

Cascadia *Always*:
Autonomy, Empire, and Counter-Mapping Counter-Insurgency

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Abstract

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The Pacific Northwest's Cascadia movement constitutes a perplexing crossroads. It's jarring breadth, an enigma, enamoring observers as Anarchists, Neo-Nazis, Non-Profits, decolonial activists, and Bill Gates all stake (secessionist) claims in the same space, under the same name: Cascadia. This thesis explores the contested geography of the Pacific Northwest; specifically, I investigate the complex movement centered around developing its regional autonomy from the U.S. and Canadian federal governments. I am interested in understanding how each of these drastically conflicting perspectives stake claims in the same geographic region. The region is defined differently by each wing of the Cascadia movement, but falls primarily in the states/provinces of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia. Other interpretations (notably by the Fascist and Reformist wings) include parts of Northern California, Montana, Yukon, and Alaska. The wide range of people involved in the movement's different sects – from professors to white power gang members to tech CEOs and government representatives –

demonstrates the region's dissatisfaction with and implicates the future of its governance. The Cascadia movement is motivated by the region's unique and precious ecology, and the various perspectives within the movement align in their desire to protect it from climate change and extractive industry, as well as in their agreement that U.S./Canadian federal government is not aligned with this goal. This perspective is associated with the movement's connection to the ideology of *Bioregionalism*, which emphasizes the development of environmental governance structures at a regional scale, the regions defined by watersheds and/or other environmental factors (bioregions).

Through developing a deeper understanding of the Cascadia movement, my thesis provides critical insight into the political geography of social movements, specifically in understanding the different scales at which political contestation operates and influences the future of regional/national governance. Furthermore, I provide insight into the intricacies of complex, place-based and environmental movements; this insight is vital to understanding the relationship between these movements and the State in the context of environmental collapse and rising contestation between local and federal forces. As I theorize through a human geographic lens, I am drawn to the way people and places co-constitute each other. My focus on the Cascadia movement examines how such drastically differing and conflictual perspectives are influenced by and shape the direction of the region.

My thesis is unique in its breadth and its geographic analysis of the movement, utilizing archival resources to consolidate a robust genealogy of the Cascadia movement's historical and ideological development. I also draw from archival research to analyze the concepts of Empire and counter-insurgency (COIN) in relation to the Cascadia movement. Empire is a fluid, difficult to define concept – this thesis explores various critical approaches to defining the concept and

attempts to articulate one which contends with the (settler-colonial) context of Cascadia. Counter-insurgency is the collection of practices/structures/ideologies utilized by the government – and its independent partners – in opposition to social movements determined to be a threat to its legitimacy. My thesis provides a unique, in-depth, expansive, and critical reading of COIN doctrine, and argues for an understanding of COIN as an active, worldbuilding process – as opposed to its self-described, reactive and defensive nature. In applying my analysis of Empire and COIN to the Cascadia movement, this thesis argues that these forces – through tactics ranging from elimination to incarceration to incorporation into the State – have altered the course of the Cascadia movement in directions more favorable to stability of federal governance in the region.

I argue that, over the course of its altered/contested development, the Cascadian movement has evolved into three distinct bodies: the “Liberationist,” the “Fascist,” and the “Reformist.” Alongside an analysis of these three formations’ perspectives, I employ the method of counter-mapping to visualize and analyze the contemporary Cascadia movement’s structure. Counter-mapping is a geographic methodological approach – most often used in an activist-scholar context – which utilizes maps to (re)construct how a given place is understood and motivate collective action to change it. Specifically, in this thesis, I utilize the counter-mapping method of power-mapping for movement analysis. Typically, power-mapping (also known as social network analysis) refers to the process of identifying “key players” within a given institution or for a particular campaign – e.g. identifying and tracing the connections between the leadership of a financial institution or the visualizing of the key decision-makers in the process of passing a particular reform bill. I articulate and argue for a more-expansive approach to power-mapping as a means to visualize the broad and complex systems of power dominating a particular area/space (including the “space” of a movement itself). In this thesis, I argue that power-mapping can serve

as a powerful tool for geographic research due to its capacity to aid in the development of a sense of place. More simply, through visualization of a place's structures of power, one is more capable of understanding, analyzing, and connecting with that place. Furthermore, I argue that power-mapping constructs a *conflictual sense of place*, i.e. one which centers the contestation of that place, for example in the context of a social movement. In applying my power-mapping approach to the Cascadia movement, I developed five annotated power-maps utilizing Little Sis' open-source database and Oligrapher software to visualize the central people and organizations steering its direction. These maps – available in their entirety through Little Sis and as supplementary files to this thesis – not only demonstrated the distinct structures of the different wings of the movement but also provided insight into the movement's various connections with broader insurgent movements and the (counter-insurgent) State.

To summarize – this thesis contributes to geographic literature in several key areas. First, I provide a uniquely comprehensive overview of the Cascadia movement, its development, and the various shapes it takes in the contemporary context. Second, I articulate an in-depth, expansive, and critical reading of COIN doctrine; I reconceptualize COIN through a critical geographic lens – arguing it is a world-building process, rather than one of reactivity and defensiveness. Finally, I expand on counter-mapping methods to utilize the practice of power-mapping in analyzing the Cascadia movement's structure. I argue for power-mapping's use in counter-mapping theory and practice due to its ability to construct a deeper and conflictual sense of place. My thesis has implications not only for understanding the Cascadia movement in its particularities, but also for understanding broader geographies of governance and contested space. In light of increasing tensions between local and federal forces, activist groups and state actors alongside the

increasingly unstable climate, the intricacies of the Cascadia movement prove a vital case for understanding the unfolding direction of political geographies.

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Introduction, Methods, & Approaches:
“Archival War” and the Queer Art of Studying Insurgency

Cascadia’s characteristic Autumn mist blanketed the Willamette National Forest. It was September 6, 1995 and Judge Michael Hogan had just announced plans to open Warner Creek and thousands of other forests to the logging industry; erupting from the courtroom, a cohort of Cascadia Earth First!ers (EF!) raced to the mountain in hopes of preventing the destruction of their precious ecosystem (Abraham, 2006). “Tripods,” “bipods,” and tents were planted as the EF! “action camp” took form— blocking the road, Mick Garvin “was locked into a ‘Sleeping Dragon,’ a concrete-reinforced 55-gallon drum buried in the road and covered with a metal fire door” with his arm securely within the contraption, the loggers’ industrial equipment “couldn’t proceed without rolling over him, and he wasn’t about to budge” (Abraham, 2006). Over the course of the next year, the camp would face cyclical evolutions and the cementing of its pivotal position in the history of ecological struggle. “The activists,” in their defiance of the State and Capital’s attempts to crush their dissent and extract value from their ecosystem, “began to lose their identities as Americans and pledge their allegiance to Cascadia — their bioregion, home of the ancient pines and dizzying stars, wherein all people” could become free from Empire; in honor of their autonomy, “they dubbed the blockade [the] Cascadia Free State” (see fig. 1) (Abraham, 2006).

The camp quickly developed into a veritable crossroads, with visitors ranging from schoolchildren to eco-Anarchist militants converging, interacting, and co-educating – the Cascadia Free State was soon inspiration to an array of similar actions across the region (Abraham, 2006). The transient nature of such actions was proven in August 1996, when a gang of American



Figure 1 – Earth First! Cascadia Free State Occupation (Abraham, 2006)

bulldozers and police officers would crush the Cascadia Free State; but, proven as well was the liberatory impacts of its influence (Abraham, 2006). In the decade to follow, the Federal Bureau of Investigation would turn its attention to the repression of ecological movements as the haunting apparition of the Cascadia Free State resurfaced in the form of “environmentally motivated sabotage” (Abraham, 2006).

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“Derail some trains, kill some people, and poison some water supplies” – the plan was simple, but first things come first (MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020). Just one year after the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the militant Fascist organization The Base had systematically constructed a network of training-centered “hate camps” (see fig. 2) (George Washington University, n.d.; Sokol, 2019). As an accelerationist organization, The Base sought to



Figure 2 - The Base Members Pose with Flag (George Washington University, n.d.)

radicalize independent cells and “lone wolves” to incite terrorist violence in support of creating an independent white ethno-state in the Northwest – a Fascist Cascadia (MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020). Hidden chatrooms and dark-web databases formed The Base’s robust digital infrastructure – “a trove of manuals... on terror tactics, gunsmithing, data mining, interrogation tactics, counter-surveillance techniques, bomb making, chemical-weapons creation and guerrilla warfare” – but the genocidal vanguard of white reaction was disinterested in recruiting “keyboard warriors,” only a dedicated group of militants could build something so grotesquely effective (MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020; Sokol, 2019).

Boots hit fresh ground as Fascists from around the U.S. converged on remote communes. Rinaldo Nazzaro – founder and ideolog of The Base – was insistent: in-person meetups and training camps were critical to success, after all, he asserted, “there is no political solution” (Wilson, 2020). And so, in 2018 the metaphoric backwash of the far-right – an eclectic collection

of hate-crime committers, police officers, online trolls, active-duty servicemembers, and meth-slinging skinheads – convened outside of Spokane, Washington for a weekend of “firearms training, grappling, first aid lessons” and other “paramilitary exercises” (MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020; Sokol, 2019; Wilson, 2020). Hidden on Nazzaro’s remote land and with the authorities eschewing local anti-fascist’s anxious warnings, the Cascadian air was thick with possibility; The Base was emboldened with dirt under their nails and shell casings at their feet – *this will be the Fascist Empire, they thought, this time, all roads lead to Cascadia.*

– • –

In the dark of a Vancouver conference room, invisible webs of power gathered, entangled, and extended far beyond Cascadia. Immersed in the darkness, bodies shuffled in their vinyl seats as attendees glanced around the perimeter, hoping to catch a glimpse of the other executives and



Figure 3 - Emerging Cascadia Innovation Corridor Conference Panel (Cascade Media, 2016)

representatives around them. Microsoft CEO Bill Gates strutted across the stage and took his seat in a large, white armchair patriotically placed in front of an array of state and national flags (see fig. 3)(Cascade Media, 2016). The audience – populated by a collection of tech CEOs, State and regional elected officials, non-profit directors, and academics – quieted in anticipation of the discussion to come (Microsoft, 2016). The 2016 Emerging Cascadia Innovation Corridor Conference brought together the “leaders” of business and government with a shared desire: to appropriate the power of regional identity for the sake of expanding capital through “joint partnerships in education, transportation, university research, human capital and other areas” (Microsoft, 2016; “An Idea Whose Time Has Come,” 2016). Hushed conversations amongst attendees circulated around the alignment of regional economic sectors, public private partnerships, regional cultural commitments, cross-border transportation, joking gestures toward secession, investment in green technologies, and the formal collaboration agreement to be signed by Governor Jay Inslee and Premier Christy Clark (Holmes, 2017; Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Microsoft, 2016). Cascadia’s CEOs and representatives were in high spirits – their networks expanded, their vision advanced, the promise of a wealthier tomorrow, solidified. With the establishment of the annual conference, the techno-futurist fantasies of Cascadia’s elite eloquently enmeshed what was once an insurgent movement. “Cascadia’s biggest strength is an eagerness to look ahead,” Ryan Holmes – Cascadian tech CEO – argued, “[t]here’s a reason the vision of Cascadia has fascinated dreamers and idealists on this incredible section of coast for more than two centuries. The Cascadia Innovation Corridor, once realized, stands to bring that dream a little closer to reality” (Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017).

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The fictionalized narratives presented above reflect critical moments in the perplexing crossroads of the Pacific Northwest's Cascadia movement. The jarring breadth of the movement is an enigma, enamoring observers as Anarchists, Neo-Nazis, Non-Profits, decolonial activists, and Bill Gates all stake (secessionist) claims in the same space, under the same name. Following my interest in understanding the alignment of these drastically conflicting perspectives, this thesis is unique in its breadth and its geographic analysis of the movement, utilizing archival resources to consolidate a robust genealogy of the Cascadia movement's historical and ideological development. Furthermore, I explore the complex movement, its development into three distinct wings – the *Liberationists*, the *Fascists*, and the *Reformists* – and its various desires for regional autonomy from the U.S. and Canadian federal governments. Drawing from Bonanno (1975) and the Black Autonomy Federation (2013), I utilize “autonomy” frequently throughout the thesis in reference to a praxis of anti-hierarchical power-redistribution occurring, at its most realized, through the development of individual agency and community-/ small-scale infrastructures independent of the State, the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), and other hierarchical organizations. My application of this word comes with the acknowledgement of its various misrepresentations and appropriations against each of the core principles mentioned, particularly by the Fascist and Reformist wings. The region is defined differently by various elements of the Cascadia movement, but falls primarily in the states/provinces of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia. Other interpretations (notably within the Fascist and Reformist wings) include parts of Northern California, Montana, Yukon, and/or Alaska. Generally, the region is defined in alignment with an interpretation of *Bioregionalism*, the movement's formative ideology. Bioregionalism emphasizes the development of environmental governance structures at a regional

scale, the regions defined by watersheds and/or other environmental and social factors (bioregions).

What is reflected in each wing's conception of Cascadia is an argument, a claim as to *what Cascadia is* and *who Cascadia is for*. I am fascinated by these disparate claims to the same imagined place – the different ways in which identity and desire are constructed, the narratives told of Cascadia's creation and destination – how is it that neo-Nazis share language with Anarchists and the Microsoft Corporation? The wide range of people involved in the movement's different sects – from professors to white power gang members to tech CEOs and government representatives – implicates the direction of the region. Through developing a deeper understanding of the Cascadia movement, my thesis provides critical insight into the political geography of social movements, specifically in understanding the different scales at which political contestation operates and influences the future of regional/national governance. Furthermore, I provide insight into the intricacies of complex, place-based and environmental movements; this insight is vital to understanding the relationship between these movements and the State in the context of environmental collapse and rising contestation between local and federal forces.

Moving from a commitment to liberatory movements, this thesis explores these divergent projects in hopes of uncovering something deeper: an understanding of how the interacting forces of Empire and counter-insurgency (COIN) operationalize the pre-emptive neutralization of insurgencies. The concept of the bioregion is undeniably marked by Empire – the bioregional reconstruction of boundaries synonymous with challenging its delineated borders. I speak to the complexity of defining “Empire” in Chapter 2, but state here that my use of the word refers specifically to the context of Cascadia and its power structure. Importantly, I am discussing a “bi-

national” movement and region, but note my primary focus and knowledge is on the U.S., not Canada. Further, while I draw from Hardt and Negri’s iconic *Empire*, my conceptualization and use of the term differ in their nuance. Again, Chapter 2 articulates this in depth, but I will briefly note my use of “Empire” as referring to the collection of beliefs/actions/structures/systems composing the governing power structure of Cascadia, formulated through the settler-colonization of Turtle Island.¹ I refer to this conceptualization as *Empire as a pathology*.

My highlighting of the Cascadia movement as one stemming from and with trajectories of insurgent possibilities led me to engagement with the concept of counter-insurgency (COIN) – the collection of practices/structures/ideologies utilized by the government and its independent partners in opposing social movements determined to be a threat to State legitimacy. I draw from archival research to analyze the concept of counter-insurgency in relation to the Cascadia movement while providing a unique, in-depth, expansive, and critical reading of COIN doctrine, and argues for an understanding of COIN as an active, worldbuilding process – as opposed to its self-described, reactive and defensive nature.

In applying my analysis of COIN to the Cascadia movement, this thesis argues that forces associated with COIN – from incarceration to incorporation into the State – have altered the course of the Cascadia movement in directions more favorable to stability of federal governance in the region. Stated more simply, I explore how the insurgent potential of the Cascadia movement was/is appropriated and co-opted against its liberatory origins and trajectory. Alongside my analysis of the three Cascadia formations’ perspectives, Empire, and COIN, I employ the method of counter-mapping to visualize and analyze the contemporary Cascadia movement’s structure. Counter-

¹ I will utilize “Turtle Island” instead of “(North/South) America” and similar terms throughout the thesis.

mapping is a geographic methodological approach – most often used in an activist-scholar context – which utilizes maps to (re)construct how a given place is understood and motivate collective action to change it. To summarize – this thesis contributes to geographic literature in several key areas. First, I provide a uniquely comprehensive overview of the Cascadia movement, its development, and the various shapes it takes in the contemporary context. Second, I provide a conceptualization of Empire as a pathology while placing Empire literature in conversation with COIN and Bioregionalism literature. Third, I articulate an in-depth, expansive, and critical reading of COIN doctrine; I reconceptualize COIN through a critical geographic lens – arguing it is a world-building process, rather than one of reactivity and defensiveness. Finally, I expand on counter-mapping methods, utilize the practice of power-mapping in analyzing the Cascadia movement’s structure, and argue for power-mapping’s use in counter-mapping praxis due to its ability to construct a deeper and conflictual sense of place. My thesis has implications not only for understanding the Cascadia movement in its particularities, but also for understanding broader geographies of governance and contested space. In light of increasing tensions between local and federal forces, activist groups and state actors alongside the increasingly unstable climate, the intricacies of the Cascadia movement prove a vital case for understanding the unfolding direction of political geographies.

To begin addressing the above, I continue this introductory chapter with an explanation of the various methodological approaches to my research. I first examine my utilization of Queer approaches to academic work – noting various decisions I made regarding language, emphasis, and focus – before shifting to connect such approaches to my archival research method inspired by Orisanmi Burton’s (2023) method of “archival war.” Next, I hint toward my utilization of counter-mapping (specifically, power-mapping) as a method, noting my expanded discussion of

the method in the fourth chapter. Finally, I close the introduction with an overview of the thesis' progression and central arguments.

Methods and Approaches

In this thesis, I utilize multiple methods and approaches – namely, I draw from Orisanmi Burton's "archival war" as well as counter-mapping methods, both influenced through a Queer approach to research. The rest of the introductory chapter details the various practical and conceptual elements of these, beginning with an explanation of my Queer approach, followed with archival war and counter-mapping.

The Artistic, the Intimate, and Queerness as a "Territory of Tension"

I approach research with a dedication to the long-arching struggle for total liberation. Expansive lineages of Black, Indigenous, proletarian, feminist, and other movements against oppression form the basis of a conceptual space I – drawing from the Mary Nardini Gang (2014) – identify as "Queerness." To quote from the pivotal *Toward the Queerest Insurrection*, "[s]ome will read 'Queer' as synonymous with 'gay and lesbian' or 'LGBT.' This reading falls short. ...Queer is a *territory of tension*" (Mary Nardini Gang, 2014, p. 3, emphasis added). In applying such a perspective, my Queer approach appears throughout my methods – archival war and counter-mapping – it informs my various focal points and stylistic/artistic decisions. To re-assert Queerness as a "territory of tension," as a "site of struggle," I quote once more from *The Queerest Insurrection*,

Queer is the abnormal, the strange, the dangerous. Queer involves our sexuality and our gender, but so much more. It is our desire and fantasies and more still. Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world. Queer is a total rejection of the regime of the Normal... [of] Normalcy as the Totality. The

Totality being the interconnection and overlapping of all oppression and misery
(Mary Nardini Gang, 2014, p. 3).

I attempt to embrace Queerness as a “total negation” of systems of oppression. Indigenous Anarchist Klee Benally (2023) calls for an Indigenous autonomy “illegible to the” logics of colonial society; Frank Wilderson, drawing from the prolific George Jackson, speaks of Black Liberation as a “politics of refusal and a refusal to affirm, a ‘program of complete disorder’” (2007, p. 32). Queerness, similarly, is a “terrain, born in rupture,” it is to “live beyond measure and love and desire in ways most devastating” (Mary Nardini Gang, 2014, p. 6). The centering of Queerness impacts my research in several ways, namely – my embrace of creativity and poetry throughout; my centering of intimacy in its many meanings; my antagonism toward and attempts at dismantling (false) binary frameworks; and my conflictual approach toward questioning linear, Progressive temporality.

Resistance to Empire takes many forms across Turtle Island. The trajectory of these liberation movements – weaving their way through the repressive and co-opting arms of the settler-State – is undoubtedly shaped by language. The resonance of their revolutionary messaging emerges from its ability to cut at the core of what Antonio Gramsci calls “‘common sense’” – the set of ideas crafted and propagated in pursuit of ruling class hegemony (in Hall, 1986, p. 21). This common sense, a “folklore of the future,” shapes people’s sense of possibility and frames their conception of truth (Hall, 1986, p. 21). Linguistic insurgencies waged by these movements continue to haunt Empire as seen in the contemporary resonance of “abolition,” “decolonization,” and the variety of other concepts developed in struggle. The creativity of language in the protracted revolt of Black, Indigenous, Queer, and other oppressed peoples’ is best understood as a form of poetry – an embrace of fluidity and the capability of playfulness to disrupt the suppression of Blackness, Indigeneity, Queerness, and so on. As Magrane notes, “the poetic process ‘recalibrates the

social—how we function dynamically in space, in time, with each other” (2015, p. 95). Orisanmi Burton speaks of Attica rebels who “authored a manual for carceral guerrilla warfare while immersed in the spiritual jazz of Alice Coltrane,” and Dylan Rodriguez points to the “creative, collective genius that emerges from... [worldbuilding against] chattel enslavement, settler-colonialism, militarized conquest, land displacement/occupation, domestic warfare, and otherwise” (2023, p. 75; 2020, p. 146). I attempt to draw from this lineage of creative genius in approaching language with flexibility and playfulness, making use of poetry and metaphor throughout this thesis. I draw on Magrane (2015), de Leeuw and Magrane (2019), and Nassar (2021) in working through and calling for geographic engagement with poetry, or a *geopoetics*. This perspective takes seriously the world-altering, world-building power of poems, encouraging the poetic theorist to look toward “*what this work might do in the world*” to question “[w]hat does it ask of you?” (Nassar, 2021, p. 27). Geopoetics is an activating perspective within my Queer approach that accepts the co-constitution of the poet, the poem, and the space/place around them. Sarah de Leeuw and Eric Magrane speak to the essence of geopoetics in calling for its development:

We call for a geopoetics that is resistant to individuals and systems that are
fucking up the planet and consolidating power on the backs of others,

that aerates the soil and lets the worms in,

that looks square on the wreckages of the current moment and sees them as
outliers rather than the ‘natural order’ of things,

that is playful and attentive to both contemporary poetics and critical geographic
thought,

that expands the page beyond the page,

that expands the means in which geography is practiced,

that takes the craft of poetry seriously but does not impose one school over

another, does not police
that takes a knee at the sidelines, in the margins, in solidarity,
that is difficult and dangerous, that is not didactic, that is awake,
that is troubling and unsettling, that slows,
that is self-aware,
that resists empire, a poem is not an empire (2019, p. 147)

As Meg Day notes in the introduction to *Wayward Creatures*, “[P]oems are a promise, a pact we make with the future we can’t imagine and also the one we won’t get to see” (in rhodes, 2025b, pp. ix, x).

I further utilize a Queer approach in drawing from heidi andrea restrepo rhodes’ (2025a) centering of the realm of the intimate. Empire seeks the compartmentalization of the public, the private, the intimate; it seeks the normalization of bodily exploitation and extraction; it seeks the erasure of the quotidian, the spiritual, the relational. In rejecting such patriarchal segmentation, rhodes insists on placing the intimate at the center, stating:

“methodology based on intimacy can be both abolitionist and Queer... yielding a more complex understanding of the proximities and affinities not only across the range of governing formations of violence but also across social movements and patterns of resistance in their wake” (2025a, p. 22).

I define intimacy by drawing from Lisa Lowe’s defining the word in three senses: first, as the “private” relations between people – the conjugal, familial, etc.; second, as spatial proximity; and third, in reference to the exchange of cultures, ideas, and desires of people forced into contact by colonization (in Stoler, 2006, p. 202). In centering Queerness here, I emphasize an element of the third definition – intimacy as desire itself – and speak frequently throughout the thesis of the production and manipulation of desires. As Ann Stoler notes, “colonial authority rested,” and continues to rest, “on educating the proper distribution of sentiments and desires” (2006, p. 2).

The third manifestation of a Queer approach in my work appears in my antagonism toward reductive binary logics. Throughout the thesis, I pay particular attention to disrupting and blurring the lines between binarized categories such as the domestic/foreign, the counter-/insurgent, and the State/society. Finally, I draw on Queer, Black, and Indigenous traditions of challenging linear, “Progressive” constructions of time. Far from being neutral, such notions of temporality stem from colonial narratives and logics – as Rasheeda Phillips notes, drawing from Giordano Nanni, “The conquest of space and time are intimately connected. European territorial expansion has always been closely linked to, and frequently propelled by, the geographic extension of its clocks and calendars” (Phillips, 2025, p. 143). These notions of temporality are embedded in – and itself warped by – “cultural norms, societal dynamics, [and] interwoven global and local politico-economic systems” (Phillips, 2025, p. 1). I point here to Klee Benally’s poetic articulation of colonial time:

“[Civilization] fashions its years and seconds into an anemic prison. It has shaped time into the most exquisite of weapons, obliterating memories, killing cycles. Its essence *is* time. The temporal and spatial imposition of awareness is the oblivion that is modernity and linear, or one-way time. When we name the genocidal fulfillment of a colonized future, civilization pronounces itself as The Existent. This is what is meant by ‘modernity.’ It is authoritarian temporality” (Benally, 2023: 316)

Defining and countering temporalities is a form of worldbuilding, and various alternative temporalities from Black/African, Indigenous, Queer, and other communities serve as influence for the continued, creative struggle to (re)construct counter-temporalities against Empire (Barad, 2017; Gonzalez & Mayanin, 2018; Phillips, 2025). In this thesis, I pay attention to the construction/employment of temporality in various cases, as well as challenge linear constructions of time in multiple ways. I operate from an understanding that “alteration[s] in the present may induce an alteration in the relation between the space of experience of pasts and the horizon of expectation about the future.” (Scott, 2004, pp. 44–45). In other words, my utilization of counter-

temporal approaches comes from a position which takes seriously the possibility of unsettling Empire across time through creative reconceptualization of what this world is. The influence of my Queer approach – the embrace of creativity and poetry, centering of intimacy, my antagonism toward (false) binary frameworks; and approach toward temporality – seeps into the methodological approaches in this thesis. The rest of the introduction will expand on these, namely archival war and counter-mapping.

“Archival War” and Subjugated Knowledge

I draw my first method – archival war – from Orisanmi Burton’s (2023) *Tip of the Spear*, a study of the “long Attica revolt,” and the complexly violent counter-insurgent response constructed to crush it. Simply put, archival war is an antagonistic approach to archival research involving the simultaneous and conflictual reading of “official” archival documents alongside critical and/or autonomously produced, insurgent ones. These collections of work form an archive and “counter-archive” which, when read in conversation, reveal insight into what is hidden between the lines of the State’s narrative. The counter-archive, in this sense, is meticulously constructed with respect to the official archive and is composed of insurgent or critical texts which speak specifically to that which the official archive buries. In Burton’s case, his study involved reading official prison reports and documents in conflict with zines, letters, and oral histories collected from former participants in the Attica insurrection as a means to uncover the deeper logics influencing the conflict. As Burton explains: “*Tip of the Spear* pulls extensively from archives of white supremacy and repression. ... These documents attest to a constantly mutating statecraft of counterinsurgency across prison walls. ... I analyze these hostile sources through a rebellious and disloyal interpretive paradigm.” (2023, p. 15). The framework is particularly relevant in the context of studying (insurgent) movements and counter-insurgency campaigns, as it serves to illuminate that which is

hidden between the lines of official State documents through its insistence on taking seriously theoretical, historical, and other work produced outside of the official academy. Where conventional archival approaches rely on State narratives and documentation, an archival war approach aims to unsettle the illusion of expertise, uplift the real experiences of those in struggle against Empire, and combat the State's mischaracterization/misrepresentation of movements. My Queered practice of archival war centers various critical, autonomous, and insurgent texts in reading against what I define as the COIN archive, interrogating the various dis-/continuities between them. As Dylan Rodriguez notes, "Counterinsurgency can be read against its own grain... as a present-tense archive that indexes (and in fact operationalizes) non-traditional, politically directed warfare as a modality of racial statecraft that is versatile, durable, and transnational" (2020, p. 45).

Practically speaking, the archival warfare process involves the cyclical reading and re-examination of my archive and counter-archive. I define the COIN archive as the body of texts culminating in the Joint Chiefs of Staff's (2018) Joint Publication (JP) 3-24 – *Counterinsurgency*. This manual was produced through extensive collaboration across a complex ecology of government institutions, think tanks, Universities, non-profit and non-governmental organizations and represents the doctrinal standard for contemporary counter-insurgent praxis (Rodriguez, 2027). Former senior counter-insurgency advisor David Kilcullen described JP 3-24's scope as "panoramic" – speaking to the breadth of its influence/s, which involve pan-temporal and global networks of education and experimentation (2010, p. 17). Counter-insurgency doctrine is an archive written in blood. As Dylan Rodriguez notes above, the archive not only indexes but operationalizes warfare, serving as a red thread through history which directs the racialized and militarized state onward. Such knowledge, produced explicitly through the death of those seeking

liberation from colonialism, authoritarianism, and apartheid (Galula, 2006; Gompert et al., 2008; Havron et al., 1969; *JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018; Paul et al., 2013). In reading this archive, I explored a collection of military manuals as well as academic and think-tank-produced texts influential to, cited in, or in conversation with JP 3-24 (Barnett, 2008; Boot, 2012; Department of the Army, 2014; *JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018; Galula, 2006; Gompert et al., 2008; Havron et al., 1969; Kilcullen, 2006, 2010; Milevski, 2014; Paul et al., 2013).

I constructed my counter-archive from various insurgent and critical texts stemming from a range of perspectives including: Black Liberationists (Black Autonomy Federation, 2013; Black Liberation Army, 2023); Indigenous, Insurrectionary, and Green Anarchists (Benally, 2023; Bonanno, 1975; Seaweed, 2013; The Invisible Committee, 2009); Maoists (Kelley & Esch, 1999; Zedong, 2020); Focoists/Guevaraists (Gerassi, 1971); and Abolitionists (Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2021).² Critically laboring through the COIN archive in search of the central logics of empire is an act of resurrection, a weaponization of the dead for the sake of revitalizing their struggles. Foucault notes that such a critique of power and the dominant archives is, at heart, “also an attack on [them]” (2003, p. 73). In this lies the essence of the “counter-“ in counter-archive: the taking seriously of insurgent perspectives and their utilization to unveil the reality of Empire. Anti-Black and settler-colonial structures/logics are “in significant part a (self-)narrative and/or toxic memoir through which mind-boggling mobilizations of dominance and violence are consistently marshaled,” and therefore, counter-archival strategies are of vital importance (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 117). By extracting from between the lines of the COIN archive, I am approaching it as a “site of knowledge production” noting “the

² The references here serve as examples of each tendency represented, but not as a complete list of my counter-archival sources.

rhetorical peculiarities of the documents, the places where particular figures, tropes, or circumlocutions are repeated to cover gaps or tensions” (Stoler, 2006, p. 203). More simply, I utilize the COIN archive “disloyally, treasonously, and against [its] own racial and political grain” to expose the intimately, grotesquely violent origins of American counter-insurgency (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 134). In approaching the act of dissecting the COIN archive, I draw on Foucault’s proposal to “‘de-subjugate historical knowledges, to set them free... to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse...’” and place insurgent texts at the center (in rhodes, 2025a, p. 28). This, I argue, is an act of queering study and of embracing the Queerness of studying insurgency.

Counter-Mapping, A Brief Note

In addition to archival war, I lean heavily on counter-mapping praxis for its world-building possibility and emphasis on the combining of research and action. As noted above, counter-mapping is a geographic method which utilizes mapping to (re)construct collective understanding of a given place. Counter-mapping questions conventional representations of space and place – i.e. they counter Empire’s maps – with the aim of inspiring challenges to dominant power structures (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2017; Boatca, 2021; Giesecking, 2020; Gonzalez & Mayanin, 2018; Maharawal & McElroy, 2018; Oslender, 2021). Geographic practices read and depict space/place as a means to open “the ‘could-be’ of place and the selves and worlds produced there” – the process stirring and fulfilling desires – and counter-mapping seeks to weaponize this in service of liberation (rhodes, 2025a, pp. 85, 102). Counter-mapping practices are beneficial in their ability to visualize and communicate existing structures of power, methods through which to conflict with them, and imagined insurgent horizons beyond them.

I discuss my approach to counter-mapping – and in particular my use of “power-mapping” – further in the fourth chapter of this thesis, and encourage the reader to embrace non-linearity in their reading of the thesis if desired. Power-mapping refers to the practice of visualizing the connections of various individuals and organizations within a particular space, and in the fourth chapter, I argue that a Queered approach to power-mapping can serve as a powerful weapon for a (bioregional) counter-mapping praxis in its ability to develop a conflictual sense of place. Where the majority of power-mapping discourse comes from the campaign-focused activist milieu commonly referred to as “non-violent direct action,” my Queered approach to power-mapping aims to open its possibility for broader application (Benally, 2023; Christian Aid, 2016; Myers-Lipton, 2023; Starling, 2019; *Student Activist Workbook*, 2020). Utilizing Little Sis’ open-source oligrapher software, I embrace power-mapping as an artistic practice in which the chaotic whirlwinds of power-networks become expressions of place. This software both aligns with my political commitments and serves as a vital resource in identifying connections between people/organizations (i.e. nodes). Furthermore, it provided me the ability to catalogue a variety of nodes into their database to enable further research on the movement/region. Alongside the political decision to utilize this software, I have chosen to refuse the mapping of the Liberationist Cascadia movement; not only is the Liberationist Cascadia movement largely embedded within and indistinguishable from the broader Pacific Northwest Anarchist, Communist, and other liberation-focused milieu, but the added visibility of mapping would place organizers at risk of further targeting from Fascist and State organizations. Therefore, my power-maps below focus on depicting/analyzing the reformist and Fascist Cascadia movements in a variety of ways. To close, counter-mapping serves as a means to operationalize my developed understandings of Empire and

COIN to understand their influencing and redirecting of the Cascadia movement away from liberation.

Thesis Overview

Chapter 1, “Whose *Ecotopia*?: A Cascadian Genealogy,” provides a comprehensive overview of the Cascadia movement(s) and its origins. I begin with a broad discussion of the evolution of Bioregionalism – from its origins in Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1978) to its foundational role in conceptualizing Cascadia as a political project. Next, I shift to assert the centrality of *autonomy* and *place-making* in the Cascadia project, arguing that these concepts/practices constitute the insurgent potential of the Cascadia movement(s). Following this, I trace the particularities of each Cascadia movement noting their various utilizations, appropriations, and co-optations of Cascadia/Bioregionalism’s theoretical and practical perspectives. Closing this chapter, I contend that a deep engagement between the Cascadia/Bioregionalist movement and Empire / COIN provides deep insight into the processes behind the movement’s pacification.

The second chapter, “Empire’s Pathology: Intimate Occupation, Cerebrum Nullius, and Cognitive Capture,” shifts to my engagement with theories of Empire. I begin by noting the significance of Empire as the underlying power structure against which Bioregionalism is developed. I then address the complexity of defining Empire as well as highlight the importance of formulating a narrative of Empire tailored to this context. Following this, I lay out some of the broad approaches toward defining Empire in critical and Bioregional scholarship, then note some of their shared limitations. In response, I formulate the conception/definition of Empire utilized throughout the thesis: *Empire as a pathology*. I then dissect the various worldviews and practices I understand as constituting Empire. Closing this, I articulate the concept of *cerebrum nullius* to aid in understanding Empire’s spread through a lens centering COIN.

Third, I delve into my antagonistic reading of the “counter-insurgency archive” in my chapter, “Reading Against the Counter-insurgency (COIN) Archive: Perpetual Warfare as Imperial Governance.” The chapter begins with my attempt to provide a necessarily complicated definition of counter-/insurgency, noting the complexity of the task and impossibility of providing a rigid, comprehensive, or conclusive definition. I argue that counter-/insurgencies can be understood as worldbuilding processes, first and foremost; I build off this to assert that COIN worldbuilding is a process of perpetual warfare. Here, I highlight Thomas Barnett’s (2008) “Non-Integrated Gap” theory and the “Generational Approach” to counter-insurgency – primarily detailed in Joint Publication (JP) 3-24 – *Counterinsurgency* (JP 3-24 – *Counterinsurgency*, 2018) – as potent expressions of COIN as worldbuilding through perpetual warfare. Taking a step back, I reflect on the implications of this perspective on my conceptualization of the (counter-insurgent) State. Closing the chapter, I meticulously outline the collection of central counter-insurgent practices that reappear across time before shifting toward an application of this in-depth understanding.

Chapter 4, “Counter-/Power-Mapping Cascadia: Evaluating Counter-Insurgency and Visualizing Power as Place,” refocuses on the Cascadia movement(s) and attempts to analyze them with respect to Empire and counter-insurgency. Beginning this chapter, I assert the insurgent possibility of a Cascadia movement that takes seriously the building of autonomy from Empire and counter-insurgency. Next, I move to a discussion of the role of (counter-)mapping in the Bioregionalism/Cascadia movement(s) before arguing that deeper engagement with counter-mapping – and, for this thesis, power-mapping more specifically – would benefit the Liberationist movement. For the rest of the chapter, I utilize a Queered power-mapping approach to visualize and analyze how the Fascist and Reformist strains of the Cascadia movement are embedded in

insurgent movements and/or the counter-insurgent State. I close by reflecting on the usefulness of power-mapping in building a combative sense of place.

I conclude the thesis with the chapter, “Cascadia, Becoming: Insurgent Directions for Bioregional Praxis,” in which I provide a review of my central line of argumentation point toward potential developments in the Cascadia movement. I note the contemporary development in Bioregional theory of “bioregion-*ing*” and argue that such a lens provides a means through which the movement can contend with Empire/COIN. Moving from this, I close the thesis with two found poems I derived from passages from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons* (2013) and Klee Benally’s *No Spiritual Surrender* (2023). As Eric Magrane reminds, “poetry is a form that works in a more associational or intuitive register, one that can serve to provoke a reader and reach for the gut, the stomach, the skin, as well as the mind” (2015, pp. 91–1).

1 - Whose *Ecotopia*?:

A Cascadian Genealogy

An autonomous confederation of subsistence-based ecological communes; a Fascist, white ethno-Empire strengthening its borders in anticipation of climate collapse; a militarized trade corridor controlled by environmentally-conscious tech capital – three diametrically-opposed worlds occupying the same space: the Pacific Northwest (PNW), Land of Falling Waters, Cascadia.

What, where, and when is Cascadia? This chapter approaches these questions and, drawing from academic and archival material, attempts to provide a relatively comprehensive understanding of the Cascadia movements' complex genealogies. To begin, I establish the origins and inspirations of Cascadia, as well as its accompanying ideology of Bioregionalism – the belief that ecological boundaries (e.g.,

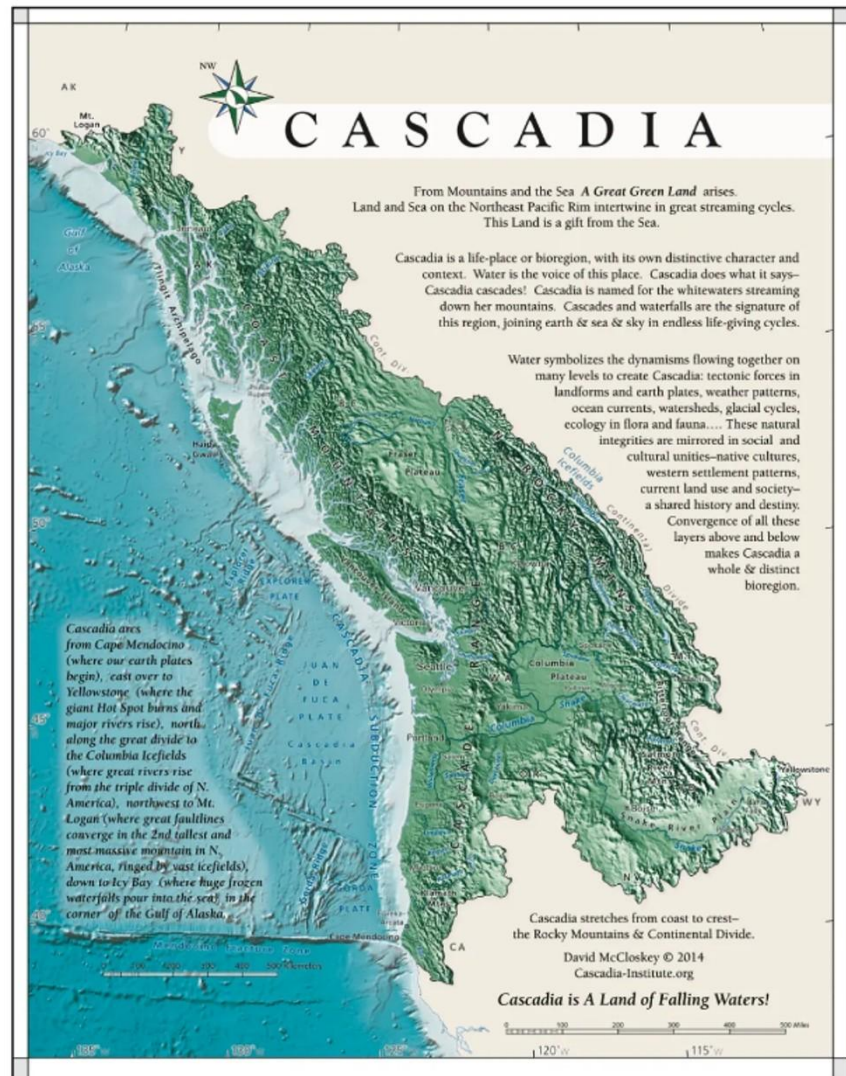


Figure 4 - McCloskey's Cascadia (Cascadia, n.d.)



Figure 5 - States Cascadia Map (“Cascadia Map,” 2026)

watersheds) should replace existing borders in structuring political, economic, and social life. Following this, I note some of the early influences in bioregional thought – particularly, Earnest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1978) – before shifting to delve into the Cascadia movement’s deeper motivations. In this section, I argue that the Cascadia movement is fundamentally a project of desire, place-making, and most importantly, autonomy. After identifying

broadly shared approaches, I interrogate the Cascadia movement’s divergence into three broad formations: the Liberationists, the Fascists, and the Reformists. I detail the movements’ various ideological and tactical commitments, paying particular attention to the movements’ differing (rhetorical) temporality, place-making, and articulations of autonomy. Finally, I conclude the chapter by arguing that analysis of the Cascadia movement calls for engagement with literature on Empire and counter-insurgency in attempting to understand its multi-faceted co-optation and appropriation.

Becoming a Place: Ecotopia and the Origins of Bioregionalism

The seed of Cascadia's conception is most often traced back to Ernest Callenbach's (1978) novel *Ecotopia*, in which Washington, Oregon, and Northern California secede from the United States and reorganize as an ecological utopia (Aarsand, 2013; Cappellano, 2019; Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.; Taylor, 2019). Earlier secessionist movements serve as inspiration for *Ecotopia* – and the Cascadia movement more broadly – including the 1850-1865 Pacific Coast Republic movement, which was led by regional political leaders and called for the “formation of an independent nation west of the Rockies” (Hull, 1916, p. 183). Callenbach's novel was inspired by the region's settler-colonial mythos which constructs the West as a place of inexhaustible abundance, beauty, and possibility; and which constructs its colonial settlers as “rugged, self-reliant, and ambitious” (Hull, 1916, p. 177; Callenbach, 1978). Alongside these narratives, histories of white/settler, utopian colonies in the Puget Sound area – in presenting themselves as anti-



Figure 6 - Different Cascadias Map (Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004)

Industrialist and egalitarian – inspired *Ecotopia* (Aarsand, 2013; Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004; Hubbard et al., 2023; LeWarne, 1995; Moran, 2019; Wiebe, 2021).³ This connection between the Pacific Northwest and *Ecotopia* serves as a foundational turning point for the concentration of secessionist ideas there (Aarsand, 2013; Callenbach, 1978; Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.). Professor David McCloskey is credited with coining the term Cascadia around 1980, in his rethinking the notion of PNW secession through the lens of Bioregionalism – a concept coined by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann in the late 1960s (Andruss et al., 1990; Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.; Kuperus, 2021; McGinnis, 1999; Wearne et al., 2023). The term bioregion is derived from the Greek *bios* and the French/Latin *region/regia* – put simply, bioregion means “life region” or “government by life” (Aberley, 1985; Andruss et al., 1990; Taylor, 2000b). While numerous approaches differ in their specific interpretations, *Bioregionalism* is, broadly, the belief that social-political-economic systems/structures would benefit from reorganization along ecological lines – specifically, through the creation of a unified territory “defined by the geographical limits [and interconnections] of human communities and ecological systems” (Aberley, 1985; Andruss et al., 1990; Flower et al., 2021; *How to Map a Bioregion – Department of Bioregion*, n.d.; Hubbard et al., 2023; McGinnis, 2016; Ross, 2019; Taylor, 2000b; Thackara, 2019). The geographic boundaries of Cascadia are widely debated (see figs. 4-6, 10),

³ As in all cases of colonization, these settlements were complicit in extreme violence aimed at shaping the region toward their desired future – not only did settlers portray the region as a white haven, they were involved in organized acts of violent displacement to make it as such, e.g. Seattle’s infamous anti-Chinese riots (Aarsand, 2013). The Puget Sound colonies sought the creation of a settler culture divergent from the dominant American Empire’s in its (pseudo-)ecological ethic and connection to place – this worldview is deeply entwined with settlers’ interaction with Indigenous peoples in the PNW and constitutes an attempt toward settler indigenization (discussed further in Chapter 2) (Erai & Morgensen, 2012; LeWarne, 1995; Ross, 2019). There is a clear connection, I argue, between these histories and the Fascist appropriation of “Cascadia,” as well as with the whiteness of the broader Cascadia movement.

but early conceptions through the end of the 1980s primarily followed McCloskey's bioregional approach.

Bioregionalism and the Cascadia movement are central influences on each other, evidenced by the Bioregional conferences which took place there in the 1980s ("Bioregional Congress of Pacific Cascadia 1988," 2020). Bioregionalism's early conceptions were deeply stereotyping and appropriative of Indigenous practices. As noted by Annie Ross (2019), countless Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island organized around complex principles which were later appropriated into "official" Bioregionalisms – connection to / knowledge of land, fluid, ecologically-derived regional borders, and various structures of resource/power distribution appearing in Bioregionalism as early as 1965-70 (Andruss et al., 1990; Anonymous, 2011; Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020; Kuperus, 2021, p. 84; McGinnis, 1999, pp. 16–19; Seaweed, 2013; Wearne et al., 2023). Bioregionalism, however, often reads Indigeneity through colonial logics outside of or against indigenous "political contexts of justice, reparation, and dispossession" (Wiebe, 2021: 152). This is seen most clearly in Wes Jackson's (1994) work *Becoming Native to This Place* and the resulting lineage of bioregional thinking surrounding "becoming native." These narratives align with the PNW's colonial mythos in its depicting of settlers as rugged and "wild" and reappear to varied extents in contemporary Cascadia movement narratives.

Bioregionalism's emergence – and its appropriation of Indigenous thought and identity – has aligns closely with that of "deep ecology," Taylor arguing the two have a "great affinity" (2000a, p. 57; Drengson & Inoue, 1995; McGinnis, 1999). Deep ecology emerged in the late 1960s and is a social movement based in critique of technology-centric environmentalism and focused on calling for a philosophical reorientation from anthropocentrism (Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Nelson et al., 2023; Taylor, 2000a). While attempting to formulate a more-insurgent and liberation-

focused ecology movement, deep ecology has been critiqued as “socially reactionary [and] misanthropic” as well as for providing a “consistent site where right-wing positions have surfaced in the radical environmental movement” (Aarsand, 2013; Taylor, 2019, p. 279). Deep ecology served as a foundational space of thought for the development of a range of Bioregionalisms, appearing in texts as early as 1986 (Taylor, 2000a); early Bioregionalists saw deep ecology as a means to politicize the bioregion into a coherent ideology that emphasized decentralized organizing, environmental renewal, and above all, “living in place” (McGinnis, 1999, pp. 23–25). Despite the flaws noted above, these formative theorizations of Bioregionalism shifted the concept toward more-concrete social-political organizing.

Alongside deep ecology – and despite the prevalence of Fascist claims to Cascadia – green Anarchism was pivotal in the development of bioregional thought as early as 1981 and continuing until its contemporary developments (Andruss et al., 1990; Taylor, 2000a; Wearne et al., 2023). Emphasis on prefigurative praxis, non- or anti-Statal approaches, and the development of self-sufficiency appear frequently throughout (early) bioregional works, as does argumentation regarding the ties between oppression of people and environments more broadly – all of which are deeply embedded in green Anarchist praxis (Andruss et al., 1990; Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020; E. E. Hardt, 2013). Regardless of the desires of early (Anarchist) bioregional theorists, Bioregionalism – like Anarchism more broadly – is not inherently liberatory. Anonymous ties this back to individualist Anarchism which was “framed directly” by the colonial frontier and its narratives of “autonomy and self-sufficiency—admittedly on stolen land” (2011, p. 79). As Klee Benally articulates, “Anarchism, or any other [liberatory] political proposition for that matter, simply cannot be imposed or ‘rewilded’ on stolen lands,” speaking to the limitations of a (Anarchist) Bioregionalism stemming from such a settler-colonial genealogy (2023, pp. 330–331).

As discussed below, the divergence of the Cascadia movement into three distinct formations results from Bioregionalism's failure to contend with its settler origins. The politicization of the Cascadia movement from the 1990s through the 2010s has resulted in its complexification. The trajectory of Bioregionalism emerges from early secessionist movements like the Pacific Coast Republic, through Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and various notions of Cascadia, pointing toward something unknown, something unsettled. Cascadia, and Bioregionalism more broadly, are projects of desire and visions of futurity, they are practices of place-making and developing autonomy.

Desiring Cascadia: Autonomy and the Practice of Place-Making

In this section, I shift my attention toward the unfolding development of the Cascadia movement(s); here, my focus is placed on the common threads across varied articulations of the Cascadia movement before shifting in the next section to their particularities. While many arguments below apply to Bioregionalism more broadly, I am primarily concerned with the particularities of the Cascadia movement(s) and, thus, not all arguments may apply to bioregional theory as a whole. As noted in the previous section, Cascadia – throughout all its disparate formations/articulations – is a project of *desire*: for a (shared) sense of (political) identity connected to place/ecology and, ultimately, for *autonomy*. The manifestation of Cascadian identity occurs through various world-building practices most often expressed in the praxes of *reinhabitation* and *bioregional mapping*; further, these are the primary means through which



Figure 7 - Cascadia Political Map (Oro, 2025)

social/cultural events have emerged in attempts to construct a cohesive and uniting Cascadian identity (“Cascadia Movement,” 2026; “Doug Flag,” 2026).

Land and place are inseparable from the body and identity; “indigenous feminists organizing in Bogotá for territorial rights have articulated a concept of ‘body-territory’ and ‘bodies-territories’ emphasizing the corporeal-environmental dialectical relation in which the bodily is always already in relation to place, modes of production, and environmental and cultural practices related to

Cascadian identity (and Bioregionalism more broadly) is politicized. Pointing to heidi andrea restrepo rhodes (2025a), mapping is inherently a world-building and “emplacing” practice – the Cascadian movement frequently utilizes this reality toward its goals (see figs. 4-6, 7, 10). I discuss bioregional mapping at length in Chapter 4, but here point to its utilization for the sake of identity formation, of which figure 7 provides a clear example. In relation to mapping Cascadia, various flags (see fig. 8), (fictional) political parties, speculative fictions, and



Figure 8 - "Doug Flag," Primary Cascadia Flag Design ("Doug Flag," 2026)

territory” (rhodes, 2025a, p. 179; Barad, 2017). *Cascadian Zen* asserts the connection to Bioregionalism: “We are therefore not on the land but *of* the land. ...How do we begin to find our place? First, we have to get ourselves out of the way of place, to not reduce it to the objects that surround us and which manifest in accordance with our interests” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 97). To state this more simply, we are in intimate and unfolding relationships with the places we inhabit, and it is critical to recognize the ways in which these relationships are created, maintained, and broken. Bioregional literature frequently aligns with these concepts in its articulation of *reinhabitation* as a praxis. Reinhabitation or “living in place” is Bioregionalism’s foremost approach to manifesting the bioregion and involves learning to live “in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation” (Andruss et al., 1990, p. 35; Aarsand, 2013; Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Kuperus, 2021; McGinnis, 2016; Nelson et al., 2023).

Primarily present in the Liberationist and Reformist wings of the movement, reinhabitation is articulated as a collective process of (radical, ecological) education – often, it is promoted alongside notions of participatory engagement, anti-hierarchy, and respect to more-than-human relationships. Reinhabitation, further, emphasizes the local and thus has synergy with the movement’s regionalism. Drawing from deep ecology, reinhabitation often pushes mythical and spiritual engagement with land and place; its primary goal is cultivating a collective sense of community, responsibility, and autonomy that serves to integrate human life with its broader, ecosystemic context (Andruss et al., 1990). Furthermore, reinhabitation is an intimate process occurring through interaction (with people in proximity, the broader ecology), through “subtle and daily practices of resistance... [which] routinely contest” the established order (Gil Everaert, 2021, p. 4334). In this practice, reinhabitation materializes place-based/bioregional – perhaps, insurgent – relations; as stated in *Cascadian Zen*, “Cascadia invites us to think politics and economics from the history and reality of our place rather than colonially demarcate it based on reigning political and economic ideologies” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. xviii). These notions are appropriated by the movement’s Reformist and Fascist wings, but in its most liberatory form has a counter-temporal nature; as noted in *Cascadian Zen*, “reinhabitation first and foremost begins with a thorough, honest investigation of the historical record and present reality of habitation. ...Inhabitation is also a deep imagination of what this place was” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 124). In creatively unsettling Empire’s historical narratives, reinhabitation can reveal that “we are no more *on* the land than we are *in* time” – to reinhabit as to unlearn Empire’s separation of the present space-time from the violent histories of occupation and resistance which continue to haunt (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 99).

The culminating goal of Cascadian place-making through reinhabitation and mapping is some form of autonomy. Various elements of the movement articulate autonomy differently, particularly

in the senses of: autonomy *from what?* and autonomy *as what?* I approach the specifics of the Cascadian movements' approaches below but note autonomy as the central thread across all. Regardless of their differences, all three bodies of Cascadian organizing place emphasis on localizing commodity chains, particularly in the production of “food, fiber, and fuel” (nothingforourselves, 2012; Lokting, 2018; Oro, 2025). This ranges from visions of self-sufficiency in support of secession to local production as a counter-cultural phenomenon similar to the “localvore” movement (Lokting, 2018). I discuss the counter-insurgent nature of representing counter-culture as autonomy further below (both in the reformist Cascadia section of this chapter and in Chapter 4) but note here that various divergences in thinking on autonomy – both as a goal and a philosophy – serves as the basis on which three disparate Cascadian movements take hold. In combination with various ideological approaches, Cascadian autonomy provides an anchor for what I identify as Liberationist, Fascist, and Reformist movements.

Divergent Evolution: Three Wings of a Movement

As the concept of Cascadia – and Bioregionalism more broadly – flows through a diversity of movement spaces, its associated calls for autonomy are taken up in various ways. I note above that the Liberationist, Fascist, and Reformist Cascadia movements speak differently regarding what autonomy is from and to what it looks like. Distinguishing these framings – alongside varying articulations of Cascadia's temporality / identity / narrative and differing movement tactics / geographies – is the purpose of the following section. Importantly, none of these categories should be considered as self-contained or entirely coherent; significant debate and factionalism occurs within and between these movements. I base my decision to divide them as such on certain outlooks shared within each category as well as on the results of power-mapping each, which demonstrates their separation (see Chapter 4). After narrating the movements' genealogies, I close

the chapter by reasserting the centrality of autonomy to a liberatory vision of Cascadia and point toward analysis of “Empire” and counter-insurgency doctrine as a means through which to strengthen narratives/notions of Cascadian autonomy.

Liberationist Cascadia

The Anarchist roots of Bioregionalism and the Cascadian movement have continued to nourish their development. Between the 1990s and the 2010s, Bioregionalism faced significant internal critique; their theoretical underpinnings expanded through engagement with (Anarcha-)feminism, Queer theory, Marxism, anti-colonialism/decolonization, and other forms of anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist thought (Andruss et al., 1990; Conference Organizing Committee, 2015; Ross, 2019; Smith, 2004; Thackara, 2019). While no coherent political ideology exists between all these theorists/approaches, I argue that a general shared commitment to what Dunlap and Jakobson (2020) refer to as “total liberation” – recognition of and conflict against the interconnected oppression of all life under the colonial-capitalist system – provides a basis on which to group them. In the Cascadian context, these Liberationists reside primarily in Western OR, WA, and BC – concentrated in major cities like Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver – and frequently battle side-by-side against the State (e.g. the 1999 World Trade Organization protests, the 2020 Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ), and various campus occupations in 2023-4). The Liberationist Cascadians – far from constituting a recognizable, independent movement – are embedded within broader liberation struggles in the region (see fig. 9) (Abraham, 2006; Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC), 2021; Cooperative Assembly of Cascadia, 2021; KOMO News Staff, 2025). Despite this, the Liberationists share several lines of thinking regarding Cascadia distinct from the



*Figure 9 - Cascadia Flag at Anti-Ice Protest in Tukwila, WA
(KOMO News Staff, 2025)*

other movement wings. Whether the result of State repression, the tainted public perception of ‘Cascadia’ as a white and/or Fascist movement, or something otherwise, the Liberationists (ironically, in considering the movement’s origins) seemingly make up the smallest proportion of the movement. Academic work on Cascadia – even when critical – most frequently falls into Reformist perspectives, and the bulk of (visible) independent organizing/writing claiming Cascadia comes from the Reformists and Fascists.

Regardless, the Liberationist

Cascadia movement maintains a strong connection to Cascadia’s (Anarchist-inspired) Bioregionalist roots and has produced significant contributions toward envisioning Cascadia.

Engagement with decolonial thought was perhaps the most significant shift from the preliminary Bioregionalisms to its Liberationist rearticulations; in questioning the inherent coloniality of *Ecotopia* and settlement narratives, border logic, and the naming of Cascadia itself,

Liberationists have shifted conceptions of Cascadia toward a decolonial project through reframing reinhabitation (Conference Organizing Committee, 2015; Taylor, 2019). While much work is to be done decolonizing Cascadia as a concept and a lived reality, Liberationists often embrace the concept of autonomy in its full possibility, and in doing so, place Cascadia in contradiction with Empire (Abraham, 2006; Andruss et al., 1990, p. 130). This rejection of U.S./Canadian Federal governance is drawn from decolonial thought and is articulated through an ethics of locality – often asserting the ineffectiveness or oppressive nature of the hierarchy of national-scale government, and sometimes going so far as to assert the bioregion/Cascadia as an “alternative to the nation state” (Aarsand, 2013, p. 43; Abraham, 2006; Andruss et al., 1990; Oro, 2025; Seaweed, 2013). While Liberationists’ conceptions of Empire are limited in depth (a claim I discuss at length in Chapter 2), its targeting is a primary driver of Liberationist Cascadia’s insurgent potential (I discuss this below as well, in this chapter’s conclusion and in Chapter 4).

Liberationists frequently embrace Cascadia as an ecological refuge, at threat from the destructive forces of the American Empire. This narrative serves to construct a conception of Cascadia and a (combative) sense of place there while politicizing the Bioregion *against* Empire; further, the Liberationists draw on the perceived “wildness” of Cascadia as in alignment with unsettling and rebellion. In such a construction of the Bioregion as an already-existing territory occupied by Empire, the Liberationists articulate a particular temporality of Cascadia. Community organization the Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC) argues that understanding of the region is incomplete without consideration for the simultaneous existence of a society in Cascadia which is deeply embedded in Empire’s global networks of exchange and exploitation, as well as one which is “deeply connected to our ecological brethren who inhabit this place” (2022, p. 5). The coexistence CURC speaks to asserts bioregions, Cascadia included, as *always existing*; the

development of bioregional/Cascadian autonomy, then, is to the Liberationists a process of uncovering the bioregion from beneath the crushing occupation of Empire, both a counter-temporal (in its anti-linearity) and insurgent claim.

In alignment with the insurgent, place-making nature of the Liberationist Cascadia narrative, the Liberationist's tactics appear as *reinhabitation-through-direct-action*. Cascadian Anarchist Seaweed succinctly explains this Liberationist bioregional praxis: "The simple proposal is this: a widespread insurgency, based on a multitude of local rebellions, each one demanding enough land to sustain its inhabitants. More specifically, occupying or reoccupying territory with the explicit view that it becomes our habitat" (Seaweed, 2013, p. 11).⁴ The Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition speaks of several other practices in alignment with this direct reinhabitation ranging from experiments in "cooperative business to community-based defense to nomadic commons" (Cascadia Urban-Rural Coalition, 4). Speaking most broadly, the Liberationist Cascadians envision the development of an autonomous Cascadia through practices of "resistance and renewal": the insurgent building of new, localized, and autonomous "means of production... [and]

⁴ It is important to note here that Seaweed explicitly considers and rejects what they understand of Bioregionalism; their primary rejection surrounds the continuation of border logic within Bioregional theories. This is a valid criticism, as much bioregional practice involves defining boundaries and in doing so risks the re-creation of logic similar to contemporary borders. This replication of logic can result in an "aggressive regionalism"/"territorialism"/"quasi-patriotism" which echoes the colonial State's process of "othering" (Aarsand, 2013; Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.; McGinnis, 2016; Newman, 2006; Seaweed, 2013; Sparrow, 2006). Insistence on bioregional boundaries dictates who should and should not be included within them – as stated in *Desert*, "State boundaries have by definition a fixed immovable, and intangible line, that are purposefully made not to be transgressed" (Anonymous, 2011, p. 63).

Seaweed, therefore does not consider themselves a Bioregionalist, instead favoring a framework of building "habitat" (2013, pp. 45–46). My decision to include Seaweed's work throughout this thesis as an articulation of Liberationist bioregionalism stems from an understanding of the breadth of bioregional theories. I return to the notion of bioregion-*ing* in the Conclusion but point to it here as an example of attempts within bioregional theory to reject borders and develop a more flexible articulation. Finally, Seaweed speaks to important strains of Cascadian Anarchism, bridging green, Queer, Indigenous, insurrectionary and nihilist Anarchisms.

social reproduction” (Andruss et al., 1990, p. 10; Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC), 2023a, p. 3). The Liberationist call for autonomy here is a call for self-determination through regional self-sufficiency and the breaking down of occupying, anti-ecological power structures. Liberationist Cascadia/Bioregionalism is, to phrase it succinctly, “ecology with a vengeance” (Andruss et al., 1990, pp. 10–11). Now, I shift my attention to the Fascist appropriation of Cascadia before closing with an analysis of the (counter-insurgent) Reformist Cascadia movement and its co-optation of Cascadia.

Fascist Cascadia

On the East side of the Cascade mountain range – building compounds and propagating chat rooms – a growing Fascist movement aims to appropriate Cascadia. Located primarily in Idaho and along its borders with Washington and Oregon, the Fascist Cascadia movement has a deep genealogy emanating from the settler-colonization of the Pacific Northwest, through the 20th Century development of Fascism, to the contemporary formations that dominate popular understandings of the Cascadia movement more broadly. Fascist Cascadia is most often described as a specifically eco-Fascist – an ideology which centers and weaponizes ecological thinking toward the realization of Fascist governance. While largely overlooked, Fascist ecology is not new and is, in fact, inseparable from Fascism as a whole. J. Sakai argues that “this [Fascist] type of ecological politics is held not just by a few fanatics but... [is] one possible future for insurgent Green politics” (2002, p. 1). Woven throughout the contemporary Fascist movement – particularly its “esoteric, mystical, and quasi-anarchist” elements – eco-Fascism finds affinity with deep ecology and Bioregionalism by extension (Taylor, 2019, pp. 277–278). Importantly, the Fascist Cascadians – like many eco-Fascists elsewhere – emerge from a genealogy more-closely, though not exclusively, aligned with (Neo-)Nazism than Italian, Spanish, or other Fascisms. This explains

eco-Fascism's alignment with the esoteric and mystical elements of contemporary Fascist ideology, as well as the prominence of specifically neo-Nazi organizing in Cascadia (see the power-maps in Chapter 4). Richard Walther Darre, Reich Minister of Food and Agriculture for the Nazi Party, is credited as a foundational figure in Fascist ecology who pioneered "Blood and Soil" sloganeering (London Permaculture, 2018; Sakai, 2002). This rhetoric argued that people's "blood," i.e. their racially-constructed Nation, is inseparable from a particular "soil" or homeland and was utilized in justification of the concept of Lebensraum – Nazi Germany's policy of colonization in Eastern Europe (Sakai, 2002, p. 5).⁵ Alongside this, Darre formulated much of the Nazis racial ideology, a reality which deeply impacts Fascist ecology's logic (Sakai, 2002). The Fascist Cascadians' appropriation of Bioregionalism is, in reality, a thinly-veiled rebrand of their blood and soil ideology – one which ties white nationhood in Cascadia to the survival of the global ecology.

The central conceptions of Fascist ecology stem from a (racist, patriarchal, and colonial) perspective that the "state of nature" is survival of the fittest, that white people are superior and have thusly "mastered" the domination of nature, and that (the ascendancy of) non-white people are a threat to ecological stability and "purity" (Sakai, 2002). The "survival of the fittest" mentality aligns closely with the Fascist obsession with war, and in viewing the world as such, the Fascist ecologist sees "a ceaseless conflict of stronger predators upon weaker prey, as the perfect metaphor for their own terroristic political economy" (Sakai, 2002, p. 20). Connecting this Fascist view of ecology to the Italian Fascist "ruralization" programs (similar to Nazi "Back to the Land" programs), Huq and Mochida (2018) assert that "[e]nvironmental fascism is founded on the

⁵ To draw out the eco-Fascist genealogy and complicate its linearity – Lebensraum was inspired by the American Empire's settler-colonial practices and logics which continue to appear in contemporary (eco-)Fascist theorization alongside Lebensraum (Sakai, 2002).

assumption that nature should be unconditionally opened up for extraction in order to serve the needs of ‘citizens,’ i.e. members of a white nationalist state.” This logic rationalizes itself as “ecological” rhetorically through the assertion of white mastery over environment and practically through the outsourcing of environmental destruction to land occupied by non-white people. A “broad network of right-wing groups... channeling environmental concern into support for anti-immigration policies” exists alongside and tied to broader eco-Fascist formations and share the racist logic which attributes ecological collapse to the global south while fear-mongering about climate refugees (Taylor, 2019, p. 278).

Eco-Fascism is the weaponization of a Fascist understanding of ecology toward the creation and militarization of white, Fascist ethno-states. Alongside this and previously mentioned beliefs, eco-Fascists frequently fall into the category of accelerationist⁶ – whether they romanticize “a premodern imaginary” or a “hypermodern” futurism – aligning with Fascism’s rhetorical urgency (Taylor, 2019, p. 286; Sakai, 2002). The contemporary condition of ecological collapse proves a potent weapon for the eco-Fascist narrative and is strengthened by Fascism’s appropriation of insurgent rhetoric and tactics (particularly in considering eco-Fascists use of concepts such as “ethno-pluralism” and “national anarchism” – which I return to below) (Sakai, 2002; Taylor, 2019; London Permaculture, 2018). As Sakai notes, eco-Fascism “is not conservative but... violently radical,” it speaks to a desire for drastic change in defense of the planet (2002, p. 101). Fascists promise a National revival, renewal, rebirth – the eco-Fascist presents themselves not as their apocalyptic and genocidal reality but as “the palingenetic myth of ‘new birth’ coupled with

⁶ “Accelerationist” refers to their belief that white supremacist acts of terror – mass shootings for example – will hasten the coming of a race war, which will result in white, Fascist rule (e.g. Atomwaffen Division (AWD), The Base).

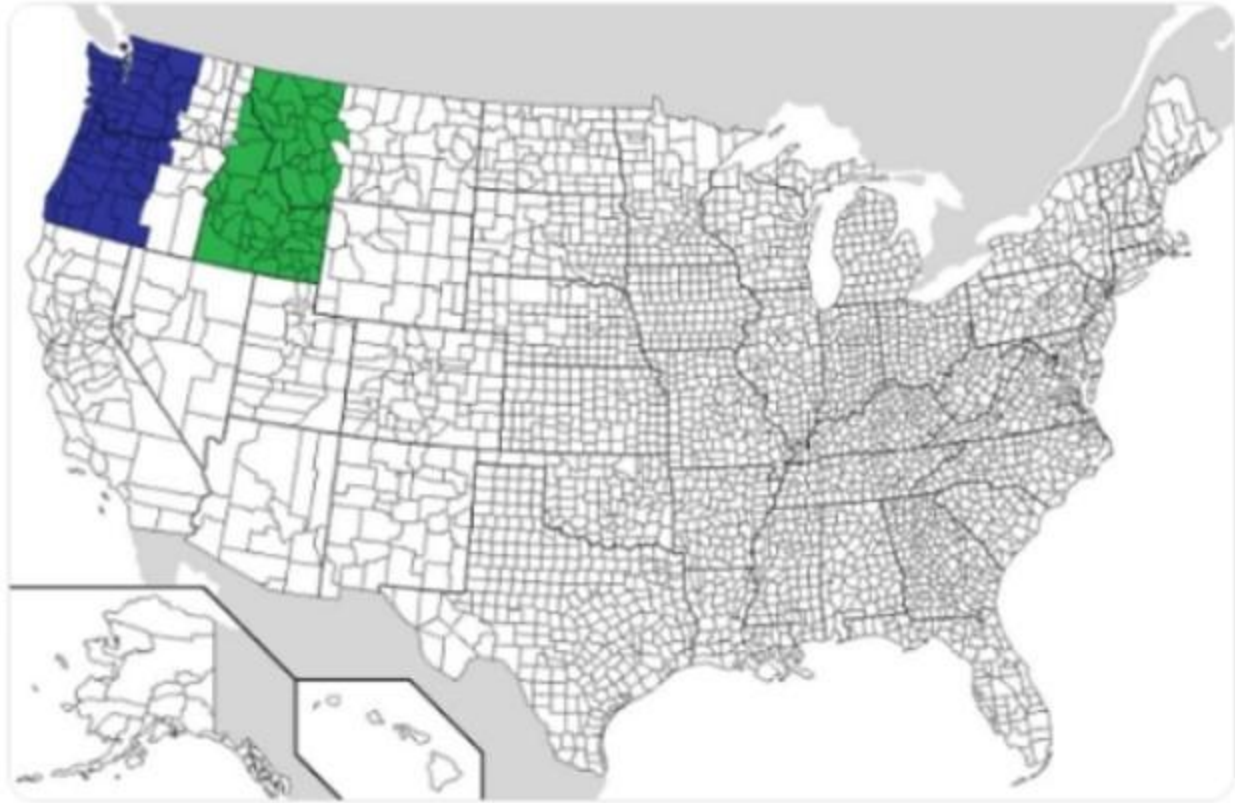


Figure 10 - NWTI Map (Anonymous, 2020)

populist ultra-nationalism manifest[ed] through fears of nihilism of the white race” (Huq & Mochida, 2018).

In the eco-Fascists promise of rebirth one finds the basis for an eco-Fascist project of autonomy and the central link between eco-Fascism and Cascadia. Articulated through critique of the perceived failures of the American Empire – importantly, not through conceptual critique of Empire – primarily attributed to “multi-culturalism,” globalization, and a failure to implement domestic conservation (Anonymous, 2025a, 2025b). Through these critiques emerged the most prominent articulation of the Fascist Cascadian strategy – the Northwest Territorial Imperative (NWTI) (see fig. 10). This is a call for the consolidation of Fascist/-sympathetic forces in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming and/or Montana in order to develop bases of power for the inevitable goal of seceding from the American Empire (Anonymous, 2020, 2025a; Crawford et al.,

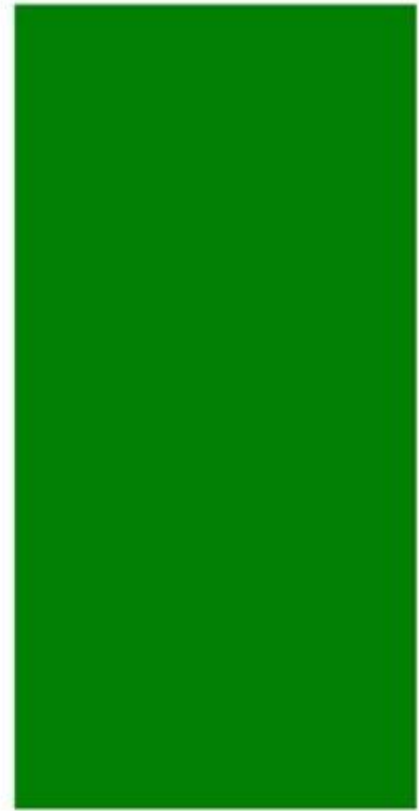


Figure 11 - NWTI Flag (Corvallis Antifascists, 2024)

1994; Lokting, 2018; Sokol, 2019; Taylor, 2019; Wilson, 2020). “The late Bob Miles and Aryan Nations head Richard Butler are generally credited with having been initial formulators of the concept. Neo-Nazi David Duke promoted a version of the plan called the ‘White Bastion’ in the early 1980s” (Crawford et al., 1994, p. n141). More contemporary notions utilizing the language of NWTI are traced back to the notorious white supremacist organizer Harold Covington and his insurgent organization the Northwest Front (NF) (Anonymous, 2020). The NWTI’s appropriation of Cascadia originates from “at least as far back as 2004, when a flag suspiciously similar to the Cascadian flag appeared on the cover” of a book by Covington (see fig. 11) (Corvallis Antifascists, 2024; Lokting, 2018; Taylor, 2019). This blatant co-optation of Cascadia serves as a means to normalize Fascism within the Cascadia movement, as well as market itself to a broader audience through the weaponization of nationalistic regionalism.

Contrary to other formations, however, the Fascist Cascadians embrace the region's settler-colonial histories and narrate its formation as a story of white mastery over nature, domination, and purification – tying these narratives to their appropriation of regional identity. Violent authoritarianism, white supremacy, and Fascism pervades the PNW's post-settlement histories – “Oregon for example was founded as an all-white state, and many Klansmen and confederates moved to the PNW after the Civil War” (Anonymous, 2025a). The NWTI has utilized this narrative in support of developing a Fascist movement in Cascadia and is increasingly successful at doing so (see fig. 12). Despite the Covington and his Northwest Front's lack of legitimacy “among certain sectors of white nationalist and neo-Nazi movements,” the NWTI has proved itself effective in galvanizing significant numbers of Fascists (Anonymous, 2020). Including the NF, I



Figure 12 - Leaked Photo, Fascist Cascadian Meeting (Stumptown Research Collective, 2023)

place my attention on seven Fascist Cascadia organizations within this thesis (see more in Chapter 4), the other six are: the Northwest Pioneer Association (NPA); the Pacific Northwest Wolfpack (PNWWP); the Wolves of Vinland / Operation Werewolf (OW); the Evergreen Active Club; the Rose City Nationalist Club; and the Northwest Nationalist Network (3N) (Anonymous, 2017, 2020, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Corvallis Antifascists, 2024; Stumptown Research Collective, 2023).⁷ These sometimes-overlapping and other-times contradictory organizations move in and around broader Fascist movement spaces, (similarly to the Liberationists with respect to their movements) but geographic alignment and their agreement on rejection of American Nationalism serve to align their interests more closely than with other Fascist formations like the Patriot Front (Anonymous, 2020, 2025a).

Ideologically, the Fascist Cascadians – while interacting with and inspired by the broader, predominantly techno-futurist Fascist movement – tends to align more closely with eco-Fascist arguments emphasizing a romantic, pastoral past. As noted above, the Fascist Cascadians are closely aligned with (neo-)Nazi theories here, particularly those (inspired) by Darre, and present their National “rebirth” with an interesting temporality. The Fascist Cascadians’ obsession with returning the region to an imagined past aligns with their accelerationist ideals and serves as a rejection of linear “Progress” narratives central to the American Empire’s temporal frameworks

⁷ This list is not comprehensive, but represents the most prominent organizations at the time of my writing. Fascist Cascadia organizations have, do, and will continue to exist in the U.S. One example is True Cascadia, which arose in the mid-2010s, spoke at the Fascist Northwest Forum in Seattle, 2016, and had a visible presence at the Fascist 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville (Taylor, 2019: 280). The organization fizzled quickly after several of its chatrooms and core members’ identities were leaked to anonymous activists in 2017 (Anonymous, 2017). The Base, mentioned throughout this thesis, is another organization which (formerly) championed the NWTI – my decision to exclude them from the central organizations listed here is noted at length in Chapter 4, but I will state briefly here that they have recently strayed from the NWTI (Anonymous, 2025b).



*Figure 13 - Post by NPA Member
(Anonymous, 2025b)*

(see Chapter 2); similarly, the NWTI's call is framed as a return home (see fig. 13). There is interesting similarity here to the Liberationist framework of Cascadia as *always* existing, though the Fascist's nationalistic presentation of Cascadia relegates it to the realm of the past or the future. That is, Cascadia (as a white ethno-state) is articulated as a history to return to, only through the collapse of the United States and Canada. In presenting and understanding the continued existence/development of the U.S./Canada as corrosive to the Fascists' desired return, the Fascist Cascadia movement attempts

to synthesize and appropriate eco-Fascist and bioregional theories. This serves the Fascist Cascadia movement by expanding their appeal through an adoption of language deemed more-acceptable than traditional Fascism. Through this manipulation, Fascist Cascadians advocate for "blood and soil" style nationalism under the guise of a bioregional socio-political rearrangement (London Permaculture, 2018; Taylor, 2019). In the past decade, these theories have been rearticulated under the language of "ethno-pluralism" and "National Anarchism." The former, in simplistic terms, argues that every race of people originates from a homeland, and that they should remain there; any nuance aside, this theory is a genocidal one based on justifying the elimination of people of color in territory claimed by whites (Taylor, 2019). The latter – National Anarchism – is a further attempt to rearticulate Fascist Bioregionalism and expand its broader appeal – the theory merges

ethno-pluralism with appropriations of Bioregionalism’s deep ecologist and “Anarcho-primitivist” elements and aims to incorporate potentially-insurgent actors into Fascist movements – including those who would typically align with Liberationist perspectives (London Permaculture, 2018; Taylor, 2019). National Anarchist theory frequently appropriates Indigenous



Figure 14 - Northwest Nationalist Network (3N) Logo (Stumptown Research Collective, 2023)

nationhood into its ethno-pluralism, and speaks frequently to those who desire direct, militant action in the name of environmentalism. In Cascadia, the Fascist Bioregionalists demonstrate success in these attempts to incorporate, with Vince Rinehart (Tlingit) and Eric Lee Flores (Tulalup) advocating positions in close alignment with the Fascist Cascadian movement (Taylor, 2019, p. 282).

Tactically, the Fascist Cascadians align with the Liberationists in their emphasis on direct and autonomous organizing/actions, but diverge in alignment with their ideological differences. Simply put, Fascist Cascadia is concerned with developing *national-identity-through-reinhabitation* – a reinterpretation/appropriation of reinhabitation as a (colonial) process of white occupation through homesteading and base-building in conjunction with the development of autonomous infrastructures and the advocating of militant action. In the Fascist sense,



*Figure 15 - Northwest Pioneer Association (NPA) Member
(Anonymous, 2025a)*

reinhabitation is primarily a process of identity-formation in support of white relocation to Cascadia as a form of movement consolidation (see fig. 13). Fascist Cascadian organizations utilize consistent aesthetics – the NWTI flag as well as symbolism drawn from broader Fascist spaces – in their construction of Fascist Cascadian identity (see figs. 13 - 15), often in conjunction with propagandizing and organizational techniques drawn from the broader contemporary Fascist movement (Corvallis

Antifascists, 2024; Stumptown Research Collective, 2023). One significant approach adopted by the Fascist Cascadians is the active club model popularized by organizations like the Proud Boys (who have a strong presence in Cascadia themselves). According to the Stumptown Research Collective (2023), “[t]he active club model is a template for autonomously organized and loosely

networked crews of white men whose common cause is rooted in their obsession over fitness, masculinity and racial grievance.” These organizations often engage in public displays and release “hyper-stylized videos in an attempt to recruit disaffected, young white men” by providing a space in which they build community (Stumptown Research Collective, 2023). To reassert – this is a process of Fascist reinhabitation in which various organizations engage in a collective process of place-making, attempting to forge unity in support of a Fascist, white ethno-state Cascadia.

Like the Liberationists – while diametrically opposing them, of course – the Fascist Cascadians assert the need for direct actions in support of Cascadian autonomy. These direct tactics appropriate heavily from Liberationist traditions – including, but not limited to, various Anarchist and Marxist schools of thought – and demonstrate the insurgent bent of the Fascist Cascadia movement.⁸ Covington’s Northwest Front explicitly “calls for ‘acts of insurrection and guerrilla warfare,’ and states that ‘actual and serious physical damage must be inflicted on the enemy’” (Anonymous, 2020). In attempt to develop the capacity for such activities, the Fascist Cascadia movement frequently engages in base-building practices not wholly unlike those proposed and utilized by Mao Zedong. This base-building ranges from temporary armed occupations to the development of autonomous “prepper” compounds around the region (Anonymous, 2025b; Corvallis Antifascists, 2024; Huq & Mochida, 2018; MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020; Sokol, 2019; Wilson, 2020).

Despite this insurgent rhetoric and militant preparation, the practical realization of Covington’s call for war is less often a mobilizing force against the American Empire as it is “a rational facade constructed around a core desire to kill random non-white people and gays” (Anonymous, 2025a).

⁸ Most dramatic of these appropriations comes from the alleged leadership of the NPA’s Portland Cell, who have turned to promotion of “Nazi-Maoism” alongside their devotion to NWTI/Fascist Cascadia (Anonymous, 2025b).

Several alleged members/leaders of the Fascist Cascadia movement have committed acts of racist and anti-Queer violence – up to and including homicide (Corvallis Antifascists, 2024). Beyond this, the movement involves various affiliations and relationships with other violent Fascist, neo-Nazi, and otherwise white-supremacist organizations, prison gangs, and motorcycle clubs (see Chapter 4) (Anonymous, 2017, 2020, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Corvallis Antifascists, 2024). Viciously persistent racial agitation in combination with “unfaltering support of extremist, lone-wolf violence” is a central strategy for contemporary Fascist movements in Cascadia and beyond (Anonymous, 2020). To summarize, the Fascist Cascadia movement draws from Fascist ecologies and appropriations of Bioregionalism to develop a racial-National Cascadian identity capable of spurring white, Fascist relocation/consolidation to prepare for and accelerate a race war they believe will result in Cascadian autonomy as a white ethno-state. In response to the terror of the Fascist Cascadia movement and the insurgent potential of the Liberationist Cascadians, a plethora of organizations have emerged with the goal of reorienting the Cascadia movement toward Statal, pacifist, and counter-cultural movements – in this thesis, I group these approaches under the label of “Reformist Cascadia.”

Reformist Cascadia

While coming from a range of political positions, the Reformist Cascadians are aligned in their commitment to legalistic and policy-oriented organizing as well as in their rejection of Cascadia as a secessionist or otherwise insurgent project. This countering of an insurgent Cascadia appears in a variety of forms, most commonly in reducing Cascadia to: a consumer identity; an environmental culture and associated governance; and/or a trade corridor (Hubbard et al., 2023; McGinnis, 2016; Smith, 2004). Practically speaking, these approaches serve to incorporate Bioregional perspectives into State- and/or Capital-friendly frameworks while/by weakening their calls for autonomy (Haenke & Wahl, 2021; Smith, 2004). To the Reformists, the Cascadian project is primarily one of promoting



*Figure 16 - "Main Street" Cascadia Map
(Cascade Media, 2016)*

intra-regional cooperation in economic and environmental activity/governance – therefore, their understanding of Cascadian autonomy/independence is not one of complete self-determination but of limiting the power of the US and Canadian Federal Governments over the region (Smith, 2004). This aligns closely with the fact that the Reformist Cascadia movement is primarily located in Western OR, WA, and BC’s “Main Street’ Cascadia” – i.e. concentrated in the major economic hubs of Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver (see fig. 16) (“An Idea Whose Time Has Come,” 2016; Cappellano, 2019; Cascade Media, 2016; Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004; Holmes, 2017; Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Inslee & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Microsoft, 2016). In some instances, the Reformists stray from autonomy altogether, approaching Cascadia/Bioregionalism as a depoliticized form of “lifestyle-ism” or consumer identity centered around eating local, community gardening, biking, and other activities associated with “environmentalism” (Hubbard et al., 2023). Both approaches effectively undermine Bioregionalism’s deep critiques of the colonial capitalist system while appropriating the language and imagery of Cascadia into a narrative/platform in line with the interests of Empire.

The Cascadia movements each attempt to construct a regional identity, the Reformists do so by drawing on narratives of Progress and regional exceptionalism. Cascadia is construed as an environmental paradise in need of protection with a population aligned in their commitment to do so (through the State)(Aarsand, 2013; Cappellano, 2019; Holmes, 2017; Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017). This Cascadian mythos emphasizes the region’s ‘unique’ potential for bioregional governance, ecological purity, and most importantly, economic strength (Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.; Engelson, 2017). Here, Cascadia is given a particularly linear and futurist temporality in which regional political-economic development – allowed to

progress on its own basis – will result in the creation of a green tech economy capable of protecting Cascadia’s ecosystem and reversing global climate collapse.

Depending on how one defines the boundaries of Cascadia, its post-1990s economy would land somewhere in the global top twenty with an annual GDP of nearly a trillion dollars (Engelson, 2017; Lokting, 2018). This economy is largely dependent on the growth of big tech firms like Microsoft, which happens to be a foundational figure in the creation of the Cascadia Innovation Corridor (CIC) – one of the most prominent Reformist Cascadia organizations (see Chapter 4 for more) (“An Idea Whose Time Has Come,” 2016; Cappellano, 2019; Holmes, 2017; Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Inslee & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Microsoft, 2016; Trautman & Cappellano, 2019). Utilizing Microsoft’s position as “the most connected actor in the Cascadia innovation ecosystem,” the CIC quickly mobilized “stakeholders on both sides of the border, including additional tech giants such as Amazon, colleges and universities, major cancer centers, and various scales of government” as well as non-profit organizations and business associations like “Challenge Seattle and the Business Council of British Columbia” (Cappellano, 2019, p. 12; Trautman & Cappellano, 2019, p. 1; “An Idea Whose Time Has Come,” 2016; Holmes, 2017; Holmes & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Inslee & Cascadia Innovation Corridor, 2017; Microsoft, 2016). Under the name of Cascadia, the CIC and similar organizations – e.g. the Discovery Institute’s Cascadia Center for Regional Development and the Sightline Institute (see Chapter 4 for more) – weaponize the environmental reputation and “natural history of Cascadia to ‘brand and market it in the global circuits of consumption and investment’” (Aarsand, 2013, p. 51; Oro, 2025). Reformist Cascadia champions programs such as the “‘preferred customer’ PACE lane for border crossing and its post 9/11 replacement... NEXUS system [which] clearly divided Cascadia’s citizens into two groups depending on profile and

payment through planned replacement of national passports with privately-run ‘credit/access cards’” (Smith, 2004, p. 101). This example clearly demonstrates the Reformist Cascadia movement’s agenda to shift power from the US/Canada Federal Governments to regional (non-/State) power structures. Reformist Cascadia is, at its most realized, a “policy metaphor” for the “efficient movement of transnational, neo-liberal elite” utilizing regional ecological narratives toward higher levels of State control (Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004, p. 61). In the contemporary context of exponentially expanding (automated) surveillance, war, and climate collapse, a Reformist Cascadia would amount to “a transnational corridor that gives privileges to the neo-liberal elite with little border-crossing restrictions while widening,” and militarizing, “the border for the rest” (Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004, p. 61).

In their adapting of the idea of Cascadia to State-/capital-friendly perspectives, the Reformist Cascadians undermine – as they do to the concept/project of autonomy – the Bioregionalist core of the movement. The Reformist Cascadians, who vary in environmental approach, lie somewhere between social democratic ‘Green New Deal’ (GND) perspectives and ‘green’ techno-solutionism; the former argues for global ecological recovery through the expansion of the State and its investment in low-carbon infrastructures and decarbonization policies, the later arguing for the same through the deregulation of and investment in so-called green technologies (Dunlap & Laratte, 2022). The two perspectives consistently overlap in and outside of the Reformist Cascadia space. Alexander Dunlap speaks extensively of the limitations of such “green capitalist” approaches due to their replicating of “colonially shaped [global] North-South relations,” “various forms of internal colonization,” and land-/value-grabbing based “extractivism” (Dunlap et al., 2024, pp. 438, 443; Dunlap, 2018; Dunlap & Laratte, 2022; Sovacool et al., 2025). Green New Deal perspectives and green techno-solutionism propose “rapid and extensive deployment of low-

carbon infrastructures” such as “wind and solar energy generation, high-voltage power lines (HVPLs), digital (or ‘smart’) technologies and electric-mobility” alongside “processes of ‘green financialization,’ involving carbon markets, payment for ecosystems services and green bond markets” which simultaneously replicate unequal and imperial global power relations while ignoring “the extractive, land-use and economic reality behind low-carbon and so-called ‘renewable energy’ infrastructures” (Dunlap & Laratte, 2022, pp. 1–2, 6; Dunlap et al., 2024, p. 443). Dunlap further clarifies the colonial processes operating behind such projects:

“Megaprojects in general, and wind energy in particular, create a self-fulfilling cycle of state, economic and energetic dependency on infrastructure systems through large-scale development that gradually weakens localized food systems, while promoting development on a scale incompatible with ecological sustainability, which also stifles potential development alternatives” (2018, p. 562).

By leveraging a strong political-economic position in the global order – whether it is the American Empire or Cascadia more specifically – these perspectives claim a unique, global responsibility/right to such “green development” projects, a logic which mirrors the “‘white man’s savior complex’” (see Chapter 2) (Dunlap, 2018, p. 553). Considering the ecologically-devastating, colonial effects of Reformist Cascadia’s environmental perspectives, Bioregionalism’s expansive ecological perspective is clearly undermined by ideologies which seek to preserve Cascadia’s ecologies by “externalizing the threats to somewhere else in order to feel protected in one’s own backyard” (Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004, p. 64). Such lack of consideration for the globally “polarized nature of accumulation” results in the Reformists articulating a vision of Cascadian futurity which maintains its position within the imperial core and, often, within the American Empire itself (Ajl, 2023, p. 39; Cold-Ravnkilde et al., 2004). To close, I point to Klee Benally’s antagonistic question: “*do we really want a more ecologically friendly form of settler colonial capitalist domination, or do we seek to abolish its very existence?*” (Benally, 2023, p. 141, emphasis added).

The divergent evolution of three distinct movements for Cascadia has come with a variety of approaches to bioregional thinking and – most importantly, I argue – articulations of Cascadian autonomy. From the Liberationists, a variety of challenges to the dominating American Empire converge in their calls for autonomy as total liberation and self-determination through regional self-sufficiency and the breaking down of occupying, anti-ecological power structures. This aspirational vision represents an attempt to take the concept of Cascadia to its most insurgent, to understand it as a call to liberate an ecosystemically-constructed community (i.e. the Bioregion) which is *always already existing* from beneath the dominating structures of Empire’s occupation. The Fascists present a violently oppositional fantasy: Cascadian autonomy as the creation of an independent, white, eco-Fascist ethno-state. Inspired by the settler-colonial origins of the American Empire and faced with the precarity of apocalyptic climate collapse, the Fascists call for a (racially-determined) National rebirth enabling whites’ militant self-preservation in the constructed homeland of Cascadia. The concepts of bioregionalism here are twisted and appropriated into narratives of white superiority and the necessity of global and genocidal ethno-nationalism. The Fascist Cascadia movement’s complex embrace of the American Empire’s white settler origins and rejection of it’s contemporary “multi-culturalism” – construed as an existential ecological threat – results the movement presenting itself less often as an insurgency against the American Empire than as a small-scale, protracted civil war against the Liberationists and marginalized populations. In (counter-insurgent) reaction to the Liberationist and Fascist Cascadia Movements, the Reformists attempt to co-opt Cascadia and Bioregional concepts toward State-and/or capital-friendly perspectives. In softening these ideas, the Reformists present their calls for autonomy as little more than a policy-based redistribution of power into the hands of regional

governments and a facilitation of regional, cross-border political-economic cooperation. I argue that a failure of the (Liberationist) Cascadia/Bioregionalism movement to deeply engage with the concepts of Empire and counter-insurgency has left it vulnerable to Fascist and Reformist appropriations/co-optations which redirect movement energy away from challenging the legitimacy and authority of the American Empire; this arguably prevents the possibility of Cascadian autonomy (as the Liberationists envision it) and Bioregional thought. Further, I assert that by placing Bioregional/Cascadia movement praxis in conversation with these concepts, new insights can be gained across all areas. The following two chapters – “2 - Empire’s Pathology: Intimate Occupation, Cerebrum Nullius, and Cognitive Capture” and “3 - Reading Against the Counter-insurgency (COIN) Archive: Perpetual Warfare as Imperial Governance” – approach the concepts of Empire and counter-insurgency respectively before returning in the final two chapters to apply this thinking to the Cascadia movement

2 – Empire’s Pathology:

Intimate Occupation, *Cerebrum Nullius*, and Cognitive Capture

For the Liberationists – in seeking to develop the insurgent potential of the Cascadia movement – recognition of the bioregion’s conflict with existing power structures is critical. Insurgency is poetic: it is of its context, and thus it is a practice of responding, of deeply understanding context. As Orisanmi Burton asserts in *Tip of the Spear*: “This poetics of living rebellion mobilizes its own rationality, a way of seeing ‘the thousands of things that is the world’... it acquires meaning through feeling and listening” (2023, p. 74). David Scott introduces the concept of a “‘problem-space,’...a discursive context, a context of language” as a means of understanding the “ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes... hangs” (2004, p. 4). Insurgency is a problem-space (as it is a space of embracing problems) and therefore “the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having” within it are vital (Scott, 2004, p. 4). After all, Scott reminds us that “the way one defines an alternative depends on the way one has conceived the problem” (Scott, 2004, p. 6). In the following chapter, I argue that the insurgent problem-space of the Cascadia movement calls for engagement with the concept of Empire. In particular, I assert that approaching Cascadia as a region occupied by Empire and developing a critical/insurgent narrative of Empire’s emergence, existence, and potential execution serves to unsettle bioregional thinking and open its horizon of possibilities. Below, I approach the concept of Empire and attempt to formulate a conceptualization of it tailored to this problem-space.

I begin with a note on the critical importance of narrative in Empire’s conception, as well as in critically conceptualizing Empire for the context of Cascadia. Then, I interrogate various critical approaches to the concept. While understanding the impossibility of neatly distinguishing these approaches – as well as the irony of attempting to do so in light of my approach to “Empire” – I

broadly categorize them into three (overlapping) perspectives: the Politico-legal, Economistic, and Militaristic Approaches to Empire. After defining and exploring these, I expand upon the ways in which the Cascadia movement has engaged with the concept of Empire while finding intersections with the three approaches laid out before. Shifting to a more critical view, I then take note of their common reliance on (false) notions of Empire's temporal and spatial scale, as well as a consistent utilization of binary lines of thinking. Following this, I shift back to the problem-space of Cascadia and begin conceptualizing Empire as a pathology, a perpetual (and self-reinforcing) process of coercion and pacification aimed at nurturing a universal identification with Empire's worldview. In this section, I highlight the importance of centering counter-insurgency, flexibility, and settler-colonialism in Empire's construction. I spend significant time in the next chapter detailing Empire's practical reappearance across time; therefore, this chapter is focused primarily on establishing the logical roots of Empire as a pathology. Finally, I speak on Empire's worldview – drawn from the concepts of *terra nullius* and *corpus nullius* – which I deem *cerebrum nullius*, or the belief that uncolonized minds (identified as those in the way of Empire's expansion) are objects open to colonial penetration: every brain is a new frontier.

Critically Approaching Empire: Definitions, Narratives, Limitations

Considering the complexity of academic discourse on the term Empire, I find it necessary to address my approach to the word itself. Uses of “Empire,” “Imperialism,” “Colonialism,” “Colonization,” and the variety of related terms – often overlapping and sometimes interchangeable – present so uniquely in each work that it would hardly be an exaggeration to assert that each theorist has their own definition(s). In many ways, I find the constant taxonomizing and recategorization of these terms as unhelpful as it is inspired by a lineage of colonial scholarly practices. Of course, much of the scholarly work doing such taxonomizing is critical – if not

insurgent – but construction of rigid boundaries where they do not exist helps no one. Furthermore, David Vine notes “the white male domination of theorizing empire” – an ironic domination given the racialized and gendered nature of Empire itself (2018, p. 252). I thus approach theories of Empire with caution and with hope that synthesis, muddling, and queering may unsettle “Empire” in insurgent directions. To reiterate, I have refused the task of distinguishing “Empire” from “Colonialism” or “Imperialism” as counterproductive to the problem-space in which I speak. Behind the complexity of terms (Empire, Colonialism, Imperialism), beyond the false solidifying of their fluid boundaries, lies an equal complexity of situations, formations, desires. Every individual empire is formulated within its own temporal-spatial contexts, possesses its own socio-political-economic contexts, and produces its own onto-epistemologies and futurities through narrative.

The forces of Empire – as well as anti-imperialism – constitute themselves through narratives tailored to their problem-space (Scott, 2004). Narrative is worldbuilding; it is a prefiguration of real worlds in the minds of its adherents. “The relation between pasts, presents, and futures”, David Scott argues, “is a relation constituted in narrative” (Scott, 2004, p. 45). In their iconic *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) address this power of narration:

“[t]he imperial machine lives by producing a context of equilibria and/or reducing complexities... the imperial machine, far from eliminating master narratives, actually produces and reproduces them (ideological master narratives in particular) in order to validate and celebrate its own power” (2000, p. 34).

Storytelling performs vital pedagogical labor in producing value(s) and desires, and to reiterate Ann Stoler, colonial authority rests on the “proper distribution of sentiments and desires” (2006, p. 2). Narrative – and Empire, for that matter – is a temporal process, one of constructing notions of past, present, and future. Deconstruction of Empire’s narrative is, therefore, a vital speculative

practice of calling to, demanding, and creating new worlds in contradictory coexistence with Empire. Speculation is an act of creation.

In Empire's imaginary, "[t]he future itself becomes a land, a territory subject to property regimes while being contingent on the relations established with and through land as property" (rhodes, 2025a, pp. 2, 32). In this way, Empire is both geographic and speculative while demonstrating the lack of distinction between the two. The "speculative geographic," rhodes asserts, "is therefore a means through which colonial fantasy is projected onto the racialized space and place of the colonized other" (2025a, p. 32). It is, in part, through narration that this projection occurs, through the linguistic act of world-making through storytelling. Empire makes spatial and temporal claims, largely surrounding a narrative of Progress – that is, Empire presents itself as the "most advanced" society, able to bring all others into a state of Development and Civilization through promoting trade and "peace" through centralized force in the hands of the State (Arneil, 2024; Wynter, 2003). As Hardt and Negri note, Empire is formed on the basis that it presents its "force as being in the service of right and peace" (2000, p. 15). This Progress narrative presents Empire's (spatially/temporally) total colonization as inevitable and positive, leaning on its linear temporal frameworks (Phillips, 2025). As rhodes notes, these "linear temporal frameworks... utilize periodization schemes to illustrate its own evolution and contemporary successes," that is, Empire divides history into Progressive eras leading to its culmination as the height of social possibility (2025a, p. 27). The temporal segmentation of Empire's narrative renders histories of anti-colonial resistance less potent. Stated succinctly by rhodes, "this narrative relies on the construction of these events as the isolated origins of surges in violence, producing a collective sense of the armed conflict as terroristic" (2025a, p. 5). Rasheeda Phillips takes this further, asserting that under linear and segmented Progress narratives, "the future becomes a monolithic

structure, rigid in its form and closed to negotiation or reimagination” (2025, pp. 228–229). Empire’s narrative is profoundly expansive, viewing all, multi-directional horizons in land and time as claimable – “it imagines an empire in perpetuity” (Kaplan, 2004, p. 4). The past, future, and the present are unsettled, zones of constant conflict and rearticulation, spaces of counter-/insurgency.

Empire, most broadly speaking, is “a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls another political society” (Anghie, 2005, p. 11). The practices of empires involve – to various degrees – the imposition of colonial cultures, theories, structures, and customs; the exploitation of colonized lands, bodies, lives; and the expansion of settlement through invasion (Anghie, 2005; Dunlap, 2018; Jacobs, 2002). As mentioned earlier, Empire describes a relationship of domination – Barbara Arneil’s descriptions of Colonialism and Imperialism are useful in identifying the various, contradictory outlooks of those involved in Empire-building. Further, Arneil asserts that a “central thread of modern colonialism... [was] animated by an internalized, penetrative, and productive form of power that seeks to segregate and ‘improve’ ‘backward’ people(s) from within and ‘improve’ ‘waste’ lands”; she differentiates this from Imperialism, defined as “animated by a sovereign form of power that seeks to dominate ‘naturally inferior’ subjects and vast territories from above and afar” (2024, p. 148). Empire – in the context of Cascadia – employs both outlooks throughout the complex process of its expansion under the names “United States” and “Canada.” Antonio Gramsci reminds us, “[a] collective organism is made up of single individuals, who form the organism” in their replication and acceptance of it (2012, p. 187); Empire, as a collective organism, cannot be defined concisely, it can only be understood as a complex interaction of (often contradictory) practices, ideologies, onto-epistemologies, futurities, spatial / material organizations, all mediated through narrative. The

following sections approach the critical narratives constructed in attempts to define Empire. I divide these into three primary lines of thinking: the Politico-legal, the Economistic, and the Militaristic. Additionally, I investigate the approaches to Empire utilized in Bioregional writing. Again, I insist on understanding these approaches as mutually constituted, frequently overlapping, and equally important.

Politico-Legal Approaches

The Politico-legal Approach to defining Empire emphasizes the direct political control of one State over a given “foreign” population (Immerwahr, 2019). Frequently, this approach emphasizes the lack of sovereign government on behalf of the colonized population. Insurgent Hawaiian scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask eloquently enumerates a politico-legal approach to anti-imperialism in her 1993 “Speech at the ‘Onipa’a event at ‘Lolan Palace, Honolulu”:

“The other day in the paper, I read, ‘sovereignty is aloha, its love,’ later on, someone said, ‘it’s pride.’ No. Sovereignty is government, sovereignty is government. It is an attribute of nationhood! We already have aloha, we already have pride, we already know who we are! Are we sovereign? No! Because we don’t have a government, because we don’t control the land base. Sovereignty is not a feeling, it is the power of government, it is political power, it is politics!” (1993).

In her articulation, Trask identifies Empire with the denial of the colonized people’s sovereignty, meaning their statehood, their self-governance. This approach aligns closely with State-centered articulations of autonomy within the Cascadia movement (Anonymous, 2020; Oro, 2025), despite the fact that the historical limits of anti-imperialist nationalism are well documented, as is Empire’s manipulation and weaponization of sovereignty and law (Anghie, 2005; Asad, 2010; Foucault, 2003; M. Hardt & Negri, 2000; Newton & Lenin, 2004; Scott, 2004).

Politico-legal approaches are frequently interwoven with Economistic and Militaristic ones and are often expressed with the language of “power over a foreign entity.” Andrew Hedden

exemplifies: “Empire... [is] defined by asymmetrical relations of power that extended far beyond the nominal boundaries of the city and the nation-state, rendered through labor exploitation, uneven economic integration, and enabled and enforced by violence” (2023, pp. 21–22). Huey P. Newton expresses a similarly expansive view, stating, “[a]n empire is a nation-state that has transformed itself into a power controlling all the lands and people” (in Newton & Lenin, 2004, p. 31). Newton’s prophetic 1971 speech “Intercommunalism” integrates with the Politico-legal Approach a rich understanding of globalizing capitalism’s role in constituting the hegemonic American Empire (in Newton & Lenin, 2004). This focus on capitalism and economic domination/exploitation echoes the second approach I emphasize: the Economistic Approach.

Economistic Approaches

The Economistic Approach equates empire with “economic-imperialism,” or a given State’s domination of “foreign” economies. This approach is common amongst Marxist theorists who are frequently accused of lacking engagement with the intimate and non-economic dimensions of Empire (Brogan & Hugill, 2014; Harvey, 2003; Lenin, 1977, 2011; Narayan, 2019, 2020; Newton & Lenin, 2004; Panitch & Gindin, 2013). V.I. Lenin’s *Imperialism* is central to many Economistic formulations of Empire; in this classic text, Lenin defines imperialism as the development of global, monopolized, and financialized capitalism – seen as a natural stage of capitalist development (in Lenin, 1977). *Imperialism* situates the capitalist drive toward endless expansion alongside the social disparities of monopoly capitalism – hence, the economic role of imperialism is simultaneously to satisfy capital’s desire for / reliance on new frontiers of profit and to alleviate the pressure toward proletarian insurgency within the Empire itself (Lenin, 1977, pp. 225–230). Extending this logic to analysis of the U.S. Empire, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin’s *The Making of Global Capitalism* asserts that “[t]he creation of stable conditions for globalized capital

accumulation... was now accomplished by the American informal empire, which succeeded in integrating all the other capitalist powers into an effective system of coordination under its aegis.” (Panitch & Gindin, 2013, pp. 7–8). Pointing to the post-WWII expansion of international financial institutions and the strengthening of the dollar, Panitch and Gindin exemplify the Economistic Approach to defining Empire (2013, p. 8). While often supplemented with other approaches, the Economistic Approach frequently asserts the predominance of the economic; once again, Panitch and Gindin provide the clearest example of this: “[t]he containment of Communism... was largely about ensuring that as many of the world’s states as possible would be open to the accumulation of capital” (2013, p. 11). Here the narrative centering of capital accumulation in the expansion of Empire paints a reductive picture which fails to contend with the racialized and politically / militarily strategic drives for the pacification of the Communist movement. Such an approach as Panitch and Gindin’s – which places economic domination and the drive for capital accumulation as primary – is contrasted, starkly at times, by the Militaristic Approach to defining Empire.

Militaristic Approaches

David Vine (2018) and Daniel Immerwahr (2019) point to military power as the foremost feature of Empire – Vine stating this explicitly. Immerwahr (2019), blending Politico-legal and Militaristic Approaches, defines Empire as “a way of describing a country that, for good or bad, has outposts and colonies”; furthermore, he states, “empire is not about a country’s character, but its shape.” The Militaristic frequently aligns with this logic, identifying military bases/infrastructure as primary sites of imperial power; Immerwahr (2019) describes the U.S. Empire as a “pointillist empire” (see fig. 17), a view encapsulated in Vine’s description of U.S. imperial geography: “the small-scale acquisition of territory for island bases has allowed the United States to dominate large swaths of ocean territory upon which global trade and the nation’s

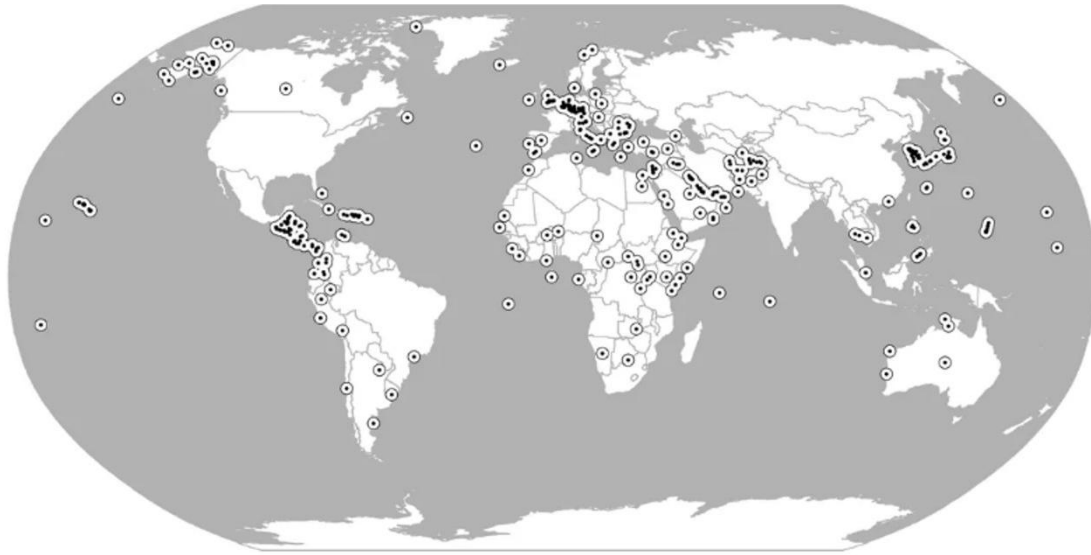


Figure 17 - "Pointillist Empire" Map (Immerwahr, 2019)

economy rely” (2018, p. 264). Other articulations of Militaristic definitions of Empire range from Andrew Hedden’s (2023) description of Seattle as an imperial city due to its centrality in military manufacturing to theories of “internal colonialism/imperialism” which risk conflating Empire with State violence more broadly (Arneil, 2024; Stoler, 2006). Before detailing my issues with the three interconnected approaches to Empire detailed above, I identify where bioregional theorists have approached the question.

Bioregional Approaches

Bioregional theorists engage with the concept of Empire at various depths. Most often, this engagement comes from the insurgent wings of the movement: Marxist, Anarchist, even neo-Nazi. Some approaches – primarily the Liberationists – place emphasis on the ongoing colonial character of Empire in Cascadia (and other bioregions across Turtle Island), while most approach colonization from a largely historical perspective. For example, Douglas Aberley’s (1985) foundational *Bioregionalism*, in which the settler author approaches colonization as a phenomenon of the past, or various Fascist Cascadians who view settler-colonization as a lost era to resurrect

(Anonymous, 2020). This lack of critical interrogation of the ongoing nature of imperial structures appears across time, a more contemporary example being Ingeborg Aarsand's *Imagining Cascadia* (2013). I understand these approaches as close to the Militaristic in that they identify Empire simply as a unique form of violence. Roy Oro (2025) illustrates another example: ““The US Empire thus took on its international dimension and paved the way for global hegemony in the aftermath of World War 2, which then evolved into ‘Domino Theory’ and then of course, the ‘War on Terror’. What underlies these imperialist efforts is not ‘national security’ but rather are the evolutions of the land-grab economics of early US construction.” Oro’s identification of American Empire as constituted because of colonial and later “international” military violence clearly echoes the Militaristic Approach.

Advocates of Cascadian secession frequently mirror the Politico-legal Approach, emphasizing bioregional sovereignty as the means by which to free themselves from Empire (nothingforourselves, 2012). The replication of national liberation logic is clear here, but presents itself even in some non-secessionist articulations of Cascadian sovereignty. Alexander Baretich, artist of the most widely recognized Cascadian flag design, urges that “Cascadia’s about survival, survival [after the collapse] of the empire” and urges focus on developing self-sufficiency in the Cascadian movement over “fight[ing] against an empire which is one of the most brutal... in recorded history” (in nothingforourselves, 2012). Bioregional theories of Empire along the lines of the Politico-legal Approach tend to rely on nationalistic narratives of Cascadia and the assertion that some form of recognized sovereignty will free the region from Empire. These approaches are of the minority, and most assertions of Empire within bioregional theory do not rely on constructing such a relationship between Empire and an imagined sovereign Cascadia. The editors of *Cascadia Zen Vol. 1* assert – “Cascadia invites us to think politics and economics from the

history and reality of our place rather than colonially demarcate it based on reigning political and economic ideologies. We are unwilling to leave global capitalism unchallenged” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. xviii). Here, the connection of coloniality and global capitalism mirrors Economistic Approaches to defining Empire. This approach – far more common than the Politico-legal – is rooted in Bioregionalism’s insistence on locality and sustainability: opposition to “Empire,” i.e. globalization, as an anti-ecological project. Ironically, this narrative is often mirrored by elements of the neo-Nazi Cascadia advocates, though frequently in combination with explicitly (ethno-)nationalist sovereignty/secessionist approaches. Blair Taylor succinctly articulates this position:

“[Eco-Fascists’] ecological antimodernism targets the ‘Empire of Nothing’, characterized by unfulfilling capitalist materialism, an unnatural and emasculating egalitarianism, and a corrupt state which protects it. Nature represents a timeless hierarchical order and the alternative to modernity, whose multiculturalism, feminism, wealth, urbanism, and statist bureaucracy breeds decadence, weakness and inferiority” (2019, p. 285).

While diametrically opposed to decolonial bioregional approaches to Empire, the Neo-Nazi weaponization of Empire rhetoric is notable.

Identifying Empire with anti-ecology is far from exclusive to the Neo-Nazis – this broad definition is utilized by David Haenke, Green Party activist and advocate of “ecological economics,” who states “[t]he simultaneous ethnocide and ecocide of indigenous peoples and the lands where they live is an action of the mega-cancer to kill another crucial part of the fabric and spirit of the Earth” (in Haenke & Wahl, 2021). The editors of *Cascadian Zen* draw a similar connection, posing “the economics of politics of empire” as a barrier to connection with land and place (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 97). Broad notions of Empire appear frequently in work on Cascadia, from *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Andruss et al., 1990) to writing by Seaweed (2013) and Oro (2025) – generally, “Empire” here shares the characteristics of being anti-ecological, anti-Indigenous, white supremacist, and exceptionalist. However, most interestingly – I argue –

bioregional theories of Empire identify it primarily in cognitive terms; in other words, Empire is understood as a manifested worldview. Employed to foil re-inhabitation, the bioregional theory of Empire largely understands its power as cultural, to be found in our collective detachment from the places in which we live.

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Each of these critical approaches to defining Empire – the Politico-legal, the Economistic, the Militaristic, and the bioregional – struggle with conceptualizing a framework to fit the nuances of the Cascadian context. Even while acknowledging the flexible, sometimes incomprehensible, nature of Empire, many attempts to define its structure result in a rigidity which too closely mirrors colonial lines of thinking. Empire is marked by complex interrelation, formed through movement, intimacy, and change. As V.I. Lenin notes, “all boundaries in nature and in society are conventional and changeable... it would be absurd,” he asserts, “to argue... about the particular year or decade in which imperialism ‘definitely’ became established” (1977, p. 737). The limitations of existing approaches struggle in their reliance on false binaries and rigid temporal frameworks.

Limitations: False Binaries and Scale

The U.S. and Canadian Empires – with their settler-colonial character – blur, if not entirely obliterate, the widely accepted binaries of foreign/domestic, metropole/colony, core/periphery. Further and as previously discussed, Empire haunts across time; histories, futures, presents are in constant re-negotiation as Empire’s narrative shifts and realigns. The difficulty of encapsulating Empire by a single definition is clear, as is the need for a conception which contends with the fluidity of Empire.

A central question arises in much of the literature: when does Empire *become* Empire? Such questioning, as can be seen from Lenin quoted above, fails to contend with the flexible reality of

Empire's constitution. This temporal compartmentalization is embodied in Panitch and Gindin's statement, for example, that Empire "actually operates through states and through markets, as opposed to territorial expansion"—a blatant erasure of the American Empire's settler origins (in Brogan & Hugill, 2014, p. 104). Obscuring of colonial settlement is central to the U.S. and Canadian Empires' self-justification and reappears frequently in the limitations of critical conceptions of Empire. Many accounts of Empire, in fact, begin with either the 1898 U.S. colonization of the Philippines (Immerwahr, 2019; Kramer, 2006), America's 1950s post-war ascension (Barnett, 2008; Brogan & Hugill, 2014; Good & Phillips, 2022; Hedden, 2023; Narayan, 2019), or later actions seeking military-economic dominance (Ali & Barsamian, 2005; Harvey, 2003; Kwet, 2019). These notions of Empire, which define it's origin after the colonization of the so-called "continental U.S.," work from an acceptance of American nationhood along the Manifest Destiny borders and thus fail to incorporate settler-colonization into their definitions of Empire. These conceptions define Empire "by asymmetrical relations of power that extended far beyond the nominal boundaries of the city and the nation-state, rendered through labor exploitation, uneven economic integration, and enabled and enforced by violence" (Hedden, 2023, pp. 21–22). To place this definition in conversation with my emerging critiques of Empire's defined (temporal and spatial) scale raises questions: which "nominal boundaries" are accepted?; at what point were those boundaries constructed?; what constitutes extension "far beyond"?; how can we understand this extension as spatial *and* temporal?

"Empire exhausts historical time," argue Hardt and Negri (2000), it "suspends history and summons the past and future within its own ethical order. ...Empire presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary" (2000, p. 11). Empire's expansiveness is clearly temporal as well as spatial, and many theorists argue the importance of considering it as an unfolding process,

that is to say the power formations that become Empire form long before Empire and the cognitive and material processes stemming from its formation remain long after its collapse (Dunlap, 2018, p. 554; Wolfe, 2006). This processual understanding of Empire centers continuity and challenges the historical compartmentalization of Empire's narrative which compartmentalizes histories of state-sanctioned violence "into bygone periods of land conquest, racial colonization, chattel slavery, and apartheid segregation" (Rodriguez, 2020, pp. 29–30). Such compartmentalization undermines the centrality of settler colonization, enslavement, and segregation to Empire's worldview.

Beyond blurred temporal boundaries, many conceptions of Empire's geography are structured along an understanding of a clear binary between the "interior" and "exterior" – but, as Ann Stoler remarks, "[t]erms like metropole and colony, core and periphery presume to make clear what is not" (2006, p. 200). The spatial boundaries of Empire are constantly in flux (Jacobs, 2002, p. 159), from its settler-colonial origins to contemporary claims by president Trump regarding the acquisition of Greenland, Canada, Venezuela, etc. Further, flows of knowledge, material, and people serve to blur these boundaries; the "imperialist dissemination of military counterinsurgency training and technologies from the United States to other political contexts" from Colombia to East Timor (rhodes, 2025a, p. 24), the extension of American capital and industry beyond the "national" (Panitch & Gindin, 2013, p. 4), and the movement of people-as-labor into the "national" (Jacobs, 2002) are clear examples of such blurring which renders notions of "internal" and "external" incomprehensible. As Dunlap, Verweijen, and Tornel argue: "[t]he project of capital accumulation retains little-to-no respect for boundaries, whether of economic sectors or nation states" (2024, p. 441). This synthesizes well with the imperial "boomerang effect" discussed by Césaire (1972/2000), Foucault (2003), Anghie (2005), and Schrader, who notes, "[f]oreign' and

‘domestic’ are... contested outcomes of social, political, and economic processes” (2019, p. 15). Linda Gordon draws on this and further unsettles these categories in her application of “internal colonialism,” which she argues exposes the foreign/domestic distinction as “an ideological one” (2006, p. 429). This segmenting of foreign/domestic is in-line with Empire’s temporal segmentation mentioned above. Settler-colonialism is a story of shifting borders, redefined “domestics” – Empire cloaks itself in colonially-defined spatial-temporal borders, erasing its settler origins and propagating a narrative justifying its claims to territorial legitimacy. Here, in attempting to conceptualize a notion of Empire which contends with its settler-colonial nature, I propose understanding Empire as a Pathology.

Empire as a Pathology

First and foremost, I must clarify my utilization of the word ‘pathology,’ meaning the functional manifestation of a disease (a condition or tendency regarded as abnormal or harmful) (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2016, p. 1292). I apply the framework of pathology with full acknowledgement and understanding of Empire’s longstanding and ongoing pathologization of the oppressed and the insurgent: from the demonization/dehumanization/devaluation of disabled bodies to the labeling of Queerness and the desire for liberation from enslavement as diseases. Embracing my Queer methodological approach, I reject what the Mary Nardini Gang refers to as “the regime of Normal” and aim to poetically turn this pathologization on its head (2014, p. 3); to draw from Césaire, “a civilization which justifies colonization... is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased” (1972/2000, p. 4). The dark, poetic irony of the phrase “sick civilization” is heavy in contending with the vile weaponization of disease by Empire from the settler-colonization of Turtle Island to

experimentation on Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized peoples in/by prisons and Universities (Burton, 2023; Children of the Setting Sun Productions, 2023).

What does it mean for Empire to *be* a pathology? This is to say, Empire is a self-perpetuating structure (of power) – manifested materially and experienced through the body – which spreads through the cognitive infecting of an occupied subject. Stated more simply, the essence of Empire is its process of extending and enforcing its worldview through the weaponization of narrative, material power, and intimacy/proximity. As noted by Antony Anghie, “the ideal situation” for the colonial State, “was one in which economic control could be exercised over a non-European state which was nominally, at least, ‘sovereign’” (2005, p. 90); extending this to the pathology framework, Empire’s ideal situation is one in which control is exercised with minimal required direct intervention. This approach takes inspiration from various others which emphasize Empire’s flexibility and constant reformation (Benally, 2023; M. Hardt & Negri, 2000; rhodes, 2025a; Rodriguez, 2020; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2021; Wolfe, 2006; Wynter, 2003).

Contending with Empire’s flexibility and spatial/temporal/ideological fluidity is the first benefit to approaching Empire as a pathology. Contextually, Empire in Cascadia – and across the rest of the U.S. and Canadian Empires – possesses a particular flexibility in relation to past Empires. As noted by various scholars, the centrality of capitalism and the capitalist ideology to the U.S. Empire in particular serves to open its spatial flexibility and expansiveness (Harvey, 2003; Narayan, 2019, 2020; Newton & Lenin, 2004; Panitch & Gindin, 2013; rhodes, 2025a). To quote the poetic heidi rhodes, “[t]he constant expansion needed for capital to thrive, let alone survive, invests material, geographic, and figurative latitude with a sense of infinite possibility for, and as, expanse. It operates through a telos of limitlessness that constructs its preconfigured end as endless” (2025a, pp. 98–99). The second strength of Empire as a pathology is in line with rhodes’

argument: its centering of Empire's expansiveness, its inability to be confined to a particular temporality/geography/practice. This contends with scholars' aforementioned, contradictory attempts to identify the "beginning" of Empire, and takes seriously Lenin's (1977) assertion that to do so is an impossible task. Pathology perpetuates through mutation of what came before, it's an echo or a haunting – Empire's genealogy extends long before the colonization of Turtle Island.

The final advantage to categorizing Empire as a pathology is in its emphasis on intimacy/proximity through the utilization of "infection." This notion takes seriously the weaponization of intimate relationships, occupation, and the body – and therefore the brain – as sites of anti-/colonial conflict. As Steven and Gwen Poinn (Stó:Lō Nation) note, "the biggest change that came [with the tragedy of colonization] was in our ethos, our philosophy, which didn't get to be transferred from one person to the next because... [s]o many of the elders were gone" (in *Children of the Setting Sun Productions*, 2023, p. 39). Empire is a largely cognitive process, perpetuating itself through "infecting" occupied populations' worldviews. This resonates with my desire to center counter-insurgency in defining Empire, as COIN is itself a largely cognitive process (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018). Orisanmi Burton notes these cognitive counter-insurgent processes in the colonial situation – "prisons function in tandem with other tactics of white patriarchal domination. The aim... was to 'denature' African people: to crush their spirits, destroy their cognitive autonomy, and transform them into obedient 'negroes' with no knowledge of their history or will to resist" (2023, p. 2). The centrality of counter-insurgency in the expansion of colonial society is identified by Rhodes (2025a) as well, who associates it with capitalism's reliance on endless expansion. To punctuate the perspective of Empire as a pathology – before shifting toward explanation of the worldviews composing this pathology – I quote from *The Invisible Committee*,

“When we speak of Empire we name the mechanisms of power that preventatively and surgically stifle any revolutionary potential in a situation. In this sense, Empire is not an enemy that confronts us head-on. It is a rhythm that imposes itself, a way of dispensing and dispersing reality. Less an order of the world than its sad, heavy and militaristic liquidation” (2009, p. 13)

Diagnosing the Settler Pathology

To understand and apply Empire as a pathology, it must be characterizable through a set of reappearing frameworks across time. In other words, it would not make sense to characterize such a varied set of practices/formation under the term “Empire” without a throughline. The following sections examine the various, sometimes contradictory, outlooks – deeply rooted in settler-colonization and enslavement – which form Empire’s pathology. I refer to the particular form of Empire’s pathology as the “settler-pathology”; while the position of “settler” has its own particularities, and certainly not all members of Empire’s colonial society are settlers in the strict sense of the term, I utilize “settler-pathology” in order to call to the particular shape Empire takes in the wake of the settler-colonization of Turtle Island. As Scott Morgensen points out, “Settler colonisation performs the West’s potential universality, by transporting and indigenising Western governance upon territories far from Europe: in settler-states that then may appear not to be perpetual colonisers, but rather to be natural sites of Western law” (in Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 13). Empire’s settler project seeks the naturalization of colonialism; the land-claims established by the “white supremacist conquest fantasy of Manifest Destiny” attempting to erase the pre-colonial histories of Turtle Island and embodying “a delusion of divinely ordained white globality” (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 64). Further, the figure of the settler remains central to Empire’s ideal, serving as a reference point from which Empire extends its horizon (rhodes, 2025a, p. 134). As noted above, the following sections detail the various perspectives composing the settler-pathology.

Surrounded, Besieged, and Deputized

The position of the settler is one of dis-ease (the pun intended); it is an identity constructed in hostile territory, constantly facing an insurgent threat to its tactics of genocidal domination. This threat to the settler-colony is both external – Indigenous people’s defending their lands and livelihoods from encroaching settlement – and internal – enslaved people demanding liberation, Queer/feminist/Anarchist/other insurgent formations. The introduction to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s iconic *The Undercommons* notes “films like *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) or *Shaka Zulu* (1987),” in which “the settler is portrayed as surrounded by ‘natives,’ inverting... the role of aggressor so that colonialism is made to look like self-defense,” the passage continues to assert, “[t]he fort really was surrounded... besieged” (2013, p. 17). The insecurity of the settler society remains through to today, as noted by Hardt and Negri, “the construction of Empire, and the globalization of economic and cultural relationships, means that the virtual center of Empire can be attacked from any point” (2000, p. 59). And, furthermore, serves as justification for the extensive and ongoing militarization of settler society.

This narrative – the settler as surrounded, besieged – haunts Empire’s worldview and is evident in its constant and cyclical (re)construction of existential threats. Such a manufactured threat, Antony Anghie argues, aims to justify “self-defense,” of the colonial State as “fundamental [and] whatever self-defense requires [as] legal” (2005, p. 292). The fabrication of an enemy appears across various discourses from a range of political positions and temporalities – from Donald Trump’s immigration fear-mongering to Bernie Sanders’ calls to expand the settler-State in the name of a “war” on global climate change (Dunlap et al., 2024). To tie this perspective to the Cascadia movement(s), we see replication of this insecure logic in the Fascist Cascadians’ apocalyptic propagandizing against climate refugees and in Reformist Cascadians’ ties to the

defense sector/industry (see Chapter 1 and 4 respectively). Beyond the militarization of the State, the construction of a threat serves to deputize all settlers/enslavers in the war against liberation and decolonization. This theme reappears in the COIN archive (see Chapter 3) and serves as a central perspective of Empire, which seeks to diffuse and decentralize its coercive apparatus. Welty (1938) notes the deep alliance between the federal and local settler-State in repressing resistance to expansion of the “frontier.” Similar themes are echoed by heidi rhodes, speaking to the settler-colonial character of the settler-colonial Columbian state:

In the national imaginary, indigenous and black rebellions, peasant uprisings, leftist social leaders and grassroots movements, and guerrilla armed forces have all been conflated and regarded as the insurgent enemy of the people and the state. The state’s rhetoric of counterinsurgency has conscripted the national public into counterinsurgency’s culture of fear, conflating freedom with counter-insurgent warfare against dissenting civilians and land rights movements” (2025a, p. 56).

This example demonstrates the power of Empire/counter-insurgency’s deputization in combining the neutralization of potentially-insurgent movements with the strengthening of reactionary nationalism. Max Boot notes the particularly rampant violence of “[s]ettlers’ militias” in their enforcement of Empire’s authority, while Stuart Schrader identifies the State’s reliance on settlers due to the strength of their “affective intimacy and spatial proximity” (2012, p. 146; 2019, p. 48). The settler-society, surrounded and besieged by an insurgent threat to its project of domination, aims to deputize everyone in the war for its world.

Intimacy, Indigenization, Incorporation, “Improvement”

Settler-colonization and enslavement – therefore occupation and incarceration – are inherently intimate processes. Proximity means relationships – whether violent, sexual, or both – and these relationships are crafted in service to Empire. The interaction between settlers, Indigenous, and enslaved people was foundational to Empire, a profound evolution and intermixing of cultures in

conflict and dialogue (Schaeffer, 2022; Stoler, 2006). Intimacy – particularly of the sexual sense – serves several purposes: to “indigenize” the settlers (i.e. make them “truly American” rather than European); as coercive and/or “corrective” action; as a means of “improving” (i.e. incorporating and assimilating) colonized peoples.

Indigenization refers to the process by which the settler-colonial Empire attempts to “naturalize” European socio-politico-economic structures and ideo-onto-epistemologies to the colonized world. The indigenization of the settler world is “‘driven by the crucial need to transform an historical tie (‘we came here’) into a natural one (‘the land made us’)” and resonates with the Empire’s use of “homeland” – a “shared mythic past engrained in the land itself” (Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 9; Kaplan, 2004, p. 8). Amy Kaplan (2004) and Joy James (2007) both discuss the notion of “homeland” in American political discourse, noting its irony in the light of the settler-colonial origins of the Empire’s formation. Such a concept is politically potent in its erasure of settlement and in its ability to lean on pervasive feelings of insecurity amongst settlers, as discussed above. This practice resonates with early work on Bioregionalism and its utilization of “becoming Native.” Settler attempts at indigenization present most dramatically, however, in the historic practice of settler’s “‘playing Indian”” (W. Jackson, 1994; Rodriguez, 2020, p. 126). Beyond the individual, settler society itself practiced indigenization in its appropriation of government, military, and social structures/practices from Indigenous peoples. Settler’s use of guerrilla warfare against the British army in the U.S. War of Independence and other conflicts of the era demonstrate this appropriation and served as potent expressions of settlers’ desires to forge an “authentic, American” identity separate from their European origins (Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 9). Schaeffer clearly articulates the role of this appropriation in Empire’s mythos:

“Settler faith in a distinctly American character of innovation that could tame the chaos of the frontier and its inhabitants was premised on the superiority of human

technological intelligence over the natural world. While the Spanish and the Mexicans were unable to control the Apache, the Euro-American military prevailed, but only when they figured out how to adopt Indian scouts, and the force of nature more broadly, as part of the repertoire of innovative technology” (2022, p. 47).

Settler’s weaponize intimacy, appropriating Indigenous practices into their colonial project.

The weaponization of intimacy takes on several forms; Erai and Morgensen’s *Karangatia: Calling Out Gender and Sexuality in Settler Societies* asserts that it is impossible to “read settler-colonialism and gender/sexuality separately... [as] we find them to be profoundly co-constitutive” – Empire is deeply entwined with the colonial gender/sexual hierarchy (2012, p. 12). Further, the imposition of colonial sexual/gender binaries/hierarchies serves as a means to make these systems appear “natural” and universalizable; the forced indigenization of cis-heteropatriarchal hierarchies to Turtle Island “implies their capacity to universally describe human nature” and thus further naturalizes settler-colonial power (Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 13). This serves the settler-pathology in several capacities: in its drive to “eliminate the Native,” as a corrective or punitive practice against the colonized, and as a means to “improve” colonized populations from the inside (Wolfe, 2006; Erai & Morgensen, 2012; James, 2007; Arneil, 2024). Elimination is sought in the sense that all colonized gender/sexual identities are replaced by settler ones, and in the sense that Indigenous populations are generationally colonized from the inside through forced reproduction through rape (Erai & Morgensen, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Settlers, as Patrick Wolfe (2006) notes, seek to weaponize reproduction in service of genocidal colonization and in line with their racial ideology.

Barbara Arneil notes, “Colonialism does not seek obedience so much as the improvement of idle bodies (becoming industrious) and irrational minds/souls (rejecting ‘backward’ language, habits, customs, and/ or spirituality and adopting more ‘improved’ ways of being, knowing, and/ or worshipping) via education, training, and labor” (2024, p. 156). “Labor” can be read in two

ways here – as work, and as reproduction – the later speaking to Empire’s desire to colonize over generations. “Improvement” occurs in varied forms, expressed at its height as the assimilation of the colonized into settler lifeways/worldviews/power structures (Wolfe, 2006). Eric Olund notes, “the assimilation of Native people and their spaces into the American polity became an explicit project of US governance” (2002, p. 129). Further, Klee Benally identifies “trade” as “an indispensable part of” Empire’s so-called “civilizing mission”; “Implicit within [trade] was a new world view... because trade was the mechanism for advancement and progress, it was essential that trade be extended as far as possible into the interior of all these societies” (2023, p. 97). The assimilation of the colonized serves settler attempts to universalize Empire (as a worldview, State structure, economic system, etc.) as well as its mission of indigenization (Benally, 2023; Erai & Morgensen, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). While Empire understands itself – across time – as intimately surrounded by a threat (to its violent occupation), it simultaneously asserts its desire to neutralize such threat not only through immense violence and physical liquidation – even while these means were utilized extensively – but through the “improvement of idle bodies,” i.e. the incorporation of colonized peoples’ and their land into colonial lifeways and logics.

Manifest Destiny and Terra/Corpus/Cerebrum Nullius

Empire’s desire to “improve” colonized people and their land – i.e. its Civilizing mission – is most visible in the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Representative of Louisiana John H Harmanson articulated Empire’s perspective clearly in 1847: “the influence of our new civilization [is] gradually winning its way into the hearts and minds of men the world over... our great national army, on its march to a more perfect civilization, [will] break down all obstacles to our intercourse with the world” (in Rodriguez, 2020, p. 65). Harmanson’s linguistic choices are important to emphasize: “hearts and minds” later becomes a popular phrase in modern COIN theory, and the

revealing ironies of “intercourse” are emphasized by the prior section (Boot, 2012). Manifest Destiny expressed a particular craving, an entitlement Empire feels to spatial and temporal infinity (Phillips, 2025). Alexander Dunlap explains succinctly:

“the core of colonialism can be whittled down to an assertion: that there is only one, right way to use land, live, organize culture and/or develop a nation. Inherent is a sense of superiority that articulates itself not only through overt domination with the ‘right of conquest’, but also the good intentions that manifest in paternalism, charity, or as one critic has called it, ‘the white-man’s savior complex’” (2018, p. 553).

This “white-man’s savior complex” is a clear reference to Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” poem – a direct call for the expansion of Empire. Kipling calls on Americans to “[s]end forth the best ye breed” in the U.S. colonization of the Philippines; again, the sexual/reproductive language is revealing of Empire’s intimate nature (in Kramer, 2006, p. 12).

Central to this savior complex is both the belief in white supremacy and in an existential duty to extend this to others – as Antony Anghie explains, “[t]he idea of the civilizing mission, of extending Empire for the higher purpose of educating and rescuing the barbarian, had a very ancient lineage” (2005, p. 96). Of course, Empire deems only some peoples capable of Civilization, weaponizing such narratives in genocidal capacity. Nonetheless, white saviorism served/s as a central justification for the (settler-colonial) spread of Empire. As Cowen notes, “elites premised their arguments for the transcontinental rail on the claim that Canada’s ‘finest portions’ were otherwise ‘abandoned to the savage’” (2020, p. 473).

Manifest Destiny, alongside its white saviorism, utilizes the logics of *terra nullius* and *corpus nullius* as justification for settler-colonization. *Terra nullius* translates to *land unoccupied* and involves the narrative/legal constructing of uncolonized land as “unoccupied,” “undeveloped,” and/or “unproductive” (Barad, 2017; Jacobs, 2002; Shaw et al., 2006). The concept weaponized/s the erasure of Indigenous peoples in conjunction with the settler’s commitment to “improve”

“unproductive” lands to encourage settler expansion of Empire. As noted above, Empire extends this logic to the bodies of colonized peoples, this is the logic of imagining “the black and indigenous body as a *corpus nullius* available to the tenets and fantasies of settler colonization, its tactics” (rhodes, 2025a, p. 165). *Corpus nullius* “historically referred to laws regarding what can be done with the bodies of the dead” and has since been reconceptualized as the logic by which groups of people are excluded from the status of Human – in conjunction with *terra nullius*, “these concepts have been used to justify the proliferation of capital and property regimes... into the [lands and] bodies of black and indigenous people across the world” (rhodes, 2025a, p. 166). In the operationalization of these logics, in conjunction with Manifest Destiny and Empire’s forming racial ideology more broadly, “[t]o become or ‘ascend’ to Whiteness” becomes “to enact a self – or self-actualize – in a way that requires the death of others” (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 40). That is to say, the actualization of the settler pathology occurs only through the violation of colonized peoples and lands.

Of course, and as noted above, the expansion of Empire occurs in many ways through the incorporation and assimilation of colonized peoples/lands in addition to violence against them. As Antonio Gramsci notes, “[o]ne of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer ‘ideologically’” – that is to say, colonization/Empire is a cognitive process as well (2012, p. 10). I discuss the cognitive realm’s centrality to counter-insurgency theory at length in the next chapter, but shift here toward this attempt at cognitive capture in attempting to center COIN in my conception of Empire (Galula, 2006; Kilcullen, 2010). Consideration of the cognitive with respect to Empire’s pathology should extend the logics of Terra / Corpus Nullius; this perspective, which I articulate as *cerebrum nullius*, explains the settler logic which casts all uncolonized minds – that is, those which do not align with

Empire’s pathology – as frontiers for encroachment. The spreading, or infection perhaps, of Empire’s ideology into the minds of the colonized serves as a central practice by which Empire secures itself through the creation of managed, “docile client populations” (Khalili, 2014, p. 39; Sovacool et al., 2025). In its pursuit of totalizing, global colonization, Empire seeks to infect the mind of the “uncivilized” – to shape their worldview, their social-political-economic-spiritual structures in its interests.

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Understanding Empire as a pathology is to understand its desire to weaponize the logic of *cerebrum nullius* in pursuit of total cognitive capture: the aligning of all people on Earth with Empire’s desires. This chapter explored various critical conceptions of Empire in attempting to conceptualize a narrative of its emergence and perpetuation tailored to the context of the Cascadia movement. I identified three general approaches in critical scholarship – the Politico-legal, the Economistic, and the Militaristic – and explored how bioregional theories approach the notion of Empire. In doing so, I identified a general over-reliance on binary frameworks which failed to contend with Empire in Cascadia as a settler-colonial formation. In formulating an alternative definition, I concluded on the conception of Empire as a pathology, noting the synergies this approach has with counter-insurgency. The next chapter, “Reading Against the Counter-insurgent (COIN) Archive,” explores the concept of COIN and expands on these overlaps with Empire (as a pathology).

3 - Reading Against the Counter-insurgent (COIN) Archive: Perpetual Warfare as Imperial Governance

Empire's pathological desire is to spread, its central logic: self-perpetuation. In its expansion, Empire violently represses, neutralizes, liquidates, appropriates resistance in its counter-insurgent governance. The following chapter is an antagonistic exploration of the COIN "archive": the body of doctrinal work which culminates in the Joint Chiefs of Staff's *JP 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (2018). As noted in the introductory chapter, I draw my approach – "archival war" – from the work of Orisanmi Burton (2023). This method is an antagonistic approach to archival research involving the simultaneous and conflictual reading of "official" archival documents alongside critical and/or autonomously produced, insurgent ones. These collections of work form an archive and "counter-archive" which, when read in conversation, reveal insight into what is hidden between the lines of the State's narrative. In this chapter, I wade through the counterinsurgent (COIN) archive, weaving the threads between COIN and Empire to provide a comprehensive overview of Empire's COIN strategy across time. More clearly, I aim to examine the counter-insurgent archive to glean a deeper understanding of its motivating worldview and its connections to Empire.

I begin this chapter by seeking a comprehensive definition of counter-/insurgency. Drawing from (counter-/)insurgent theory, I evaluate the definitions common in COIN doctrine and expanding upon them to reach a deeper, more holistic understanding. After this, I focus on *JP 3-24's* (2018) "generational approach" to counter-insurgency to formulate an understanding of COIN as a process/structure of perpetual warfare. This section is the definitive collision moment between my thinking on COIN and Empire, pointing specifically to perpetual warfare as the means by which the American settler pathology is operationalized and manifested into material structures of domination. Finally, this involves a critical reading of counter-insurgency theory itself, and in the

section I spend time highlighting what I understand to be the central practices of counter-insurgency. Notably, this section seeks to emphasize the settler/enslaver origins of these practices in order to identify a clear genealogical trajectory from settlement to contemporary COIN literature.

The Living Art of Counter-/Insurgency: Definitions and Origins

First and foremost, counter-insurgency and insurgency are living arts – their tactics and strategies constantly evolving in antagonistic conversation. COIN theorist Bernard Fall famously asserted, “[In war,] *if it works, it is obsolete*,” emphasizing the unremitting necessity of adaptation in counter-/insurgency (in Kilcullen, 2006, p. 124). It becomes difficult, in the face of such rearticulation, to provide a clear definition for the terms; theorists on either side of insurgent warfare – from David Kilcullen and T.E. Lawrence to Mao Zedong and Che Guevara – provide deep insight into the nature of counter-/insurgency. First, I would like to interrogate the art of insurgency as identified by both the counterinsurgents and insurgents themselves. COIN presents itself as a reactive process – David Galula, French military officer and formative COIN theorist, goes so far as to say “only one [side] — the insurgent — can initiate a revolutionary war, for counter-insurgency is only an effect of insurgency” (in Kilcullen, 2006, p. 112). While I challenge this claim below, there’s no denying that COIN is, in large part, modeled in conversation with advances in insurgent praxis, as COIN theorist David Kilcullen states – “[t]he concept of ‘counter-insurgency’ is logically contingent on that of ‘insurgency’” (2006, p. 112). Therefore, I dive first into understanding the nature of insurgency.

The nature of insurgency

First and foremost, insurgency is war. But, beyond bands of guerrillas striking supply lines, beyond barrages of gunfire in the foothills, insurgency is a protracted struggle to win – as many counterinsurgents phrase it – the “hearts and minds” of a population (Gompert et al., 2008; Taber, 2002; Zedong, 2020). To define insurgency by the central pieces of contemporary COIN doctrine, it is “an organized political-military struggle by a predominantly indigenous group or movement designed to weaken, subvert, or displace the control of an established government for a particular region” (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. I–1; Galula, 2006; Kilcullen, 2006, 2010; Paul et al., 2013). Further, Counter-/insurgency is frequently referred to as “asymmetrical warfare,” a term emphasizing the seeming power imbalance between the State/counter-insurgents and the insurgents. However, these definitions frequently fall short of speaking to insurgents’ desires, their perspectives on and motivations for struggle, their approaches toward nurturing these in the broader population. As military theorist Lukas Milevski (2014) states, “[t]he generation of asymmetry is the basis of much, if not most, strategic theory” – even in conventional/industrial warfare; further, Milevski (2014) notes the well-understood centrality of popular support in counter-/insurgency, de-emphasizing the importance of material asymmetries. If insurgency cannot be understood accurately with the simplistic approach taken by counter-insurgency doctrine – that it can be defined simply as a struggle against a particular State – what definition can encapsulate the essence of the insurgent perspective?

The first challenge in defining insurgency comes from the vast range of organizational forms and strategies taken to insurgent warfare. Counterinsurgent theorists frequently acknowledge the changing structure of insurgency; as David Kilcullen asserts: “[t]oday’s insurgencies differ significantly — at the level of policy, strategy, operational art and tactical technique — from those

of earlier eras” (2006, p. 111). COIN doctrine, following Empire’s approach toward narrating history, tends to divide insurgency into distinct historical periods. Military historian Max Boot claims that “[g]uerrilla warfare is as old as mankind” – highlighting the emergence of insurgent forces across history (2012). Early insurgent approaches (broadly, pre-1300s) were localized and generally revolved around independent guerrilla formations, small groups of (often nomadic) militants who would attack military and other State infrastructures from the outside (Boot, 2012; Gompert et al., 2008). Insurgencies developed significantly from the 1300s-1900s, largely in response to the expanding encroachment of colonial Empires; this time saw the development of more-structured guerrilla tactics, the incorporation of urban space into insurgent strategies, and the development and proliferation of insurgent Anarchism in Europe (Boot, 2012). The 1900s were another era of developing insurgent strategies, particularly in the second half of the century. Kilcullen (2006) argues that “classic” insurgencies – those which took place following WWII, in the first major era for COIN theory – followed the theories of Mao Zedong and Vo Nguyen Giap. The majority of the decolonial revolutions of the late 1900s adopted this approach, often referred to as Marxism-Leninism(-Maoism), and serves as the basis from which counter-insurgent theory was officially conceived. The Marxist-Leninist(-Maoist) approach to insurgency most often involved the coalition of various formations in conflict with the (colonial) State, under the leadership of a Communist Party; insurgents focus on developing control over contested geographies by developing guerrilla bases, creating centers of production, training militarily, and waging sabotage campaigns (Gerassi, 1971; *JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018; Taber, 2002; Zedong, 2020). Furthermore, as highlighted in Lin Biao’s “People’s War,” the Marxist-Leninist(-Maoist) approach emphasized the centrality of popular support – “[e]verywhere [the insurgents] went, [they] did propaganda work among the masses, organized and armed them, and helped them

set up revolutionary political power” (in Gerassi, 1971, p. 128). Since this “classic” era of insurgency, strategies have largely shifted toward decentralization, taking shape as “a self-synchronizing swarm,” cooperating transnationally in “cell-based structures resembling ‘leaderless resistance’” which render many “classical countermeasures ineffective” (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 117). The range of insurgent strategic approaches points toward the fact that the essence of insurgency is something deeper; the wide range of political perspectives insurgencies takes does the same.

Insurgency is waged from a wide variety of perspectives ranging from Anarchist to Fascist. This is significant in attempting to define insurgency, as it drastically limits the scope of what constitutes the shared characteristic of insurgencies. Counter-insurgent theorists Paul, Clarke, Grill and Dunigan, in their study on post-WWII insurgencies – *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* – argue that “[e]very insurgency is unique, but not so much that it matters at this level of [COIN] analysis” (2013, p. xix). This analysis is clear in its assertion that “insurgency” is coherent despite its vast ideological and structural range, but the authors’ argument that such variance is not important in COIN analysis collapses the insurgent – with their many motivations, desires, and self-reflections – into the flattened image of an “enemy of the state.” This flattening, I argue, stems from the counterinsurgent’s tendency to define themselves in opposition to insurgency (discussed further below); it is extending this logic which leads to defining insurgency as being *against* the state rather than *for something*. Here, to gain a richer understanding insurgency, I shift to reading texts from insurgents themselves.

Beyond an embrace of complexity in organizational structures, insurgency is waged through a plethora of tactics. The insurgent Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare highlights this clearly in Nine Theses on Insurgency – “Insurgency is neither violent nor not, neither symmetrical nor

not, neither armed nor unarmed” (2014, p. 9). In this sense, it is critical to differentiate between insurgency and commonplace activism; most important in this task is identifying activism as 1) action “on the discursive terrain of a mythologized ‘social conversation,’” and 2) an embrace of symbolic struggle on “abstract political terrain” motivated by an adherence to pacifism and legal avenues of addressing grievances (Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, 2014, pp. 3–9). Critically, the move from activism to insurgency is not only one of increased militancy – insurgent theorists are quick to note that “militancy can be just as dangerous as pacifism” – but of shifting attitudes toward State legitimacy, e.g., insistence on action / accountability outside of the court or electoral systems and acknowledgement of the ongoing, violent nature of counterinsurgent warfare (Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, 2014, p. 9). This act of conflict-acknowledgement is critical to constituting insurgency and serves as the primary mechanism for transitioning from symbolic activism to “material engagement of hostility toward the immediate [defined] enemy within a context of warfare” (Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, 2014, pp. 4–9). Following the definition and acknowledgement of concrete conflict with the State, the insurgent manifests insurgency as “a form of engagement which plays out in a hostility toward the enemy, and reveals itself in a posture toward the war that finds us, wherever we are, in our everyday lives”; in other words, insurgency is a movement from symbolic action in distinct moments (activism) to an ontology of conflict with the state, a seeing of oneself within the context of a protracted war (Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, 2014, p. 9).

This protracted war, to the insurgent, is the inevitable result of incompatible worlds colliding, their resistance to Empire’s pathological imposition of colonial-capitalism. Huey P. Newton echoes this outlook in his statement, “revolution, basically, is a contradiction between the old and the new in the process of development” (Newton and Lenin, 2004: 84). In this way, insurgency is

profoundly spatial, and as noted above, the co-occupation of space by counter-/insurgents is central to the conflict. China Miéville's (2009) concept of "grosstopicality" – or the simultaneous existence of two (or more) different worlds in the same space – is useful in grasping the insurgent worldview here. Deborah Cowen (2017) provides a concrete example of grosstopicality in "the ways that settler laws and lives are violently mapped on top of Indigenous ones" – it follows that insistence on autonomy and disentanglement of the Indigenous world from the settler constitutes an insurgency. Brandi Summers (2022) provides another example of a grosstopical framework in her discussion of insurgent artwork in Oakland, CA; she argues, protest murals painted across the boarded-up windows of gentrified buildings constituted an insurgent assertion of another Oakland that remains, occupied. Miéville (2009) refers to this act of asserting the occupied world as a *breach* – "a momentary rupture" which allows both realities "to come into view" and motivates action amongst the affected parties (in Summers, 2022, p. 845). The rupture of insurgency, the collision of worlds, is "a crossing that does not rely on physical movement, but on new modes of both seeing and relating. ...in fact an unseeing of unseeing" (Cowen, 2017). These acts of breaching provide insight into the essence of insurgency both in this assertion of another world existing alongside and in conflict to the dominant one and in their generalization of insurgent action. Returning to The Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, they state: "[insurgency] reveals itself in a posture toward the war that finds us, wherever we are, in our everyday lives" – the essence of insurgency, beyond conflict with the State over co-occupied space, is the generalization of this perspective of conflict (2014, pp. 7–9).

Robert Taber, in his foundational study of insurgency – *War of the Flea* – gestures toward this conflict-generalization in his concept of the "will to revolt" (2002, p. 13). Contrasting a rigid Marxist understanding of insurgency in which "awareness of deprivations" leads to revolt, Taber

asserts that this acknowledgement of unequal power structures must be accompanied by “a [spreading] belief that they can be rectified through armed struggle” in other words, “a newly awakened consciousness, not of ‘causes’ but of potentiality” (2002, pp. 13–14). The prolific Invisible Committee speaks on this in their *The Coming Insurrection*, assessing the spread of a mentality of potentiality:

“Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by resonance. Something that is constituted here resonates with the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there. A body that resonates does so according to its own mode. An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density” (2009, pp. 12–13).

This metaphorizing of musical resonance speaks to the poetic and counter-spatial-temporal nature of insurgency in which histories and futures of revolt and autonomy collide in the present through said resonance. Taber (2002) described the guerrilla/insurgent as a missionary, spreading the message and culture of insurgency; perhaps a more accurate understanding is the insurgent as a poet, re-articulating the poetics of insurgency within new spatial-temporal contexts, hoping to find resonance. It follows Taber’s assertion of the importance of newly awakened potentiality that the insurgent is also a narrator (poet) of *potential worlds*, an act of (cognitive) breach in which Cowen’s (2017) articulation of crossing (into the insurgent space) without moving is actualized.

This poetic insurgency – the creation of worlds in resistance, is emphasized in the insurgent techniques of anti-enslavement and anti-colonial war. Insurgency waged through mutiny, escape, spiritual and religious practices, arson, guerrilla ambushes, refusal to work, faking sick, assassination, magic practices, destruction of tools, and insurrectionary revolts asserted a liberated world on top of the plantation and the frontier (Benally, 2023; Black Liberation Army, 2023; Chin, 2014, p. 36; Phillips, 2025, p. 111; Shoatz, 2012). Herbert Aptheker (1974) notes the nearly 200

anti-enslavement insurrections which occurred during the two centuries prior to the Civil War, a clear testament to the breadth of insurgent experimentation across the time and space of Empire. Further, insurgent theorist Russel Maroon Shoatz (2012) details the extensive networks of maroon communities – autonomous spaces cooperatively governed primarily by liberated, formerly-enslaved people – which sustained anti-enslavement insurgencies across the U.S. through their development of and experimentation with various “guerrilla hit-and-run tactics” and practices of “living [with] the land.” Broader histories of Black and Indigenous insurgent resistance serve as formative moments in counter-/insurgency’s development (Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas, 2019; Black Liberation Army, 2023; Cowen, 2020; Shoatz, 2012). While the significance of these insurgencies are largely erased from the official COIN archive, their clear historical role in counter-/insurgent experimentation and prominence in the work of insurgent formations demonstrates their significance. The BLA’s writing on ongoing Black insurgency serves, for example, as a potent representation of the insurgent art of re-narrating histories, interwoven with calls for the birth of new worlds – they speak from the space of the theoretical chasm of “domestic” counter-insurgency to re-narrate its genealogy. These insurgencies, to return to the task of defining the term, serve as intense moments of breach – the assertion of liberated worlds within the spatial-temporal context of Empire. The essence of what defines insurgency, I argue, is found here – in the poetics of insurgency as the re-articulation of spatial-temporal relations, i.e., the assertion/prefiguration of, and insistence on, an insurgent world in conflictual co-existence with the dominant State/Empire. To summarize and provide a definitive definition: insurgency is a protracted war against a dominant State/Empire over the (non)governance of space, waged by various formations of people prefiguring (an) insurgent world(s) through the generalization of a culture / the skills of militancy, refusal (of institutional and/or symbolic action),

and autonomy / cognitive dis-identification from the aforementioned State/Empire while justifying the elimination/neutralization of individuals and institutions deemed in alignment with that State/Empire.

The nature of COIN

The counter-insurgent worldview begins from a position of identification with the State/Empire, it operates from an understanding of insurgency as pathological – an unnatural deviation from the acceptable. Kilcullen, once again, provides a potent example of the counter-insurgent outlook:

“Insurgencies, like cancers, exist in thousands of forms, there are dozens of techniques to treat them, hundreds of different populations in which they occur, and several major schools of thought on how best to deal with them. The idea that there is one single ‘silver bullet’ panacea for insurgency is therefore as unrealistic as the idea of a universal cure for cancer” (2010, p. 1).

I begin to define counter-insurgency here at its most broad, drawing directly from COIN doctrine. The most dramatic of these broad approaches is David Killcullen’s, in which counter-insurgency is defined simply as “all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency” (2006, p. 112). Directly adjacent to Kilcullen is the definition provided by Paul et al.: “whatever one does when opposing an insurgency” (2013, p. 3). This extends beyond the most simplistic definitions in which counter-insurgency is defined as “a form of opposed or contested governance” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. 1), or as “an armed political competition between a government and its partners and insurgents and their supporters” (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. xiii). The reactive nature of counter-insurgency is clear, but such definitions – in their emphasis on pathologically defining insurgency – fail to encompass the deeper motivations and processes advancing the counter-insurgent worldview. The counter-insurgent positions themselves against the insurgent, counter-insurgency is the denial of the insurgent world’s existence through the eradication of life there – counter-

insurgency is a carceral phenomenon, denying the breach/movement between these worlds, and it is a process of counter-world-building in defense of the State/Empire. Taber articulates this succinctly: “primarily the counterinsurgent’s task must be to *destroy the revolution by destroying its promise*—... [proving] that it cannot and will not succeed” (2002, p. 20). The process of denying, destroying insurgent worlds demands deeper definition than COIN as the response to insurgency; here, I first look through the shifting nature of COIN before broadening to find the basis of such a deeper definition.

COIN’s defensive position – what Taber identifies as the “dog’s disadvantages: too much to defend; too small, ubiquitous, and agile an enemy to come to grips with” (2002, pp. 27–28) – places agency in the hands of the insurgent, with COIN ever-evolving in response to the development of the insurgent art (Kilcullen, 2006, 2010). Archaic “scorched earth” COIN tactics throughout most of recorded history amounted to little more than unsuccessful campaigns of terror (Boot, 2012, p. 19), and colonial COIN tactics such as “fencing villages, cordon and search, curfews and food control” proved as ineffective in crushing the insurgent narrative and denying its resonance (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 120). Counter-insurgent reflections on these failures led to tactical development in the “classic” era of COIN in the mid-to-late 20th Century, but as heidi andrea restrepo rhodes articulates, these formative COIN practices served foundational roles in the constitution of the “liberal European state” and “Enlightenment ideals” which continue to influence the contemporary State (2025a, p. 57). The “classical” COIN theory – developed in the bloody wars of national liberation – shifted counter-insurgent focus from the ruthless hunting of insurgents toward winning the “hearts and minds” of a population (Boot, 2012; Gompert et al., 2008). As explained by David Kilcullen “[h]earts’ means persuading people their best interests are served by your success; ‘minds’ means convincing them that you can protect them, and that

resisting you is pointless” (2010, p. 37). This reflects a deeper understanding by the counter-insurgent of the political/social nature of their role beyond the military one. Alexander Dunlap articulates this outlook clearly in explaining that “[COIN] extends to manufacturing a discourse and a socio-technical apparatus of political control to reinforce and affirm state and economic imperatives, meanwhile fragmenting, mitigating and pacifying its real, imagined or potential detractors” (2022, p. 40). Such a shift in COIN outlook/doctrine follows an acknowledgement of the protracted nature of counter-/insurgency and contemporary work on counter-insurgent theory centers this; as Kilcullen explains, “[COIN’s] scope – philosophy, politics, strategy, history, minor tactics, administration – [is] panoramic” (2010, pp. 17–18).

The expansiveness of contemporary COIN doctrine – in addition to COIN’s pan-temporal structural and tactical breadth – speaks to the deeper nature of counter-insurgency beyond simply protection of the State/Empire. If the counter-insurgent art is to isolate the insurgents and deny the existence of an insurgent world (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 117), if it is to forge intimate relationships with the occupied population (Khalili, 2014, p. 23), if it is to develop counter-insurgent leadership through “indoctrination and training... or natural selection” (Galula, 2006, pp. 66–67), then it must be understood as a generational and world-building process; counter-insurgency, thus, is not simply defense of the State/Empire, it is the rearticulating of its basis, its expansion through incorporation. The Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare draw on the Rand Corporation’s concept of “full-spectrum dominance” here – that counter-insurgency is more than coercive and violent measures against insurgents, it is the creation and control of an environment of consent to the State/Empire (2014, p. 88). This (generational) practice of consent-creation is highlighted in Galula’s articulation of the counterinsurgent goal: “to obtain the support of the population— support not only in the form of sympathy and approval but also in active participation in the fight

against the insurgent” (2006, p. 53). Here, one finds the narrative/world-building essence of counter-insurgency, in the parallels between counter-/insurgent praxis. David Kilcullen goes so far as to say “[p]olitically, in many cases today, the counter-insurgent represents revolutionary change, while the insurgent fights to preserve the status quo of ungoverned spaces, or to repel an occupier” (2006, p. 113). The shocking perspective, seemingly contradictory to the concept of counter-insurgency, serves to weave COIN doctrine closer to Empire’s pathology and to emphasize the counter-insurgent’s role as worldbuilder. Understanding both counter-insurgency and insurgency as world-building practices, one can reach a deeper and more-comprehensive definition of counter-insurgency. Rather than the simplistic defense of the State/Empire, counter-insurgency is a protracted war against an insurgent world – in the process of becoming within a given space – waged by the State occupying that space, through the generalization of a culture of pacifism, legality / institutionality, and material embeddedness / cognitive identification with the aforementioned State while justifying the elimination/neutralization of individuals and populations deemed oppositional to that culture. Further, these two definitions – of insurgency and counter-insurgency – can combine into a comprehensive understanding of counter-/insurgent conflict: counter-/insurgency is a protracted war between grosstopical (layered) worlds in a given space – that of the dominant State, and (an) insurgent world(s) in the process of becoming – through the generalization of cultural/cognitive identification with and material embeddedness in their (State/insurgent) power structures and the justification of eliminating/neutralizing those individuals and populations deemed oppositional to those power structures.

U.S. counter-insurgency is, at its heart, the pathological perpetuation of Empire – COIN doctrine can be understood as an expression of the ever-shifting worldview of the settler pathology. As noted above, resistance to enslavement served as a foundational space for insurgent

experimentation. Enslavement incites war through occupation and incarceration – as Olaudah Equiano articulated in 1789, when one is enslaved, they are compelled to live with their enslaver in a state of war (in Burton, 2023, p. 11). If we understand anti-enslavement and anti-settlement as central moments of rupture in the lineage of insurgency – and if we are to take seriously Olaudah Equiano’s assertion that such enslaver/settler occupation is an incitement of war – then we must similarly understand the plantation (the slave ship, the prison) and the frontier (the “uncharted/un-Discovered,” the reservation) as central sites of counter-insurgent experimentation. These sites produce subjects, relationships, and worldviews in/through which Empire and anti-imperialism come into being. The BLA speaks to this, noting that “[t]he slave trade was not just an economic strategy to exploit Afrikan labor; it was also a military strategy to keep” Black people “subjugated and oppressed” (2023, p. 150). They continue, “[s]lave code laws, fugitive slave laws, vigilante terror and divide-and-conquer tactics were used to prevent the New Afrikan Nation from uniting politically and militarily” (Black Liberation Army, 2023, p. 152). Counter-insurgency is, in part, synonymous with the governance of enslavement; William Chin argues the same – “[slavery] was an unconventional war involving black insurgency and white counterinsurgency forces opposing each other over the span of centuries. ... The Constitution created a union of states bound to support each other against black resistance” (2014, pp. 33–35). This binding seeps deeper than the tactics of occupation and control, Chin’s counter-insurgent forces are bound in their denial of liberated, Black worlds.

Beyond the bounds of the plantation lies another foundational site of counter-insurgency – the frontier. Marx argues – in his “The Modern Theory of Colonization,” *Capital, Vol I* – that the frontier served as an economically-stabilizing, counter-insurgent tool in which the dissatisfied European proletariat could ascend, through settlement, to the petit bourgeoisie (2018, pp. 508–

511). This logic aligns deeply with counter-insurgent State logics which selectively incorporate or deputize populations against insurgency (discussed at length below). The frontier serves another purpose here, as well, in its role as a counter-insurgent lab for a wide variety of tactics. Felicity Schaeffer (2022) extensively documents the centrality of frontier wars in the evolution of American military intelligence/surveillance practices, incorporation of guerrilla strategies/tactics, and development of doctrine. Traces of this genealogy – while obscured within COIN doctrine – are scattered across Empire’s language; Klee Benally points to the US military’s use of the term “Indian Country” to refer to insurgent territories in Iraq and Afghanistan as clear evidence of this (2023, p. 386). Benally (2023) expands upon this, identifying how “Geronimo” – insurgent military leader and medicine man from the Bedonkohe band of the Ndendahe Apache people – “was the codename given to Osama bin Laden,” as well as noting the “‘military-style counterterrorism measures’ [used] to suppress [Indigenous-led] resistance to [the Dakota Access Pipeline]” and the “hyper-militarized mercenary crew (with veterans who had combat experience in the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan) [who] characterized the Standing Rock resistance as ‘an ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component’ that operated along a ‘jihadist insurgency model.’” The frontier – as well as the plantation – embodied and reinforced narratives in which settlement and the settler-colonial State (discussed in depth below) are conflated with safety, Progress, Development, and stability (rhodes, 2025a; Schaeffer, 2022). These narratives are replicated in counter-insurgency’s denial of insurgent worlds and assertion of Empire.

Contemporary COIN doctrine provides insight into the logics of the American Empire (settler pathology) in its emphasis on narrative / the cognitive realm, its pathologizing of insurgency, its insistence on incorporation (into the State), and perhaps most potently, its emphasis on being

surrounded. Hardt and Negri provide clear insight into this mentality: “...any member of the population could be a guerrilla fighter, and the attack can come from anywhere with unknown means. Guerrillas thus force the dominant military power to live in a state of perpetual paranoia” (Institute for the Study of Insurgent warfare, 2016, p. 80). The specter of the (Indigenous/Enslaved) insurgent threat to settlement, discussed above, consistently reappears throughout COIN doctrine; as the Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare articulates,

“the difficulty of counterinsurgency is that occupying forces have to protect everywhere, all the time, while insurgents can strike anywhere at any time. At the point of the first attack the possibility of insurgent action becomes total, and the insurgency begins to take on a spatial element; it cannot be identified, and therefore can be anywhere.” (2016, p. 117)

In the grosstopical, multi-layered war of counter-/insurgency, conflict (military, political, social, psychological, spiritual) is generalized and the threat is found everywhere/nowhere. The settler pathology is clearly at play here, in the “never-ending police campaign[s] in the black holes of the metropolis”, in the extension of war/colonization beyond a “distinct event in time... instead diffract[ing] into a [never-ending] series of micro-operations” (The Invisible Committee, 2009: 57). COIN doctrine articulates, then, a “principle of government” – settler counter-insurgency as a basis of the State/Empire (The Invisible Committee in Dunlap, 2023a, p. 40).

The next section investigates the historic role of Fascism in counter-/insurgent conflict, an important project for the context of the Cascadia movement. Following this, the rest of this chapter will examine the ways in which reading contemporary approaches to COIN as a process/structure of perpetual warfare can illuminate the ties between COIN and colonization/Empire. Then, I will approach a critical understanding of the (counter-insurgent) State, and finally will interrogate the COIN “archive” for the central practices that follow/stem from the settler-pathology.

The Counter-/Insurgent Complexity of Fascism

The role of Fascism in counter-/insurgent history is one which blurs the categories' distinction – defining Fascism as either insurgent or counter-insurgent is as difficult and contentious as defining Fascism itself. Across various spatial-temporal contexts, Fascism takes shape through a manipulative, pragmatic conversation with the forces around it. This contextual development of Fascism constantly bends, shifts and breaks the lines of counter-/insurgent war. R. Palme Dutt, in his study on Fascism – *Fascism and Social Revolution* – identifies the insurgent character of Fascism in its embrace of “the propaganda of war” (1974, p. 46). In the Fascist party, war is seen as the escape “from the unending nightmare of economic crisis, misery and unemployment”, it is a mobilization of people in a war against the existing State structure; as Mussolini states in *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, “Fascism believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace.... War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it” (in Dutt, 1974, p. 140). Further, the generalization of the glorification of war comes with general cultural reaction, the revolt against culture, the revolt against education, the cutting down of education in all capitalist countries, the increasing reactionary discipline and militarization in the universities and schools, and-the final and complete symbol of the culminating stage revealed by Fascism – the burning of the books” (Dutt, 1974, p. 38). Despite this militant, insurgent rhetoric, Fascism serves in many ways to re-establish the existing hierarchical order and is often described as a “faux revolution” (Dutt, 1974). For this reason, I have not drawn from Fascist texts in my pursuit of defining insurgency; while this presents some concern of an incomplete understanding of insurgency, COIN doctrine is similarly skewed in its drawing primarily from Anarchist, Communist, and Indigenous insurgent praxes/histories. In this way, “Fascism itself is less a policy than a state of mind” it is

“developed as a movement in practice without a [consistent] theory” beyond the capture of insurgent energy toward the re-entrenchment of a militarized State and private property regime (Dutt, 1974, pp. 49–50). The complex counter-/insurgent role of Fascism becomes clear with Dutt – Fascism both captures / weaponizes a population’s insurgent energy (away from liberatory movements) *and* inevitably directs it toward strengthening the State (power hierarchies maintained, in large part, as before). In the contemporary context, the counter-/insurgent role of Fascism is particularly debated – with many labeling the Trump regime as Fascist itself, while others reserve this language for formations more-external to the state. The Base serves as a potent example of an insurgent Fascist formation – and one originating from Cascadia in 2018; the Base (an english translation of Al Qaeda) is an organization of white nationalist accelerationists who organize “race war preppers” and “hate camps” to prepare for and initiate an insurgent war in support of the formation of a white ethnostate (see chapter 1 discussion of the Northwest Territorial Imperative).⁹ The Base – along with various insurgent/accelerationist Fascist organizations like the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) – is tied to an ongoing collection of sabotage, vandalism, assault, and assassination campaigns and takes a determined insurgent approach to organizing (Anonymous, 2025b; MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020; Sokol, 2019; Wilson, 2020).

⁹ The Base is also a pivotal organization in the spread of the Northwest Territorial Imperative, directing much of its organizing and propaganda toward Fascist convergence in Cascadia (Wilson, 2020). The Base’s connection to the NWTI is well documented; not only has the organization espoused its beliefs, Rinaldo Nazzaro – organization founder – was first publicly introduced as an organizer for the Northwest Front (NF) (Wilson, 2020).

I have chosen not to include The Base as a central Fascist Cascadia organization in my power-maps on account of two factors: 1) due to the organization’s classification as a terrorist organization in various countries, accompanied by various convincing claims that Nazzaro was collaborating with State authorities, The Base has greatly decreased in size and activity since its height in the late 2010s; and 2) alongside the increasing difficulty of their operation in Cascadia (and the US and Western Europe more broadly), The Base has shifted focus from the NWTI toward the building of a white ethno-state in the Carpathian mountains of Ukraine instead (Anonymous, 2025b; MacFarquhar & Goldman, 2020; Sokol, 2019; Wilson, 2020).

In Cascadia and beyond, Fascists historically complicate the line between counter-/insurgent through their engagement in protracted and small-scale acts of civil war – i.e. in their various acts of vigilante violence against marginalized populations and liberation-focused insurgent formations (Gelderloos, 2007). Various alleged leaders of the Fascist Cascadia movement are (allegedly) tied to homicides, assaults, and other acts of violence in addition to their connections with the broader Fascist movement (Corvallis Antifascists, 2024; Lokting, 2018). In response to the autonomous/insurgent face of (Cascadian) Fascism, the State employs various direct counter-insurgency techniques ranging from targeted arrests and infiltration to labeling organizations as “terrorists”; see, for example, accusations that the Northwest Front was a “honeypot – a front organization routinely used... to entrap people” (Wilson, 2020). However, Fascists and their weaponization of vigilante violence are not always entirely oppositional to the state. This is made clear through the extensive connections revealed between Trump and the January 6 rioters, as well as in the case of Seattle’s CHAZ, when Fascist violence prompted militant escalation from the state against a whole range of insurgent actors (Rosa Negra – Seattle, 2020). Peter Gelderloos (2007) argues that Fascists have been weaponized similarly throughout history; Fascism closely aligns itself with the ideologies of Empire, the State, and cis-hetero-patriarchy, making it a potent weapon against liberation-focused insurgent movements (Dutt, 1974). Returning to Dutt (1974), the Fascist appropriation of insurgent rhetoric, aesthetic, and (sometimes) tactics serves to redirect insurgent energy toward the strengthening – rather than dismantling of – Empire. Under the narratives of class collaboration and national revival, Fascism historically galvanized working-

class people and proletarianized, former owners toward a violently anti-Communist “false revolution” (Dutt, 1974; Gelderloos, 2007).

Black Panther Party leader and theorist George Jackson (1990) argues that Fascism presents itself in more-subtle ways as well – namely, as counter-insurgent reform. Jackson states bluntly in his prolific *Blood in My Eye*: “if one were forced for the sake of clarity to define [Fascism] in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be ‘reform’” (1990, p. 118). To Jackson, Fascism appears in the State’s counter-revolutionary maneuvers to buy-off the population with “breadcrumb”-style reforms while pursuing authoritarian militarization. On the other hand, Insurgent Fascists present a clear line of justification for the expansion of the State’s repressive capacity, while the incorporation of Fascists into the State results in further (anti-Liberationist) justification for expansion. Not only does the open appearance of insurgent Fascists serve to legitimize militarization (including local collaboration with federal COIN forces), but also legal Fascist/-adjacent actors by proxy, therefore shifting State politics further toward a right-wing authoritarianism (Crawford et al., 1994). This “radical flank” of seemingly autonomous, insurgent Fascist formations is beneficial to the counter-insurgent State in these ways as well as in simultaneously claiming rhetorical space and undermining the project(s) of insurgency more broadly. Fascism clearly blurs the line between counter-insurgent and insurgent, State and non-State. Shifting focus back to COIN, I now interrogate contemporary perspectives on counter-insurgency and how they explain the process as one of perpetual warfare.

Perpetual Warfare and Contemporary Perspectives on COIN

Following my desire to excavate the various interconnections between COIN doctrine and the formation/perpetuation of Empire, this section approaches four central themes and attempts to unsettle our understanding through viewing COIN through a lens of *perpetual warfare*. The four

themes addressed are: 1) the spatial-temporal implications of counter-/insurgency as a “protracted” conflict; 2) Empire and COIN’s shared historical-narrative segmentation; 3) COIN with respect to the incomprehensibility of the domestic/foreign divide in a settler-colonial context; and 4) COIN as an agent, worldbuilding process as opposed to its characterization as purely reactive. In approaching my understanding of Empire’s COIN as a structure of perpetual warfare, the end of this section places central focus on two themes in contemporary COIN thinking: Thomas Barnett’s (2008) conception of the “non-integrating gap” and the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s (2018) and Department of the Army’s (2014) “generational approach”.

Understanding COIN as perpetual warfare

As stated above, counter-/insurgency is a protracted war – a long-term conflict centered on the generation of variable forms of power and asymmetries (Milevski, 2014; Taber, 2002; Zedong, 2020). Extending our understanding of “war” / “warfare” beyond the intermittent and sensationalized moments of gunfire (i.e. kinetic warfare) into the realm of the social / political is critical in understanding the meaning of counter-/insurgency’s protraction. As Mao Zedong states, also reflecting on the experience of the Chinese Communist revolution, “Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive” (2020, p. 75). Applying this logic of protracted, non-kinetic warfare, Zedong continues to argue that “[w]ar is the continuation of politics”, and, therefore, “politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed” (2020, p. 33). This claim is foundational to insurgent perspectives, reappearing across various theorists’ work from Michel Foucault (2003) to Dylan Rodriguez (in *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism* & Rodriguez, 2025). Counter-insurgent perspectives speak to the continuation of war beyond the kinetic as well – Carl von Clausewitz stating that the aim of war is to “disarm the enemy and destroy their capacity for resistance” (in Burton, 2023, p. 225). “War”

Rodriguez reminds us, “is not just weapons, it’s not just bombs. It’s propaganda, it’s narratives” (Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025, 2:00).

As noted above, Foucault’s (Foucault, 2003) theorizing on war’s connection to power, politics, law, and the State synergize well with understanding the protracted nature of counter-/insurgency. To Foucault, power, politics, and law represent the “continuation of war by other means [...] a war that begins before the battle and continues after it is over... [w]ar in the sense of the distribution of weapons, the nature of the weapons, fighting techniques, the recruitment and payment of soldiers, the taxes earmarked for the army; war as an internal institution, and not the raw event of a battle” (2003, pp. 15, 159–160). Insurgents and insurgent formations identify with such perspectives, George Jackson (1990) and the Black Liberation Army’s (2023) tethering of counter-insurgent war to “domestic reform” and “law and order” campaigns – prolific in light of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s (2018) extensive and frequent discussion of such campaigns as central to counter-insurgency. Dylan Rodriguez utilizes the concept of “domestic war” to critically articulate the condition of ongoing counter-insurgency within the American Empire, stating

“[b]y domestic war, I am referencing the dynamic ensemble of state technologies that attempt to discipline, contain, and socially/politically neutralize the creative, insurgent (and often criminalized) socialities enabled by ongoing liberation and self-determination struggles of oppressed, colonized, and displaced (incarcerated, segregated, colonized) peoples” (2020, p. 182).

While I question the use of “domestic” in the settler-colonial context, Rodriguez’s work exemplifies the strength of utilizing war as a means of understanding colonial/counter-insurgent governance.

Such ongoing, structural war is typical of colonial and counter-insurgency campaigns and serves as a potent example of the genealogical ties between the two – as Talal Asad states, in both, “the separation between war and peace is not easily established precisely because *the formal conclusion to war is missing*” (Asad, 2010, p. 16, italics added). I point to counter-insurgent

theorist Kilcullen’s argument that “‘victory’ may not be final [and] ‘permanent containment’,” or occupation, in other words, “may be needed” to prevent the re-ignition of insurgency (2006, p. 123). His formulation is at once a contradiction and a confession – a contradiction in that permanent containment/occupation cannot result in prevention but only in the inevitability of insurgent (re-)formations, and a confession to the counter-insurgent understanding of this fact. Through this confession, I return to Hardt and Negri’s poetic framing of the (counter-insurgent) State’s position of “perpetual paranoia” – like the settler camp, surrounded by an unknowable insurgent force. heidi andrea restrepo rhodes mirrors this language in their poignant discussion of Colombian colonial/counter-insurgent campaigns, which, they argue, embody “less an internal war and more a systematic and *perpetual counterinsurgency operation* that conflates the figure of the state’s internal enemy with anybody who dares to challenge the state’s authority” (2025a, p. 14, italics added). Further, Antony Anghie speaks to the colonial origins of perpetual warfare, contending that the criminalization of resistance to colonization resulted in a perpetual war against the Indigenous (2005, p. 27). Inspired by the potency of these theorists’ framings, I argue that reading the counter-insurgent archive through the lens of perpetuality, viewing it as a process/structure of perpetual war, is useful in exposing the genealogical interweaving of colonialism/Empire and counter-insurgency.

Temporal and spatial de-segmentation as reading against Empire

As explored in the previous chapter, the American Empire relies on a segmented historical narrative in which “the most intensified and spectacular forms of U.S. racist state and state-sanctioned violence are narratively compartmentalized into bygone periods of land conquest, racial colonization, chattel slavery, and apartheid segregation” (Rodriguez, 2020, pp. 29–30). Such segmentation serves an apologetic narrative of Progress, of the “tide of history” (Paul et al., 2013)

invariably flowing toward the expansion of the State and capital accumulation. This tide of history narrative closely mirrors Sylvia Wynter's references to "techno-industrial Progress," in which white, colonizing societies assert themselves as evolutionarily superior (in Rodriguez, 2020, p. 1). Colonial logics of white superiority are embedded in the tide of history narrative, which serves counter-insurgency by justifying violence against insurgents deemed counter-to-the-tide – Talal Asad speaks to this, noting as well the re-appearing narrative of counter-insurgency as "humanitarian": "in ensuring that the initiation of hostilities will by definition be just—and that the enemy will therefore be unjust—humanitarian intervention dissolves the distinction between defensive and aggressive war and extends and intensifies the space of violence" (2010, p. 20). This extension of violent space is operationalized through the devaluation of Black and Indigenous life/people and their association with the insurgent, the oppositional-to-Progress. Such a linear narrative of assures the (white) colonial State of its "social dream of pacification in perpetuity" – to quote from Rodriguez – "White Being's ascendancy is affirmed in the native's [/ the insurgent's] endemic— that is, racial— failure to fulfill the expectations accompanying their (involuntary, coerced) residency within white civil society's political, cultural, and physiological architectures" (2020, pp. 99–100).

Ann Stoler states that the "cultures of empire [were] forged at the violent thresholds where internal enemies were conflated with external ones" (2006, p. 12). Movement across the foreign/domestic border and absorption of colonized people into the imperial country places the "Other" internally (Jacobs, 2002, p. 71), leading to further racialized attitudes and fear of internal insurrection. While Kilcullen argues that the State's willingness to engage in particular tactics depends on whether the insurgency is "domestic" or "expeditionary" (2010, p. 11), Max Boot points to the deep influence of "domestic" tactics such as "the use of native scouts, attacks on the

enemy's food supplies, and the rounding up of the insurgent population" on "counterinsurgency campaigns well into the twentieth century" (2012, p. 153). Stuart Schrader (2019) details, for example, the globally-expansive network of counter-insurgent education for police, through which local police agencies from around the world share knowledge and equipment with each other and military forces ranging from the US Army to the IDF. Dhoruba bin Wahad speaks extensively on this exchange, pointing to the ideological/technical/strategic overlaps between the FBI's infamous COINTEL Program, the CIA's (domestically-operating) Operation Chaos and the CIA's Phoenix Program in Vietnam (in James, 2007, pp. 83–88). These programs – designed to infiltrate, isolate, eliminate, surveille, or otherwise physically/psychologically torture suspected insurgents – constitute "a program of war waged by a government against a people, [even] against its own citizens" (bin Wahad in James, 2007, p. 80). Furthermore, such exchange is not confined to a particular historical era and is, in fact, ongoing. From the use of identical military aerial surveillance systems in Iraq and Baltimore, to the utilization of drones by police in the Bay Area (Ghaffary, 2020) and the weaponization of Palantir data-mining technology by the LAPD (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2021)top LAPD Spying Coalition, 2021). Empire's boundaries – spatial and temporal – are porous and flexible, the same is true for counter-insurgency. In opening one's eyes to the spatial-temporal expansiveness and coherence of Empire/counter-insurgency, their shared development is made more visible. Beyond this, the recognition of counter-insurgency as a protracted, perpetual war speaks to its central role in shaping imperial governance. One need only look to the "perpetual paranoia" of Empire/counterinsurgency to understand the absurdity of the counter-insurgent's claim to reactivity. Foundational counter-insurgent David Galula states that only the insurgent "can initiate a revolutionary war, for counterinsurgency is only an effect of insurgency" (2006, p. 1); Galula absolves the counter-insurgent/State/Empire of their

warmongering, their initiation of conflict through settler-colonial occupation. To view the perpetual war of counter-insurgency/Empire is to view its worldbuilding process – as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) asserts, “War is not just part of the origin of the capitalist system, it is part of each and every one of its ‘qualitative leaps.’” (2016, p. 269). In an attempt to illuminate the world-building nature of such perpetual war, I shift here to discuss two contemporary theories in COIN doctrine – Thomas Barnett’s (2008) “non-integrating gap” and the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s (2018) and Department of the Army’s (2014) “generational approach.”

Contemporary (Colonial) Perspectives

Thomas Barnett is a military geostrategist whose talk, “The Pentagon’s New Map”, has informed generations of American military generals and theorists. In this talk, Barnett attempts to formulate a conception of the necessary military structure to advance the project of globalization; the world is divided into two camps, Barnett (2008) argues – the “core” of those who are economically integrated with the American Empire, and the “non-integrating gap,” which lacks connectivity “no matter how you measure [it]”. The argument Barnett poses is quite blatant, the lack of connectivity between the “non-integrating gap” and the American Empire positions it as the “frontier of globalization”, which “attracts US military power time and time again”; Barnett (2008) calls for the expansion of American Empire, the integration of the non-integrating gap – “[w]e are in an age of frontier integration, where your focus should be ‘do you look like me economically, not politically.’” This call comes with the explicit acknowledgement that “when the global economy expands, it tends to do so in spasms... [and v]iolence is attached to that process” (Barnett, 2008), echoing the colonial narrative in which “trade was an indispensable part of the civilizing mission itself; [where] the expansion of commerce was the means by which the backward natives could be civilized” (Anghie, 2005, p. 97). Barnett’s desire for global integration

mirrors Empire's spatial expansion/expansiveness – “imperialists often sought to represent global power as the seamless ‘expansion’ of the nation” (Kramer, 2006, p. 22) – articulated in the language of economic globalization.

The “non-integrating gap” serves another counter-insurgent purpose as well – dissemination of the “surrounded” narrative and, therefore, justification for the securitization of the State. Barnett (2008) asserts that pandemics, narcotics, and terror are “the gap’s worst exports,” that “basically every war, every civil war, all the ethnic cleansing, all the genocide, all the mass rape as a tool of terror, all the children lured or forced into combat activity, all of the UN peacekeeping missions... [all of the] US nation building missions, 95% of the terrorist activity in the last 20 years, virtually all of the mass violence in the system” has occurred within the gap; his decontextualization of global violence and attempt to identify the geographies of the “non-integrating gap” as a threat is followed by a call to “firewall off” the core. This logic clearly aligns with the settler-pathology / counter-insurgent “surrounded” narrative; furthermore, the temporal implication of these narratives connects to the understanding that occupation – or globalization in Barnett’s case – stokes insurgent responses.

The US Military's Joint Chiefs of Staff (2018) and Department of the Army (2014) understand the perpetuation of insurgency well, its tendency to reappear across time. As stated in *JP 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, “[c]ounterinsurgents can make progress in defeating insurgent forces, but if they neglect the younger generation of the population they may lose the war” (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. VII–4). In reaction to the tendency of insurgencies to appeal to youth, counter-insurgency doctrine emphasizes a generational approach toward the counter-insurgent generalization of a culture of pacifism, legality / institutionality, and material embeddedness / cognitive identification with the aforementioned State. Primarily, the generational approach –

detailed in *JP 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (2018) and *FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5: Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies* (2014) – centers intimate interactions between the State and potentially-insurgent populations to cultivate trust and identification with the State as well as acceptance and participation in “legal methods of political discourse and dissent” (VII-4). As the Joint Chiefs of Staff contend, “mass mobilizations and protests are preferred reactions to government failures instead of violent resistance or coup attempts”(JP 3-24 – *Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. VII-4). The logic of the generational approach closely aligns with my conception of *cerebrum nullius*, in which Empire views each mind as a frontier for its expansion. If counter-insurgency seeks to cognitively capture potential insurgents into the realm of the State, it urges to move beyond simplistic relationship-building, the generational approach seeks a deeper alignment between local forces and the counter-insurgent, eventually urging locals to engage in counter-insurgent actions themselves (Department of the Army, 2014, pp. 10–12). This deputization of those unsympathetic to insurgent claims constitutes a “fundamental principle” of the generational approach, the Department of the Army noting that membership in local anti-insurgent organizations “should be used as a key indicator of success” (2014, pp. 10–13). One can see – in the counter-insurgent deputization and structuring of local organizations, in the incorporation of generational strategies – the world-building nature of COIN. Counter-insurgency, like Empire, projects itself indefinitely into the realm of the future, beyond the bounds of its “domestic” geographies through its process of perpetual warfare; I turn here once again to Thomas Barnett in attempting to grasp this war-as-worldbuilding. The expansion of Empire, Barnett (2008) suggests, “tends to destabilize before it stabilizes. It tends to disintegrate before it reformats and integrates.” Paul Kramer affirms this, claiming that Empire “often meant rupture and discontinuity” (2006, p. 22), as does the insurgent EZLN – “[Empire] seeks the destruction of a particular territory in order to rebuild it. More

precisely: it disorganizes it so as to reorder it. ...The wasteland resulting from a war is also a commodity, as is its reconstruction” (2016, pp. 267–270). The chilling assertion of the wasteland-as-commodity is cheerfully adopted by Barnett as fundamental to counter-insurgent success, to establishing the “stable” counter-insurgent world Empire envisions – “There’s the market, and there’s the aftermarket. ...[Y]ou gotta think about war as a market, you gotta think about peace,” defined by so-called humanitarian counter-insurgent occupation, “as the aftermarket” (2008).

What is the (Counter-insurgent) State?

Michel Foucault suggests that “[t]he State is nothing more than the way that the war between the two groups in question continues to be waged in apparently peaceful forms” (2003, p. 88). While the use of reading the protracted counter-insurgency of Empire through the lens of war has been established, the glaring question of what is the State (which counter-insurgency sets out to protect) remains unanswered. The State is notoriously difficult to define, with countless interpretations and nuances to the use of the term. In many ways, counter-insurgency is central to the formation of the State – David Kilcullen reasons as much, claiming COIN “seems to be an enduring human social institution that has been part of the role of virtually every government in history and perhaps even partly defines what we mean by the word ‘state’” (in Dunlap, 2023a, p. 41). Similarly, the formation of the State is deeply entwined with the formation/perpetuation of Empire; Anton Anghie identifies the use of “State” as a means to devalue Indigenous forms of social organization (which did not resemble the European State) and justify occupation (2005, p. 83), and Alexander Dunlap “recognizes state formation as colonialism, statism as (neo)colonialism and the state as colonial model(s)” (2023b). In light of the State’s counter-insurgent/colonial genealogy, it is critical to center these logics/structures in defining the State.

Common conceptions of the State collapse its definition to that of the government – this “definition of the state always depends on distinguishing it from society, and the line between the two is difficult to draw in practice” (Mitchell, 1991, p. 77). This line necessarily cuts through “the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained,” therefore failing to fully consider, for example, the means by which counter-insurgent governance occurs (Mitchell, 1991, p. 78). Expanding understanding of the State beyond simply government institutions takes into consideration the various institutions beyond government which produce commodities, subjectivities, “needs, social relations, bodies, and minds” (M. Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 78). This formulation troubles another common conception of the State as “an organization that claims a monopoly within a fixed territory over the legitimate use of violence” in incorporating the “consent”-focused State apparatuses that exist in addition to the coercive (Mitchell, 1991, p. 82). The monopoly-on-violence definition is common amongst insurgent Anarchists and lies closely to a Marxist/Marxist-Leninist conception of the State as “the product and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms,” in which one class centralizes the means of coercion in order to expropriate (the labor or the capital) of the other (Lenin, 2011, p. 8). While both conceptions speak to the reality in which State violence against insurgent formations is institutionalized, legitimized, and normalized, they fall short in accounting for counter-insurgency’s protracted nature, its ongoing weaponization of social programs, NGOs, and town halls.

The State, when considering its colonial/counter-insurgent core, should be understood as an abstraction or an effect describing the vast networks of Empire’s governance over those who passively endure or actively reject it. I draw this line of thinking from Timothy Mitchell, who advances the argument that the State should be understood “as an effect of mundane processes of

spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation” creating and maintaining the hierarchical divisions within a given geography (Mitchell, 1991, p. 95). The frontier, Mitchell urges, is a foundational characteristic of the “modern state” – the construction and maintenance of territorial boundaries through “continuous barbed-wire fencing, passports, immigration laws, inspections, currency control,” necessarily established by deep webs of institutions and individuals, providing insight into the complexity of State formation (Mitchell, 1991, p. 94). As Alexander Dunlap reminds about Empire, it “first had to organize an internal process of trade, domestic conquest, internment, Othering, disciplining, extraction and education to establish a self-sustaining network of political control to forcefully organize populations dedicated to nation-states, (colonial) warfare, factories, commerce and overseas extractivism” (2023b). This conglomerate body of relatively-autonomous institutions perform what Mitchell (1991) called the “state effect,” in which the role of “‘educat[ing]’” consent (to draw from Gramsci (2012)) to the unfolding relations of Empire. In a final acknowledgement of the complex organism which is the State, I point to Michel Foucault who questions, “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (James, 2007, p. 295). Now, I shift toward exploring the ways through which the State/Empire operationalizes the counter-insurgent/settler-pathological worldview.

Central COIN Logics/Practices Across Time

First, I must acknowledge that the following sub-sections are neither an exclusive nor comprehensive list of COIN tactics/practices, but rather represent a broad-strokes approach to categorizing those which provide the clearest link between COIN and Empire. Furthermore, the categories are frequently overlapping, muddled in the complicated context of perpetual war – the

purpose of their categorization is in identifying broad groupings/trends of approaches which reappear across time.

Weaponization of Reform and Incorporation

The State serves a dual purpose – on the one hand, to militarily dominate dissent and expand Empire; on the other, to build consent for Empire. Orisanmi Burton speaks to “repression and reform as complementary tactics of war” and points to various terms which describe the co-opting of insurgent movement potential through the reform process, e.g., “‘movement absorption,’ ‘movement capture,’ ‘movement channeling,’ and the ‘institutionalization of dissent’” (2023, p. 17). COIN doctrine speaks to the intentionality of this movement capture; the Joint Chiefs of Staff point to “co-opting local grievances and political agendas into a broader movement” as central practice for both counter-/insurgents while noting that it is critical “short-term [counter-insurgent] stabilization measures do not undercut long-term development goals” (2018, p. II–5, III–35). The Department of the Army’s *FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5* lays out the process of this grievance “co-opting” as “leveraging key leadership at the local and district levels to meet with and discuss significant issues with the population” while “follow[ing] through on major discussion topics and resolv[ing] issues that are significant to them” (2014, pp. 10–14). Interestingly, this closely mirrors the Communist insurgent strategy of “The Mass Line” promoted by Mao Zedong (2020), which similarly identifies a process through which to investigate and incorporate local grievances into the broader narrative structure of the insurgency. The counter-insurgent cannot, of course, resolve the contradictions at the heart of the insurgency – opposition to the State, colonization, capitalism, patriarchy, and so on – without dismantling their own power and “undercut[ting the] long-term development goals” entwined with it (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. II–5, III–35). Havron et al. note that “[a] grievance system is primarily a psychological tool” and explain the purpose of

local reform as providing a needed “outlet for complaints” to “reduce tensions and provide civilians with reasons for faith in the constabulary and in the government that supports it” (1969, p. 135).

Resulting from understanding the psychological role of reform, counter-insurgent reform efforts tend to focus on manipulating the “cognitive realm” of the protracted war through the utilization of “Progress[ive]” narratives (Kilcullen, 2006; Wynter, 2003) and the promotion of “Peace” (Barnett, 2008; rhodes, 2025a). This narrative weaponization is demonstrated clearly by rhodes’ depiction of Columbia’s counter-insurgency narrative, which is narratively embedded by the counter-insurgents in the State’s “move toward ‘fiscal management and reduced risk’ and a maturing market with thriving industrial, agricultural, and tech sectors ripe for foreign investment,” reducing violence while “opening room for more rural development projects on land which, under armed conflict, had ‘wasted potential’ for production and profit” (2025a, p. 68). Beyond the increased commodification of land, rhodes identifies the Columbian counter-insurgent narrative’s emphasis on “smart city” development and “technologization,” which the counter-insurgent argues will increase “productivity, sustainability, security, and information and communications technology” (2025a, p. 68). David Galula mirrors this, speaking to the use of infrastructural projects “directly benefiting the population – such as cleaning the village or repairing the streets –” in order to lead “the inhabitants gradually, if only in a passive way, to participate in the fight against the insurgent by such work as building roads of military interest, helping in the construction of the village’s defensive installations, carrying supplies to military detachments, providing guides and sentries” (2006, p. 82). The reforms resulting from such a counter-insurgent program will not address the hierarchies foundational to insurgents’ grievances, but will serve to divide and weaken insurgent movements through strengthening the counter-

insurgent while co-opting those less embedded in the insurgency. Alexander Dunlap identifies core practices of counter-insurgent reform which overlap greatly with these narratives, dividing them into six categories: 1) social development, which promotes the benefits of working with the State; 2) public relations, creating a narrative of State legitimacy; 3) the utilization of various research institutions to delegitimize, counter, or incorporate insurgent movements; 4) counter-mobilization, or the creation/cultivation of organizations to counter or co-opt insurgent demands; 5) infrastructure projects, which control/enclose space and insurgents while promoting short-term job growth and economic stabilization; and, more contemporarily, 6) green-washing, or the promotion of environmental narratives/reforms as responding to deeper, insurgent, ecological demands (2020, pp. 82–83). Each of these narrative strategies/reform tactics promote a “softer” image of the State in order to capture the possibility of insurgent movements by co-opting their demands in promotion of incorporation/embeddedness into the State. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney poetically affirm: “politics”, reform, the State, “soldiers on, claiming to defend what it has not enclosed, enclosing what it cannot defend but only endanger” (2013, p. 18).

Movement enclosure within the State, alongside the previously discussed practice of reform, constitutes the second major role of the counter-insurgent State. This process of incorporation focuses on assimilating insurgent dissenters into legal routes of redress as a means to detract from the deeper calls of an insurgency, therefore promoting a generalized acceptance of counter-insurgent reforms as enough. The Department of the Army states this rather directly:

“A main role for organizations is to make the connections between the local organizations and the provincial or national level government, as well as other stakeholders and peer organizations. At some point the NGOs will not be present to facilitate government access, and will be most effective when they facilitate cooperative and enduring relationships between the population and the government” (2014, pp. 10–13).

Such a strategy stems from a colonial history, in which Indigenous peoples' assimilation into the American State "were not designed as a benevolent form of harm reduction, [but] were an extension of a military strategy that couldn't fulfill its genocidal programs... [a] part of [the] colonial strategy to, 'kill the Indian and save the man'" (Benally, 2023, p. 243). Patrick Wolfe speaks to this in his description of the phases of the colonial process: (1) initial confrontation (or invasion), (2) an incarceration period (displacement and resettlement), and (3) an assimilation period that aims to integrate Indigenous populations into the colonial system" (in Sovacool et al., 2025, p. 649). The legacy is clear in the counter-insurgent outlook, which parallels the colonial intent of "containing, controlling, and civilizing" the insurgent (Sovacool et al., 2025, p. 649). When movements' energy becomes "enclosed" within the State – to draw again from Moten and Harney (2013) – it fails to assert the insurgent world it once called for and thus loses its insurgent character. Incorporation into the State serves as a form of deputization, in which democratic, or even dissenting, institutions/organizations are solicited in service to counter-insurgent, i.e. carceral, systems.

Deputization and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC)

Incorporation into the State occurs primarily through two pathways: domestication of resistance through the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), and pacification of insurgent thought through incorporation into academic institutions (INCITE!, 2017). Apart from explicitly counter-insurgent non-profit organizations like the RAND corporation, those non-profits which embed resistance into the peaceful mechanisms of the State – i.e. the NPIC – have a "commitment to maintaining the essential social and political structures of civil society (meaning institutions, as well as ways of thinking) [which] reproduces and enables the most vicious and insidious forms of state and state-sanctioned oppression and repression" (INCITE!, 2017, p. 37). Through the

“professionalization” of “activism” and the non-profit insistence on legalistic means of struggle, the NPIC serves the counter-insurgent goal of a generalized State legitimacy.

In lock-step with the NPIC is the role of academic institutions in the pacification of insurgent thought. Klee Benally argues that “[w]riting Indigenous knowledge systems into Western academic frameworks (aka “Indigenizing”) is a form of pedagogical syncretism that makes great careers for Indigenous academics (Who else could specialize?) while implicitly preferencing and furthering capitalist modes of knowledge sharing” (2023, p. 29). This imperial/colonial practice applies as well for counter-insurgency – where pacification occurs through the incorporation of insurgent(-adjacent) thought into Western academic frameworks, capitalist modes of knowledge sharing, and the decontextualized (with respect to insurgent praxis) space of the University. Both forms of incorporation – the NPIC and the academic institution – serve to justify or otherwise obscure violence against the remaining insurgents, who are pathologized (as violent, irrational, against-the-tide of Progress) in comparison to the “rational citizens” who have incorporated their dissent into “legitimized” resistance.

Deputization, however, does not end with the incorporation of sympathetic populations into the State. Another central practice is the incorporation of private interests into State militarization/surveillance expansion, sometimes referred to as the military industrial complex. Counter-insurgent programs such as predictive policing (PredPol) were built by “an entire infrastructure of government agencies, academia, and private interests... [which] uphold harmful ideologies and fund, create, or otherwise influence the development and implementation of technology” (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition & Free Radicals, 2020). Such collaboration emphasizes the expansiveness of the (counter-insurgent) State, as well as serves to further blur the domestic/foreign boundary as central figures in PredPol’s development – such as UCLA professor

Jeff Brantingham – who “imagined its profitable application in our own backyards” as well as in “the frontlines of Iraq and Afghanistan” (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and Free Radicals, 2020). More-contemporary examples such as Palantir’s data-collection for military forces or Microsoft and Amazon’s collaboration with Israeli intelligence agencies serve as potent reference points for the continued practice of deputization. The Department of the Army, however, make particular note the “counterinsurgents should not limit themselves to the vocal intellectual elite,” and that engagement with low-income, rural, or otherwise marginalized populations is central to developing a cohesive and effective counter-insurgent force (2014, pp. 10–12).

One example of this practice discussed earlier is Marx’s assertion of the counter-insurgent nature of settler colonization. The incorporation of the settler – a previously-marginalized population more likely to be sympathetic of insurgency – into the State through settlement served a counter-insurgent purpose in Europe as well as on the edge of the frontier in their fight against insurgent Indigenous peoples. This functionally decentralizes counter-insurgent action and ensures resilience in areas the State is unable to centralize its efforts. Patrick Wolfe speaks to the centrality of the settler in advancing the project of colonization, asserting that “irregular, greed-crazed invaders who had no intention of allowing the formalities of federal law to impede their access to the riches available in, under, and on Indian soil” were instrumental in withering away indigenous insurgencies (2006, p. 391). Horrific examples of such deputization can be found in the Mississippi Department of Corrections “so-called prisoner trust system... [in which] some 300 designated white convicts were given state-owned guns and whips (known as the “Black Annie”) and ordered to maintain prison law and order” through racialized terror until 1974 (James, 2007, p. 297). More recently, the (independent) practices of “doxxing” – the publicly exposing of one’s identity, address, place of employment, or other sensitive information – and sporadic vigilante violence

against insurgent activists falls as well under the label of “deputization.” Similarly to the incorporation/reform practices mentioned above, deputization initiates and justifies violence against populations deemed sympathetic to insurgency.

Racialization, Narrative, and Temporal Domination

The pathologization of insurgency is the creation – in the mind and the narrative of the counter-insurgent – of an “expendable” population, incapable of assimilating into “peaceful” society (i.e. Empire). Kilcullen notes that successful counter-insurgency requires the separation of the “enemy” from “the population in which it hides” (2010, p. 7). This process of pathologizing the “enemy” performs significant cognitive work in creating “an emotional state akin to war psychology” which accepts and/or calls for violence against the portrayed “menace” (Good & Phillips, 2022, p. 144). The generalized acceptance of violence against those deemed insurgent, Talal Asad argues, obscures the line between the “enemy” and the “civilian” – “when civilians are killed according to a justifying calculus, they are part of getting at the enemy” (2010, p. 15). Following the genealogy of American COIN, the line which identifies the “enemy” and initiates their “expendability” is undeniably racialized. The American Empire’s legacy of white counter-insurgency has culturally embedded the normalcy of racialized violence as central to militarized counter-insurgency (e.g. the carceral system); as Klee Benally asserts, “Colonial occupation is the constant promise of settler violence,” (2023, p. 25), Frank Wilderson extends, “from the incoherence of black death, America generates the coherence of white life” (in James, 2007, p. 29).

Racialization has served counter-insurgency long before the contemporary racial order, see Foucault’s identification of the figure of the “Barbarian,” who appears alongside and in essential contradiction to the formation of colonial Civilization (2003, p. 195). Counter-insurgent historian Max Boot points to the “Barbarian” in the counter-insurgent/colonial context, “most of these

[counter-insurgent/colonial] conflicts occurred on the periphery of empire against enemies that were considered “uncivilized” and therefore, under the European code of conduct, could be fought with unrestrained ferocity” (2012, p. 200). To translate this to a more-contemporary COIN context, the isolation of insurgents and formed divisions between differentiated populations serve to maintain the peripheral nature of the insurgent “Barbarian” – contact between and across these groups is deemed dangerous, in line with the legacy of the plantation (Stoler, 2006, p. 203). In fact, the coherence of “permanent carceral war” emerging from abolition and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment illuminates the connection of these racialized violences across time as well as emphasizes the role of the plantation / the prison / the policed neighborhood in isolating populations on the “periphery” of colonial society (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 63). To re-emphasize, the relegating of particular populations beyond the bounds of “society” serves to locate them closer to insurgency, and thus to pathologize them and normalize their “presumed vulnerability to bodily disintegration” (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 71).

The communication of this racialization is necessarily a narrative process, one which serves to delegitimize the insurgent promise, isolate and pathologize the insurgent population, and promote the worldview and trajectory of Empire. As foundational counter-insurgent David Galula states, “[o]n the eve of embarking on a major effort, the counterinsurgent faces what is probably the most difficult problem of the war: [they have] to arm [themselves] with a competing cause” (2006, p. 71). The critical value of a counter-insurgent narrative is echoed across COIN literature, the Joint Chiefs of Staff making note of narrative as the process through which counter-/insurgents prove the value of their action to the broader population (2018, p. I–8, II–13, II–14). Further, narrative assists in developing a “sense of purpose [and] unity of effort” among counter-insurgents, while increasing their “ability to gain and maintain initiative against insurgents” (*JP 3-24* –

Counterinsurgency, 2018, p. VII–2); this extends beyond counter-insurgent military forces into the broader State, the COIN narrative serving as a means to “influence public perceptions” through coordination amongst “local leaders, pillars of the community, religious figures, media personalities, and others who set trends” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. 42). This logic closely aligns – once again – with Mao Zedong’s writing on insurgent strategy, particularly his concept of the “Mass Line” (2020). To reiterate an earlier point, this narrative work demonstrates the shared worldbuilding nature of counter-/insurgency and provides evidence to Dylan Rodriguez’s assertion that “symbols, metaphors, [and] concepts actively destroy, humiliate, demoralize, and kill” (*Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez*, 2025, 28:56).

Narrative approaches to COIN provide a story of the “good” counter-insurgent fighting the “bad” insurgent, playing off what Barnett (2008) identifies as the American desire for binary, simple answers. This can be seen in media portrayals of community organizations – such as the Black Panther Party – as “primarily an armed insurrectionary group,” simultaneously delegitimizing/obscuring their practices of mutual aid / infrastructure building and associating membership in the party with impending bodily harm (Newton, 1980, p. 19). Such a tactic deters potentially sympathetic populations from engaging in work to aid these insurgent formations; Orisanmi Burton – drawing from Frantz Fanon and Kuwasi Balagoon – argues that “the primary barrier to the liberation of the colonized was within their own minds,” and points to counter-insurgent narrative work as central in forming these anti-liberatory cognitive processes (2023, p. 42). Such practice is frequently discussed as “armed social work,” “psychological operations,” or “psy-ops” and forms a central counter-insurgent practice in “‘influenc[ing] the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of hostile, neutral, or friendly groups in such a way as to support the achievement of national objectives’” (Khalili, 2014, p. 31; Burton, 2023, p. 151). Dylan Rodriguez,

in a 2025 conversation with the podcast *Millennials are Killing Capitalism*, identifies the colonial and counterinsurgent practice of war through language as “lexical warfare.” Again, this process of “reorganizing and redirecting entire parameters, entire theaters of conflict, through the conquest and colonization of words, definitions, and narratives” is fundamentally prefigurative, speculative (*Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025, 33:00*). “There’s no distinction,” Rodriguez declares, “between lexicon and all of... the so-called concrete, material things – from law to governance to policing to a kind of material distribution of wealth and goods. All of that is lexical from its foundation” (*Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025, p. 25:55*). The intricate manipulation of lexicon impacts the collective contextual connection made between certain words and broader material categories; more simply, the way each of us understands the broad interconnections of the world is filtered through our collective understanding of language, which is shaped by ongoing colonial power relations (*Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025*). To quote Rodriguez once more: “[t]he lexicon is what gives order to this wretched fucking beast of Civilization. The lexicon is the mental, rhetorical everyday glue that orders all that shit. And the point is this: symbols, metaphors, [and] concepts actively destroy, humiliate, demoralize, and kill” (*Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025, p. 28:56*).

Empire is, as I argue above, the manifestation of settler-colonial victory in the narrative war. I mirror Dylan Rodriguez’s language of lexical warfare intentionally, pointing toward the centrality of counter-insurgency in *Empire*. The Joint Chiefs of Staff note, “Operations appropriately aligned with a narrative are strengthened through sense of purpose, unity of effort, and the ability to gain and maintain initiative against insurgents. The COIN narrative is most effective when recognized and respected across the COIN force and emboldened by everything counterinsurgents say and do” (2018, p. xviii). Clearly, narrative is recognized as central to COIN, and thus to the stability

and survival of the State. Rodriguez speaks to this in asserting that language “is not weaponized for a war... [it] is the theater of war [itself]” (Millennials Are Killing Capitalism & Rodriguez, 2025, 10:55). Before diving deeper into the American Empire’s construction of narrative, I dive into the prominent trends of critical discourse on Empire. The theater of narrative war is painfully asymmetric, but Empire’s hold on our worldview is far from eternal. “The difficulty of being on Turtle Island is that we don’t call it Turtle Island” argues Jason M. Wirth in *Cascadian Zen*, “We mark it with empire, and don’t look at the genocide of Indigenous peoples, who, by the way, lived in a way that suddenly seems pretty good, given that we’re about to destroy ourselves” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 115).

To shift attention back toward Empire’s temporal manipulation, (COIN) narrative is an essentially temporal process/argument – the controlling of collective timelines and trajectories constituting a practice of temporal domination. Deeper than Empire’s influence on broad temporal arcs, COIN tactics center the manipulation of interpersonal time as a means through which to establish deeper mechanisms of control (Phillips, 2025). The experimentation of this technique was rampant in the maintenance of enslavement with labor regimes, curfews, and the centrality of the “master’s clock” serving as potent examples (Phillips, 2025, pp. 15, 112, 199). This temporal domination extended to restricting clock possession for the enslaved and the establishment and enforcement of “a temporal order by use of sound; bells, horns, public clocks, chants, songs, speech patterns, and the like” (Phillips, 2025, p. 110). While the particular focus of counter-insurgent forces has shifted, carceral curfews and labor regimes remain central to counter-insurgent “order”, as does the production and enforcement of broad temporal trajectories.

Intimacy, “Consensual” Governance, and Rape Culture

The weaponization of intimacy is woven throughout a considerable number of counter-insurgent tactics. As discussed above, the intimate encapsulates far more than the romantic or sexual – though, it certainly includes this. By intimacy, I am referring also to proximity, the manipulation of environments, and the construction/dissemination/imposition of desires. In this sense, the spread of the settler-pathology, the COIN narrative, is an inherently intimate process. Laleh Khalili speaks to the inevitability of intimate interactions between the counter-/insurgents and the broader population, noting the practice of “drinking tea with the locals” as “a (counter-insurgent) euphemism for generating intimacies with the Afghan and Iraqi populations” (2014, p. 32). The gendered dynamics and discourse here are interesting in comparison to the intensity with which counter-insurgency re-enforces Western gendered/sexual hierarchies, as counter-insurgent war is often “‘feminized’... with emphasis on humanitarianism, on soft tactics, and on ostensibly thoughtful “soldier-scholars” rather than “warriors” designing the doctrine and practices of warfighting” (Khalili, 2014, p. 28). This is particularly ironic in light of COIN literature’s near-total lack of discussion on women’s roles in insurgency and complete erasure of Queerness/gender non-conformity. It wasn’t until the 2018 edition of *JP 3-24* that discussion of insurgent women was included at all, an alteration amounting to little more than one page (2018, pp. iii, II–9). Queer, gender-nonconforming people and women form the functional basis of countless insurgent movements (Black Liberation Army, 2023; EZLN, 2016), in line with Robert Taber’s assertion that the insurgent’s most powerful weapon is their “relationship to the community” (2002, p. 18). Mao Zedong echoes this, stating that “[t]he [insurgent] army must become one with the people so that they see it as their own army. Such an army will be invincible...” (2020, p. 82) – and such a sentiment seems held by the counter-insurgents as well, David Galula stating,

“What makes it possible for the guerrillas to survive and to expand? The complicity of the population. This is the key to guerrilla warfare, indeed to the insurgency, and it has been expressed in the formula of the fish swimming in the water. ...The guerrilla operations will be planned primarily not so much against the counterinsurgent as in order to organize the population” (2006, pp. 33–34).

Here is where the counter-insurgent most potently mimics insurgent strategy – in their embedding into populations. To quote Galula again,

“soldiers living in barracks would always appear to the population as outsiders, as people apart. If no construction other than what is strictly necessary is allowed, the counterinsurgent forces will be forced to live like the population, in shacks if necessary, and this will help to create common bonds” (2006, pp. 79–80).

The intimacy with which counter-insurgent war occurs is, in another word, occupation – as insurgent movements develop relationships with broader populations, “Insurgencies become the terrain, fuse into space itself, and counterinsurgency is an attempt to reconstruct the dynamics of this space... this reconstruction of space is far from a passive process; it is the abrupt and forceful seizing of space and reconstruction of space by an occupying element” (Institute for the Study of Insurgent warfare, 2016, p. 117). This flows from the settler-colonial essence of the American Empire, after all, settlement is a structure of occupation (Wolfe, 2006); COIN historian Max Boot identifies the counter-insurgent character of such occupation: “The occupation of [Indigenous] hunting grounds by white settlers doomed the Indians as surely as any battle” (2012, p. 152). A contradiction arises once again between the necessity of occupation by the counter-insurgents and the inevitability of insurgency in the context of occupation. As Klee Benally bluntly states: the settler/the (counter-insurgent) occupier “can only exist without consent” (2023, p. 394).

This phrasing of “consent” carries weight and when interrogated can expose some contradictions central to the American Empire’s narrative. The Joint Chiefs of Staff state, “[a]ll governments govern through a combination of consent, influence, and to some degree, coercion” (2018, p. x). Importantly, these differing strategies of achieving “the tacit or explicit agreement of

the population” – or, at least, “its submissiveness” or “passivity” – to the State/Empire (Galula, 2006, pp. 4, 77) are applied to differing populations. Galula explains clearly:

“In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the [counter-insurgent] cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause. The technique of power consists in relying on the favorable minority in order to rally the neutral majority and to neutralize or eliminate the hostile minority” (2006, p. 53).

Galula does not mince words – in counter-/insurgency, “[t]he true allegiance of every citizen is open to doubt” (2006, p. 49). Dylan Rodriguez explains, “the consensual basis of ‘hegemony’ has always been overwhelmingly reserved for the geographies, publics, and privileged collective subjectivities of White Being, including non-citizen, immigrant, and even ‘undocumented’ white Europeans” (2020, p. 11), highlighting the reality of Galula’s statement: white populations are considered further from insurgency and thus capable of consent, whereas Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are automatically associated with insurgency and thus subject to coercive governance. Frank Wilderson echoes this:

“the black American subject imposes a radical incoherence upon the assumptive logic of Gramscian discourse... the insatiability of the slave demand upon existing structures means that it cannot find its articulation within the modality of hegemony (influence, leadership, consent) — the black body cannot give its consent because ‘generalized trust’, the precondition for the solicitation of consent, ‘equals racialized whiteness’” (2003, pp. 225–231).

In evaluating the intimate spreading of the COIN narrative and worldview, the colonial logics of *corpus and cerebrum nullius* reappear. Those deemed potentially insurgent are empty bodies and minds, deserving of and calling for coercion. In working through the concept of consent(ual governance), I turn to Dianne Herman’s (1989) concept of “rape culture” and its many synergies with *corpus/cerebrum nullius*. Rape culture describes the perpetuation of rape in a given society through the normalization of and systemic failure to address sexual violence (against particular, devalued populations) (Herman & Freeman, 1989). This culture closely follows the logic of *corpus*

nullius and the “violability” of particular bodies (Benally, 2023, p. 132; Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 4), while similarly constructing resistance as pathological and failure to resist as compliance. The Joint Chiefs of Staff say in regards to State legitimacy, “[c]onsent may range from active support; passive support; or indifference, through begrudging compliance” (2018, p. I–8).

The prevalence of sexual violence in the counter-insurgent context speaks volumes to the limits of “consent” in settler-colonial/counter-insurgent governance. Orisanmi Burton goes so far as to proclaim “that sexual violence lies at the core of counterinsurgency,” its absence from the archive a void (2023, p. 121). As Klee Benally (2023) states, settler-colonialism can only exist without consent, and the language of Empire reflects this; to quote prominent American Imperialist Senator Albert Beveridge: “A hundred wildernesses are to be subdued. Unpenetrated regions must be explored. Unviolated valleys must be tilled. Unmastered forests must be felled” (in Immerwahr, 2019). The subduing, penetrating, violating, and “mastering” Beveridge speaks of was extended to the bodies of the colonized. Black Liberation insurgent Dorubah Bin Wahad describes the “psychosexual component of [anti-Black] oppression” and points to the prevalence of rape in enslavement as well as the sexual nature of lynching as key evidence (in James, 2007, p. 84). Recorded and written testimony of those liberated from enslavement attests to this. Statements by William Ward, Louisa and Sam Everett, John Cole, and W.L. Bost, amongst others – recorded by the National Humanities Center (2007) – speak of: forced mating or breeding between enslaved people; rape by enslavers sometimes resulting in children who would be enslaved or killed; and other forms of sexual violence, all of which were weaponized punitively/correctively, i.e. as counter-insurgency. Extending through and beyond enslavement, lynching was another form of corrective/counter-insurgent and sexual violence. William F. Pinar attests that “rape was the key

to lynching” and provides various accounts of the graphic sexual violence involved (in James, 2007, pp. 291–292).

While these particular expressions of racialized counter-insurgent sexual violence have since altered, rape continues to serve as a counter-insurgent weapon, notably in prisons and so-called “black sites.” Orisanmi Burton’s (2023) account of the Attica prison insurgency and its subsequent insurgent resonances details the extensiveness with which sexual violence was weaponized against the imprisoned. Beyond rape by prison guards serving “as modes of domination,” the Attica massacre itself “was a collective act of sexual revenge that aimed to punish the rebels and defend the racial breach within normative masculinity” that was central to the insurgency (Burton, 2023, p. 120). Further than this, sexual violence in the form of experimentation was performed in Adirondac Correctional Treatment Education Center (ACTEC), as well as Atascadero State Hospital and Vacaville Medical Facility, which was also used by the CIA as a test sight for their MK Ultra drug-induced-mind-control program (Burton, 2023, p. 201). Outside of American prisons, “black sites” like Abu Ghraib saw similar forms of sexual torture in their role within counter-insurgent programs where “the American culture of sexualized and racialized torture remain[ed] recognizable” (James, 2007, p. 296). This violence in dealing with populations labeled as insurgent serves as one foundational tool of the counter-insurgent State, utilized against those who refuse to or are denied the ability to consent to Empire. In shifting toward other populations, I turn to Gramsci’s notion that the State weaponizes both “repressive, and pedagogical apparatus[es]” – “The State does have and request consent, but it also 'educates' this consent” (in INCITE!, 2017, p. 28). Stated bluntly by Ann Stoler, “[s]exual violence was fundamental to conquest, but so was colonizing the hearts and minds of women, children, and men” (2006, p. 58).

The most potent example of Gramsci's "educating of consent" is COIN's "generational approach," in which youth are intentionally targeted for psychological operations geared toward raising acceptance of Empire. David Galula serves again to blatantly state the counter-insurgent point of view:

"The administrator in peacetime has to preserve a politically neutral attitude toward the population, has to let 'a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools of thought contend,' but not in counterinsurgency, where *his duty is to see that only the right flower blossoms and not the weed*, at least until the situation becomes normal again" (2006, pp. 66–67 italics added).

Emphasizing the importance of restricting the bounds of particular modes of thinking under counter-insurgent governance. The usefulness of these informational, political, lexical tools is highlighted in COIN doctrine – "some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot" (in Boot, 2012, p. 541) – and are acknowledged by insurgent formations as well; young members of the EZLN state,

"We as Zapatista youth are facing a low-intensity war that the bad government and the bad capitalists wage against us. They put ideas into our heads about modern life... through TV, through soap operas, soccer games, and commercials, so that we as youth will be distracted and not think about how to organize our struggle" (2016, p. 103).

Educational institutions – from the kindergarten to the University – are deeply tied to the counter-insurgent generational approach of instilling particular cultural/knowledge/value systems in alignment with Empire (Foucault, 2003; Stoler, 2006). As Foucault states, the University is designed for the "selection, normalization, hierarchalization, and centralization" of Western knowledge over Indigenous knowledges (2003, pp. 180–183; Ali & Barsamian, 2005). Klee Benally extends this analysis to the contemporary selective incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into academic institutions and frameworks, critiquing: "[t]he institution of colonial higher

education is designed to produce an elite managerial class within Indigenous communities that shapes and subdues cultural knowledge systems to fulfill colonial economic and political expansion” (2023, p. 48).

Regarding youth, the American Empire’s history of boarding schools for the Indigenous serves in many ways as ideological basis for the logic of assimilatory education institutions. “[C]olonial politician... Carl Schurz clarified the economics behind the strategy stating that, ‘...it would cost a million dollars to kill an Indian in warfare, whereas it cost only \$1,200 to school an Indian child for eight years’” (Benally, 2023, p. 47). The boarding school system was a direct alternative to genocidal war, “designed to brutally assimilate Indigenous children into white settler society” while banning their cultural, spiritual and linguistic traditions (Benally, 2023, p. 47). Furthermore, boarding schools were not free from the counter-insurgent logic and weaponization of sexual violence and serve as its connection to the generational approach; “indigenous scholars [have] document[ed] how the gender violence and sexual abuse that defined institutional life for indigenous children produced trauma that can be inherited by descendants while specifically affecting gender and sexual identity and familial relations” (Erai & Morgensen, 2012, pp. 11–12). A central pillar of Empire’s counter-insurgent education is its imposition of Western gendered and sexual hierarchies which subject non-conforming people to violence and coercion into complying with cisgender and heterosexual dominance. This is central to the establishment and maintenance of Empire and was manifested in a complex variety of ways across its geographies.

At its core, “Colonial state-building was itself a masculinist project that re- constructed patriarchy, grounding colonial hierarchies in the purportedly deficient masculinity of indigenous elites,” and the gendered logics of Empire’s formation serve countless roles in its perpetuation (Kramer, 2006, p. 23). In addition to connections with the previously discussed settler logics of

“indigenization,” sexuality and gender served as the basis for establishing hierarchical relationships between the colonized and the colonial power (Stoler, 2006, p. 441). Further, marriage was and still is used to facilitate access to Indigenous land and resources (Dunlap, 2018). The intimate realm later served as a means to indoctrinate the (formerly) enslaved and colonized into the American Empire (Stoler, 2006, p. 195) while undermining “[t]he power of the matriarchal system[s]” found in many Indigenous cultures (Children of the Setting Sun Productions, 2023, p. 165). The dissemination of these hierarchies to both the Indigenous people and settlers occurred through the various counter-insurgent educational institutions, where traditional gender roles were taught to children (Children of the Setting Sun Productions, 2023, p. 29), and as explained by Erai and Morgensen, “settler participants in residential/boarding schools, US Indian agencies, religious education, and other sites of settler governance gained gender and sexual identities through asserting control over indigenous people” (2012, p. 12). The formation and imposition of hierarchical settler gender and sexual regimes served the central counter-insurgent role of assimilation as well as undermining the internal structure of Indigenous resistance. Klee Benally, quoting from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, argues that familial, gender, and sexual hierarchies served to deputize Indigenous men as “agents of heteropatriarchy” who “could therefore exert colonial control from within” (2023, p. 134). Through this revelation, another central counter-insurgent logic becomes visible: divide and conquer.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff’s insistence on “isolat[ing] the insurgency” (2018, p. III–13) is an obvious example of dividing and conquering, and this practice extends to counter-insurgency tactics waged within insurgent formations. Galula explains, “the goal of the counterinsurgent’s psychological warfare should be, on the contrary, to divide their ranks, to stir up opposition between the mass and the leaders, to win over the dissidents” (2006, p. 86). Disguised behind the

foregrounding of the psychological or “winning over” is the counter-insurgent’s desire to generate consent for violence against insurgents. Ali and Barsamian speak of this quite bluntly: “[k]ill, kill, kill, kill. This is how collaborators are created” (2005, p. 23). The long lineage of this counter-insurgent tactic is, once again, woven into the settler-colonial and enslaving foundation of the American Empire. Major General George Crook expressed the colonial point of view quite clearly, ““unless savage should be pitted against savage, the white man would be outwitted, exhausted, circumvented, possibly ambuscaded and destroyed”” (in Boot, 2012, p. 148). William Chin contends that this logic applied to the plantation as well, noting as evidence:

“plantations in the South were located great distances from each other. Kinship groupings were dissolved. Slaves speaking different African languages were grouped together on plantations. Slave owners set up a spy network to report on conditions in the fields and the slave quarters. They recruited blacks to spy on other blacks. Whites created a slave hierarchy of personal servants, household servants, drivers, and field workers that were pitted against each other” (2014, p. 44).

Divide-and-conquer continues to be a central counter-insurgent strategy, notable in the American Empire’s co-opting of national liberation (Ali & Barsamian, 2005), installation of friendly proxies (Schrader, 2019), weaponization of Indigenous militant formations against other insurgent groups (Havron et al., 1969), and “control tactics heavily reliant upon infiltration, deliberate misinformation, selective harassment, and the use of the legal system to quell broad based dissent and its leadership” (Newton, 1980, p. 5). Regarding the so-called domestic sphere, divide-and-conquer tactics were vital to anti-Black-Liberation counter-insurgency campaigns between the 1960s and 80s – part of the genealogy crossing all of the American Empire’s existence. As Huey P. Newton (1980), founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP), explains, the FBI utilized various tactics – infiltration, false letters, “fed-jacketing”, amongst others – in order to facilitate a division in BPP leadership. Autonomous insurgent organizers contend that these tactics remain prominent, reports from Seattle’s 2020 Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) occupation alleging that

public meetings were repeatedly disrupted by people later identified as (former-)police or private investigators (Rosa Negra – Seattle, 2020). Most dramatically, counter-insurgent’s attempts to internally divide insurgent organizations sometimes culminate in targeted incarceration or assassination with hopes of “nip[ping] the insurgency in the bud” (Galula, 2006, p. 44). This practice occurred within the “domestic” sphere as well, notably in prison-based counter-insurgency programs (Burton, 2023) and against the Black Liberation Movement (Bukhari, 1981).

Divide & Conquer: Incarceration, Surveillance, and the Weaponization of Fear

Fundamental to dividing-and-conquering within the American Empire is the carceral system and the weapon of targeted incarceration. Dylan Rodriguez notes that incarceration “manifest[s] an otherwise abstracted sense and structure of ‘authority’” (in James, 2007, p. 36) and speaks to the carceral system’s production of “a technology of social order and a cohering of peace, lawfulness, and security through war, violence, and punishment” (2020, p. 210). This centrality of incarceration is typical of settler-colonial projects (Erai & Morgensen, 2012, p. 11) and enslavement (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 26; Chin, 2014, p. 37) and has been weaponized in American counter-insurgency in various ways from the internment of Indigenous and Japanese civilians to the construction of “black-sites” in the so-called “war on terror” (James, 2007). “Prisons”, Orisanmi Burton advances, “function as central nodes within global networks of counterinsurgency knowledge production. This knowledge is coercively extracted from captive Black revolutionaries and redeployed in the broader world” (2023, p. 203). He proceeds, through analysis of the Attica counter-/insurgency, to posit that the proliferation of “so-called Control Units, Maxi-Maxi, and Supermax prisons” was part of a broader counter-insurgent strategy against Black insurgency (Burton, 2023, p. 68). In addition to expansion of prison infrastructures, the

continued (focus on) expansion of State surveillance networks composes a vital component of counter-insurgent carceral programs.

As David Galula affirms, isolation of the insurgent calls for counter-insurgent surveillance of “the population’s activities” and the collection/observation of their biometric data (Galula, 2006, p. 82). Further, “counterinsurgency doctrine instructs U.S. forces to ‘[e]stablish patrolling tactics’”, mirroring practices established during enslavement (Chin, 2014). Surveillance is particularly significant in contemporary approaches to counter-insurgency, seen in police/military’s heightened interest in: predictive-policing (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2021); drones, sensors, surveillance towers, and AI-enabled devices; glass-fiber optic vibration sensors; “stingrays,” or cell tower simulators / “IMSI catchers” (Ghaffary, 2020); “national-level biometrics, forensics, DOMEX [document and media exploitation], and derogatory reporting databases” (*JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018, p. VII–43). The awe-inspiring expansiveness of State surveillance serves to establish a “panopticon” effect – to draw from Foucault – which structures/limits (insurgent) social activity through the construction of a culture of fear of potentially being surveilled. Marshall Eddie Conway identifies the use of surveillance-induced fear in the targeting of the BPP:

“An actual observation post [was] set up in the neighborhood with cameras in the windows across the street, monitoring the car traffic, monitoring the door traffic, agents changing shifts going in and out—I mean it was, like, obvious that these officers [had put the bpp] under surveillance. And the idea was not directed at the Panthers themselves but directed at the community in the sense of, ‘You don’t want to go in there.’ It was intimidation for the community at large. It was like, ‘You’ll be observed, there will be files on you, you’ll get yourself in trouble’” (in James, 2007, pp. 101–102).

COIN theorists speak little about the weaponization of fear – an exception being Barnett (2008), who claims his “business is basically a business of fear-mongering” – but it appears between the lines when doctrine speaks of surveillance, incarceration, occupation, and more-direct strategies

like the “carrot-and-stick” (Gompert et al., 2008, p. xxxix). Despite this absence of discussion, fear has remained a central component of counter-insurgency since at least the formation of the American Empire. The generalized, “corrective” violence of the plantation, the horrific and gruesome spectacle of violence on the frontier both exemplify the terror of counter-insurgency. Chin speaks of the terror of lynching as a white counter-insurgent tactic, noting that “White support for lynching made it an effective weapon of social control” (2014, pp. 53–54). This logic of fear extends to the horror of the slave ship and the formation of slave patrols to the contemporary police occupation of marginalized neighborhoods (Brown, 2019; James, 2007). Beyond the terror inflicted by counter-insurgents, fear penetrates the settler psyche, appearing in the previously discussed fear of being surrounded. Mumia Abu Jamal speaks to the generalizing of this fear: “Americans live in a cavern of fear, a psychic, numbing force manufactured by the so-called entertainment industry, reified by the psychological industry, and buttressed by the coercion industry (i.e., the courts, police, prisons, and the like). ...The state’s coercive apparatus of ‘public safety’ is erected as a needed protective counter-point” (in INCITE!, 2017, p. 21). In the construction of this cavern of fear, the counter-insurgent relies on the threat of a de-spatialized insurgent (as discussed by The Invisible Committee above).

Maps, Models, and Making Violence Possible

The narrative of being “surrounded” by potential insurgents is profoundly spatial, which speaks to counter-insurgency’s (technological, historical) interconnections with geography. To quote from heidi andrea restrepo rhodes,

“Military geography, by harnessing knowledge about the topography, hydrography, orography, and climate, could assist national defense efforts in navigating enemy terrain, surveilling communication, and operationalizing war tactics. It is thus that the colonization, settlement, and development of the exterior, with the purpose of

connecting the territories, is... vital not only to national security but also to the 'economic and administrative awakening of national life'" (2025a, p. 148).

The construction of the aforementioned narrative serves as justification for the militarization of the State / violence against the insurgents and aids in the formation of a unified national identity. Furthermore, the State's weaponization of geographic thought and technology aids in the construction of such an insurgent threat by making insurgent geographies legible through the lens of threat/conflict. Histories of military/academic collaboration in the field of geography, particularly during the "quantitative revolution" of the 1950s, illuminate the importance of geography in COIN's development. This period – touted as the "classic" era of counter-insurgency when significant development occurred – saw the profound expansion of military science and ties between academic institutions, think tanks, and the military (Barnes, 2008, p. 8). Institutions like the Office of Scientific Research and Development and the Office of Strategic Services blended social and hard sciences in military mapping/modeling strategies (Barnes, 2008, p. 7). Geography served Empire/counter-insurgency in "the drawing and interpreting of maps, the understanding of topographic features, the knowledge of regions and their boundaries" (Barnes, 2008, p. 15), all of which served to make supposed insurgents legible and thus vulnerable to attack – as Rhodes (2025a) notes, all geographic practice is a form of world-making. The counter-insurgent RAND corporation – which, by the end of the 1950s, possessed "more computing power than any single site in the world" – became "the epicenter of mathematical modelling during the 1950s"; models were "a full-bodied means to change" the world, serving the US military in "thinking the unthinkable" and pursuing counter-insurgent objectives by any means (Barnes, 2008, pp. 4–10). Mapping and modeling remain a central feature in counter-insurgent literature, assisting in visualizing and making insurgent movements legible to the State. These projects involve a variety of practices for mapping/modeling the organizational form of insurgent movements (see fig. 18),

the timeline of counter-/insurgency campaigns (see figs. 19 - 21), and the most-effective COIN practices (see figs. 22 & 23) (Department of the Army, 2014; *JP 3-24 – Counterinsurgency*, 2018; Paul et al., 2013).

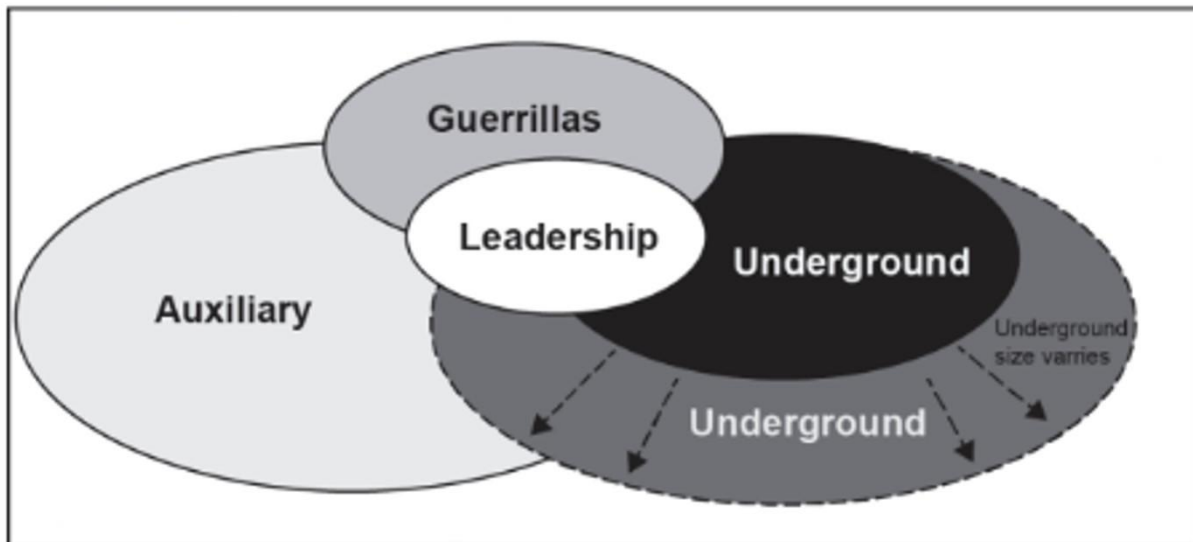


*Figure 18 - Organizational Elements of an Insurgency Diagram
(Department of the Army, 2014: p. 4-16)*

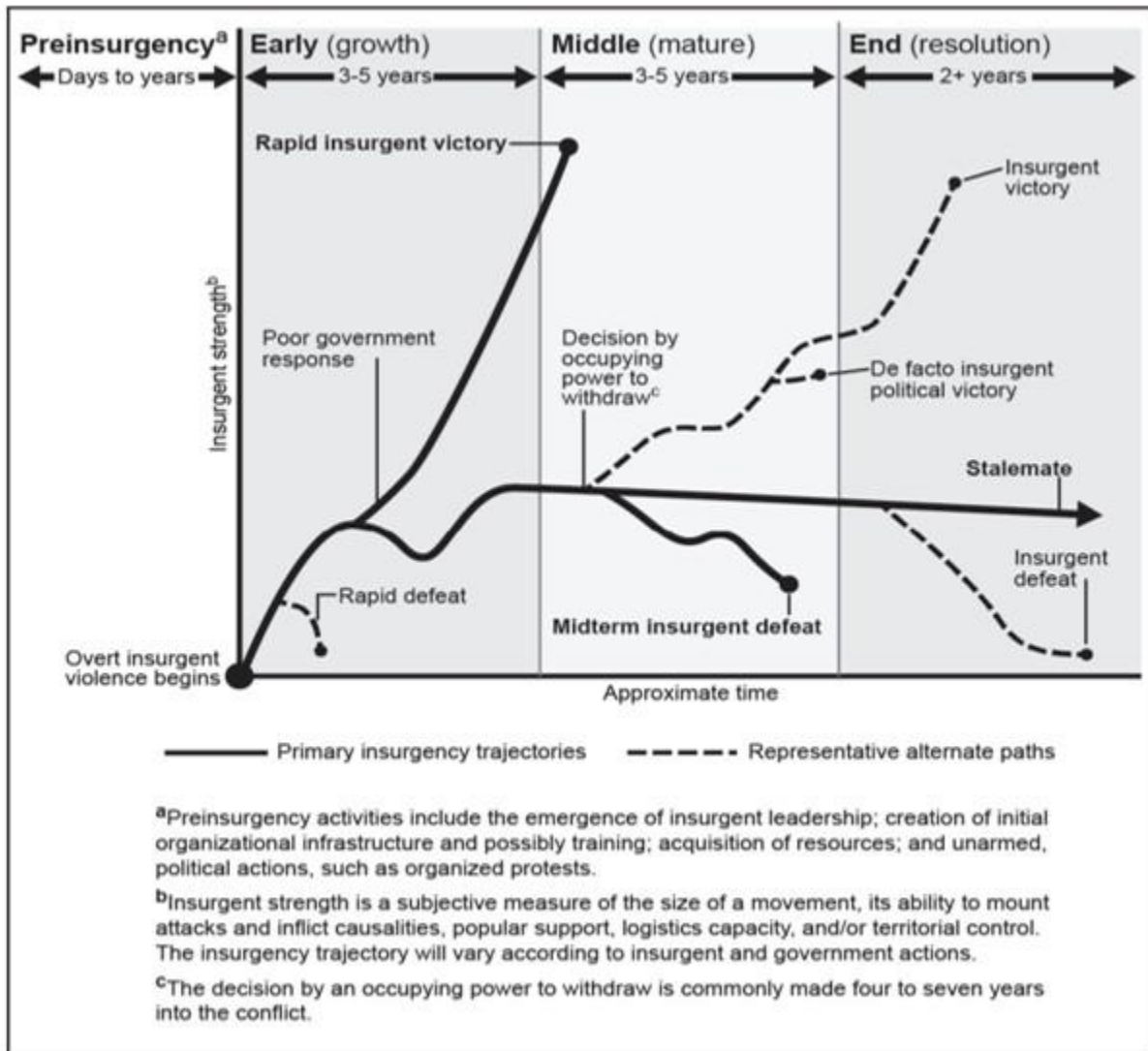


Figure 19 - Counter-/Insurgency Timeline Model (Department of the Army, 2014: p. 4-15)

Insurgent Actions, Political and Military

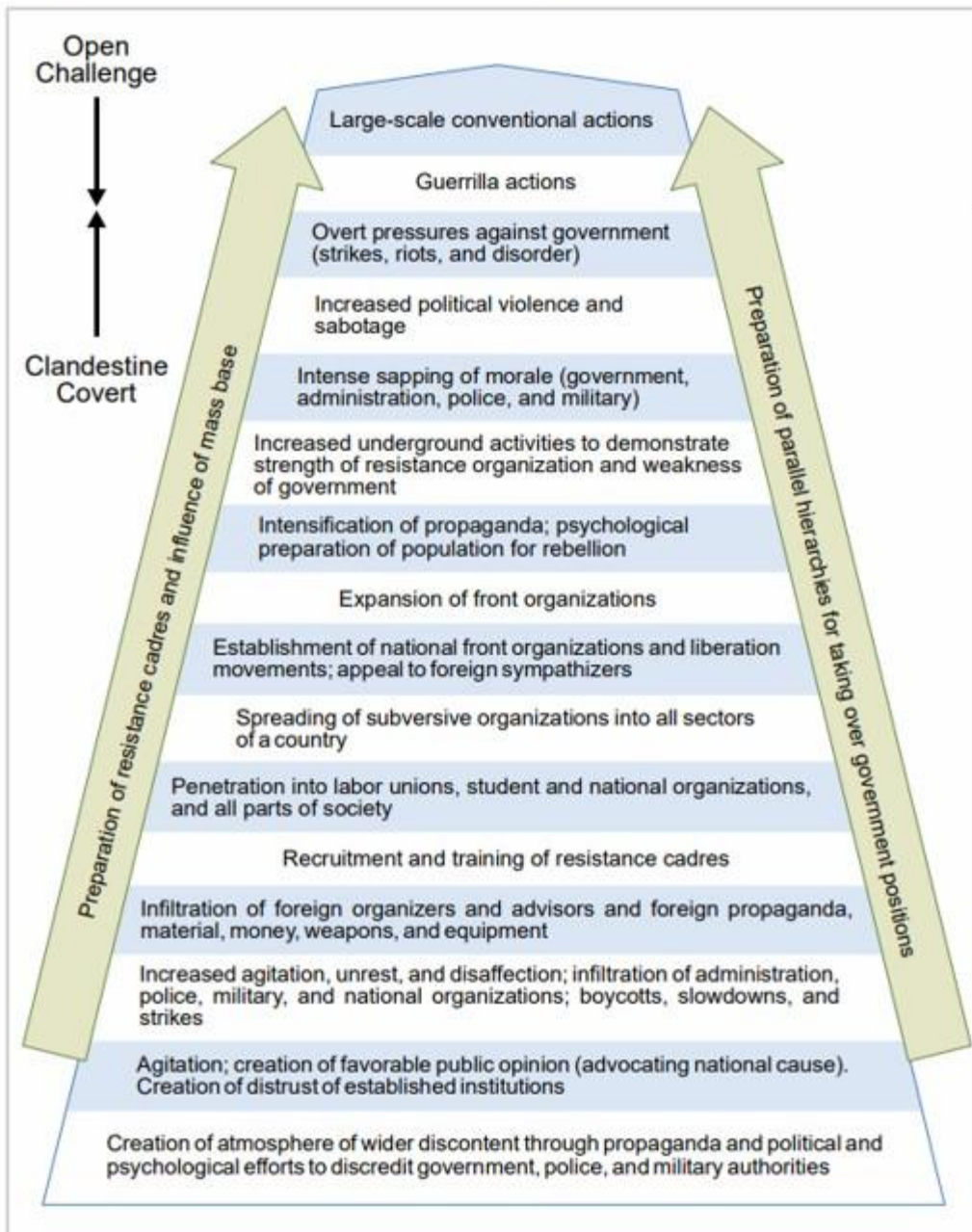


Figure 20 - Timeline of Insurgent Actions Model
 (JP 3-24 -- Counterinsurgency, 2018, p. II-18)

Transition Examples

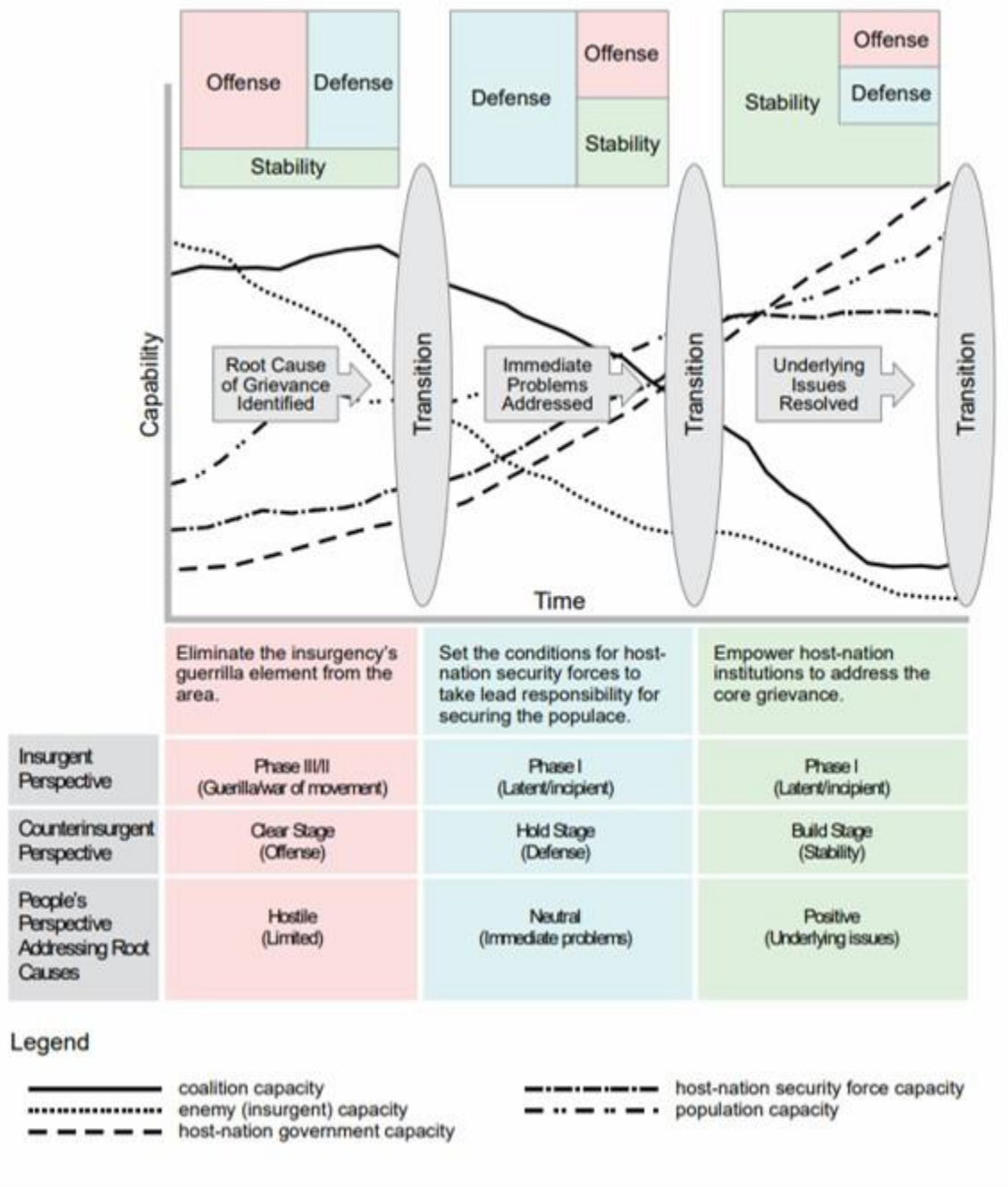


Figure 21 - COIN Transition Stage Model
(JP 3-24 -- Counterinsurgency, 2018, p. VII-11)

Concept	Degree of Evidentiary Support
Development	Strong support
Pacification	Strong support
Legitimacy (government)	Strong support
Legitimacy (use of force)	Strong support
Reform	Strong support
Redress	Minimal support
Democracy	Minimal support
Unity of effort	Strong support
Resettlement	Minimal support
Cost-benefit	Strong support
Border control	Strong support
Initiative	Strong support
"Crush them"	Strong evidence against
Amnesty/rewards	Minimal support
Strategic communication	Strong support
Field Manual 3-24 (Counterinsurgency)	Strong support
Clear, hold, and build	Strong support
"Beat cop"	Strong support
"Boots on the ground"	Strong support
"Put a local face on it"	Minimal support
Cultural awareness	Minimal support
Commitment and motivation	Strong support
Tangible support reduction	Strong support
Criticality of intelligence	Strong support
Flexibility and adaptability	Strong support

Figure 22 - COIN Practices Chart (Paul et. al, 2013, p. xvi)

Balance of Good COIN Practices and Bad COIN Practices for the 59 Core Cases

Score	COIN Losses	COIN Wins
-11	1	0
-9	2	0
-8	2	0
-7	4	0
-6	3	0
-5	2	0
-4	4	0
-3	5	0
-2	4	0
-1	4	0
2	0	2
3	0	3
4	0	2
5	0	3
6	0	3
7	0	1
8	0	1
9	0	1
10	0	4
11	0	2
12	0	2
13	0	3
15	0	1

Figure 23 - COIN Practices Scorecard Chart (Paul et. al, 2013, p. xxi)

The central insight gleaned from my practice of archival war was into the worldbuilding nature of counter-/insurgency. Counter to narratives of COIN as a reactive, defensive process, its continuous centrality in the formation, maintenance, and expansion of Empire – as well as its logical and tactical ties to Empire’s pathology – reveal the worldbuilding project it facilitates. As COIN advances Empire’s domination, it seeks total cognitive capture into its logics/worldview and the liquidation of insurgent threats to this expansion: this process of perpetual warfare is an intimate, militarized, and generational one. Various logics – ranging from the incorporation into the State to the weaponization of sexual violence to the building of (colonial) educational institutions – compose of the core logics of counter-insurgency across time and tie it to Empire’s pathology. These advancements in deepening and expanding understandings of COIN are beneficial in evaluating its influence within (liberation) movements. The following chapter – “Counter-/Power-Mapping Cascadia: Evaluating Counter-Insurgency and Visualizing Power in Place” – explores the structure of the Cascadia movement and analyzes its co-optation/appropriation into the forces of Empire and COIN.

4 - Counter-/Power-Mapping Cascadia:

Evaluating Counter-Insurgency and Visualizing Power in Place

The insurgent potential of a bioregional movement like Cascadia presents itself in its multiplicity of calls for dis-identification with Empire. If the primary goal of counter-insurgent praxis is the nurturing of State legitimacy, an insurgent approach to Cascadia which calls for and asserts the autonomy of the bioregion *beneath* the occupying Empire is fundamentally counter to counter-insurgency. Cascadian Anarchist Seaweed promotes such a vision, calling for the formation of “a home, a habitat” through the “freeing up colonized land, rehabilitating plundered land, or seizing land... rent strikes or squatting... wilderness camps, fishing shacks, shared berry patches, collective harvesting of wild foods and group gardening and permaculture” (2013, p. 12). These militant tactics, alongside Seaweed’s insistence on autonomy and rejection of imperial power, speak to the contradictions between (insurgent) bioregional thought and Empire; these contradictions are not new, with “cultural autonomy and self-government” and critiques of Empire appearing across various bioregional works (Andruss et al., 1990, p. 130; Nelson et al., 2023). Against such insurgent potential, the pathologically counter-insurgent force of Empire seeks to realign Cascadia with the American project by undermining calls for militancy and autonomy. This counter-insurgency manifests through various non-profit, academic, and local organizations promoting pacifism and State-centered approaches while de-politicizing Bioregionalism by promoting autonomy-as-lifestyle/counter-culture. In this chapter, I set out to demonstrate the three Cascadia movement sects’ relative separation and dissect the various threads of counter-insurgency woven throughout them. In addition to this, I spend the start of this chapter employing power-mapping as a tool for illustrating counterinsurgent power structures, as well as discuss its synergies with my methodological approaches and potential as a geographic practice of place-

making. After my discussion of power-mapping, I approach the three strains of Bioregionalism – Liberationist, Fascist, Reformist – and note occurrences when their thinking/power structures serves a counterinsurgent role.¹⁰ Finally, I close looking toward the next chapter, in which I argue for the insurgent potential of recent developments in bioregional theory.

Nodes in a perpetual war: Insurgent, bioregional approaches to counter-/power-mapping

Mapping has always been a central practice of Bioregionalism, the movement having engaged in a variety of bioregional mapping practices (Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC), 2023b; Flower et al., 2021; *How to Map a Bioregion – Department of Bioregion*, n.d.; Nelson et al., 2023, 2023; Sparrow, 2006). “[A]ll geographic endeavor is speculative,” heidi rhodes states, “[it] writes a map of coming time. It *emplaces* time, producing the ontological and economic status of place on the horizon,” and Bioregionalism moves with this, attempting to unleash the bioregion through (re)mapping it (2025a, pp. 31–32). In line with the bioregional praxis of reinhabitation, the practice of bioregional mapping creates a sense of place and re-seeing similar to Cowen’s (2017) vision of breach: “a crossing that does not rely on physical movement, but on new modes of both seeing and relating. ...[A]n unseeing of unseeing.” Here, bioregional mapping engages conflictually with colonial cartography in asserting a (small) form of bioregional self-determination: the unsettling of Empire’s self-imposition on/in the bioregion. There is clear alignment between bioregional mapping and counter-mapping more broadly and I aim to tease out the insurgent potential of this combination.

¹⁰ This section relies heavily on the power-maps I produced using Little Sis’ software. Detailed power-maps can be viewed directly through Little Sis (links provided in Appendix A) or as supplementary files to this thesis.

(Counter-)Mapping and the bioregion

Ulrich Oslender reminds us that “maps tell (hi)stories and produce memory” (2021, p. 4), a truth well-known to the forces of Empire. Two stanzas from Cascadian poet and bioregional thinker Diane di Prima’s “Cartography” playfully note the hold of colonial mapping:

“It is probably better to
color within the lines
cross at the crosswalk. Never stare
into a stranger’s eyes.

On the map
assume north is
where they say it is” (Nelson et al., 2023, pp. 20–21).

The phrase “Never stare/into a stranger’s eyes” reflects Empire’s erasure of alternative worlds, and di Prima’s use of “assume” connotes the expectation that we believe at face value the narratives of colonial maps. Such narratives “make social conditions appear natural,” they assert colonial notions of value while/through establishing the norms of understanding space and place (Kollektiv Orangotango+, 2018, p. 13). Empire’s maps demand acceptance of its borders, its language, what and who it deems important. Bioregional mapping attempts to push against this, rather than imposing the colonially established borders on the land, a bioregional map accounts for the more-than-human and cultural boundaries. As Jason M. Wirth argues in *Cascadian Zen*, bioregional mapping “inverts—we might even say, revolutionizes—our thinking” and “demonstrate[s] that our maps are routinely upside down...” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 98). Such bioregional re-orientation serves to encourage a re-examination of human interaction with the more-than-human world and critique of Empire’s various structures/narratives in similar ways to other counter-mapping praxes/projects (Harrington et al., 1999, p. 33). Even while challenging Empire in these ways, bioregional maps often rely on border thinking and thus implicate themselves in mapping’s colonial logics (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 98). The goal of bioregional mapping should not be dividing

up the land as Imperialist powers have – the creation of hard borders – nor the static depictions of mathematical data, a deeper engagement with counter-mapping literature would serve to further antagonize bioregional mapping against Empire.

Some bioregional theorists encourage a questioning of Empire’s border logics, asking “can we not learn to think of maps as not recording political borders and domains of conquest, but rather as the layers and porous boundaries of bioregions?” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 98). This aligns closely with counter-mapping’s questioning of conventional representations of space and place, its aim to challenge dominant power (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2017; Boatca, 2021; Gonzalez & Mayanin, 2018; Maharawal & McElroy, 2018; Oslender, 2021). Counter-mapping organization Kollektiv Orangotango+ speaks to this overlap as well, noting many instances in which counter-mapping is utilized in questioning colonially-established borders (2018, p. 205); amongst these, various forms of Indigenous resistance through mapping serve to further link bioregional- and counter-mapping (Caquard et al., 2019; *Indigenous Mapping – Department of Bioregion*, n.d.; Sparrow, 2006). Further engagement with counter-mapping can motivate bioregional mapping as an active and creative praxis, seeking to motivate solidarity, political activity, and experimentation in geographic praxis (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2017; Maharawal & McElroy, 2018). As Oslender notes, counter-mapping practices are about the creation of “constellations of co-resistance and liberation,” about building an understanding of how place and space are constituted through intimate interaction and power-building (2021, p. 1). Two more stanzas from Diane di Prima’s “Cartography” beautifully illustrate the liberating nature of overcoming and undermining colonial ways of mapping (and therefore worldview):

You love the maps
Tho they lied
they got you here.

[...]

perhaps you dreamed
the maps. perhaps you
burned them. Anyway
they're not here.

And north is everywhere (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 21).

The disorientation emphasized in this final line points bioregional mapping praxis in counter-mapping's conflictual direction – toward the weaponization of the carto-/geographic against Empire. Klee Benally asserts that, in one sense, Land Back is “a question of unmapping ‘legal’ terrain, tearing down walls, and cutting through fences” (2023, p. 148) – it is, in this way, a counter-mapping practice. The bioregion, read through a queered lens, is occupied by Empire – the coexistence of these worlds artistically articulated in Sam Hamill's poem “Of Cascadia”:

I have lived in Cascadia, no paradise
nor any hell, but both at once and made,
as Elytis said, of the same material.
A poor poet, I studied war and love.
But Cascadia is what I'm of (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 134).

In embracing counter-mapping's conflictual potential, a queered approach to a bioregional counter-mapping could aid in visualizing the various methods and spaces through which Empire's occupation is constructed – exposing hidden domination, revealing networks of power (Kollektiv Orangotango+, 2018, p. 26). This not only educates but motivates and enacts action and worldmaking against Empire; in the rest of the chapter, I attempt to approach the concept of “power-mapping” as a form of counter-mapping. I argue that a Queered approach to power-mapping can serve as a powerful weapon for a (bioregional) counter-mapping praxis in its ability to develop a conflictual sense of place.

Approaches to Power-Mapping

The majority of discussion around the concept of power-mapping comes from the activist milieu commonly referred to as “non-violent direct action” (NVDA), a set of tactics championed by the non-profit industrial complex. These approaches tend to center on single-issue or campaign-style organizing focused on passing reform through a series of performative actions which slow the status-quo functioning of the organization they are targeting (Benally, 2023). Power-mapping plays a significant role in the NVDA process as a means through which organizers strategically choose the targets for their reform campaigns. Power-mapping, therefore, appears across a selection of activist manuals (Christian Aid, 2016; Myers-Lipton, 2023; Starling, 2019; *Student Activist Workbook*, 2020). Scott Myers-Lipton’s *Change!: A Student Guide to Social Action* provides a clear example of the NVDA power-mapping strategy, advising organizers to determine their “target, which is the lowest ranking person that can meet your demand” and then assessing the relative network of people impacting the issue (2023, pp. 75–76). The primary limitation of this approach is that, in constricting the power map to a particular campaign, one is forced to emplace false boundaries around a particular “issue” — i.e. disconnecting it from its broader historical-social-political-psychological-ideological-economic contexts. Furthermore, such a limited focus constrains the ability of a particular organization or movement to adjust, expand, and adapt its focus.

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition’s “Algorithmic Ecology” is one approach to power-mapping which aims to expand the practice (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition & Free Radicals, 2020). This model (see fig. 24) attempts to visualize the networks of power behind LAPD’s carceral algorithms, rather than focusing on a particular policy or organization (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition & Free Radicals, 2020). In broadening focus to various organizations and ideological

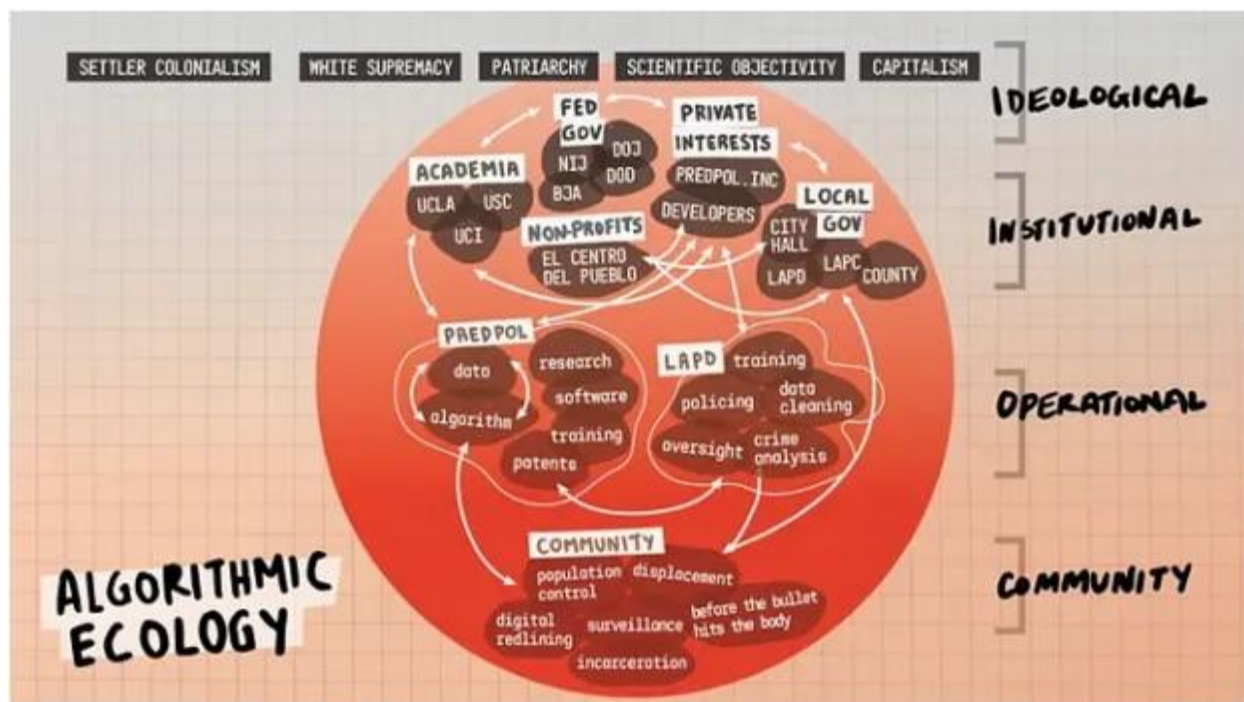


*Figure 24 – Algorithmic Ecology Diagram
(Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and Free Radicals, 2020)*

commitments, the algorithmic ecology aims to illustrate which structural interests are being served and therefore educate a deeper approach to organizing targeting core ideological tenets of oppressive structures. The algorithmic ecology model goes beyond the NVDA approaches as well in its emphasis on various scales of power – from the ideological to the community level. This expansion of power-mapping demonstrates how it can be used as a means of visualizing the power structures of a given place/space. Furthermore, broadening the scope of power-mapping from a single campaign focus broadens the conflictual possibility of it as a practice – for example, the Algorithmic Ecology motivates autonomous power-building against entire structures, institutions, and ideologies rather than toward the goal of influencing a key handful of actors (as in the NVDA approach).

Counter-insurgency doctrine speaks to the use of power-mapping in a counter-/insurgent context, primarily through the discussion of Social Network Analysis (SNA) in the Joint Chiefs of

Staff's (2016) JP 3-25 – *Countering Threat Networks*, and the Department of the Army's (2014) FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5 – *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies*. SNA goes beyond a description of individual organizations to provide “a picture of the population,” expanding usefulness of power-mapping (Department of the Army, 2014, pp. 4–18). The Department of the Army speaks extensively in their FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5 about the potential of non-cartographic forms of mapping. Counter-insurgents utilize the visualization of insurgent networks and structures through various mapping strategies (see fig. 25 - 28) to operationalize their (violent) COIN programs and justify action in the eyes of the broader population (2014, pp. 4–16, 4–18, 4–21). Furthermore, as noted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this approach to power-mapping shapes environments as much as it expands understandings of them (2018, p. I–5, II–2). Evidence to the efficacy of SNA in altering the environment of a counter-/insurgency is demonstrated in JP 3-25 (2016), and can be seen clearly presenting in figures 25-28. In the context of Cascadia, Francesco Cappellano (2019) made use of SNA in analyzing the Cascadia Innovation Corridor's “cross-border economic

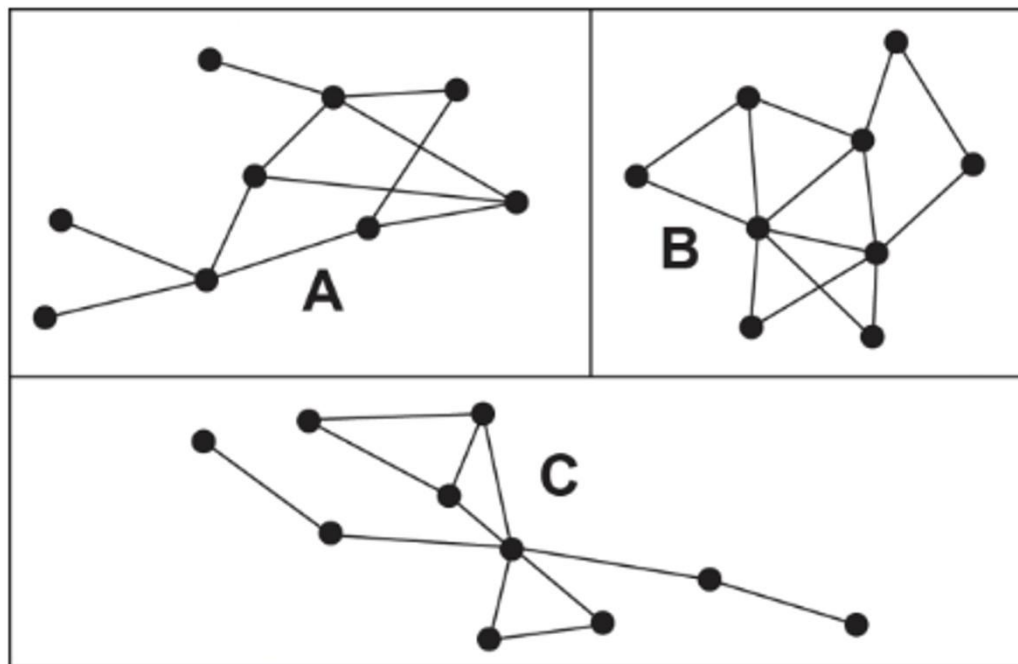


Figure 25 - Networked Insurgencies Diagram (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 4-21)

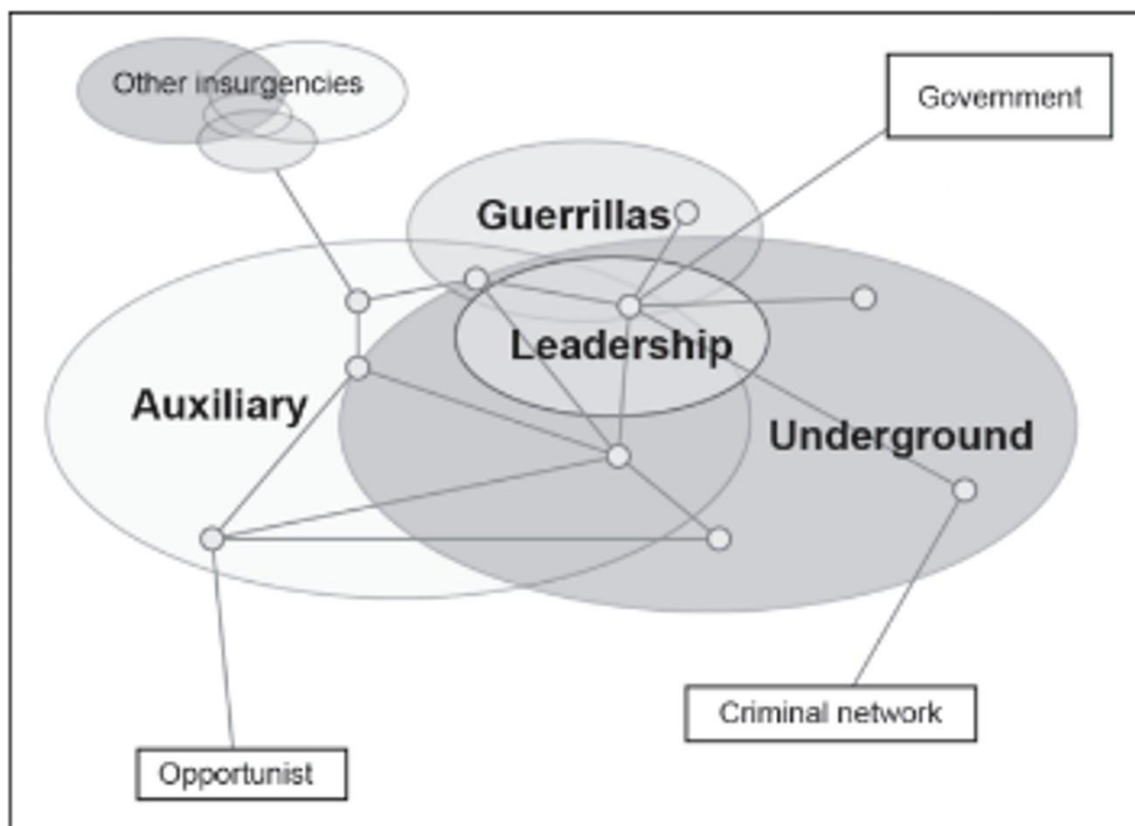


*Figure 26 - Social Network Analysis of Insurgency
(Department of the Army, 2014, p. 4-18)*

cooperation” – utilizing SNA for its strength in both depicting and shaping the issue. I argue that adapting Social Network Analysis into a Queered power-mapping framework can serve to produce conflictual senses of place that motivate broad and protracted organizing toward autonomy.

In attempting to perform this power-mapping of the Cascadia movement, I approached it as an artistic process in two senses. First, the discombobulating, overwhelming whirlwind of connections in these power networks demonstrate the intricacy with which counter-insurgency and Empire encroach on attempts at autonomy. That is, the maps most effectively represent power networks if they are, in their entirety, incomprehensible. Power networks are structured in complicated, confusing formations understanding which requires intricate parsing out – an effective power map should do the same. Second, the drawing and visually presenting of these

Network Analysis for Fragmentation Strategy

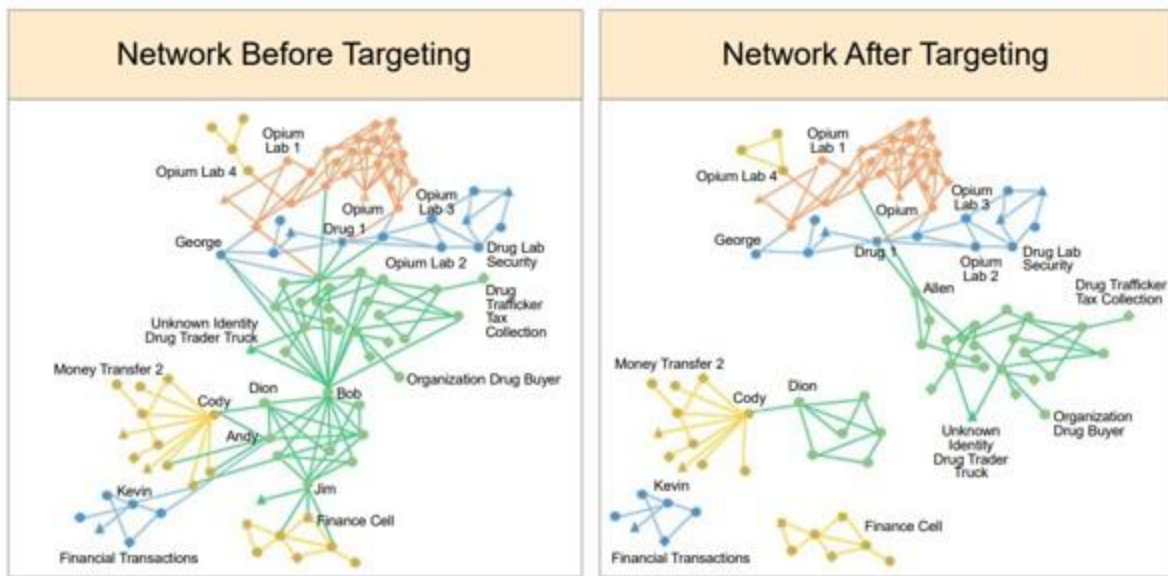


Figure 27 - Network Analysis for Fragmentation Strategy
 (“JP 3-25 – Countering Threat Networks,” 2016, p. V-11)

networks deepens our ability to reflect on, unweave, and dismantle these forces. My power-maps, like any that take this broad approach (*JP 3-25 – Countering Threat Networks*, 2016), are not comprehensive but focus on visualizing key individuals and organizations (or “nodes”) and their links to each other. Links between nodes indicate some form of social connection (friendship, employment, leadership for example), which I conceptualize as a representation of “the trajectories

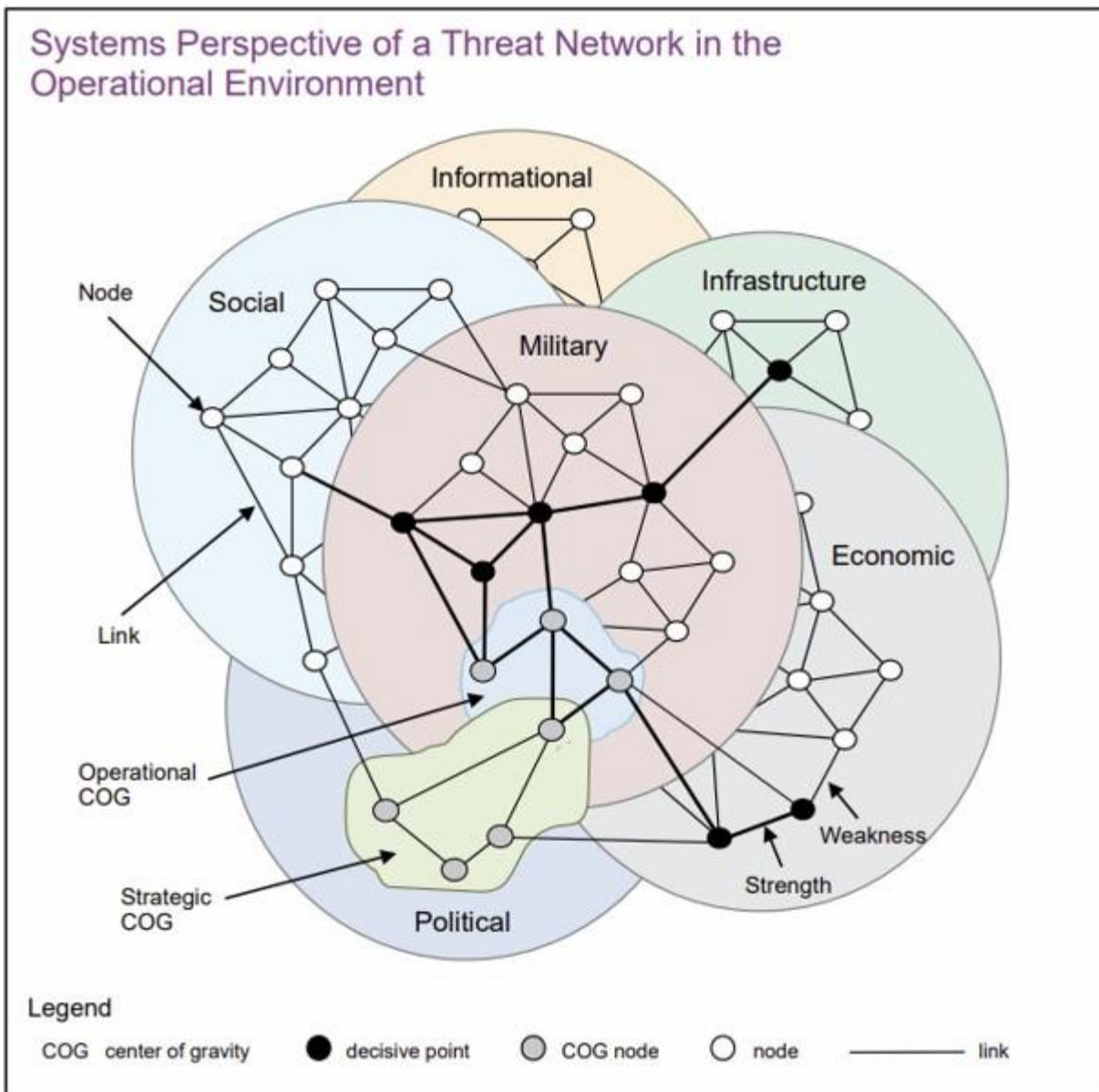


*Figure 28 – Operational Environment Analysis Diagram
(Department of the Army, 2014: I-8)*

of bodies in... space” (Netto et al., 2018, p. 1). Jen Jack Giesecking (2020) notes, in their mapping of “constellations of queer urban space,” the counter-temporalities illuminated in understanding how spaces are constructed across time. Adapting their Queer understanding of space to the context of counter-mapping counter-insurgency, I am less concerned with temporal overlap (two individuals connected through employment at the same place *and time*) than in visualizing the pan-

temporal network of institutions/organizations through which movements are created and co-opted. To visualize this counter-insurgent co-optation of the Cascadia movement, I have drawn from SNA in color-coding nodes based on their institutional role (see fig. 28). More specifically, I divide nodes into central members of Cascadia movement organizations (light green); other individuals (grey); Fascist Cascadia organizations (red); other Fascist organizations (orange); reformist Cascadia organizations (light blue); academic organizations/institutions (dark green); government institutions (yellow); political organizations (brown); business associations (tan); think tanks (purple); publishers (pink); tech companies (black); other non-profits/foundations/NGOs (dark blue); and other private organizations (teal). Each map is incorporated into the rest of the chapter below, woven within my analysis of counter-insurgency within the movement. Most, if not all, of the maps are to an extent illegible in PDF format – I thus recommend viewing them directly on Little Sis (links available in Appendix A) or in the supplementary files to this thesis.

Power-mapping Cascadia¹¹

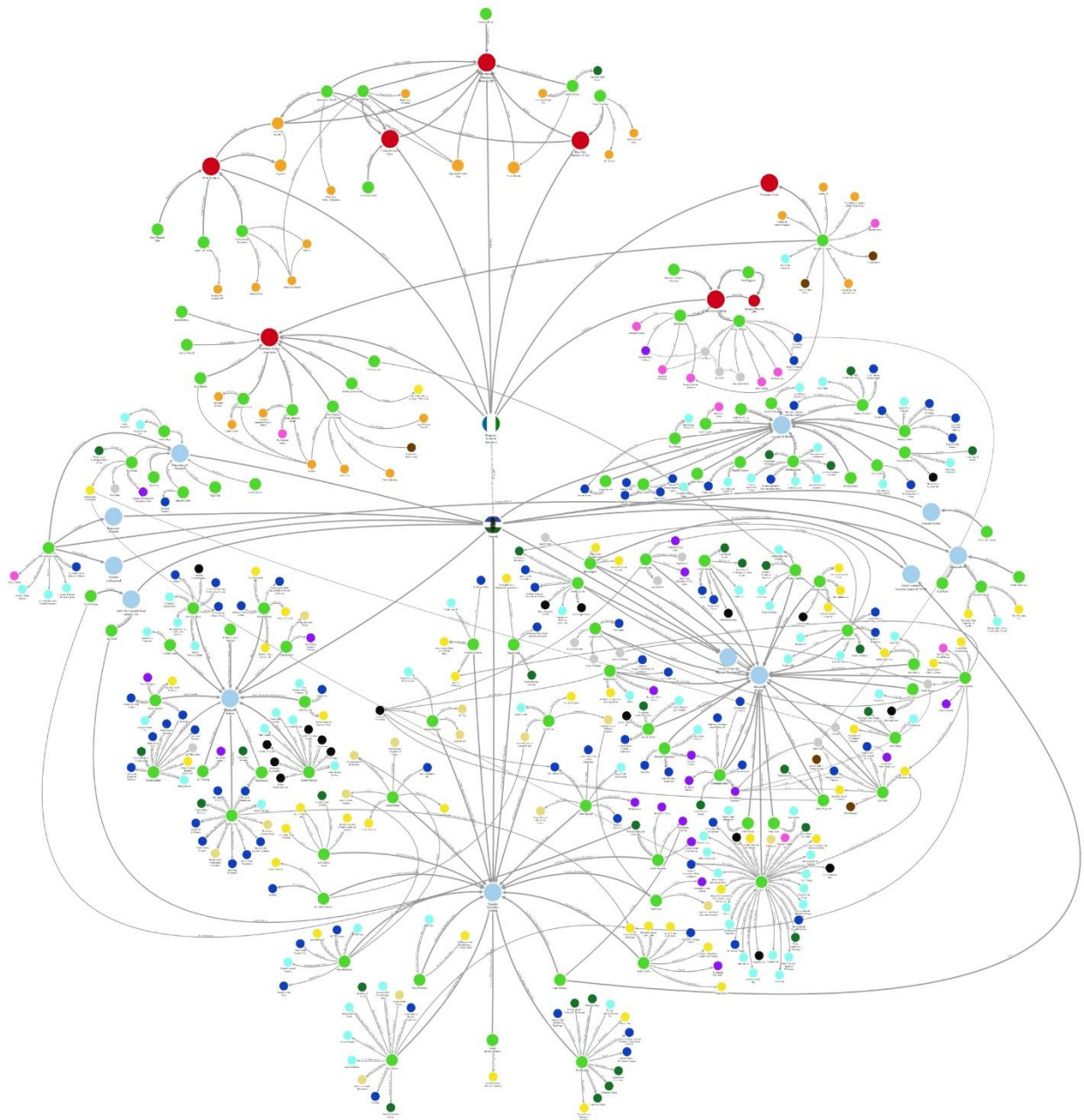


Figure 29 – Power-Map: Full Cascadia Movement
<https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11488-full-cascadia-movement>

¹¹ Detailed power-maps can be viewed through Little Sis (links to full maps provided and in Appendix A) or as supplementary files to this thesis.

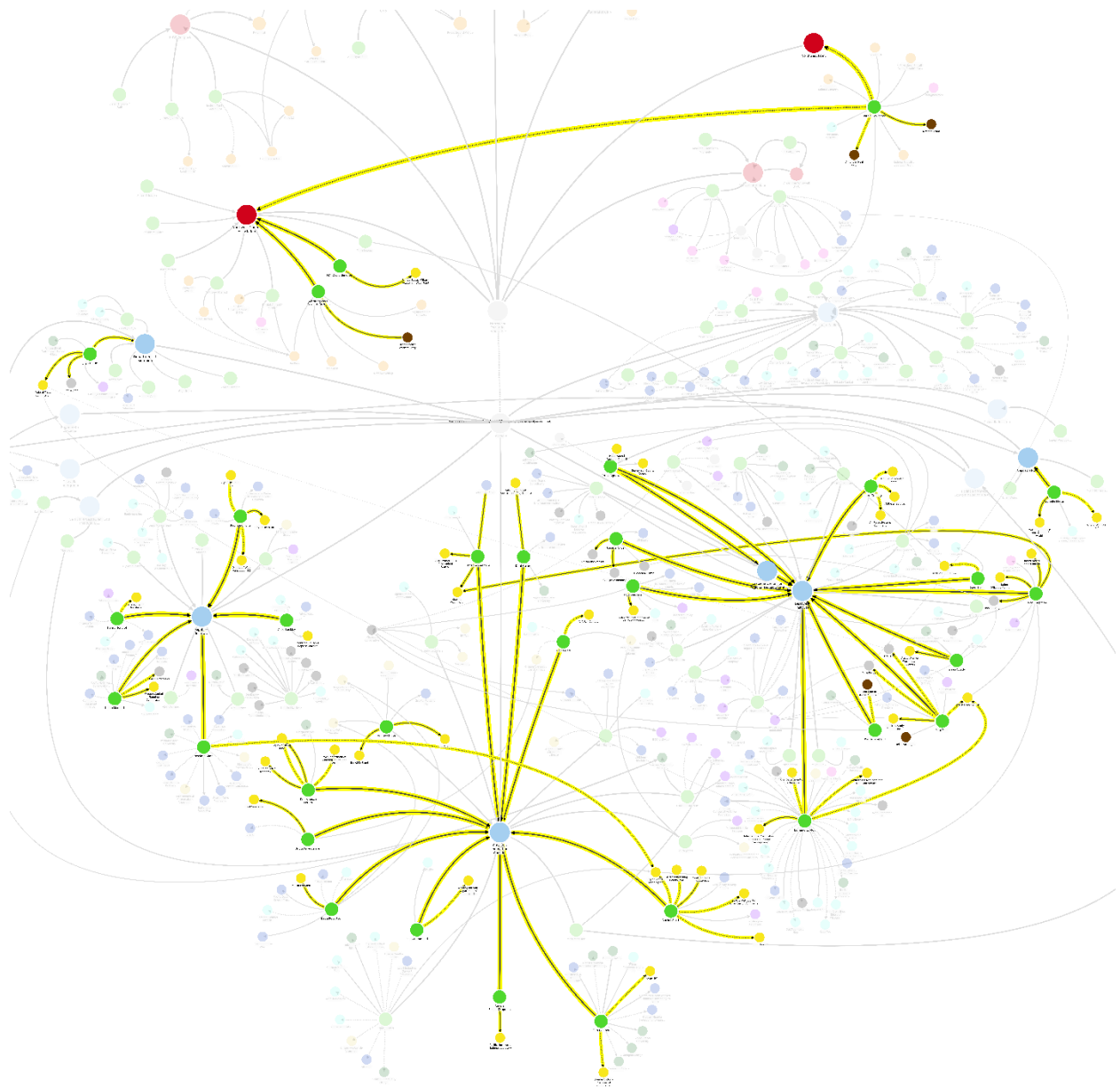


Figure 30 – Power-Map: Full Cascadia Movement (Government and Political Connections)

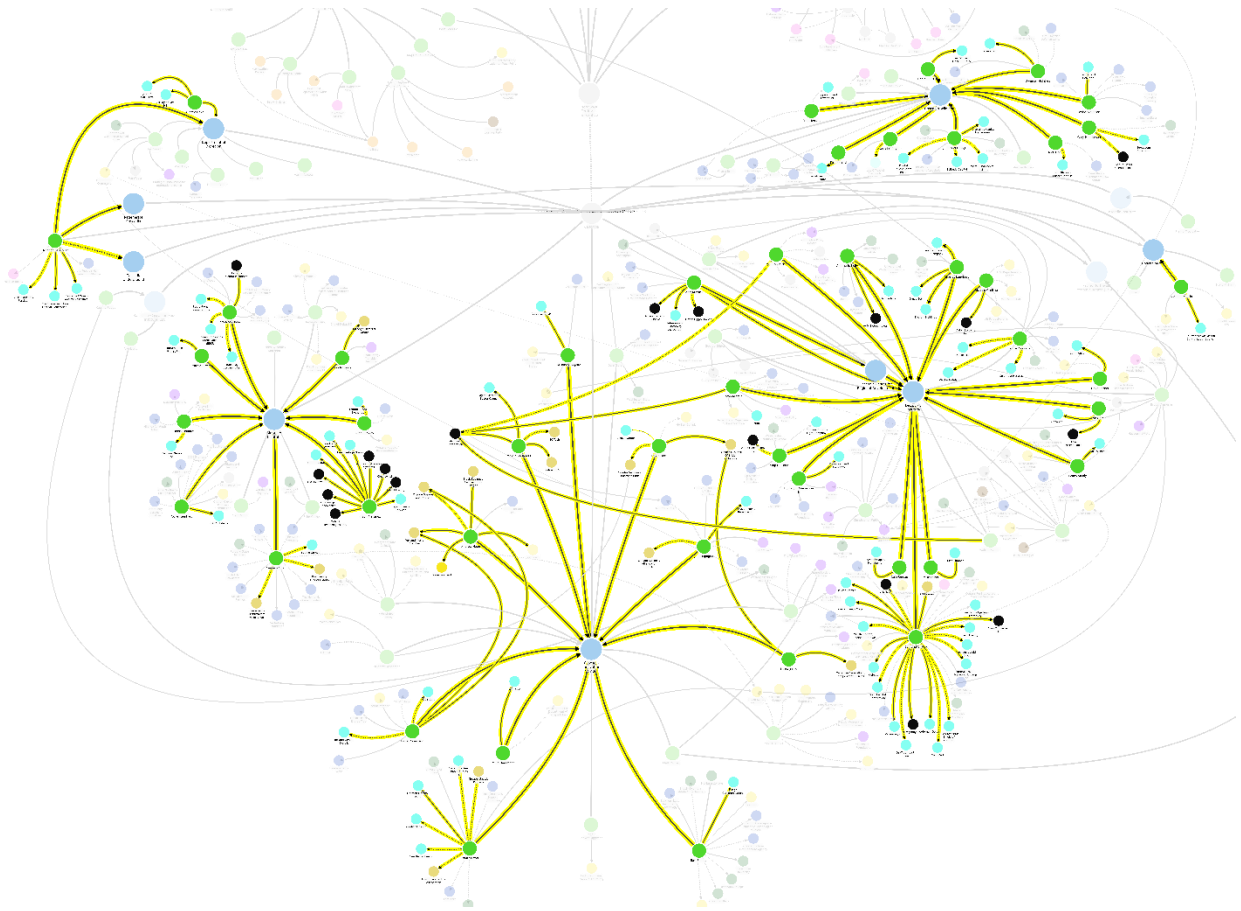


Figure 32 - Power-Map: Full Cascadia Movement (Business Association, Private Company, and Other Connections)



Countering Liberationist Cascadia

As mentioned above, the Liberationist Cascadia movement is largely dispersed throughout other liberation-focused movements in the Pacific Northwest – e.g. Anarchist, Communist, decolonial. In this way, their counter-insurgent repression takes shape in the ways typical of suppressing these insurgent formations: criminalization, infiltration, assassination. See, for example, the State’s counter-insurgent approach to dismantling the 2020 Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) in Seattle – tactics here ranged from infiltration and surveillance to the use of chemical agents and less-lethal ammunition against organizers (Rosa Negra – Seattle, 2020). Regarding “soft” counter-insurgent tactics, however, significant work has been done in the ideological co-optation of Liberationist Bioregionalisms. Primarily, this occurs through the promotion of individualism (e.g. “preppers”) and so-called “lifestylism” (promoting Cascadia as a counter-culture or consumer, aesthetic identity) within liberation movement spaces. Co-optation presents itself as well in the academic incorporation of Liberationist bioregional thought, often channeling toward the individualism and lifestylism mentioned above or promoting visions which appropriate insurgent/bioregional language while channeling action in ways more friendly to the State and capitalism – e.g. Haenke’s “ecological economics” (2021). The primary goals of counter-insurgent action against the Liberationist Cascadians are the utilization of repression-induced fear as a deterrent from direct action, the incorporation of critiques and tactics into more-State-friendly means of redress, and the creating of isolation and ineffectiveness through the promotion of individualism and lifestylism. Now, I shift to analyzing the structure and role of the Fascist Cascadia movement.

The Counter-/Insurgent Complexity of Fascist Cascadia

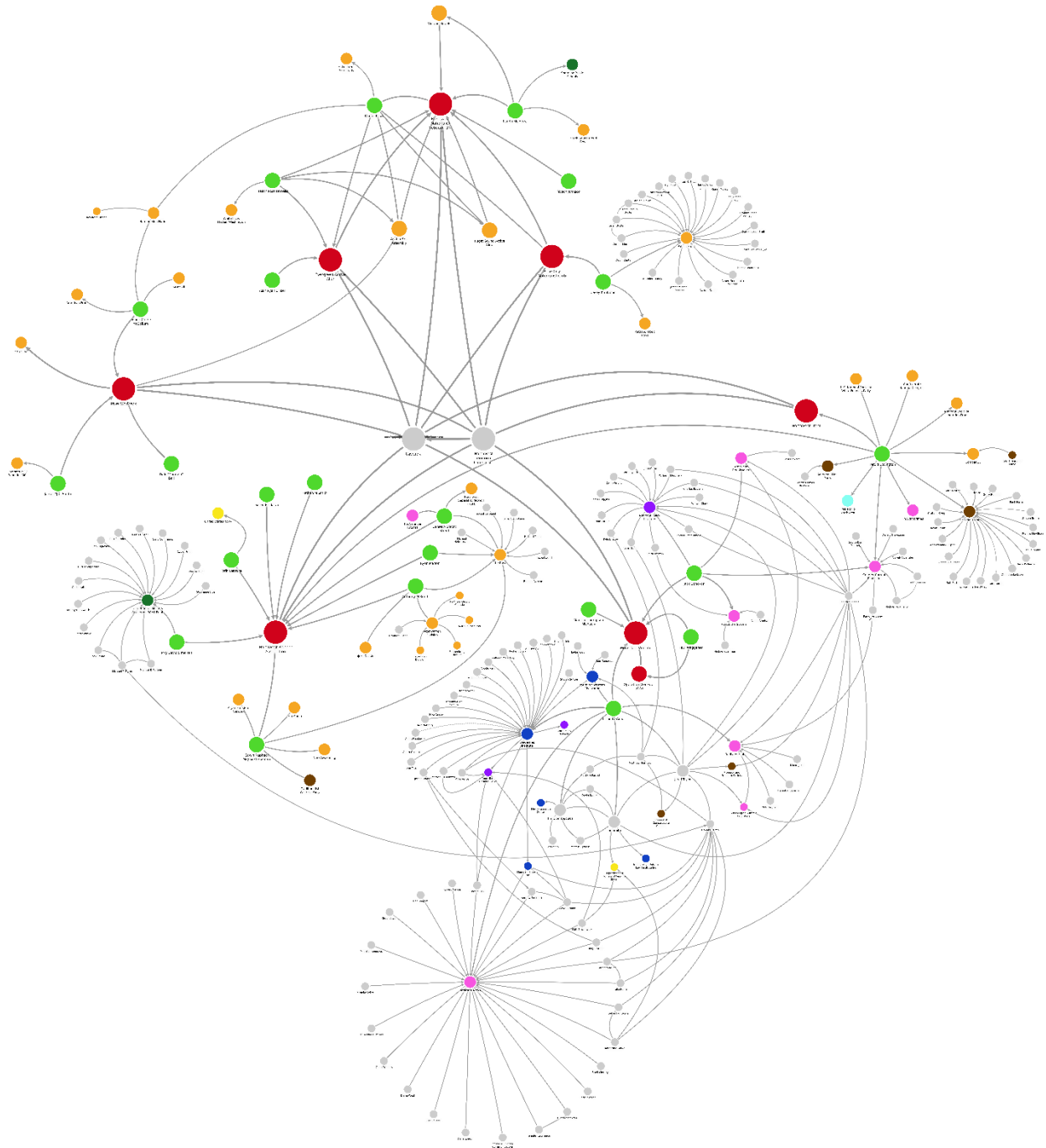


Figure 34 - Power-Map: Fascist Cascadia Movement Map (Full)
<https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11425-fascist-cascadia>

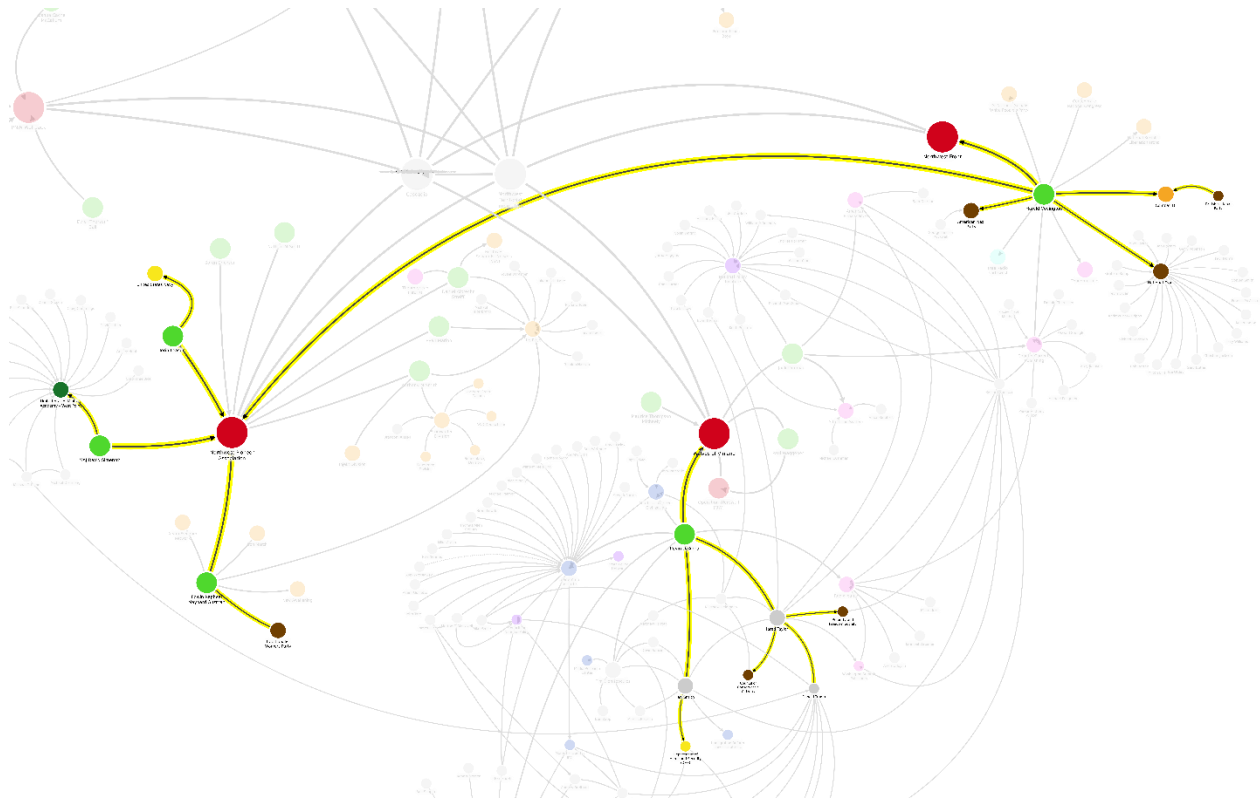


Figure 36 - Power-Map: Fascist Cascadia Movement (Alleged Government and Political Connections)

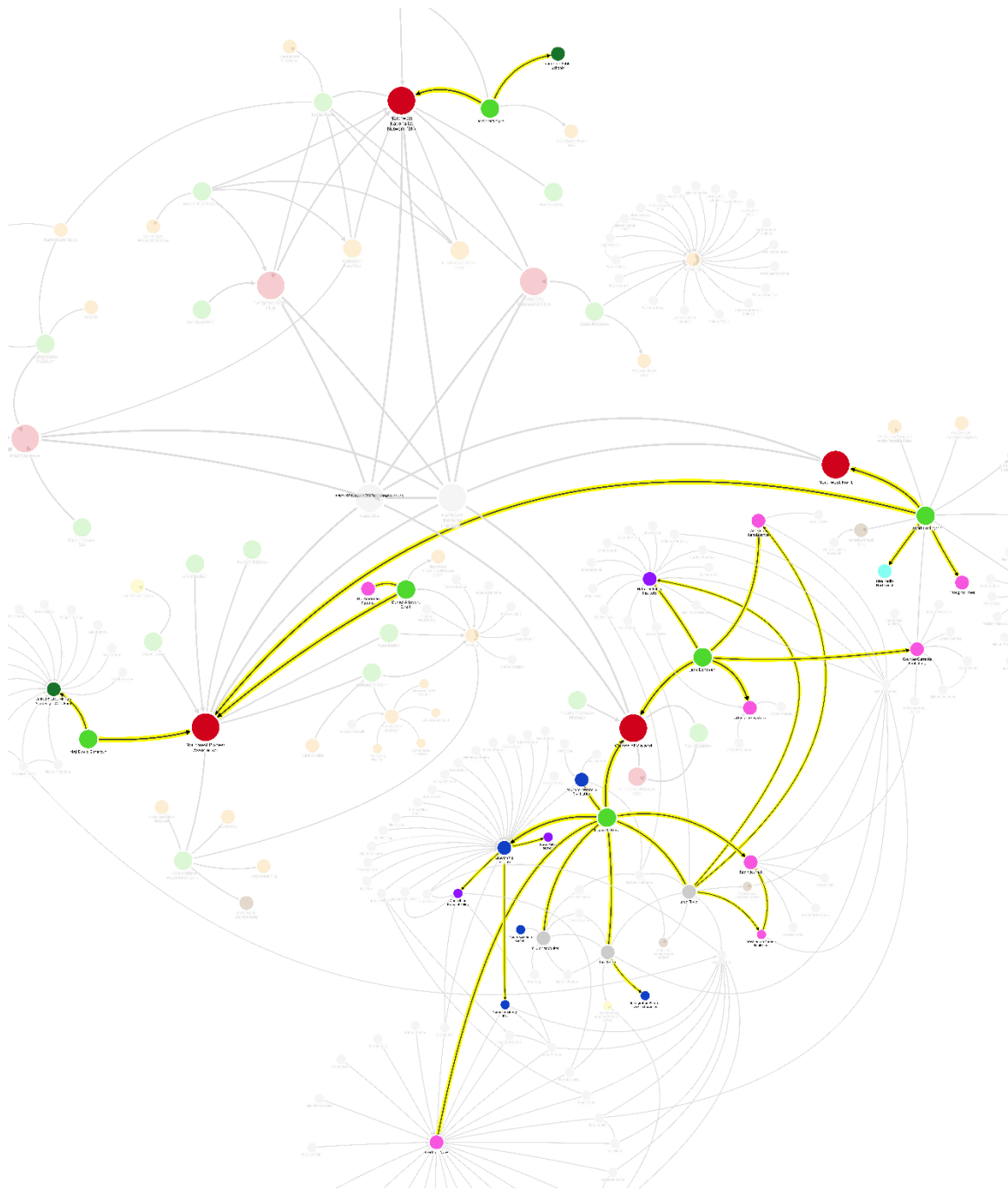


Figure 37 - Power-Map: Fascist Cascadia Movement (Alleged Non-Profit, Think Tank, Publisher, and Academic Connections)

I identified several organizations central to the Fascist Cascadia movement (see fig. 34): the (foundational) Northwest Front (NF); the Wolves of Vinland/Operation Werewolf (OW); the Northwest Pioneer Association (NPA); the Pacific Northwest Wolf Pack (PNWWP); the Evergreen Active Club; the Northwest Nationalist Network (3N); and the Rose City Nationalist Club. The alleged leadership of these organizations have various alleged connections to insurgent Fascist organizations, express sympathy to these types of action, and espouse various ideological positions drawing from insurgent thought – most absurd of which being “Nazi-Maoism” (Anonymous, 2020, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Corvallis Antifascists, 2024; Stumptown Research Collective, 2023). I investigated these alleged connections in my power-mapping and identified several key connections between the Fascist Cascadia movement and independent (sometimes insurgent) Fascist organizations (see fig. 35); notable examples include Combat 18, The Base, AWD, American Front, Hammerskin Nation, Patriot Front, and various Proud Boys. These connections reflect the insurgent approach taken by the Fascist Cascadia movement and – in the geographic distribution of their base-building – demonstrate the importance of the Pacific Northwest to the broader independent/insurgent Fascist movement. While there are significant distinctions between the Cascadia Fascists and the movement’s broader approaches (and, resultingly, a disconnection between these various formations), the entanglement of them speaks to the fact that Cascadia/NWTI remains potent in these spaces. Furthermore, where the Fascist Cascadians take a distinct approach to their ideological/philosophical outlooks from the broader American Fascist movement, links between these node clusters indicate the deep ideological and tactical influence of insurgent Fascism on the Cascadian Fascists. These relationships built with broader Fascist organizing presents a tactical and strategic advantage to the Cascadian Fascists in: their ability to gather and weaponize information; propagandizing and kinetic capacity; financial

resources and expertise; and the physical space controlled, thus ability to strike counter-insurgent forces, embed within a population and evade capture. Despite these advantages, the appearance of national-scale, pro-American Fascist formations (e.g. Patriot Front, American Front) in the map speaks to the reliance of the Fascist Cascadia movement on external support and hints at a tension within the movement regarding commitment to building an autonomous region against the American Empire. In working with those who call for a Fascist continuation of American Empire, the Cascadian Fascists undermine the strength and consistency of their (and the broader bioregional/Cascadia) narrative in multiple ways – primarily the shifting away from the “uniqueness” of place and the need for localized/place-based organization and the weakening of commitment against collaboration with the anti-ecological structure of Empire. Power-mapping demonstrates that the insurgent capability of the Cascadian Fascist movement, while rhetorically challenged, is extensive.

Regarding Cascadia, insurgent Fascists tie the formation of an autonomous (and therefore, insurgent) Cascadia to the conception of the NWTI – as mentioned in the first chapter, one can’t think of Cascadia without thinking about white neo-nazis. Whether intentional or not, these extreme and oppressive ideologies serve a counter-insurgent role for the Cascadia movement; outside observers are unlikely to engage with an idea associated with Fascists, thus weakening Cascadia’s insurgent “legitimacy,” and left-wing Cascadia advocates are pushed toward pacifism and (shadow-)State-embeddedness to distance themselves from the insurgent Fascists.

As noted in Chapter 3, Fascists blur the counter-/insurgent distinction and frequently work in alignment with the State. My power-mapping demonstrates various attempts by alleged Fascist Cascadia organizers to interact/embed with(in) insurgent formations and the (shadow-)State (see figs. 36 & 37); this is both a strategic approach to legitimize and spread their ideologies, and a

means through which the insurgent capacity, security, and autonomy is undermined. The various alleged political connections – see the Traditional Workers Party, the National Front, for example – represent attempts at the legitimization of Fascist ideology through participation in electoral politics or, in the case of Jared Taylor/Donald Trump, support for a political movement attempting a rightward-shift. Alleged government connections are distinctly military – e.g., West Point Academy, the Department of Homeland Security – speaking to the Fascist approach of “entryism” and developing militant capacity/knowledge. The Fascist Cascadia movement’s connections to a broad range of non-profit organizations, publishers, and educational institutions point toward a desire to further normalize and disseminate Fascist ideology, while also aligning with the counter-insurgent desire to corral energy from potentially-insurgent actors into legal means of struggle. Central alleged non-profit connections speak to a drive toward policy-focused and electoral strategies, in line with counter-insurgent strategy; but, as Crawford et al. note, rightward shifts in policy/electoral landscapes create more-friendly atmospheres for extreme Fascist formations, hinting at the strategic nature of these relationships (1994, p. n9). Broadly speaking, the alleged connections of the Fascist Cascadia movement revealed through my power-mapping demonstrate a relative autonomy of the movement from the State and broad set of alleged connections with a plethora of autonomous/insurgent organizations from the broader American Fascist movement. Now, I shift my attention to interrogating the reformist Cascadia movement – encompassing a wide range of political perspectives, unified in their use of Cascadia *without* calls for autonomy from the American Empire.

Reformist Cascadia and Insurgency Pacified

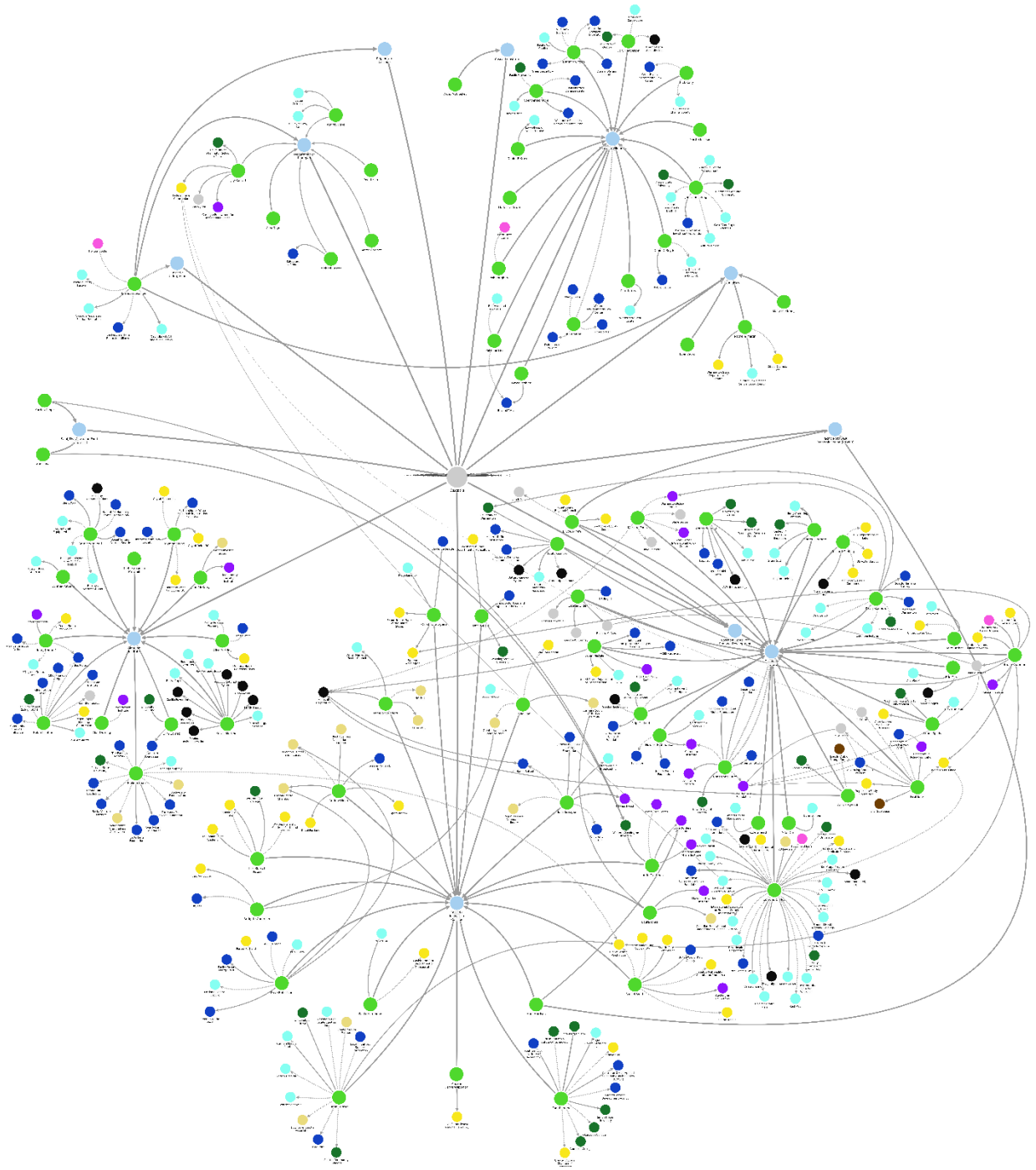


Figure 38 - Power-Map: Reformist Cascadia Movement Map (Full)
<https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11485-reformist-cascadia-movement-working>

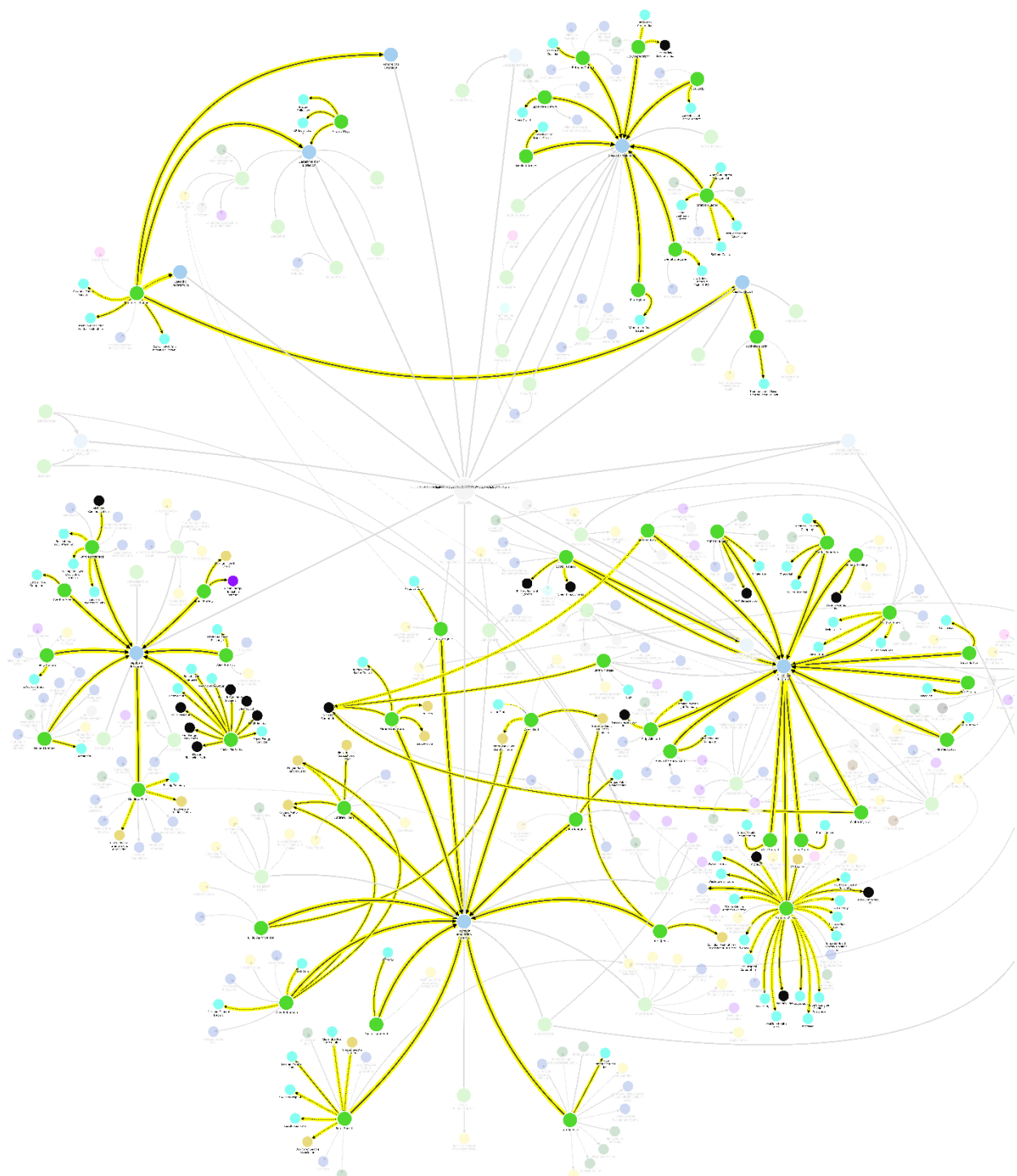


Figure 39 - Power-Map: Reformist Cascadia Movement (Business Association, Private Company, and Other Connections)

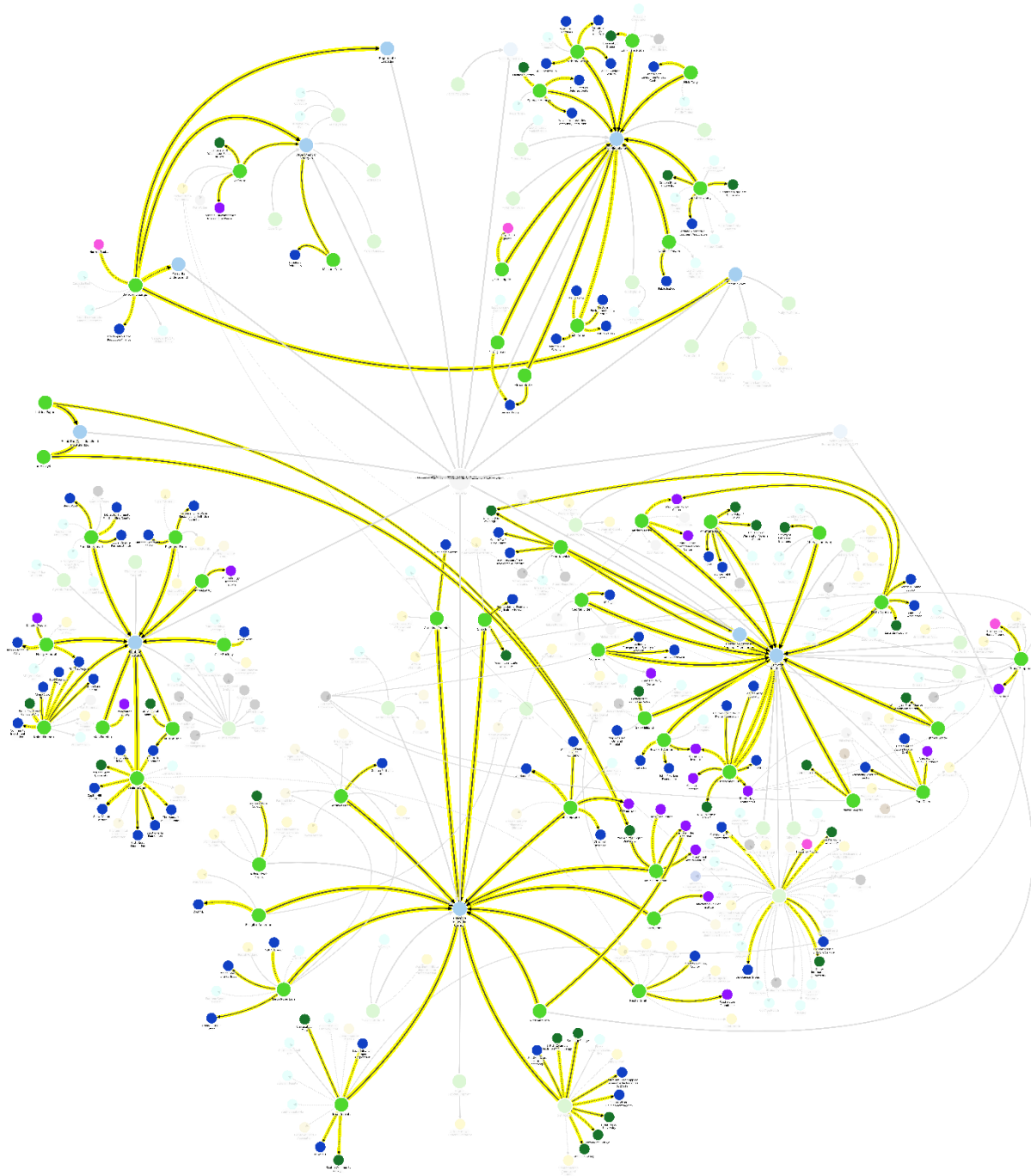


Figure 40 - Power-Map: Reformist Cascadia Movement (Non-profit, Think Tank, Publisher, and Academic Connections)

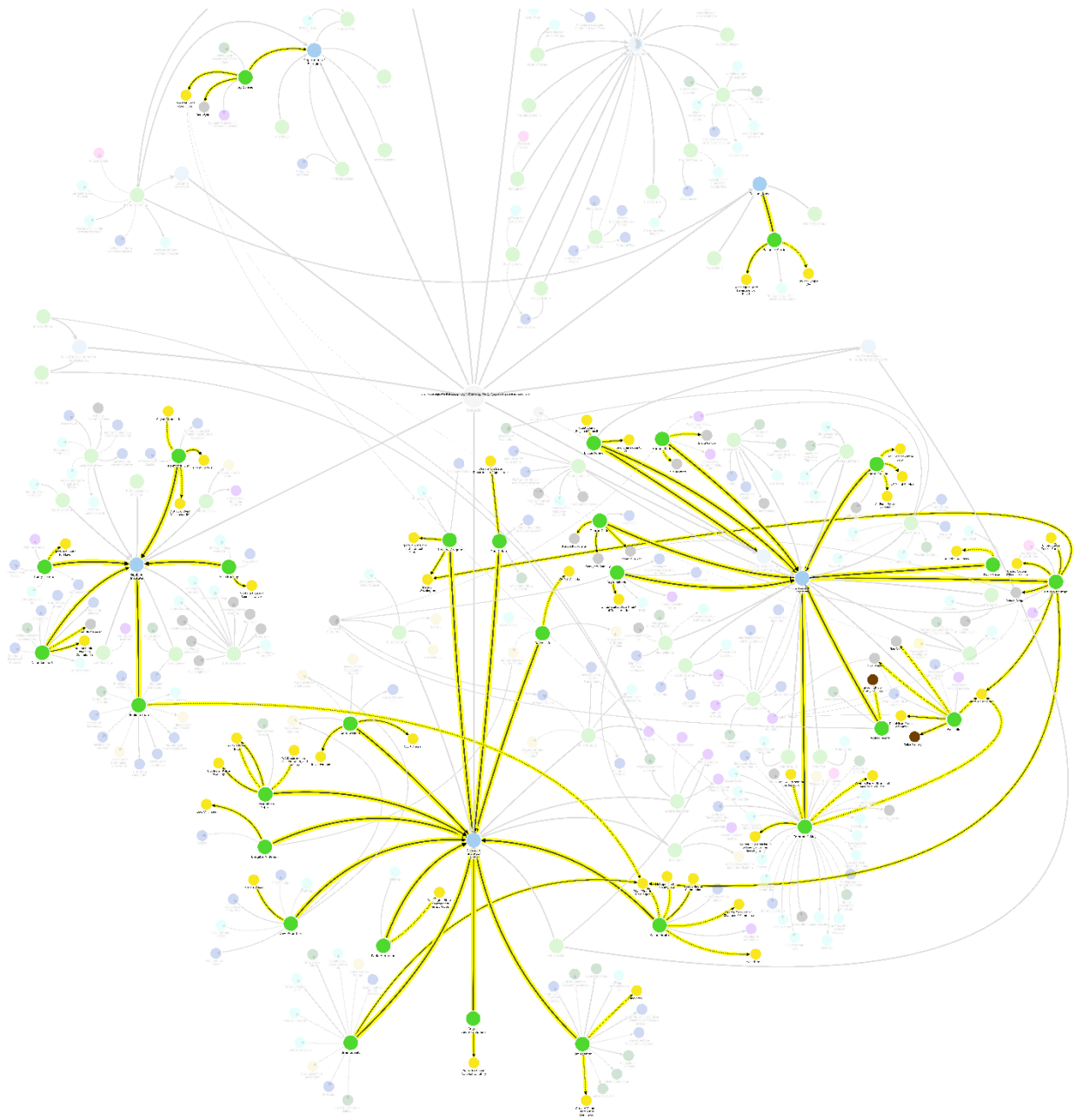


Figure 41 - Power-Map: Reformist Cascadia Movement (Government and Political Connections)

As mentioned above, a desire to distance Cascadia's image from that of an insurgent white ethnostate has shifted the movement's energy toward promoting Cascadia as a reformist project (Lokting, 2018). This has several meanings / implications, and stated simply, involves a combination of the following: promoting Cascadia as a counter-culture / lifestyle / consumer identity; speaking to the Cascadia region as a "cultural" rather than bioregional phenomenon; and utilizing the "progressive" and environmental image of Cascadia to promote "Green Development." Central organizations in the Reformist Cascadia movement are almost entirely non-profits, with a couple academic / think tank or community-based organizations as well (see fig. 40). Various organizations promoting Cascadia-as-identity appear in the map (e.g. Cascadia Association Football Federation) as do a variety of connections to official sports commissions, city tourism departments, business associations, and organizations seeking to attract investment (see fig. 39). Various university, think-tank, and other educational institutions represent the incorporation – and subsequent taming – of Bioregionalism/Cascadia into academic frameworks (see fig. 40). Some of these connections also bridge the Cascadia-as-identity and "Green Development" categories – see the Biodiversity Funders Group and the Future Borders Coalition – but the latter is clearly represented in the plethora of (environmental) non-profits and (tech) companies in the map (see figs. 39 & 40). Alexander Dunlap (2023a) and Klee Benally (2023) identify extensively how "Green Development" fails to overcome colonial, capitalist logics and thus presents as a form of neo-colonial domination and extraction. Furthermore, Dunlap highlights the counter-insurgent role of the "green" economy as it shifts potentially-insurgent ecological activists toward reformist routes that, inevitably, "stabilize environmental anxiety... [and] intensify techno-capitalist development" while expanding State power (2023a, p. 40). The Reformist Cascadia movement is a prime example here, its extensive networks of

governmental/political ties weaving together with all variety of other organizations to promote a Cascadia economic region aligned in its “green” tech development (see figs. 39 & 41). Not only does this bolster the already-dominant industries in the region, it presents the possibility of an “environmental” future for Empire. This co-optation of potentially-insurgent narratives regarding the role of Empire in global ecological collapse is starkly in line with the desires/strategies of counter-insurgency. I highlight two reformist Cascadia organizations as central in entangling the movement with Empire’s broader structures of power – the Cascadia Innovation Corridor and the Cascadia Center for Regional Development, hosted by the Discovery Institute (see figs. 42 - 49). Both organizations possess a whirlwind of connections from federal and local political leaders and government institutions to all scales of non-profit/NGO/community-organizations to massive firms like Microsoft and Boeing, who dominate Cascadia’s economy. Aligning with my discussion of the reformist Cascadia movement in Chapter 1, the various Cascadia Center and Cascadia Innovation Corridor power maps demonstrate attempts to – whether intentionally or not – corrupt the concept of Cascadia from a project for full autonomy to one which serves the already-dominant industries and State formations of the region. In utilizing the concept of Cascadia to present a project of regional capitalist and State cooperation and consolidation, the reformist Cascadians undermine the broader movement in several ways: 1. Incorporating sympathetic people into funded, structured, hierarchical organizations which speak to existing grievances against the American Empire in order to promote and promise change through legalistic, pacifist routes of redress; 2. Weakening notions of “autonomy” away from self-governance and similar concepts; 3. Demonizing and flattening insurgent visions of Cascadia – Liberationist and Fascist – and; 4. Urging other potential-insurgents (namely Anarchist, Communist, and other liberation-minded perspectives) away from investigation of / affiliation with the concept of Cascadia.

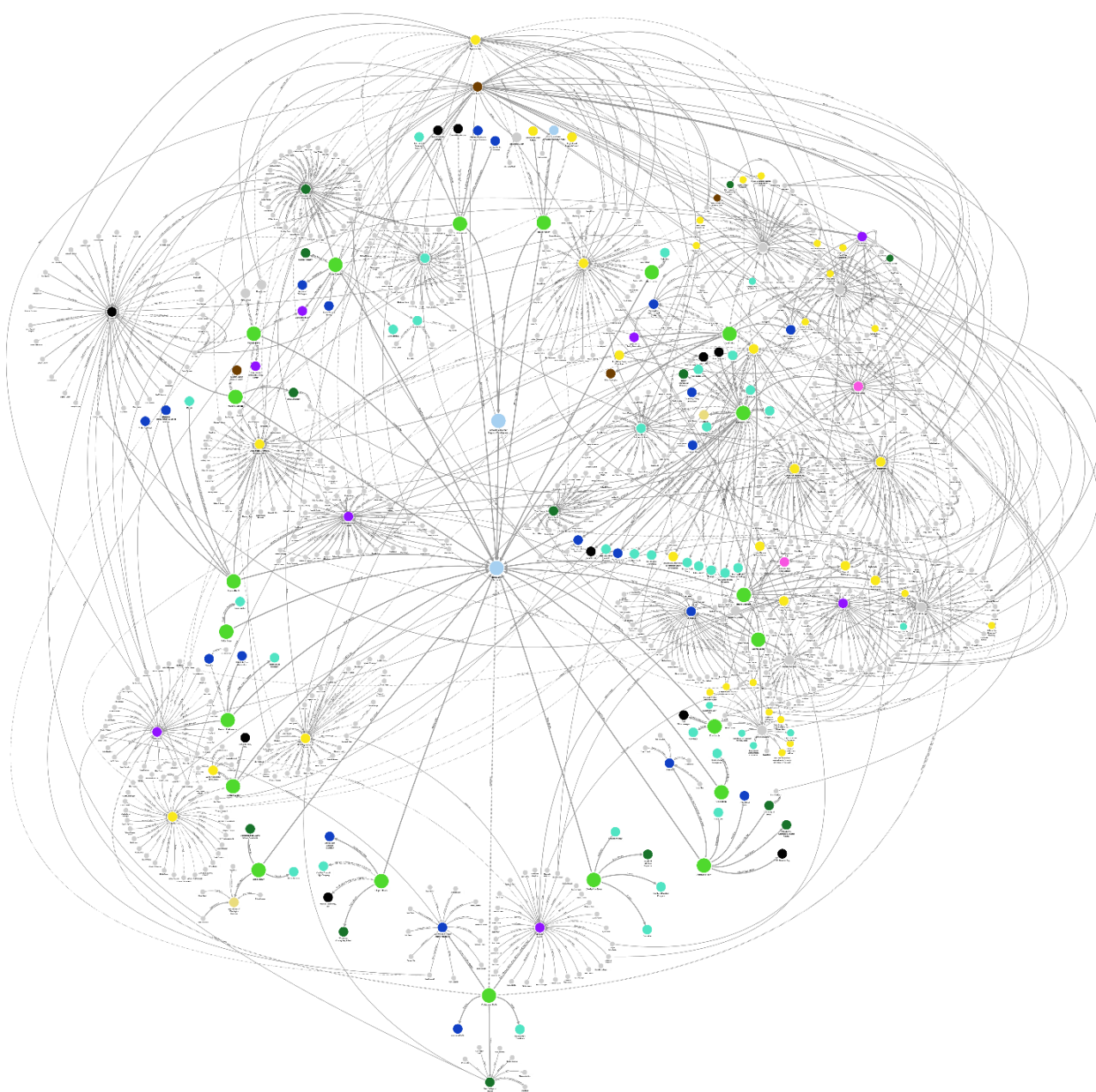


Figure 42 - Power-Map: Cascadia Center for Regional Development / Discovery Institute (Full)
<https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11445-cascadia-center-discovery-institute-leadership>

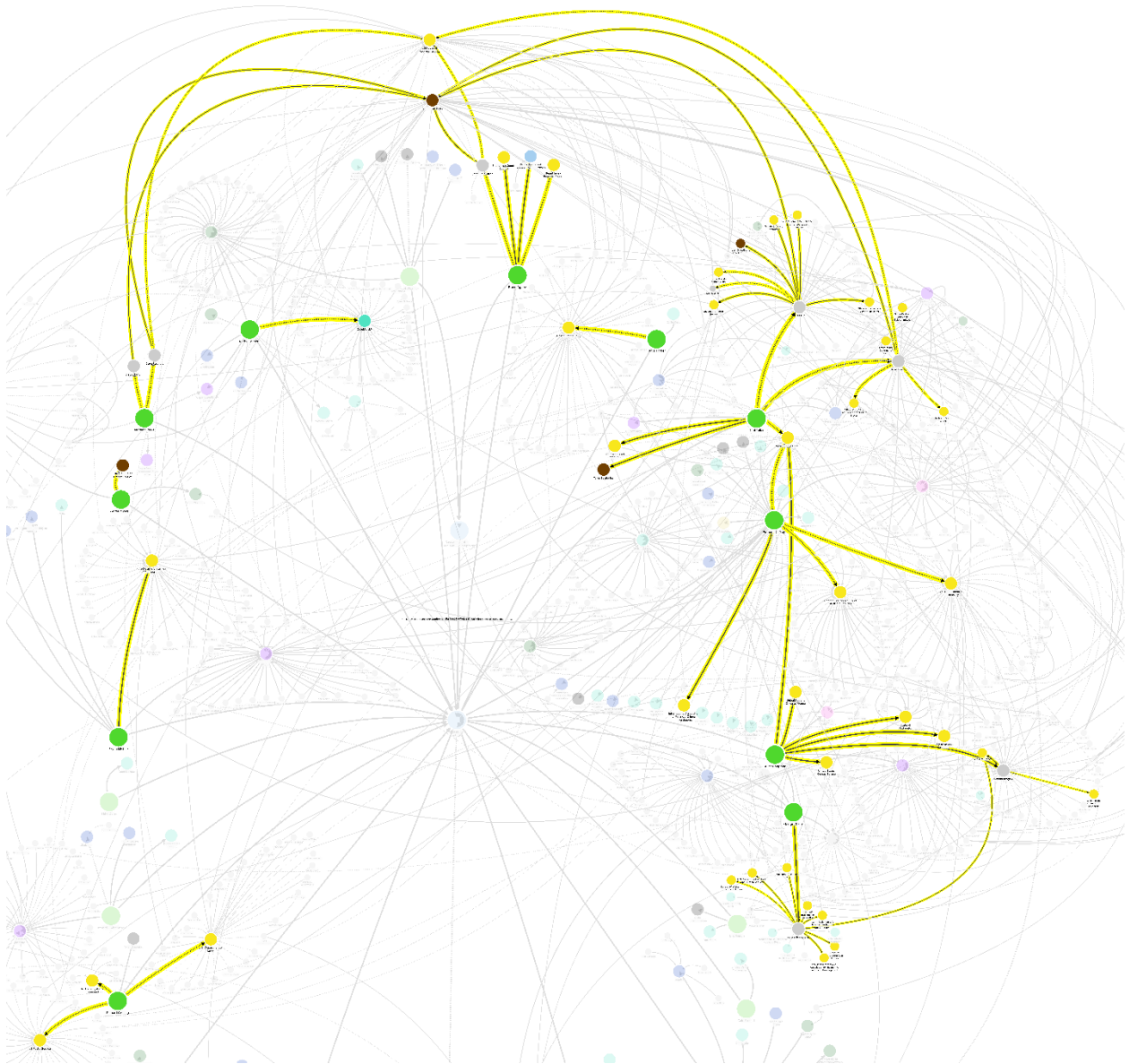


*Figure 43 - Power-Map: Cascadia Center for Regional Development / Discovery Institute
(Government and Political Connections)*

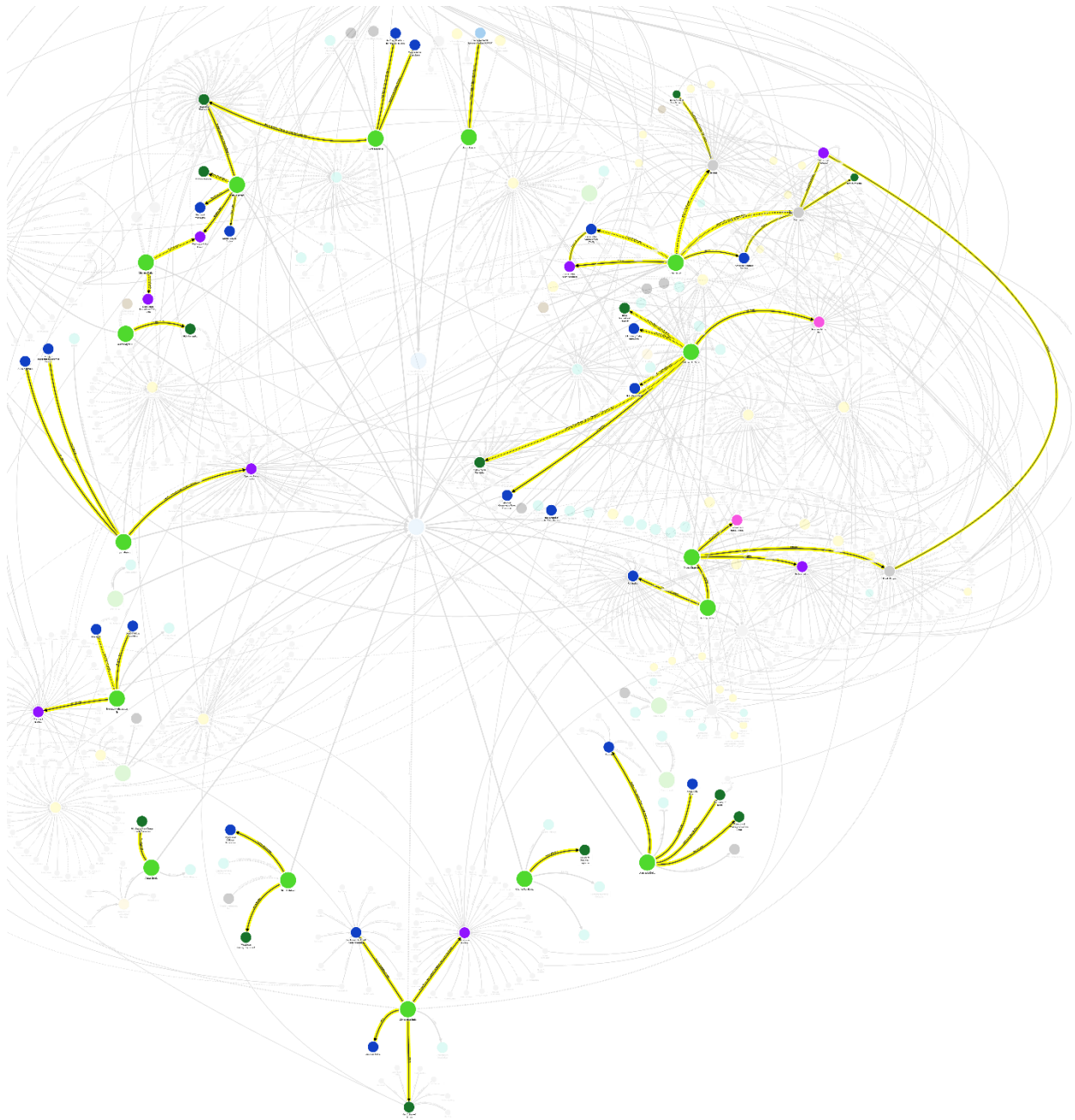


*Figure 44 - Power-Map: Cascadia Center for Regional Development / Discovery Institute
(Non-Profit, Think Tank, Publishing, and Academic Connections)*

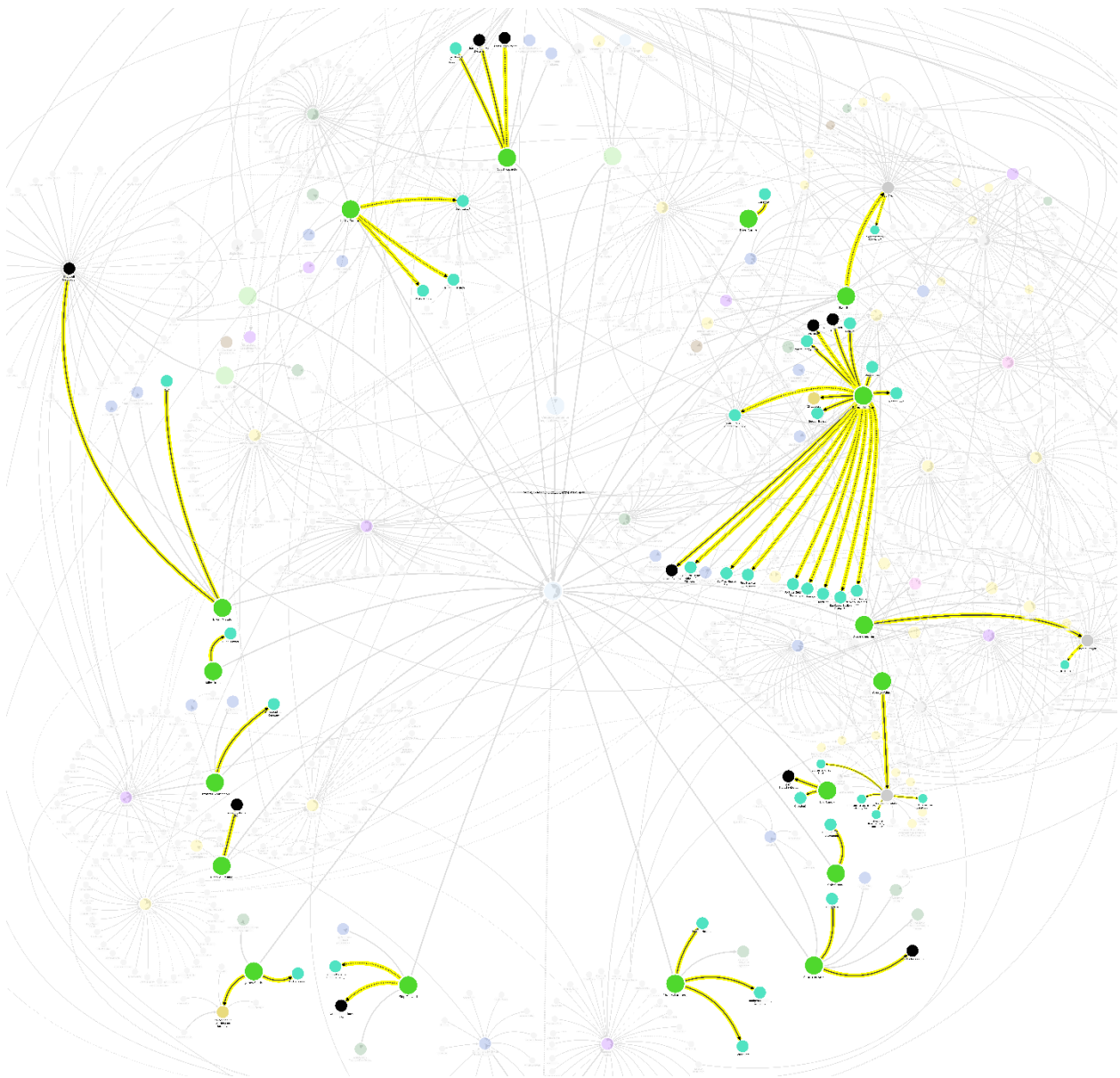


*Figure 45 - Power-Map: Cascadia Center for Regional Development / Discovery Institute
(Business Association, Private Company, and Other Connections)*

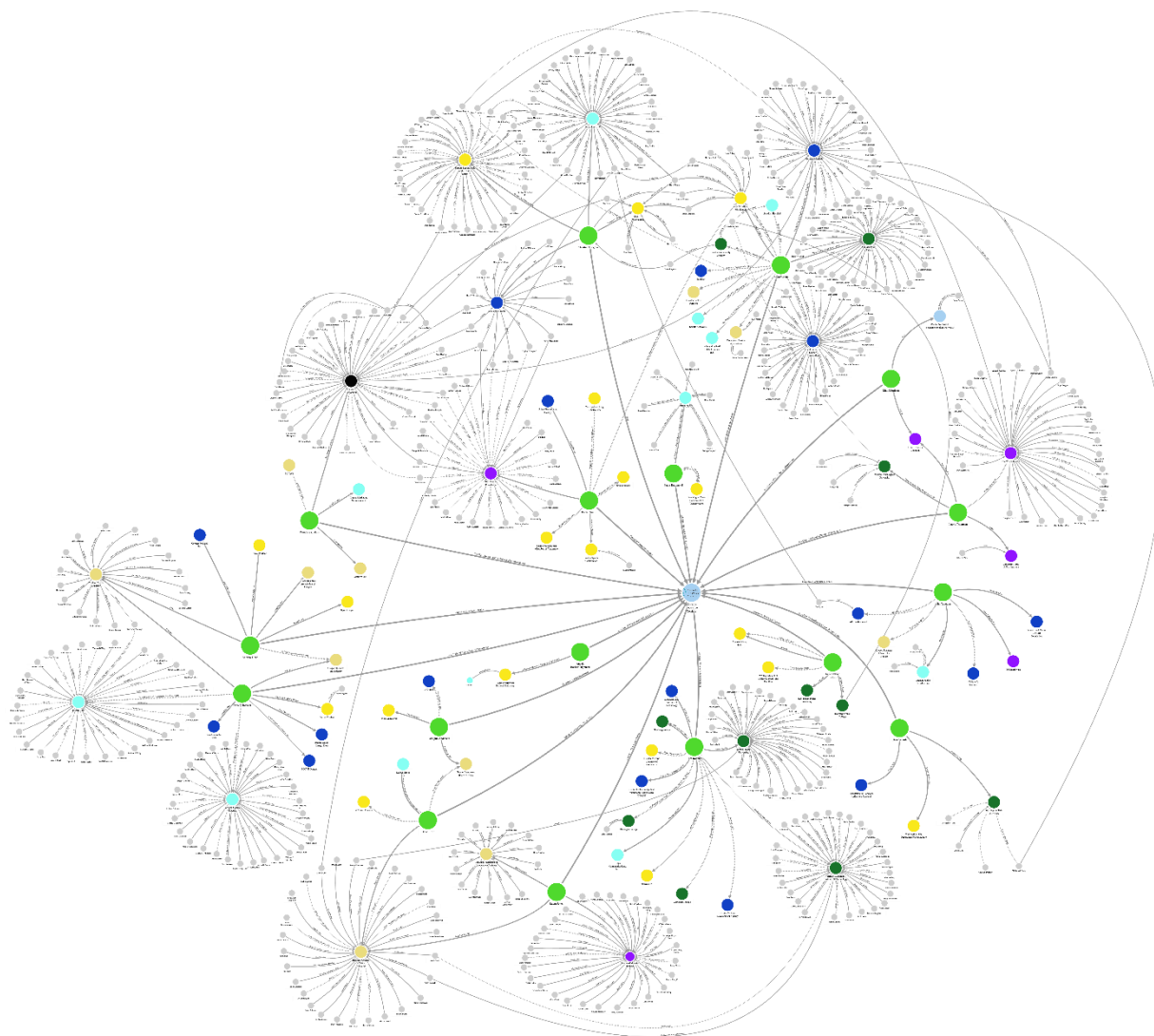


Figure 46 - Power-Map: Cascadia Innovation Corridor Map (Full)
<https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11404-cascadia-innovation-corridor-leadership>

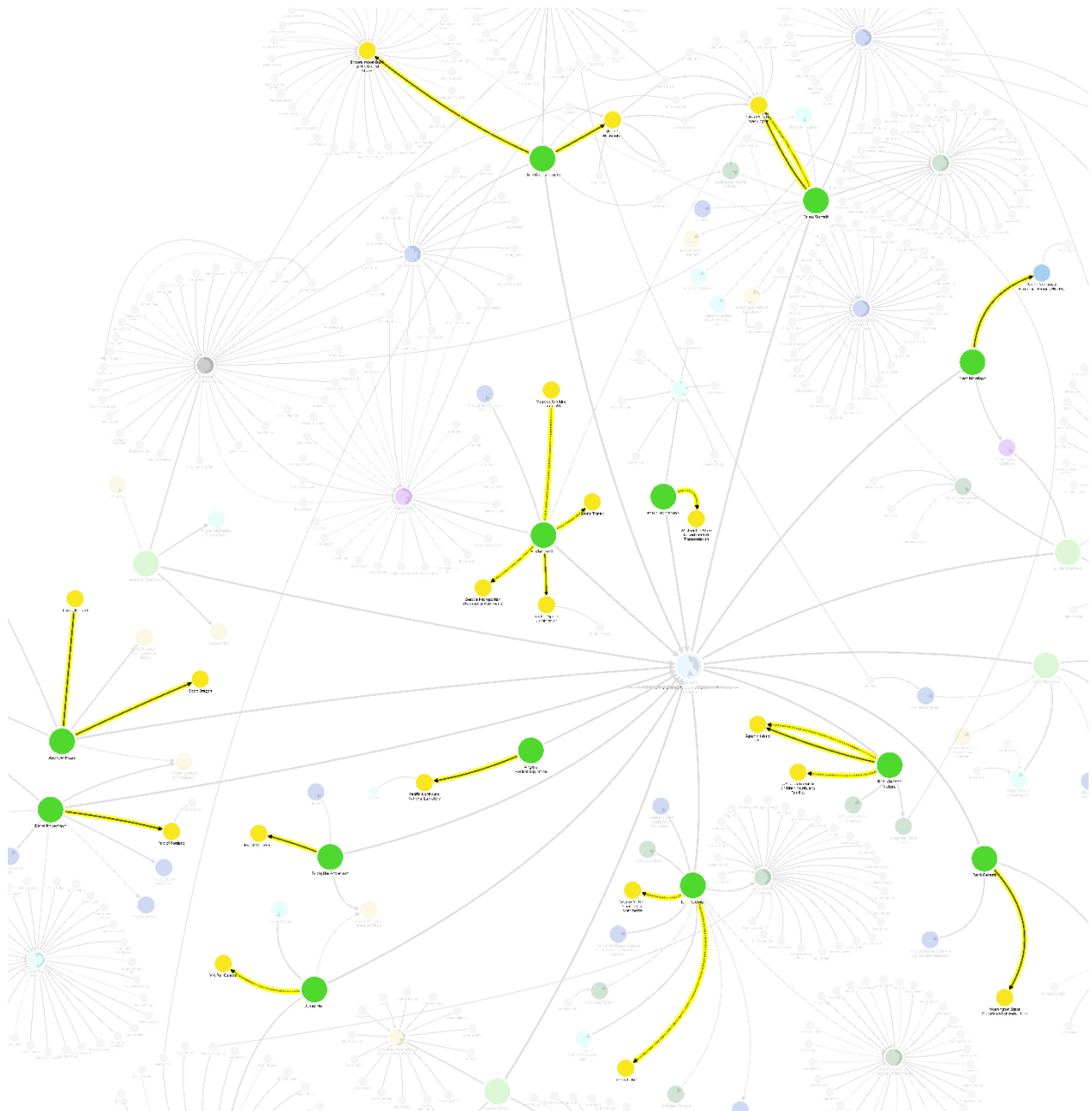


Figure 47 – Power-Map: Cascadia Innovation Corridor (Government and Political Connections)

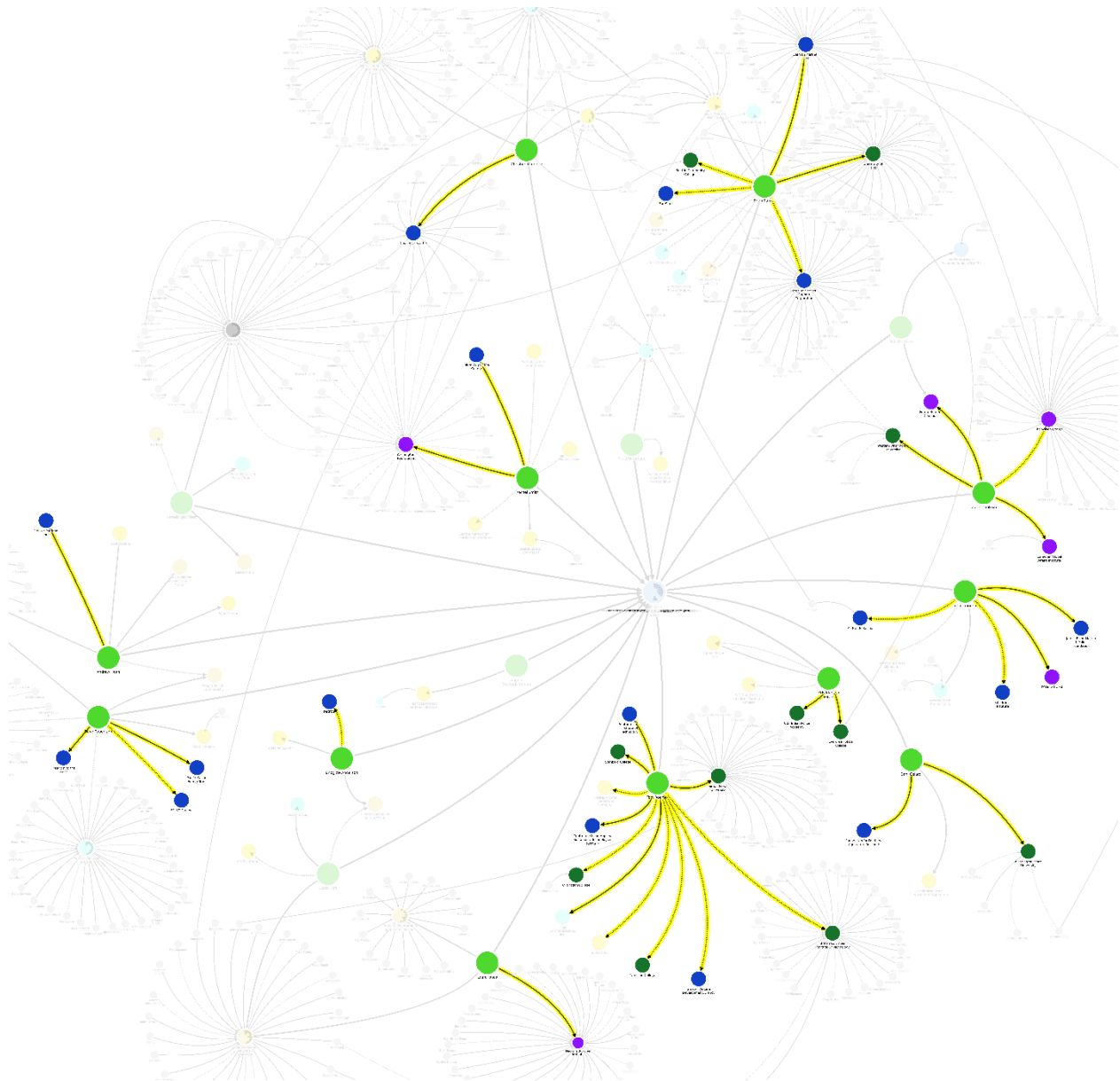


Figure 48 – Power-Map: Cascadia Innovation Corridor (Non-Profit, Think Tank, Publishing, and Academic Connections)

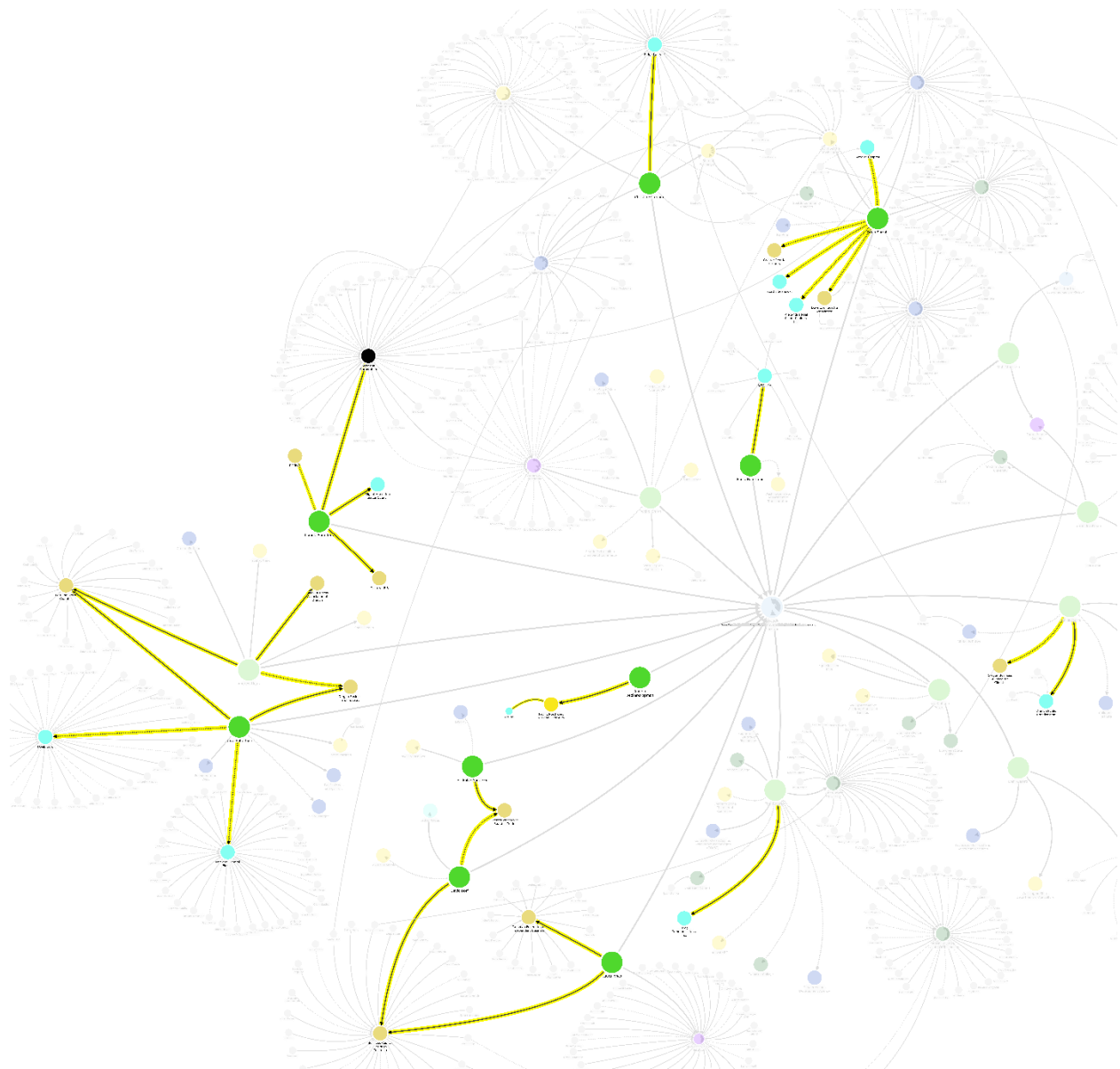


Figure 49 – Power-Map: Cascadia Innovation Corridor (Business Association, Private Company, and Other Connections)

My power-mapping presents several key takeaways regarding the Cascadia movement(s). First, they demonstrate the distinctive structures of the Fascist and Reformist movements, demonstrating there is some, but minimal overlap between them. Second, they speak to the insurgent commitments of the Fascist Cascadia movement through visualizing its alleged connections to broader, insurgent Fascist formations like the Base and Atomwaffen Division. Third, they expose the Fascist and Reformist's counter-insurgent ties to the (shadow-)State, including: government agencies/officials; political parties; non-profit/non-governmental organizations; think tanks; publishers; academic institutions; private companies; business associations; and more. Fourth, in this visualization, the maps demonstrate the influence of Cascadia's dominant industries on the Reformist movement. Fifth, the maps prove the multi-national, cross-temporal networks of power composing the Fascist and Reformist movements. Finally, the maps reveal the relative influence/power of the Fascist and Reformist movements within the broader Cascadia movement milieu, based on the visualization of their network expansiveness. More specifically, the maps uncover that the Reformist movement network is vastly more institutionally embedded and expansive than the Fascist.

Beyond the Cascadia movement, this chapter explored the various insights power-mapping can provide to counter-mapping praxis. These key methodological insights surround power-mapping's use in visualizing power and exposing the various spaces power-networks move through, as well as improving analysis of (counter-/insurgent) movements. Power-mapping is useful to counter-mapping praxis in its ability to aid in the construction of a (combative) sense of place. This artistic depiction of these networks serves in formulating an insurgent/conflictual sense of place taking two forms: first, power-mapping practice involves rooting in and developing an understanding of

the cohesiveness of power structures in a given space; and second, it constructs a conceptual space from which one identifies as oppositional to networks of power understood as external to and occupying a given place. The work and art of researching and laying out the maps, the act of deeply reading and tracing nodes' connections, these processes encourage one to reflect on the ways in which the local is smothered by Empire, in which the insurgent and daring is corralled back into the existing forces of State and capital. Further, and speaking to the Cascadian context, in taking seriously the notion of Cascadia – as a movement and a geographic reality – the act of power-mapping emplaces Cascadia; that is, it actualizes Cascadia as a place through demonstrating the cohesiveness of its power structures. I argue that my queered approach to power-mapping, in combination with a bioregional perspective, opens the ability to view Cascadia (and bioregions more broadly) as ever-present, beneath the occupation of Empire. The next and final chapter of this thesis – “Cascadia, Becoming: Insurgent Directions in Bioregional Praxis” – explores recent developments in bioregional literature and points toward the possibility of a conceptualization of Cascadia which contends with Empire and COIN.

Conclusion – Cascadia, Becoming: Insurgent Directions in Bioregional Praxis

This thesis explored the contested geography of the Pacific Northwest. Specifically, I investigated the Cascadia movement's complex nature and the various forces/structures/practices of Empire and counter-insurgency manipulating it. My investigation into the Liberationist, Fascist, and Reformist Cascadian's calls for varied autonomies and claims to the same space provides critical insight into the political geography of social movements, specifically in understanding the different scales at which political contestation operates and influences the future of regional/national governance. Furthermore, I provide insight into the intricacies of complex, place-based and environmental movements; this insight is vital to understanding the relationship between these movements and the State in the context of environmental collapse and rising contestation between local and federal forces.

Exploring the Cascadia movement, I was drawn to an examination of Empire and COIN. My exploration of these concepts in conversation reveals several key insights into the Cascadia movement (and Bioregionalism more broadly), particularly revealing the weakening of the Liberationist movement and the co-optation or appropriation of the movement into more-Empire-friendly formations. Primarily, the failure to deeply interrogate the concepts/structures/practices of Empire and COIN results in acceptance of their logics/institutions: Bioregionalism frequently replicates Empire's border logics, culminating often in nationalist-like tendencies; the movement/ideology's lack of concrete perspective on the State frequently results in incorporation; and conforming to legal institutions leads to rejection of insurgent perspectives and embrace of the reformist/pacifist tactics preferred by COIN forces.

In reflecting on the dramatic impact of Empire and COIN on the Cascadia movement, I wish to close this thesis with some thoughts on the movement's potential development in insurgent directions. As noted above, the insurgent potential of a bioregional movement like Cascadia presents mainly in its call for cognitive dis-identification with Empire in favor of the bioregional. These calls are left vulnerable, though, in Bioregionalism's vulnerability to Empire's border logic and its potential to stoke nationalistic tendencies. In this chapter, I hope to conclude my exploration of the Cascadia movement with a queering of Bioregionalism by drawing from the contemporary approach, *bioregion-ing*. While some perspectives/angles from the thesis call for further exploration – the differentiation of Fascist insurgency from other approaches, addressing and understanding the whiteness of even the Liberationist Cascadia movement, investigating Canadian expressions of the Fascist Cascadia movement, and spatial analysis of the movement's power centers – I push for incorporation of a bioregioning perspective as a means to circumvent movement co-optation/appropriation. First, I walk through the literature emphasizing bioregioning, paying particular attention to its emergence through critiques of Bioregionalism. Here, I note the strength of bioregioning's (spatial-temporal) flexibility in countering Empire's logics. Then, I address the tactical approaches embraced by bioregioning and note their liberatory potential. I close the thesis with some final thoughts expressed in poetic form.

Queering the -ism: Bioregioning against Empire

Since the late 2010s, bioregional thought has had a resurgent emphasis on praxis; new theorizations under the name *bioregion-ing* are “shifting [bioregional thought] from a somewhat static ‘-ism’” into an active engagement with practices of “how best to live [with and] on Earth” (Hubbard et al., 2023, p. 2). In many ways, the conception of bioregioning is a resurrection and reassessment of Bioregionalism's origins in green Anarchism. Jim Dodge, for example, asserts:

“Bioregionalism is adaptive and still forming, it cannot be definitely defined... and is at least as old as consciousness” (in Andruss et al., 1990, p. 5). Bioregioning draws from this “still forming” conception of bioregional praxis to emphasize the necessity of reinhabitation as an insurgent, prefigurative, and direct approach to “bringing the [autonomous] bioregion into existence” (Hubbard et al., 2023, p. 6). More simply, bioregioning shifts emphasis from Bioregionalism’s somewhat-static understanding of the bioregion to one which refuses to (pre-)define its borders. In this sense, bioregioning brings the bioregion to life, asserting its existence as an active and emerging process of ecological connection. Such an approach rejects Bioregionalism’s rigidity in favor of a flexibly conflictual framework which aims to assert the bioregion *as the dismantling of Empire* – Jason M. Wirth states in *Cascadian Zen*, “[i]t’s not a second regime of habitation. ...[R]einhabitation first and foremost begins with a thorough, honest investigation of the historical record and present reality of habitation” and concludes with a reconceptualization of how we collectively live with the Earth (2023, p. 124).

As noted above, bioregioning originates from critiques of Bioregionalism’s rigidity in light of its co-optation and appropriation away from its liberatory origins. Primarily, this critique relates to Bioregionalism’s replication of colonial bordering processes – the “accepting [of] bioregions as predefined units” (Wearne et al., 2023, p. 2130; Conference Organizing Committee, 2015). Bioregioning provides an alternative to rigidly defined bioregions by defining its space in relative terms – *where does the movement currently hold (physical and ideological) space; where does it have connection to human and more-than-human community?* This relative conception defines the bioregion as those spaces in which a liberatory connection-to-ecology has replaced Empire; Cascadian Anarchist Seaweed refers to this process as building “habitat” and emphasizes its importance in rejecting colonial territorialization and embracing the ephemeral reality of the anti-

Statal contestation of space (Seaweed, 2013, pp. 12, 45–46). The act of bioregioning is the act of reconstructing place through the development of liberatory, ecological relationships and thus, the act of unleashing/uncovering the Bioregion from beneath Empire.

Tactically, bioregioning adopts common practices from green Anarchist, decolonial, and other Liberationist approaches. These include a variety of direct actions and community organizing approaches ranging from “freeing up colonized land, rehabilitating plundered land, or seizing land... rent strikes or squatting... wilderness camps, fishing shacks, shared berry patches, collective harvesting of wild foods and group gardening and permaculture” to “communes, co-ops, [and] community gardens” (Seaweed, 2013, pp. 6–12). In brief, bioregioning centers “commons growing, network shaping, land connecting, [and] system building” (Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC), 2024, p. 3). Where bioregioning differentiates from a broader Liberationist approach is in its emphasis on developing (temporary) “liberated territory” through the act of reinhabitation. While these liberated territories are foundational to Liberationist praxis – from Huey Newton and the BPP to Attica to Cascadia itself with the Capitol Hill Organized Protest – bioregioning stresses the vital importance of developing community and power through more-than-human relationships (Narayan, 2020; Burton, 2023; Leslie, 2020; Wearne et al., 2023). These territories serve as an “‘abolition geography’” in which those participating “remap their world, literally ‘changing places’ without ever leaving” – new ethics of place, new richness of relationships to the local ecology – as Orisanmi Burton states, these liberated territories become “zone[s] of epistemological antagonism with the state and... infrastructure[s] of collective self-creation” (Burton, 2023, p. 91). The power of insurgency, Klee Benally states, “does not come from non-consensual majority rule top-down man-made laws but is derived in relation with, and in proportion to, all living beings”; this hints toward the potential of a bioregioning movement

which derives its strength from the continual development of more-than-human solidarities (2023, p. 255). “The direct antithesis of the Empire was the Commune,” Lenin quotes from Marx, speaking to the negative power of communal relations against Empire’s cognitive capture (Lenin, 1977, p. 36). The assertion of the Bioregion against Empire through its sporadic emergence as liberated territories serves as a poetic maneuvering against the varied structures of counter-insurgency, one which accepts the Bioregion not as a desired end but *as a process and an action*. The poetics of *Cascadian Zen* speaks to this: “writing a poem... [is] not about naming so much as verb-ing or wording what seems at first wordless. When I start a poem, I have no idea where it’s going to end.” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 13).

The emergence of bioregioning from critique of Bioregionalism aligns closely with the increased ability of a bioregioning framework to deal with the realities of Empire. Bioregioning places insurgency’s grosstopicality – see chapter 3 – at the center, asserting the bioregion as a process of liberating territory from beneath Empire’s domination. Gary Snyder, formative advocate of Bioregionalism and Cascadia, states that “[t]here are tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but who are not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally” (in Cascadia Urban Rural Coalition (CURC), 2024). What Snyder is speaking to is the disidentification with Empire that comes from re-connecting to place, a powerful sentiment in reflecting on the notion of Empire as a pathology. Orisanmi Burton ruminates on the cognitive liberation from Empire that manifested through the brief liberating of Attica: “The incomprehensible violence of the state failed to divest them of their will to resist and become. Across their protracted and multifaceted struggle, they saw themselves as prisoners only in a material sense. In their minds they were already free” (2023, p. 76). In focusing on liberating territory, the bioregioning framework aims toward the reconstruction of what a place is, to uncover

a deep bioregional connection in the elimination of Empire. This is not exactly, as Burton states it, a “profound experience of liberation and movement while remaining in place,” but a profound liberation/movement through changing (within) place (2023, p. 107).

Bioregioning is also a profoundly counter-temporal frame, rejecting both Empire’s dominion over the territory of the future and Empire’s Progressive narrative, which insists and relies on futurisms. Bioregioning is a project of the present, a project of the here and now. To quote the poetic *Cascadian Zen*,

“[r]ather than the land being itself for the time being, that is, for the duration of itself, it is empty of intrinsic being. It is rather the manifestation... [of] *uji*, being-time. We are not generally in Cascadia. We are intimately in Cascadia. ...Here and now the mind of the poet, of the spatial interdependence and temporal singularities of Cascadia, manifests anew, again and again” (Nelson et al., 2023, p. 100).

Here, Cascadia is not a concrete location hoping to secede, but a process of (re)creating ecologically rebellious and liberated places. This messy process is neither spatially nor temporally linear or Progressive and accepts with open arms the complexity of insurgency. As Rasheeda Phillips reminds, the acceptance of Empire’s temporality is the (spatial/temporal) misdirection of liberation movements (2025, p. 15). The reconceptualization of what and when Cascadia is unsettles Empire’s narratives of becoming (inevitable, total). Klee Benally notes, “[s]ettler time dies when we stop imagining its futures and histories” (2023, p. 402). Bioregioning is a rejection of these in favor of the potential of now: *what can be constructed, what can be deconstructed, what can be unsettled, what needs to be forgotten?* Bioregioning is a call to construct Cascadia *as a present*, that is, as something which is *always existent* – around, between, and under Empire. Bioregioning reminds us that a place is what we make it, that power is constructed in how we act, that “[t]ruly, the earth is alive,” after all, “The People are still here” (Children of the Setting Sun Productions, 2023, p. 71).

I close this thesis with some brief reflections, expressed in the form of poetry. The two found poems I've constructed – “We Conspire (We Make Sure of It)” and “We're Already Here (The Cascadian Undercommons)” – speak to and reflect on the potential of a flexible bioregioning praxis against Empire. They are derived from Stephano Harney and Fred Moten's (2013) *The Undercommons* and Klee Benally's (2023) *No Spiritual Surrender* respectively – with love, admiration, inspiration, and respect for their work as formative to my thinking.

Final Thoughts, in Poetry

We're Already Here (The Cascadian Undercommons)

*Derived from and dedicated to
Harney and Moten's prolific,
The Undercommons (2013, p. 19)*

Uncut devotion
to the critique of this illusion
makes us delusional.

In the trick of [Empire's] politics
we are insufficient, scarce, waiting
in pockets of resistance
in stairwells,
in alleys,
in vain.

The false image
and its critique
threaten the common with democracy, which is
only ever to come, so that

one day, *which is only never to come,* we will be more than what we are.

But we *already are*.
We're already here, moving.

We've been around.
*We're more than politics,
more than settled,
more than democratic.*

We surround democracy's false image in order to unsettle it.

We Conspire (Make Sure of It)

*Derived from and dedicated to
Klee Benally's inspiring
No Spiritual Surrender (2023, p. 314)*

my father says,
 'There aren't two worlds,
 there is just one... with many paths.'

Colonial and capitalist paths are
 linear by design.

In this space
 between harmony and devastation, we
 listen to these cycles, we listen to
 the land, and
we conspire.

 If the path of greed,
 domination, exploitation, and
competition doesn't accept that it's
 reached its
 dead
 end,

then its up to us to
make sure of
it.

Appendix A:

Power-Map Information

Node Key:

- Central members of Cascadia movement organizations (light green);
- Other individuals (grey);
- Fascist Cascadia organizations (red);
- Other Fascist organizations (orange);
- Reformist Cascadia organizations (light blue);
- Academic organizations/institutions (dark green);
- Government institutions (yellow);
- Political organizations (brown);
- Business associations (tan);
- Think tanks (purple);
- Publishers (pink);
- Tech companies (black);
- Other non-profits/foundations/NGOs (dark blue); and
- Other private organizations (teal)

— • —

Full Cascadia Movement Power-Map:

- <https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11488-full-cascadia-movement>

Fascist Cascadia Movement Power-Map:

- <https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11425-fascist-cascadia>

Reformist Cascadia Movement Power-Map:

- <https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11485-reformist-cascadia-movement-working>

Cascadia Center (Discovery Institute) Power-Map:

- <https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11445-cascadia-center-discovery-institute-leadership>

Cascadia Innovation Corridor Power-Map:

- <https://littlesis.org/oligrapher/11404-cascadia-innovation-corridor-leadership>

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