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Summary and Conclusion to the Special Issue

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The preceding articles have examined many of the different ways society and government have identified and managed urban nuisances in Canada. As Owen Temby highlighted in the introduction, Canada has a long heritage in which government and activists have used new "ecological modernization" technologies to manage urban nuisances without harming businesses. When so much of the Canadian economy depends on megaprojects that significantly alter the natural environment and the ways in which people interact with it, a major theme in Canadian urban history is the process of identifying and reducing nuisances within a system dependent on the very industrial activities that create them.

Temby's introduction proposed "a bipartite distinction between (1) the politicization of the nuisance issue (i.e., the extent to which local activists are mobilized in seeking to mitigate or eliminate it), and (2) whether or not a policy outcome (e.g., a bylaw, statute, program, a specific action) resulted that purportedly or ostensibly dealt with the problem." The contributors to this special issue have each examined this bipartite distinction through their individual case studies. In the process, each has brought new insight into how very personal aspects of human life, like the animals that we eat or the air that we breathe, become politicized, and, in the process, move from local nuisance to national issue.

In Stéphane Castonguay and Vincent Bernard's article, "National and Local Definitions of an Environmental Nuisance," they examine the fundamental importance of water to both society and the economy in Quebec, and the difficult process of maintaining local access to clean water and the freedom of industry to develop along fresh waterways. The compromise that resulted from balancing liveable and industrial space along Quebec's water systems was more of a redefinition of what it meant to be "safe" and "contaminated," further highlighting the social construction of these categories within their historical context.

The Castonguay and Bernard article on industrial water pollution in Quebec contrasts with Don Munton and Owen Temby's analysis, "Smelter Fumes, Local Interests, and Political Contestation in Sudbury, Ontario during the 1910s." Moving from Quebec's riverain communities to Ontario's nickel belt, Munton and Temby highlight how the increased industrial production of a nearby urban centre can harm the agricultural development of farmers

who feed the local population. One of the most interesting aspects of this article is how Munton and Temby trace the priority shift in the local economy away from smaller-scale farming to larger-scale mining. They ask questions of power and protection within Sudbury's urban framework, and show how prioritizing one industry over another affects health, livelihood, and economy of the local population.

The final article, "Urban Environments and the Animal Nuisance," by Sean Kheraj, offers a comparative analysis of the different ways Canadian cities regulated animals in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal during the nineteenth century. In the process, he uses the regulations involving animals in cities to show how society and government reflected and shaped the economies and values of rising urban centres. As with the Munton and Temby article, Kheraj queries the modes by which urban animal regulations were put in place, and how these policies affected the local population, as well as signalled a shift in economic focus.

Nuisances are a matter of opinion. They are also a matter of power. As the preceding articles discuss, the power to label something a "nuisance" almost exclusively belongs to the elite, even though those without power—the working class or other marginalized populations—are the most likely to be adversely affected by the contaminants in their water, the smelter smoke ruining a harvest, or the animal waste in the streets. It is through examinations like those that urban nuisances can be seen through the lens of environmental justice.

Urban environmental nuisances affect everyone living in the city, as well as many in neighbouring hinterland communities. As Nancy Jacobs writes in *Environment, Power, and Injustice*, "It is necessary to recognize that environmental and social justice are linked and that power imbalances will determine the ways men and women, rich and poor, and blacks and whites live with each other and the natural world."[1] Jacobs, as well as other scholars of environmental and social justice, remind us that urban nuisances rarely affect all citizens equally, and action is usually taken when only those in power grasp that they themselves are at risk, and they often take up the flag of "activist" because they have the time, access, and privilege to do so.

Risk is another major theme in this special issue, and the urban hazards examined in the preceding articles are perhaps disserved by the term *nuisance*, which does not quite convey the real dangers involved with living and working in contaminated

environments. Water, air, and soil are essential to human life, but when they are contaminated, so too are the lives that depend on them.

But, of course, cities are socially and economically constructed to be dirty spaces, constantly juxtaposed with the "breath of fresh air" that comes with immersing oneself in non-urban environments. In her writings on risk, cultural theorist Mary Douglas emphasizes the importance of historical context in examining how by-products of urban life are labelled a nuisance.[2] Temby addressed this very issue in his introduction, explaining that while nuisances are very real for those suffering from them, they are also socially constructed and can often be a marker of what a particular community or region values or fears at a given point in time. Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky further explain that while the dangers of nuisances like tainted water or contaminated air are real, when and how they are identified and managed is a true reflection of social principals and criticism.[3]

When delving into urban nuisances in Canada, the preceding articles have raised important questions regarding the liveability of cities. The significance of historical and social context in each of the case studies should inspire us to think of the ways Canadian urban life and identity are continuing to change alongside new technologies, industries, and awareness. What are the nuisances of Canada's urban centres today? The articles highlight how local populations define risk and danger in their urban environments, and how policy-makers and industry leaders use these constantly changing definitions to maintain industrial development in an increasingly regulatory society. While the nuisances may change from city to city, decade to decade, Canada has a rich heritage of identifying and balancing risk in urban centres that continues today.

Notes

1 Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 221.

2 See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Abingdon: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966); and Douglas, Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992).

3 Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 7.