Editorial Ecozon@ **Issue 10.1**

Axel Goodbody

Welcome to the Spring 2019 issue of *Ecozon@*. The special focus of this number is 'Toward an Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design.' The term 'ecopoetics' possesses particular importance in the French-speaking world, where it is sometimes used in the broadest of senses, in preference to 'ecocriticism', but it has also had wide currency in North America and Britain for the last twenty years. While it is most frequently used in the analysis and theorising of 'ecological' forms of poetry, it is equally applicable to prose fiction and nonfiction, drama, film and art. As Jonathan Skinner has written in a blog entitled "What is ecopoetics?", for some, ecopoetics is simply thematically defined, as "the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology [...] or poetry that explores the human capacity for becoming animal, as well as humanity's ethically challenged relation to other animals," or even "poetry that confronts disasters and environmental injustices, including the difficulties and opportunities of urban environments". For others, however, ecopoetics is "not a matter of theme, but of how certain poetic methods model ecological processes like complexity, non-linearity, feedback loops, and recycling [...] or how poetic experimentation complements scientific methods in extending a more reciprocal relation to alterity— ecopoetics as a po*ethics*".

In their Introduction to the themed section of this issue, Guest Editors Franca Bellarsi and Judith Rauscher survey the debates surrounding ecopoetics, and discuss the role played by randomness and design in it. The seven articles which they present examine texts ranging from contemporary US and Canadian poetry to fourteenth-century vernacular pilgrimage poems in Italian, English and French, from Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* to the German-language novels of Yoko Tawada, from a set of poems published in English and Spanish as part of a GPS computer programme intended to disrupt US immigration policy on the Mexican border to a Maori novel whose juxtaposed plotlines, narrative voices, and temporalities unfold in fern-like spirals, and finally photographs of alternative, ecologically sustainable interior design and architecture encountered in a fieldwork study. Despite the disparateness of this material, the essays by Harvey Hix, Susan Morrison, Bénédicte Meillon, Tara Beaney, Melissa Zeiger, Jessica Maufort and Clara Breteau (all but the last written in English) are, as Bellarsi and Rauscher explain, united in arguing that neither pure randomness nor pure design exists—either in the material world or in ecopoetics—and that the many forms of enmeshment of the two merit our attention as models of 'ecological' balance between chance and intent, perturbation and pattern, contingency and necessity.

In the first of the two essays in the General Section, 'Kareema's Ecological Self in Salwa Bakr's Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees', the Lebanese academic Marianne

Marroum analyses a short story written in Arabic by the Egyptian critic, novelist and author Salwa Bakr. Marroum shows how Bakr's female protagonist comes to embody the 'ecological self' posited by deep ecology theorists, and tries to promote environmental ethics in her everyday life. Sadly, her concern for the quality of life, her love of nature, her attachment to the city of Cairo and her feelings of oneness with the ecosystem lead to her incarceration in an asylum. Her decline into mental instability symbolises the experience of women marginalized in a conservative patriarchal society.

The second essay, 'Shrieks from the Margins of the Human: Framing the Environmental Crisis in two Contemporary Latin American Movies', written by Leticia Gómez and Azucena Castro, explores the complex intra-action between the human and non-human worlds in the feature films *Beauty* (dir. Daniela Seggiaro, 2012) and *A Decent Woman* (dir. Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2016). Both films highlight the marginalization of the non-human world through the pursuit of progress and development. In *Beauty,* nature is threatened by deforestation of the dry forest landscape called the Gran Chaco; the plot of *A Decent Woman* unfolds dramatically as the barriers are broken down between a nudist community set in a natural jungle-like area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires and the adjacent gated community for wealthy residents.

In the Art and Creative Writing Section, Damiano Benvegnù presents images and writing embodying an ecopoetic of randomness and design. In his introduction, he writes of mushrooming as an aesthetic practice in which strategic planning is blended with irrational wandering. The goal-driven human perspective of gathering food as quickly and efficiently as possible is necessarily left behind as we enter into a natural world characterised by randomness as much as regular configuration: mushrooms evoke "both contemplation and distraction; progress and indeterminacy; bio-technological randomness, but also artistic design". The section opens with digital images of mushrooms and mould by the French artist Ophélie Queffurus exemplifying the porous boundary between art and biology, and continues with two separate collaborations between a poet and an artist from the north of England: Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker in the first instance, and Daniel Eltringham and David Walker Barker in the second, explore the elements of randomness and design in place writing and artistic evocation. These collaborative projects are followed by three poems by Frances Presley on waves and the will o' the wisp as examples of unpredictable natural phenomena interwoven with science and mathematics. The last two contributions are flower poems by Robin Murray in which botanical accuracy is combined with layers of metaphorical and personal meaning, and an excerpt from a long poem entitled 'Tree' by the Australian John Charles Ryan. Here as throughout, as Benvegnù notes, the natural objects represented are part of a world in which humans are part of larger life-projects where we neither have total control nor are simply neutral observers.

The issue concludes with reviews of two important recent volumes which seek to cross disciplinary boundaries, presenting contributions by groups of researchers in (mainly) Germany and France respectively. *Texts, Animals, Environments: Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics* (reviewed by Graham Huggan) explores the interface between ecocriticism and cultural animal studies. *Rethinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries*

offers, according to Bénédicte Meillon, an excellent introduction to the environmental humanities, tracing the greening of work in disciplines ranging from history and literary criticism to anthropology, sociology, psychology and urban planning.

With this issue we welcome a new team of Reviews Editors, Astrid Bracke (Book Reviews Editor) and María Isabel Pérez-Ramos (Assistant Book Reviews Editor), and we thank Hannes Bergthaller for his stirling work in this capacity over the past nine years.

Ecozon@

Vol 10, No 1

Toward an Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design: An Introduction

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In memoriam
Jack Collom
(1931 - 2017)

What ecopoetics is and what it does, how it relates to but also exceeds ecopoetry, and the nature of its relationship to the more general *poiesis* ("making") at work in the material universe remain open and thorny questions. Moreover, what are the insights from the more specialised field of experimental ecopoetry that we may bring to our understanding of ecopoetics in general, whatever the genre and material support on which environmentally-inflected *poiesis* deploys itself?

As this Special Focus section shows, one may begin to answer such questions by taking into account notions of *randomness* and *design*, concepts that operate in experimental texts and the material universe at large, but which have not been sufficiently foregrounded in the ongoing theoretical debate on ecopoetics. Any sustained effort to understand how randomness and design permeate ecopoetics requires a vision of ecopoetics that goes beyond (eco)poetry. Providing some examples of what such a broader vision of ecopoetics might look like is also one of the goals of this Special Focus.

Unfolding in three stages, this introductory essay will first map out the elements and orientations that inform the debates on ecopoetics, while also touching upon the adjacent territories of geopoetics, zoopoetics, *écopoétique* and *Ökopoetik*. A second part will meditate on the elusive concepts of randomness and design, and on how ecopoetics might be considered a form of adaptive mapping of their ever-fluid entanglement. The third part, finally, presents the contributions to this Special Focus section and surveys the different facets of the co-constitutive operations of randomness and design explored in each.

Mapping the Terrains of Ecopoetics

The term "ecopoetics" is commonly used in relation to environmentally orientated poetry and specifically in relation to experimental or innovative poetry that

foregrounds (defamiliarised and defamiliarising) language as a means to encounter and engage with the more-than-human world (e.g. see Killingsworth [2004], Knickerbocker [2012], Keller [2017], Stout [2016], Nolan [2017]). Brought to the attention of poetry criticism by German scholar Lothar Hönnighausen in a 1995 essay on the nature poets Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry,[1] and by Jonathan Bate in his influential study *The Song of the Earth* (2000),[2] the term *ecopoetics* is today more frequently associated with Jonathan Skinner's eponymous journal of avant-gardist writing and criticism. Published between 2001 and 2009, *ecopoetics* explored "creative-critical edges between writing, with an emphasis on poetry, and ecology, the theory and praxis of living on earth" (Skinner, "Ecopoetics" 329). Indeed, in the "Editor's Statement" of the first issue, Skinner expressed the hope that the journal would function as "an edge (as in edge of the meadow, or shore, rather than leading edge) where different disciplines can meet and complicate one another" (6), and thus help to "subvert endless debates about 'language' vs. lyric, margin vs. mainstream, performed vs. written, innovative vs. academic, or, [...] digitized vs. printed approaches to poetry" (6). Sixteen years later, Skinner would propose that we think of ecopoetics as

> arranged like "compass points," from sounding at true north through conceptual, documentary, and situationist practices, to boundary work (a focus on systems) at the south and "mestizo" poetics of relation in the southwest, through the important "big picture" work of theory and essay writing due west, to disrupted "third landscapes" in the northwest passage of our collective future. ("Ecopoetics" 330)

Mapping the terrain of ecopoetics in this manner points to the many modes, styles, and forms ecopoetics can take. Conceived of as an *investigative practice*, ecopoetics thus approaches the environment as a "site for poetic attention and exchange, where many different types of making [...] come to inform and be informed" (Skinner, "Statement" 128). It becomes clear that "ecopoetics may be more productively approached as a discursive site, to which many different kinds of poetry can contribute, [rather] than as the precinct of a particular kind of 'eco' poetry" (Skinner, "Ecopoetics" 329).

While Skinner emphasises the centrality of poetry for the project of ecopoetics, he also suggests that ecopoetics exceeds both poetry and writing. As he comments in an interview with Angela Hume:

> However, one important aspect of ecopoetics entails what happens off the page, in terms of where the work is sited and performed, as well as what methods of composition, or decomposition, precede and follow the poem—the modes of research, documentation, or collaboration that the work takes up and generates. (Hume et al. 760)

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[1] In his article, Hönnighausen defines ecopoetics as "the special poetics emerging from ecological concerns, reflections relating questions of poetic form to the more comprehensive socio-political and moral philosophy inspiring them" (281).

[2] In *The Song of the Earth*, Bate famously noted: "Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place—the prefix eco- is derived from the Greek *oikos*, 'the home or place of dwelling.' According to this definition, poetry will not necessarily be synonymous with verse: the poeming of the dwelling is not inherently dependent on metrical form. However, the rhythmic, syntactic and linguistic intensifications that are characteristic of verse-writing frequently give a particular force to the *poiesis*: it could be that *poiesis* in the sense of verse-making is language's most direct path of return to the *oikos,* the place of dwelling, because meter itself—a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat—is an answering to nature's own rhythms, an echoing of the song of the earth itself" (75-76).

Recent publications in the field of ecopoetics are a testament to the fact that scholarship has increasingly begun to consider the question of ecopoetics in works other than poetry. Whether they discuss gardening/landscaping (Skinner, "Gardens"), an art installation (Rigby), a community performance project (Kuppers), or fables, essays, and novels in a variety of genres (Middelhoff et al.), all these publications on ecopoetics explore manifestations of *ecopoiesis*, that is, manifestations of a "house-making […] converging on the *oikos*, the planet Earth that is the only known home for life as we know it" (Skinner, "Ecopoetics" 329). As Petra Kuppers writes in her essay on the "Salamander Project," a collaborative piece in which artists with disability creatively documented their experiences of swimming in public pools on camera as well as in writing:

> I conceive of ecopoetics work as going beyond the page, of blowing up from the two-dimensional capture of data on white paper, toward engaging audiences in an embodied poetics. If the point is to change the world, do we not need to place our ecopoetic adventures in public view? If interdependency and collaboration are at stake, do we not need to invite others, not yet part of our project, to witness and to shift standpoints incrementally? What is activism for aesthetic politics, and how can it find audiences? (Kuppers 124)

Ecopoetics, as we define it in this Special Focus section, then, does not designate a certain type of text or poetic object. It is not merely ecopoetry. Rather, without necessarily turning its back on literature and writing, it goes "beyond the page" and refers to a broad array of artistic, activist, and performative practices (including but also going beyond poetry) that examine the non-human world, human-world relations, and the conditions, possibilities, and limits of the knowledges, ethics, and politics such examinations may produce.

Adjacent to the discursive investigative site of ecopoetics lie two other poetic terrains invested in explorations of the more-than-human world, albeit with a different emphasis: geopoetics and zoopoetics. Associated primarily with Kenneth White, a Scottish poet who has been living in France since the 1970s, geopoetics combines geography, cosmology, and philosophy (White 173), and refers to "a field of presence and activity which has poïetic characteristics," whereby *poiesis* is understood in Heideggerian and Nietzschean tradition as a "poem-act that tries to appropriate the world" (White 172). According to White, this poem-act "has little in common with what is habitually known as 'poetry'" (White 172), even though he himself looks to special poetry—Whitman, Perse, Eliot, Olson, Rilke, Michaux—to flesh out his theories. It is thus only appropriate when French geocritic Bertrand Westphal claims that "[g]eopoetics focuses on the intertwining of the biosphere, poetry, and poetics," while taking an "ecological" as well as "global" perspective (xi). Indeed, American poet and scholar Eric Magrane describes geopoetics in similar ways in his article "Situating Geopoetics" (2015), where he calls for "geopoetic texts and practices that draw on the work of poets as well as geographers, [and thus] for an enchanted, earthy, and transaesthetic approach that moves to bring together contemporary poetics, particularly in the realm of ecopoetics, with critical human geography" (Magrane 2).

While geopoetics foregrounds human evocations of the inanimate non-human world in the form of different kinds of "creative geography" (Magrane 4), zoopoetics, as

conceptualised by Aaron Moe, shifts the focus of investigation toward the ways in which "nonhuman animals shape the form of human writing" ("Toward Zoopoetics" 2). Suggesting that "nonhuman animals (*zoion*) are makers (*poiesis*), and [...] have agency in that making" (2), Moe asserts that, "when a poet undergoes the making process of *poiesis* in harmony with the gestures and vocalisations of nonhuman animals, a multispecies event occurs" (2). As Frederike Middelhoff and Sebastian Schönbeck point out in their introduction to *Texts, Animals, Environments: Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics* (2019), zoopoetics and ecopoetics are mutually co-constitutive, since "animals—be it those in or outside literature—cannot be fully grasped without their environments, whereas, in turn, environments cannot be conceived without the animals living in and affecting them" (14). When Middelhoff and Schönbeck propose an "eco-zoopoetics" (17), they do so in order to promote "the study of the relationships between and the *agencies* of literature, animals, and environments" (17; emphasis added), highlighting one of the issues—the issue of human as well as non-human agency—that is also a key concern in several contributions to this Special Focus section.

While contemporary scholarship on ecopoetics sometimes invokes indigenous and postcolonial conceptualisations of *poiesis*, Anglo-American debates are often the main point of reference, even when scholars work comparatively or on non-Anglophone literatures about the more-than-human world. Yet, if one looks beyond the Anglophone world and beyond English as the primary language of ecopoetics in practice (and criticism), the discursive terrains of *écopoétique* and *Ökopoetik* invite closer inspection.[3]

At times, *écocritique* appears nearly interchangeable with the term *écopoétique*, whilst at others critics endow it with much more precise connotations. In part, this is due to one essential difference between the English-speaking and French-speaking ecocritical communities: in Anglophone ecocriticism, the focus on eco-aesthetics constitutes one approach to the natureculture continuum amongst many others and is, consequently, rarely considered separately from issues pertaining to identity politics or scientific ecological paradigms (Blanc et al., 18-22; Bouvet and Posthumus 386-87). By contrast, French-language ecocriticism has been wary of a U.S.-style ecocriticism heavily marked by the ideological critique of cultural studies and, like the latter, leaning towards a radically revisionist canon. What French-language scholars particularly reject is a canon that becomes so exclusive as to sever eco-literature from the *belles lettres,* aestheticism, and ideals of universalism, which all three remain highly valued in the French intellectual tradition (Schoentjes 22-23; also see Bouvet and Posthumus 386).

For Francophone ecocriticism, aesthetics (i.e. artifice not driven by mimesis [Pughe 71-72]) and *poiesis* as text-making are seen as productive practices that are able to retrain environmental perception (Blanc et al. 17, 22) and constitute an "unsuspected resource of ecological thought" (see Sylvain and Vadean n. p.; our translation). Therefore, important intersections do exist between Skinner's experimental ecopoetics

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[3] This section focuses on debates surrounding ecopoetics in the Anglo-American, German, and French tradition. This is not to say, however, that there is no debate in the Spanish-speaking world. Gisela Heffes, for instance, uses "ecopoéticas" (14) in her article "Para una ecocrítica latinoamericana" (2014) as a translation of *ecopoetics*. However, Heffes's essay does not expand on the issue of ecopoetics, focusing instead on the broader question of whether and how North American ecocritical approaches can be translated into and made productive for Latin American contexts.

and *écopoétique*, with the former more open to the ideological dimensions of *poiesis* and the latter more prone to primarily emphasise "*aisthesis*, i.e. the ability (or inability) of a literary text to offer us a new way of gazing upon our relation to the natural world" (Pughe 79). In part, these intersections are also due to the grounding of *écopoétique* in literary geography and landscape studies (Bouvet and Posthumus 385), Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism, and Kenneth White's geopoetics.[4] All of these influences feed into *écopoétique* and its exploration of how formal/aesthetic qualities displace biocentrism.[5]

French ecocriticism may still be in the process of trying to delineate its specificities as against the Anglo-American schools (Bouvet and Posthumus, 386-89; Finch-Race and Weber, "Éditorial" 1-3). However, overall, Francophone approaches privilege an *écopoétique* understood as a probing into the *productivity* of the acts of writing and reading (Pughe 68-69; Blanc et al. 25-27; Schoentjes 23). It is through an investigation of the "nature of writing" that one explores the "nature of nature" (Pughe 69; our translation). Instead of ideology and ecological science, "c'est précisément l'écriture qui permet la modélisation de l'action humaine avec l'environnement" (Pughe 73). This *modélisation* (which variously translates as "modelling," "design," or "mapping") of the inter- and intra-actions between humans and their environment supposes less a mimetic attunement of writing to nature than a re-invention, re-fashioning, and re-enchantment through defamiliarisation (Pughe 79), a genuine *travail.* This recurrent term (particularly see Blanc et al. 21-23) is a rich French homonym which can equally refer to work and toil, to intellectual, spiritual, or physical labour (including child-bearing labour), or to the energy expended or transferred by forces in the domain of physics. In other words, *un travail,* including the kind performed by *écopoétique*, supposes friction and effort, be they material or immaterial.

Compared to the terrains of ecopoetics and *écopoétique*, the discursive site of *Ökopoetik* remains a relatively new, yet all the more dynamic field of research.[6]

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[4] Geocriticism has been particularly influential for *écopoétique* in terms of Westphal's methodology, which is based on the "four key concepts [of] multifocalisation, polysensoriality, stratigraphy and intertextuality" (Bouvet and Posthumus 395). Geopoetics, by contrast, has been an influential model because it "includes critical analysis of maps, landscapes, land art, etc." and embraces subjectivity, encouraging "the personal, individual approach of the literary critic who willingly follows the text where it leads him or her, into biology, geography, geology, philosophy, even to other cultures, regions, places, if need be" (Bouvet and Posthumus 396).

[5] This is strikingly exemplified in Pierre Schoentjes's locus-orientated collection of essays, *Ce qui a lieu. Essai d'écopoétique* (2015), but also in various recently published special issues: Daniel Finch-Race and Julien Weber's *French Ecocriticism/L'Écocritique française* (2017); Bénédicte Meillon and Margot Lauwers's *Lieux d'enchantement: approches écocritiques et écopoét(h)iques des liens entre humains et non-humains* (2018), which exemplifies *poiesis* at work in and beyond literature, especially in the *écopoétique* of plant-like designs and of urban environments; and Daniel Finch-Race's *Poetics of Place* (2019), with its inclusion of 19th-century poetics and a dialogue with Italophone poetics.

[6] Following Axel Goodbody, Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer relate the belated arrival of ecocriticism in Germany to the absence, in the German tradition, of a prominent tradition of nature writing as well as to a reluctance, among German academics, to espouse an avowedly political, in their minds "ideological" approach to studying literature (15-16). Hubert Zapf remarks that the integration of ecocritical approaches into the theoretical toolbox of literary scholars in Germany was delayed by the overall importance of "philological and cultural-constructivist approaches" in German literary studies (269), and by "a deeply engrained skepticism about any essentialist notions of nature" (269) in reaction to the eco-

Scholarship frequently points to a long tradition of ecopoetic debate in the German-speaking world grounded in *Naturphilosophie* (see Goodbody, *Nature;* see also Zapf 272) and *Naturästhetik* (see Zemanek). Revitalised by ecocritics interested in German literature and thought, this debate has generated a number of recent publications discussing *Naturpoetik* (see Franke and Mika) and *Umweltpoetik* (Borgards et al.) as well as the poetics of *Natur-* and *Ökolyrik* (see Goodbody, "German Ecopoetry"; Zemanek and Rauscher).[7] However, it has so far not led to a more systematic investigation of a broader range of ecopoetic practices beyond poetry, nor to a sustained use of one select term, be it that of *Ökopoetik* or any other*.* Nonetheless, as the editors of *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture* (2017) suggest in their introduction, the insights of ecocritical scholarship focusing on German-speaking cultures may be of particular value for contemporary ecocritical debates, including debates surrounding ecopoetics (Dürbeck et al. xiv). After all, as Hubert Zapf notes, not only were German philosophy and German (Romantic) literature instrumental for Anglo-American ecocriticism and environmentalism in the past, but German (ecological) thought also remains highly relevant in the field due to an ongoing interest among ecocritics in phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger), critical theory (Adorno, Benjamin), aesthetics (Böhme), and, more recently, in how risk theory (Beck) and social systems theory (Finke) can be used to rethink (cultural) ecologies (Zapf 277-81).

Ecopoetics, whether creative or critical, has always considered language as well as politics. Especially the kind of ecopoetics writing associated with Language Poetry can be seen not merely as an avant-gardist practice addressing environmental issues, but as one invested too in language as a form of (Marxist) ideology critique.[8] Although "intersectional scholarship on ecopoetics is still just beginning to emerge" (Hume and Osborne 3), recent publications have broadened the scope of what such ideological critique might mean and do by foregrounding, amongst others, questions of race,[9]

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nativist/econationalist discourses of the Nazi era. If this is true for ecocriticism at large, it is certainly also, if not more true for scholarship concerned with ecopoetics, a field of inquiry in which matters of language (and the ideologies in which language is entangled) are key, preventing easy translation of concepts.

[7] In his article "German Ecopoetry," Axel Goodbody uses the term ecopoetry "in the wider sense encountered in English" (264) in order to discuss a historical development in German verse from "nature poetry" to "environmental poetry" and finally "[p]oetry of the Anthropocene" (266). In a move also common in Anglo-American ecocriticism, he defines nature poetry as poetry that "conjures up images of timeless nature and the integration of humans in a harmonious whole" (266), while describing "environmental poetry" as a poetry that "locate[s] humanity outside the sphere of the natural, castigating the damage wrought in the course of technological development, economic growth, and the emergence of the consumer society in the decades after the Second World War" (266). "Poetry in the Anthropocene," he determines, is different from its predecessors because it "recognises on the one hand that nature is constantly changing, has history and is subject to human influence on a global scale," but also on the other hand "undermines the traditional dualistic understanding of nature and culture" (266).

[8] Angela Hume's 2012 interview with four practitioners of ecopoetics—Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, Evelyn Reilly, and Jonathan Skinner—implies a historical focus of ecopoetics on Marxist critique, when she broaches the politics of ecopoetics by addressing and discussing with the four poets the direct link between ecological crisis and capitalism, before moving on to other political questions (see Hume et al.).

[9] Critiquing scholarship on ecopoetics for its lack of inclusivity and blindness to the contributions of poets of colour to the field of ecopoetics, Evie Shockley's chapter "Black and Green: On the Nature of Ed Roberson's Poetics," from her study *Renegade Poetics* (2011), argues that the African-American poet Ed Roberson "uses his distinctive poetics, including an unpredictably disrupted and disruptive hypotactic

gender,[10] disability,[11] indigeneity,[12] and sexuality/queerness.[13] Many of these recent ecopoetic publications, like other ones in the field, draw insights from New Materialism and the kind of ecofeminist philosophy that saw a resurgence with the materialist turn. Consequently, they reflect not only on matters of language and politics, but also on the language and politics of matter. Reading the poetry of the U.S.-American poets A. R. Ammons, Lyn Hejinian, Susan Howe, and Kenneth Goldsmith, ecocritic Sarah Nolan, for example, proposes an "unnatural ecopoetics" that "focuses on how material elements, ranging from a tree to a taxi cab, intertwine with nonmaterial subjective experiences and express agency through the foregrounded textual space" (13). Comparing the work of U.S.-American poet Juliana Spahr and Turkish novelist Latife Tekin, Meliz Ergin, on her part, investigates an "ecopoetics of entanglement" that "opens (post)human subjectivity to affective connections with nonhuman otherness without compromising the possibility of political agency and accountability" (2). Relatedly, Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola propose a "queer ecopoetics" that "pursues human and nonhuman associations beyond the conventions of heteronormative family bonds and anthropocentric ecological ones" (139). By examining conditions of "ecological proximity and precarity" (146), Hume and Rahimtoola assert, queer ecopoetics "exposes 'the other' to be a fiction that forecloses possibilities for community, yet also insists on the complexity and reality of our differences" (146) and "imagines new possibilities for attachment, kinship, and care" (146). While the approaches and methodologies of these scholars differ, they all think about the ways in which ecopoetics works to blur alleged binary oppositions—whether of the material and non-material, natural and unnatural, or human and non-human—and helps to imagine alternative relations, ethics, and politics. Likewise, the issues broached by these scholars include, but are by no means limited to matters of embodiment and agency, questions of sustainability and environmental justice, as well as reflections on the politics of form.

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phrasing, to illustrate not merely the interrelation, but the identity, of the natural and the political realms" (149).

[10] Laura Severin's "A Scottish Ecopoetics: Feminism and Environmentalism in the Works of Kathleen Jamie and Valerie Gillies" (2011), like much of ecofeminist scholarship, suggests that ecofeminist art must break down boundaries in order to change human perceptions of nature and imagine alternative ways of living in the world.

[11] In "Enough Defined: Disability, Ecopoetics, and Larry Eigner," George Hart argues that Larry Eigner "fuses disability poetics with ecopoetics" in a poetry that undertakes a "continual search for what is enough" and thus seeks to establish "balance between two forms of embodiment, disability and ecopoetics" (156).

[12] Hsinya Huang's article "Toward Transpacific Ecopoetics: Three Indigenous Texts," for example, argues for a "transpacific and transindigenous ecopoetics that promises to preserve an ocean and offer a vision of transnational belonging, ecological confederation, and indigenous solidarity" (121), and brings to the fore "an alternative model of reckoning space, place, and time that requires active, participatory engagement with the Pacific seascapes while simultaneously necessitating a planetary consciousness" (121).

[13] See, for instance, the special cluster of *ISLE* on "Queering Ecopoetics" (Spring 2018), edited by Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola, which features "recent queer ecopoetics scholarship to chart how scholars are beginning to grasp poetry's relationship to queer theories and ecologies," and in doing so "extend Anzaldua's work of queering ecopoetics by tackling questions of queer kinship and environmental relation, critiquing heterocentric aspects of mainstream environmentalism, and decolonizing eroticism from the prohibitions of Western modernity" (135).

Mapping the Terrains of an Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design

An Entangled Reconfiguring of Authorship

As this exploratory survey makes clear, a number of the concerns found on the ecopoetic map implicitly touch on the concepts of "randomness" and "design," but these two notions tend to remain embedded more than explicitly foregrounded in scholarly expositions of ecopoetics, even fairly recent and groundbreaking ones like Hume and Osborne's. One does not (yet) encounter the kind of open acknowledgement of the part played by "chance" and "indeterminacy" in ecopoetics that one finds, for instance, in journal articles published in the field of architecture and the visual arts,[14] or in some of the seminal monographs published in material ecocriticism (outside the field of ecopoetics proper),[15] or still in creative writing journals like *ecopoetics*, *Jacket2*, or *How2*, to name but these. In the case of such experimental writing magazines, whose style is not confined by the constraints of "pure" academic theorisation, reflection on ecopoetics becomes inseparably entangled with (eco)poetic fashioning and *poietic* processes, registering the elements of randomness as well as design at work in both.

Whether invoked by actual name in more discursive types of analysis and reflection, or enacted on the page at the level of actual compositional procedure, "randomness" and "design," and related notions like "chance" and "accident" versus "intention" and "arbitrariness," explicitly come to the fore in these experimental poetry journals. Indeed, many of the pieces contained in them are characterised by recombinant and aleatory practices involving the recycling of found art, pollination leading to genre bending, or contamination of the text by non-human agencies and deep immersion in them in an attempt to better soak them in. A telling example of the way in which non-linear practices register the forces of randomness and design is offered in a poem by Bernadette Mayer (born 1945) published in *Jacket2* in March 2016. Mayer's piece reflects on the possibilities and limits of (poetic) design by blending the linearity of axiomatic statement and syntactical constraint with mock theoretical discourse and the proliferation of playful free association:

> design what design does design how design many design you design get design tired [...][...][...] words over with over poems over made over be rectangular mean rectangular not rectangular something rectangular covering spaces the spaces things spaces some spaces of spaces [...]("Design What Design Does" n. p.)

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[14] See, for example, representative articles like Michael Eckerley's "Randomness, Rules and Compositional Structure in Design" (1990) and Lily Díaz's "By Chance, Randomness and Indeterminacy Methods in Art and Design" (2011).

[15] For instance, in a seminal study like Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007), as can be expected from an argument leaning on subatomic physics, there are 51 occurrences of the term "design" and 75 of the term "indeterminacy." In the equally foundational *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) edited by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, next to "random" and "design," a number of affiliated terms such as, for example, "assemblage," "causality,", "autopoiesis," "emergence," and "proliferation" punctuate the collection of essays, as immediately revealed by a scan of the Index.

In their attempt to map the relation between words and the space of both composition and imaginative emergence, texts like Mayer's not only do justice to Skinner's seminal definition of ecopoetics as a site of tension and investigation ("Editor's Statement" 6). They also probe into questions of "randomness" and "design" by enmeshing them in a way reminiscent of an (eco)poet like John Cage, who modelled human creation on the non-linear way in which nature operates by generating "a cacophony [...] of linguistic excess" (Jaeger, "The Imitation" 112), a cacophony which

> departs from the tradition of nature writing from the outset, because instead of referencing an object in the natural world or a topological scene
>
> it self-consciously foregrounds language itself as a natural phenomenon.
> (Jaeger, "The Imitation" 112)

Cage's seemingly paradoxical combination of formal causal constraint, on the one hand, and of intentional yielding to the *poietic* energies of an impermanent more-than-human universe "in a continual state of flux" (Jaeger, "Introduction" 4),[16] on the other, brings to mind a variety of contemporary instances of ecopoetic fashioning in which authorial control is diminished, whilst not veering into the completely unstructured or chaotic. This reduction of authorial control in favour of the *poietic* forces of more-than-human agentic materials can be of two orders: consciously willed, or instead endured by and imposed upon the fashioner by the raw materials themselves, sometimes even violently so. An approach like the "metabolic poetics" of Canadian poet Adam Dickinson (born 1974) more than aptly illustrates the incorporation of creative trajectories beyond human determination into a poetic work, with "chemical and microbial testing" on the poet's actual body leading to poems whose "narrative sequence" unfolds like "hormones [...] dependent on *cascading, sequential processes*" (Dickinson n. p.; added emphasis).

How more-than-human agencies (re-)write human anatomy and transform human creative fashioning materialises very differently in the case of San Francisco Bay Area, Beat-associated painter Jay DeFeo (1929-1989). Her monumental sculpture-in-paint *The Rose*, over which she laboured from 1958 to 1966,[17] kept shifting in unanticipated ways, forcing her to constantly reshape it (Miller 24, 29-31, 38). In fact, the accreted layers of paint were not only resculpting themselves, but the act of reshaping also ended up refashioning the body of the artist by causing cancer in part induced by the toxic lead in the paint used to coat the canvas over and over (artist Bruce Conner qtd. in "A Place for A Rose" n. p.).

As different as the scenarios of Dickinson's and DeFeo's "metabolic" reconfiguration of authorship are, an important element unites their art and bodies as sites of ecopoetic experimentation that explore the tensions of human and non-human forms of proliferation, as Skinner proposes it. In creations like theirs, "design" certainly alternates and finds itself at odds with "randomness." But this is not all: each in their

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[16] Cage, for instance, introduced "chance operations" based on the tossing of coins "in the traditional manner prescribed by the *I Ching*" so as "to determine the number and duration of sounds in musical composition" (Jaeger, "Introduction" 4).

[17] More than another two decades have to be added if one considers the artist's struggles to exhibit and conserve this very unstable sculpture.

respective way, Dickinson and DeFeo reveal the fluctuating demarcation between the "willingly caused" and "accidentally indeterminate." Dickinson cannot control what hormones do any more than DeFeo can govern the mutations of successive layers of paint. Hence "their" artistic design morphs into partial randomness, at least temporarily until this impure randomness reconfigures itself again into partial, human-generated design, once Dickinson and DeFeo embrace the generative sequencing of an agentic material over which they have no ascendancy. What experimental *poietic*/poetic practice across various media and supports repeatedly suggests, then, is that randomness and design are always *co-constitutive*. By analogy with the ecological reality of the ecotone,[18] one may even go as far as to say that the grey area of highly productive entanglement between these two notions forms a conceptual ecotone zone, which may be precisely why these two principles readily lend themselves to the sites of material-creative tension that ecopoetic practice investigates.

Ecopoetics as a Site of Adaptive Mapping

What the examples of both Dickinson and DeFeo also illustrate is that ecopoetic practice exceeds poetry, and that like most art originally, it forms an attempt to map the shifting area where randomness and design spill into another, whether this intermingling be voluntary or suffered. Precisely because ecopoetics is not equivalent to poetry and vice versa, artistic fashioning emerges as a practice of adaptation to the environment, a reading that also proves relevant, in fact, to the seven contributions gathered in this Special Focus section. Without necessarily subscribing to all the tenets of evolutionary psychology, certain of its axioms cannot be ignored, particularly the ones that raise the possibility that *poietic* fashioning and human *poiesis* more broadly may themselves respond to the *poietic* potential of the environment and the more-than-human material world. As Joseph Carroll reminds us, "the most distinctive feature of the specifically human mind—the feature that distinguishes it most from that of its primate cousins—is the emergence of a flexible general intelligence that enables humans to adapt to variations within an environment that is itself complex and unstable" (192). As a result of this flexibility,

> humans have a special need to *fabricate mental maps of models* that make sense of the world and provide behavioral directives that can take the place of instinctive behavioral patterns. For these mental maps or models to be effective in providing behavioral directives, they must be emotionally saturated, imaginatively vivid. Art and cultural artifacts like religion and ideology meet this demand. They fulfill a necessary adaptive function, that of regulating the human cognitive behavioral system. The arts provide emotionally saturated images and aesthetic constructs that produce a sense of total cognitive order and that help regulate the other behavioral systems. [...] Humans have a

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[18] The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines an ecotone as "a transitional area of vegetation between two different plant communities, such as forest and grassland. It has some of the characteristics of each bordering biological community and often contains species not found in the overlapping communities. [...] The influence of the two bordering communities on each other is known as the edge effect" ("Ecotone" n. p.). In his own conceptual transposition of the term to the field of ecopoetics, the poet Christopher Arigo reminds us that the word ecotone "is derived from the Greek from the word *tonos* meaning tension. So literally an ecotone is a place where ecologies are in tension" (n. p.).

> universal and irrepressible need to fabricate this sort of order, and satisfying that need provides a distinct form of pleasure and fulfillment. (Carroll 194; added emphasis)

Read as an activity of adaptive mapping, art-making can thus be seen as a process that helps the human mind negotiate the highly fluctuating nature of the so-called "real." Such a view of *poiesis*/making appears not only readily compatible with, but also begins to clarify what ecopoetics may accomplish as an investigative practice that acknowledges the grey zone between order and chaos, between authorial control vindicated and authorial control relinquished.

Despite global warming and its increasingly dramatic consequences, it is safe to assume that prehistoric people had a very different sense of impermanence and contingency, especially from those of us living relatively safely and luxuriously in the global North. Faced with a highly dangerous and unpredictable environment, their drawing on walls, fashioning of amulets, or fabrication of tools that combined the artful and the useful were linked to survival at the most elementary level. However, if the sources of what humans perceive as chaos or order in their immediate environment have changed and are, indeed, continuing to change (maybe today more drastically so than at most other times in human history), there endures a need for mapping the islands of relative stability amidst the flows of perturbation in which human selves are inextricably submerged. At the more disenchanting end of the spectrum of sublimity, climate change—together with the catastrophic weather phenomena, water and food shortages, and the enforced migrations it causes—makes it clear to us that the building blocks of "reality" do not offer the immutable surroundings that we once deluded ourselves we possessed and controlled. At the less disenchanting end of the spectrum of sublimity, we might relish engaging with the patterns unveiled by empirical observation and testing in the hard sciences, whose picture of probability, order, and disorder does actually not prove at odds with the worldview developed by some ancient, non-theistic, non-teleological forms of mysticism (see Capra, *Tao*), or, for that matter, with some of the alternative worldviews of indigenous and otherwise marginalised peoples.

It is, of course, not possible to review in this introduction all the varieties of disorder and (self-)organisation as they apply to living systems and as they have been theorised by different branches of contemporary science—from physics to biology. Nor would it be feasible to give a detailed account of how different tributaries to epistemological thinking—from philosophy to ecospirituality—have, over time, developed the notions of chaos and order in their combined "study of substance (or structure) and [...] study of form (or pattern)" (Capra, *The Web* 81). However, ever so briefly dwelling on but two exemplary and complementary visions of the universe—one from non-linear, non-dualist physics, the other from non-linear, non-dualist philosophy—will alert us to the fact that blindness to randomness, design, and the grey zone of impurity that the constantly ongoing entanglement of the two creates, would amount, in actuality, to remaining blind to the very fluctuating nature of ourselves, our environment, and even ourselves *in* our environment.

Indeed, what subatomic/quantum physics, for instance, highlights is that pattern and indeterminacy are central to the processual dynamics of the living, alternating as it does between temporary equilibrium and instability, chance and necessity (Prigogine and Stengers 200-201, 239-64; Capra, *Tao* 88-93, 229-47, 249-72; Capra, *The Web* 121-50, 172-88). When sub-atomic particles are made to collide with one another to create new ones, randomness (irreversible trajectories of becoming dictated by chance and unpredictability) and design (irreversible trajectories determined by laws leading to certain patterns) are at the centre of the relational activity and transformation underpinning the self-organisation of matter and energy. Moreover, next to an absence of reversibility, whereby design breaks away from the predictability of patterns that prevails in mechanistic dualism (Prigogine and Stengers 79-80, 82), quantum physics also points to a need to understand design more in terms of *impermanence* and *probable becoming* than as stable, enduring structure. As Capra notes: "At the subatomic level, matter does not exist with certainty at definite places, but rather shows 'tendencies to exist,' and atomic events do not occur with certainty at definite times and in definite ways, but rather show 'tendencies to occur'" (*Tao* 77-78).

When it comes to accounting for the co-existence of change and stability in the universe, the view from the quantum physics laboratory also reminds us that "balance" and "equilibrium"—ideals often longed for in naive forms of holism from which ecocritical discourse is not always immune—are not compatible with the energies of the living. These energies can only be described through ever more complex, non-linear mathematical equations (Capra, *The Web* 177), since living organisms depend on always evolving design open to exchange, and since "an organism in equilibrium is a dead organism" (176). Precisely because "a living organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism, involving thousands of chemical reactions" (175), the universe has to be seen not through the filter of structure only. Rather it has to be seen through the lens of what Ilya Prigogine calls "dissipative structures," that is, open systems that include "points of instability at which new structures and forms of order can emerge" (175). Such a vision of open systems brings into focus "the coexistence of structure and change, of 'stillness and motion'" (175). Further reinforcing the paradoxical nature of form and formlessness in what appears to be an oxymoronic universe, there is the fact that at the so-called "bifurcation point" where new kinds of order can arise (187), it is impossible to predict how a given system will behave. Ultimately, then, indeterminacy accompanies the potentially spontaneous emergence of "new structures of higher *order* and complexity" (187; original emphasis).

Natural *poiesis* involving the co-existence of structure and change, of flourishing emergence and indeterminacy does not only occur at the level of physics, but also at the mental level and in processes of cognition. Indeed, as embodied minds entangled in a perceiver/perceived dynamic, human organisms undergo continual flow and transformation too. Amongst the forms of non-dualist epistemology, the one found in Buddhist philosophy may, across its various schools, not be

> freighted with the heavy scholarly discourse of the new materialisms, though it offers similar conceptual tools. [...] The new materialist concept of the "entanglement" of living and non-living matters, or of bodily natures, may find its precedent and complement in

> Buddhism's concept of dependent origination, the understanding that no one thing exists apart from another. (Gaard 291-92).

Allying pattern with contingency and unpredictability, this "codependent arising" (Varela et al. 110) supposes that "cognition is not a representation of an independent, pregiven world, but rather a bringing forth of a world [...] that is always dependent on the organism's structure" (Capra, *The Web* 263).

Next to dependent origination, Buddhist theories of cognition rely on yet another fundamental concept, namely "vacuity" or "emptiness." Correctly understood—i.e. not nihilistically misread as "nothingness"—Buddhist "emptiness" corresponds to a level of non-dualistic experience which does not so much suggest the absence of phenomena as a dynamic fullness of impermanent but interrelated elements devoid "of a stable pre-ordained substance inherent in them, personal self included" (Bellarsi 71). According to this epistemological reading grid, "instead of being clearly separated from the phenomenal world, the self is moment by moment determined by the objects to which it relates; and vice versa, as there is no perceived without a perceiver, the relationship between them also fluctuating moment by moment" (Bellarsi 70). "[N]ot 'fixed' and [not] predetermined at the outset[,] but faced by a myriad of open possibilities which shape its becoming as it engages with [an] outside world" (Bellarsi 81) that is equally unstable, this "'substanceless' subject" constitutes a template of embodied reality that presupposes considerable randomness and perturbation interfering with the fixity of design (as is well known by meditators attentive to their own patterns of registration during meditation). However, the Buddhist model of cognition also proposes a "causal analysis of direct experience" (Varela et al. 111) in which impermanence alternates with patterned perceptual emergence. According to the so-called *Abidharma* decoding of cognition, dependent origination can be broken down into constitutive streams of elements and moments which in turn make up the psycho-physical complex (Varela et al. 110-23). These streams result from the entanglement between different types of contact occurring between different types of objects and different types of consciousnesses (Varela et al. 110-23, 256-58). In the Buddhist epistemological scheme, dependent origination thus comes together with a naturally wild *poiesis* of the mind— one which, by analogy with the vocabulary of quantum physics, teems with moments of "bifurcation." Yet at the same time, codependent arising also admits of change-within-structure, predictability-within-unpredictability. In other words, an ecopoetics of the mind seen in terms of randomness and design is already implicitly contained in the ancient epistemology and psychology proposed by Buddhism.

If our conceptualising is to integrate the destabilising terrain of the "real" as charted, for instance, by quantum physics or Buddhist impermanence, our endeavour to understand our ecological condition and our embeddedness in the material universe supposes the processing of a disorientating world in which randomness amounts to a partial form of order, and order to a partial form of randomness. Accepting this world of dissipative structures and beginning to decode our daily experiencing in such non-dualistic terms both mean an effort of constant adaptation and remodelling. Since "[t]o

understand a pattern, we must map a configuration of relationships" (Capra, *The Web* 81), ecopoetics—as a sort of incomplete and temporary cartography-making characterised by aesthetics that accept *impure, mutually hybridising* notions of chaos and order, and the tensions between them—may indeed be construed as a tool of adaptive mapping to a reality in which, to quote the Buddha, "form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form" (Conze, *Heart Sutra* 86).

Mapping the Terrains of the Special Focus Section

Imposing an order when dealing with the very issues of randomness and design is a highly paradoxical task, yet one that remains useful for pointing to the common themes of the contributions. Sharing an agentive conception of the material, albeit to varying extents, the seven contributors to this Special Focus Section see ecopoetics as a practice unveiling a threefold fallacy: 1) the supposed existence of "pure" randomness; 2) the supposed existence of "pure" design; and 3) the assumption of an opposition between randomness and design in terms of an allegedly absolute divide between the two. All the essays see these three suppositions as illusions that require a remapping of "reality"; and in their own way each, the seven authors understand ecopoetic fashioning as a tool whereby to initiate such a reconfiguration.

In view of the entanglement of randomness and design that all the contributors develop, in a kind of ecopoetic gesture of our own, we opted for a structure inspired by the more aleatory dynamics suggested by these very concepts. Such a dynamics— equally present in the contemporary plastic arts, music and physics—allows for both the expression of divergence and enmeshment, of thematic recycling and bifurcation. Rather than being for example grouped on the basis of the genre they discuss—poetry, the novel, or extra-literary media involving performance, architecture, or bodily movement—the articles here unfold along a more wave-like trajectory of ideas. In this "crooked" sequence, readers can, if they be so inclined, immerse themselves in common themes that get recycled and transformed from one contribution to the next, as well as in shifting perspectives that disrupt the more linear expectations of the mind and take it off the beaten poetic track. Arranged in this manner, the seven contributions also invite readers to move between the more abstract, philosophical dimensions of *poiesis* and the more concrete aspects of doing and fashioning, whereby ecopoetics fuses with ecopolitics and evolves from an aesthetics of protest into a performance (or enactment) of resistance.

Opening this collection of papers—which are all underpinned, to various degrees, by a neo-materialistic scepticism that doubts the absolute demarcation between randomness and design—the voice of poet and scholar Harvey Hix blends the reflection of philosophical enquiry and demonstration with the attentive dwelling in slower, thickening time that characterises the poetic meditation. Presenting a phenomenological argumentation unfolding along the mesmerising rhythms and cadences of a prose poem, "The Randomness Effect" muses on the indispensable role of poetics in an age where, so the line of reasoning, adequate ecological action can only result from adequate

ecological description. However, true to Skinner's conception of ecopoetics as an investigative site of exploration embracing tension and even the inevitable failure of its own project (Skinner, "Vibrational" n. p.), Hix's poetico-scholarly meditation carefully unpacks and ultimately challenges a number of received preconceptions. For him, no valid assessment of our ecological condition can emerge if the latter is not re-described in terms of three central interdependent concepts/categories: the randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity. Not only is randomness but unperceived design, suggests Hix—hence his preference for the expression "randomness effect"—but human beings stand in an unequal, asymmetrical relation to the more-than-human world which will always exceed their power of control over it. Increasing the individual's sense of vulnerability and thereby producing a condition/feeling of umbrasubjectivity, this imbalance, Hix argues, reveals the fallacy of reading the enmeshment between the human and non-human in terms of intersubjectivity and of ethics. Resolutely deviating from any over-easy, commonplace amalgamations between ecological and ethical thinking, Hix enlists various U.S. and Canadian poetic voices to highlight that the need to (re)describe the present ecological condition points not so much toward the efficiency of ethics as toward the efficaciousness of poetics. For only an ecopoetics, that is, a *self-conscious* practice of thinking and writing, would prove capable of probing into and grappling with influence asymmetry and umbrasubjectivity.

In a shift from subjectivity experienced and rethought in the present moment to corporeality lived and transcribed in the medieval past, the contribution by Susan Morrison, "Slow Pilgrimage Ecopoetics," continues to explore *poietic* fashioning as an immersive practice. Her essay challenges the speed and linearity of time at different, overlapping levels: the physical, the subjective, the spiritual, and the linguistic/philological. Focusing on a mixed Italian-, English- and French-language corpus of fourteenth-century vernacular pilgrimage poems by Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and Guillaume de Guileville, Morrison explains how for both pilgrim and reader, the physical and textual road become superimposed on a journey oscillating between the determinism of design and the unpredictability of contingency and the accidental (rather than randomness). Following, in part, the alternating movements that she investigates, Morrison herself oscillates between her central medieval texts and contemporary works of pilgrimage such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* or Ken Cockburn and Alec Finley's *The Road North*. Through these oscillations, Morrison highlights how the ecopoetic implies an investigative practice hinging on change and transformation. Indeed, pilgrimage ecopoetics, as she describes it, far exceeds pilgrimage (eco)poetry and its themes: not only does it involve the creation of a spiritual map by a physical effort of the body in movement on an equally physical road, but in turn, this corporeal labour also provides the experiential and eventually textual basis for the maybe even more important mental and literary travail of both poet and reader. Crucially too, Morrison shows how the oscillation between the contingent, the accidental and the designed in medieval pilgrimage poetry indirectly reveals ecopoetics as a processual phenomenon of co-creation: the road re-fashions the pilgrim (and by extension the poet and reader), while the pilgrim re-fashions the road. In the end, both

the road and the pilgrim co-create changing vernacular idioms, which can in turn act as adaptive tools for more attentive descriptions of and engagements with local ecologies.

Making us leave fourteenth-century European poetry behind for the contemporary U.S. novel, Bénédicte Meillon's essay, "Measured Chaos: EcoPoet(h)ics of the Wild in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*," also makes us turn from medieval spirituality to current forms of ecospirituality. This contribution blends elements of chaos theory with the musical theory of Joachim-Ernst Berendt, who sees the universe at large tending toward harmony out of chaotic rhythms. Enlisting Haraway's notion of a "sympoietic Gaia" (58), Meillon's analysis of the texture of Kingsolver's prose text illuminates the *poietic* circulations and pollinations at work between, on the one hand, human textual creativity, and on the other, the manifold patterns of self-organisation present in the biosphere and its diverse life forms—designs often invisible to and mistaken for randomness by the human perceiver. On the surface, Kingsolver's text and holist view of species entanglement may seem far removed from some of the more radical forms of contemporary experimental ecopoetics discussed earlier in this introduction. Yet, Meillon's analysis of the novel's poetics will suggest to readers how Kingsolver's interlaced narrative plots (and perhaps the novelistic genre in general), much like more avant-gardist explorations of *poiesis*, actually also open themselves up to the vibrations of the biosphere and to the self-regulating tendencies of ecological systems. Meillon's view of Kingsolver's poetics as permeated by the "measured chaos" of a universe allying proportion and rhythm will certainly appeal to readers interested in the Native American forms of ecopiety having directly inspired *Prodigal Summer*. But the measured chaos analysed here will resonate too with readers researching other forms of ecopiety, such as, for instance, Hinduism and its decoding of cosmic creation in terms of sound ("Om" n. p.), or Romanticism and its view of "The mind of Man [...] framed [...] like the breath/and harmony of music" through "[...] a dark/Invisible workmanship that reconciles/Discordant elements [...]" (Wordsworth 195).

Transporting us from West to East, the essay by Tara Beaney investigates the ecopoetics of the novel further, but breaks away from harmony and re-enchantment to delve deeper into the disharmony and disenchantment that followed the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011. The ecospiritual dimension is, however, not abandoned in this contribution, which focuses on animism and the writing of Yōko Tawada, a Japanese author also at home in the German language and German-speaking world. In "Confronting 'Unforeseen' Disasters: Yōko Tawada's Surrealist and Animistic Poetics," Beaney explores how the agentic properties of matter seep into the poetics of a novel which, in both substance and form, heavily foregrounds randomness understood as a concatenation of unforeseeable events and effects. Relying on two pivotal notions—Karen Barad's "intra-actions" between mutually constituted, entangled agencies (33) and Tim Ingold's "hylemorphic" model of creation (213), Beaney explains how in Tawada's political critique, chain-like formations of unpredictability destabilise anthropocentric conceptions of agency in general and of authorial control in particular. An animistic writer like Tawada, Beaney argues, does not only consider the outside physical world as pervaded by agentic *poiesis* and magic, but also language itself. Hence,

in a move reminiscent of Surrealism and its chance-embracing aesthetic procedures, Tawada opens novelistic design and composition to the random fluctuations of images, associations, and sounds that the animated "magic" of both world and words generates. If in Kingsolver's universe, it is more the uncovering of design hidden beneath surface randomness that helps both protagonists and readers to free their imagination from false anthropocentric conceptions, Tawada stands at the opposite end of the spectrum, Beaney suggests: in her world, it is the disruption of design through a lack of pattern and its welcome unpredictability that liberates from the perceptual straightjacket of anthropocentrism.

Making us shift back to (eco)poetry proper and to design and mapping as tools of empowerment, Melissa Zeiger also returns our attention to the ecopoetics of walking, but this time in the form of an entirely secular, laborious, and highly precarious progression over the land of the Sonoran Desert by Mexican migrants seeking to reach the U.S. In "The Ecopoetics of Survival: *The Transborder Immigrant Tool* and *The Desert Survival Series*," Zeiger discusses a set of poems written by Amy Sara Carroll, member of a civil disobedience art group specialising in disruptive performance. Published in both English and Spanish as part of installations as well as on a computer GPS programme, these pieces spill beyond institutional walls back into the community and are at the crossroads of several genres: didactic verse, nature poetry, digital (prose) poetry, and political poetry. Notwithstanding their apparent simplicity, and to some extent because of it, these poems function as a mapping device and tool for increasing ecological literacy that retrain the perceptions of two very different kinds of audiences. Borrowing from different traditions, this prosaic verse, explains Zeiger, does more than helping migrants to negotiate the invisible maze of the desert. It also seeks to remedy environmental blindness among (American) readers, encountering the poems in the safety of their homes or the gallery space, by giving instruction in how to re-imagine the apparent emptiness and lack of pattern of the desert as a fullness that deserves protection and preservation. By upsetting the social design and idealisations of georgic and pastoral conventions, *The Desert Survival Series* and its digital support not only constitute a form of ecopoetic action attempting to alleviate the suffering of cross-border migrants; it also effectively disrupts the reading habits of seasoned readers of poetry, encouraging them to confront their own complicity with the larger systems and structures that cause migrants to take up the often lethal journey through the desert.

The experience of destabilisation and the negotiation of overlapping maze-like realities are equally evoked in the very different material discussed in Jessica Maufort's article, namely a Maōri novel whose themes and poetics the author examines through the eclectic lens of what she calls the "labyrinthine compost." In her essay, "The Postcolonial Ecopoetics of Patricia Grace's *Tu*: The Compost and the Labyrinth," the struggles of indigenous men enlisted in the 28th Maōri Infantry Battalion on the Italian front during the Second World War are seen as a particularly resonant instance of the human tendency to try to make order out of interlocking forms of chaos. In the novel, the horrors of war simultaneously upset recognisable patterns of organisation in the physical landscape, personal mindscape, and the scaping of History. In her postcolonial

reading of *Tu,* Maufort presents to us a layered fiction whose juxtaposed plotlines, narrative voices, and temporalities she interprets as unfolding akin to the spiral-like structural dynamics of the fern. Maufort allies this spiralling—through which non-anthropocentric Maōri cosmology has traditionally read order and chaos in non-dualistic terms—with the *poietic* potentialities of two other, Western and indeed explicitly European motifs: the spatial and mobilising dynamics of the labyrinth, on the one hand, and the biological, trans-species, and recycling dynamics of the compost, on the other. Privileging neither randomness nor design as emancipating forces, but maintaining the two principles of organisation in tension, Maufort highlights how the interacting dynamics of the maze, compost, and spiral in Grace's novel guide both protagonists and readers through a processual decoding of reality that makes them oscillate between unexpected forms of order and chaos. As a result, colonial (pre)conceptions regarding "wildness" and "civilisation" become destabilised and can only be recast.

Clara Breteau, author of the only contribution in French to this Special Focus section, also challenges preconceptions about the "wild" and the "civilised," about the untamed and the controlled. However, this time randomness and design are dwelt upon outside the sphere of literature and of the printed word altogether. In her essay playfully entitled "**POÈME :** la **PO***ïesis* à l'**È**re de la **MÉ**tamorphose," Breteau focuses on very concrete forms combining anarchy and order, structure and accident. Indeed, from May to September 2015, Breteau engaged in fieldwork study of alternative, ecologically sustainable and often communal dwellings. In particular, she documented the forms of interior design and architecture—or as Breteau puts it, "anarchitecture"—that such countercultural modes of re-inhabitation of the living biosphere entail in their reconnection of the ecopoetic with *poiesis*, taking seriously the latter's primordial, energetic sense of a force of making and creative transformation leading to emergence. Before discussing individual study cases of Tim Ingold's "hylemorphic" design (213) in sustainable architecture and artefacts, Breteau's essay itself reconnects *poiesis* and the ecopoetic: indeed, the article opens with a detailed historical survey of the lexical meaning of the term *poiesis* outside literature, demonstrating how its connotations of travail—in the sense of struggle or effort toward change—and processual transformation have evolved over time. Richly illustrated by photographs, the essay then moves on to document individual examples of house-making and fashioning of architectural/artistic objects that wilfully open themselves to the *poiesis* at work in the non-human agencies of the plants and soil mostly. These entangled human and non-human agencies are shown to proliferate in unpredictable directions and to obey different laws of time than those of strictly utilitarian productivity. Breteau's article thus illuminates ecopoetics as an organic process of hybridisation between chance and intent, perturbation and pattern, contingency and necessity, and free and controlled emergence. In so doing, the closing contribution strikingly examines, one more time, the grey zone of interaction between randomness and design that the other articles in the variegated, aleatory-style mosaic on offer in this Special Focus section also bring to light, each in their own individual fashion: neither pure randomness nor pure design do exist, be it in the material world or in the realm of ecopoetics; and instead of us falsely insisting on a strict line of demarcation between the two, it is their enmeshment that

should engage our attention. Like Hix's opening contribution, which returns us to the conceptual fundamentals of ecology and ecopoetics, Breteau's final essay leads us back to the fundamentals of *poiesis* as an embodied ecopoetics, thereby reminding us that "Poetry is thinking with your skin" (Ferlinghetti 17).

Acknowledgements

Curating a thematic section requires the help, encouragement, and contribution of many people. As guest-editors, Franca Bellarsi and Judith Rauscher would like to warmly thank the entire *Ecozon@* Board and editorial team for their guidance, patience, and invaluable technical assistance. The guest-editors also have a huge debt toward the external peer reviewers, many of whom generously gave of the time they did not have in the first place. Without scholars accepting to share their knowledge, there would of course be no thematic section, and Franca and Judith would also like to thank their contributors for continuing to work and exchange with them over the weeks in unshakeably good spirits.

At the more personal level, Franca would also like to acknowledge Chad Weidner: their ongoing ecopoetic conversation and collaboration since 2014 continue to inspire and have certainly helped her to think further and better about "randomness" and "design."

Finally, the guest-editors wish to thank one another for the enriching intellectual cross-fertilisation that was their gift to each other over all these past months. Their collaboration once more vindicates William Blake's belief that "Without Contraries is no progression."

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The Randomness Effect

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Abstract

On the premise that sound ecological decision depends on sound ecological description, this essay takes the contrast between randomness and design as the provocation for a redescription of the human ecological situation. In phenomenological terms, it argues, our ecological condition includes the randomness effect, namely that something appears "random" or "designed" to me, not because of how it is, but because of how I stand in relation to it. In metaphysical terms, our ecological condition realizes influence asymmetry, the principle that in any system, the subsuming has more influence on the subsumed than vice versa: the influence of a system on an entity within it is relatively strong, immediate, comprehensive, and immitigable; the influence of the entity on the system is relatively weak, mediated, partial, and mitigable. In psychological terms, our ecological condition reflects umbrasubjectivity, the condition of the self not in more or less symmetrical relation to a similar self, but in an asymmetrical relation to a dissimilar. This essay concludes that ecological description in terms of the randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity shifts ecological deliberation and ecological decision away from ethics and economics, toward poetics, and begins to reflect on a number of upshots: technocracy cannot overcome the ecological situation of humans; ecology occurs under the sign of mystery, not of problem; ecology is a social project, situated in a social world; ecology is interminable; market principles are inadequate to, because irrelevant to, our ecological situation; *ethical* principles are inadequate to, because irrelevant to, our ecological situation. As a result, ecology more closely resembles the religious than the ethical; and a redescribed ecology also repositions ecopoetics.

Keywords: Philosophy and ecology, philosophy and ecopoetics, randomness, design, influence asymmetry, umbrasubjectivity.

Resumen

Dado que una decisión ecológica sensata depende de una descripción ecológica sensata, el presente ensayo toma el contraste entre el azar y el diseño como la provocación para una re-descripción de la situación ecológica humana. En términos fenomenológicos, como se argumenta, nuestra situación ecológica incluye el efecto del azar, es decir, que algo me parece "azar" o "diseño" no porque cómo es, sino por cómo me sitúo en relación a ello. En términos metafísicos, nuestra condición ecológica realiza la asimetría de la influencia, el principio de que en todo sistema lo incluyente influye más en lo incluido, que viceversa: la influencia de un sistema en una entidad interior es relativamente fuerte, inmediata, abarcadora, y no se puede mitigar; la influencia de la entidad en el sistema es relativamente débil, parcial, y se puede mediar y mitigar. En términos psicológicos, nuestra condición ecológica refleja la umbrasubjetividad, la condición del propio ser que no está en una relación más o menos simétrica con un ser parecido, sino en una relación asimétrica con un otro disímil. Se concluye que la descripción ecológica en términos del efecto del azar, de la asimetría de la influencia y de la umbrasubjetividad aparta la deliberación ecológica y la decisión ecológica lejos de la ética y de la economía, para desplazarlas hacia la poética. Esto conduce a una serie de conclusiones: la tecnocracia no puede superar la situación ecológica de los humanos; la ecología actúa bajo el signo del misterio y no del problema; la ecología es un proyecto social situado en un mundo social; la ecología es interminable; los principios del mercado son inadecuados, ya que son irrelevantes, con respecto a nuestra situación ecológica; los principios *éticos* son inadecuados, ya que son irrelevantes, con respecto a nuestra situación ecológica; la ecología se asemeja más lo religioso que a lo ético; y una ecología re-descrita al mismo tiempo re-posiciona la ecopoética.

Looking through Dürer's drawing grid onto a landscape reveals in that landscape much that otherwise one might not observe, enabling one to draw a more accurate picture than one could without the grid. Analogously, looking through the concepts of randomness and design onto the "landscape" of ecology facilitates a more accurate ecological understanding. Privileging a phenomenological angle to start its reflection, one blending scholarly and poetical meditation, this paper will look, not *at* randomness and design, but *through* them onto the question of how description of our ecological situation influences our ecological deliberation and decision. Viewing the ecological landscape through the "grid" of randomness and design reveals ethics and economics as less salient means of ecological deliberation than they might seem without the grid, and reveals poetics as more salient and robust. Taking the contrast between randomness and design as the provocation for a redescription of the human ecological situation, this philosophically-oriented essay also repositions ecopoetics on the basis of the central concepts of "influence asymmetry" and "umbrasubjectivity."

From Sound Description to Sound Decision

Climate change deniers are right about one thing, at least: namely, that description conditions decision. That the category is "climate change deniers," rather than, say, "recycling refusers" or "high thermostat setters," indicates the shared recognition. The common feature that creates the category is a shared description (the climate is not changing), not a shared decision ("I will water my lawn as often as I like," or "I will drive a gas-guzzling SUV if I want to"). Typically and problematically, climate change deniers work backward: they embrace the description they need in order to rationalize the decisions to which they are already committed. Climate-change deniers do not first research the latest scientific findings on glacial retreat, determine disinterestedly that those findings are a "bunch of hoo-ha," and, having ascertained that climate change is not occurring, *then* decide to go buy that SUV and drive it to work instead of taking public transportation. They deny climate change in order to warrant the prior commitment to a green lawn and a private commute: they would be flat-earthers if that is what it took.

Still, there is a lesson there for those of us who wish to work in the other direction, not to embrace whatever description would justify the decisions to which we are committed already, but to adjust our decisions in light of the best available description. Since the quality of our decisions depends so heavily on the quality of our descriptions, we will be wise to attend to our descriptions very carefully. Such is the relationship between fact and value that inaccurate description occasions inept decision.

The better our descriptions, the better our decisions; the worse our descriptions, the worse our decisions.

To illustrate the point, imagine a family of three, in which the parents are practicing Christian Scientists and the child contracts a life-threatening infection such as tetanus. The parents' fatally inept decision to treat the disease exclusively by prayer, without administering antibiotics, might seem to result from bad judgment. But the difference between the imagined Christian Scientists and the rest of us (those who, if we had a child with tetanus, would take the child to a doctor for treatment by antibiotics) is *not* that the rest of us all have a sound faculty of judgment while Christian Scientists all have a defective one. The difference does not lie in the general *faculty* of judgment, but in the *basis* for this particular judgment. The rest of us, confronted with a case of tetanus, would decide what to do on the basis of a description featuring bacteria as the immediate cause of that illness, but the Christian Scientist parents decide what to do on the basis of a description that identifies God as the immediate cause. If the Christian Scientist parents' description of the situation were accurate, if they were *right* that God, not bacteria, is the immediate cause of the child's tetanus, then their decision to treat the case of tetanus by praying for the child's health would be a wise decision. Given their description, their judgment is sound. What needs fixing in this situation is not the parents' capacity for judgment, but their description of the situation, the description on the basis of which they *apply* their capacity for judgment. Nothing about the parents' capacity for judgment needs mending; adjust their description of the situation, and the decision, too, will be rectified. The child will die because the parents decided on the basis of an inaccurate description of the circumstances; had they (the same parents, with the same capacity for judgment) decided on the basis of an accurate description, the child would have lived.

The infection example enjoys the advantage of consensus around the description: Christian Scientists being a very small minority, the vast majority of parents would decide on the basis of a description of the disease as immediately caused by bacteria rather than by God; so the vast majority of parents who *could* take their ill child to a doctor *would*. However, it is not the *consensus* around the description that connects it to sound decision-making: its accuracy alone does. To illustrate the point, consider Amartya Sen's argument that famine is not a function of food quantity but of entitlement relations (8). If a poll were taken, surely the majority of those questioned would hold the "common-sense" view that famines occur when, and because, there is not enough food to go around. Sen argues, though, that famine does not result from an insufficient food supply to feed everyone, but because at a given place and time, the political and economic arrangements withhold from certain persons entitlement adequate to secure enough food to live on (154-55). If the common-sense view is right, then my decision to focus famine-prevention efforts on food production will be a good one; conversely, if Sen is right, my decision will be a bad one. Which description will lead me to a sound decision is not determined by which one is more widely accepted, but by which one proves more accurate. I should base my decision on Sen's description of famine causation because it is accurate, *despite* its being held by very few other persons.

Sound decision depends on accurate description in "local" decisions such as the ill child, and in "global" decisions such as famine prevention. It also applies to specifically ecological decisions, as, for example, the poet, farmer, and environmental activist Wendell Berry (b. 1934) has argued. Berry contends that no cure to ecological problems such as "soil erosion, soil degradation, the pollution of waterways by sediment and toxic chemicals," and so on, "is possible, either in policy or practice, except within understood limits, which is to say within a correct diagnosis. This requires patience. *A good solution*" Berry asserts, "*has to begin with a description of the problem that is full, clear, and reliable*" (qtd. in Olmstead, n.p., emphasis added). This dependence of decision on description lies behind Henry David Thoreau's maxim that "There are a thousand hacking at the branches [...] to one who is striking at the root" (75).

The stakes of description can be immeasurable. The stakes of ecological description *are* immeasurable: on them depend the condition of the planetary biosphere, the well-being of billions of humans, and even the continued existence of the human species. In this paper, therefore, I address not our (individual or collective) ecological judgments *per se*, but the basis for those judgments, our (individual and collective) description of our ecological situation. What calls this paper makes for alterations to our ecological decisions remain secondary and derivative; its primary call is for refinements to our description of our ecological situation, our *basis* for ecological decision. In this context, the notions of randomness and design offer a cue as to why precisely such redescription is needed.

The Randomness Effect

In *phenomenological* terms, our ecological condition includes what might be coined "the randomness effect." As a concept that applies to all kinds of domains, it is, for instance, most memorably exemplified in a scene of the film *The Silence of the Lambs* in which Clarice, the aspiring FBI agent on assignment to catch a serial killer, discusses the case with her roommate, Ardelia. They are trying to piece together the available evidence and the enigmatic hints dropped by the brilliant but menacing psychologist Hannibal Lecter, when Ardelia, case file in hand, asks: "Is this Lecter's handwriting? Clarice, doesn't this random scattering of sites seem desperately random, like the elaborations of a bad liar?" Clarice wonders out loud, "'Desperately random.' What does he mean?" Ardelia guesses, "Not random at all, maybe. Like there's some pattern here …?" The scene draws on the widely-shared understanding that detectives and psychologists are especially adept at discerning design where others perceive only randomness: Clarice, the student detective/psychologist, is learning to recognize design where others merely detect randomness, and Lecter *is* precisely a genius psychologist because he sees design always and everywhere. Lecter knows, and the film depends on the audience's knowing, that even something that looks *very* random still only *looks* random. Good detectives and good psychologists keep investigating, no matter how much apparent randomness confronts them, until they find the design. In drawing on that understanding, the scene highlights a feature of the concepts of randomness and

design as they are most commonly defined and accepted: "design" refers (synchronically) to the structure or (diachronically) to the causation of the thing in itself, and "randomness" indicates my failure to recognize that structure or causation. Clarice knows that as long as things look random to her, she is not seeing "what is there," which *will*, however, readily reveal itself to her when she finally does see design. Said differently, the randomness is in her perception alone; the design is in the world.

"Design," thus, applies to how things *are*, "randomness" to how they *appear*. Things *seem* random, but *have* design. They seem random, not when they have no design, but when the design they do possess is not currently available to me. If I were to go fishing tomorrow morning, I might use "random" in recounting the adventure to friends in the pub later in the evening. But from my saying it was random when I got a nibble from a fish and when I did not, my listener will not be learning that the animals in the lake eat or do not eat independently of whether they are hungry, or that those fish locate themselves in the lake independently of water temperature or abundance of vegetation. What my listener will in fact learn is that I did not know the topography of the lake, to what sort of fish it serves as a habitat, and what their shoaling or feeding patterns are. I experienced the situation as random not because it *was* random, but because I am ignorant of the factors relevant to the design. There was a pattern, but I just did not see it.

Design is comprehensive: if something results from, or manifests, design, *all* of it does. Of an ecosystem, say: if it is design that coyotes eat field mice and other small rodents on the grassland, then it is not random that cows eat grass on that same grassland, and it is not random that *this* coyote is eating *this* field mouse at *this* moment, even though when I saw this coyote in this field, I could have predicted only that it would eat *a* field mouse, not that it would eat *this* field mouse. My ability to predict the one but not the other does not arise because one reflects design and the other randomness. My ability to predict is a function of how coarse-grained or fine-grained my knowledge is of such factors as the location of individual field mice in the field, not a function of a "real" shift from design governing generality to randomness governing particularity.

Randomness and design did not originate together as paired concepts in, for instance, physics, to describe two exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of phenomena in the world. The folk theory that everything originates in either randomness or design may serve quite well in many contexts, such as when people are making excuses to their life partner for their large gambling losses. However, as a scientific theory regarding the causation of events and the structure of objects in the world, this folk wisdom is implausible: that some events fulfill one order of causation, other events fulfill a contrary order of causation, and that both sorts of events occur in our world, these three combined assumptions lead to all the problems of dualism we know to expect from having watched Descartes locate the jointure of mind and body in the pineal gland, "that part [of the brain] in which the 'common sense' is said to be found" (98). If it was designed that the house have picture windows facing the golf course and random that my drive sliced in just that direction, was it random or designed

that the window broke? As categories to account for objects and events *in themselves*, independently of perception of them, randomness and design do not work.

An analogy helps to clarify the distinction. Roland Barthes observes that what I experience from fiction is not reality *per se*, but what he calls "the reality effect" (148). Barthes begins by noting a seemingly useless detail in a Flaubert story, the speaker's mentioning, in describing a room, that "an old piano supported, under a barometer, a pyramidal heap of boxes and cartons" (141). Even if "it is just possible to see in the notation of the piano an indication of its owner's bourgeois standing" (Barthes (142), yet "no purpose seems to justify reference to the barometer," an object that seems not to participate "in the order of the *notable*" (142). Barthes finds that Flaubert's description "is thoroughly mixed with 'realistic' imperatives, as if the referent's exactitude, superior or indifferent to any other function, governed and alone justified its description" (145). Its *resistance* to "advancing the plot," its "pure and simple 'representation' of 'the real'" (Barthes 146) allows it to confirm "the great mythic opposition of the *true-to-life* (the lifelike) and the *intelligible*" (146). Said resistance and representation thus advance in literature a "realism" aligned with and "contemporary with the regnum of 'objective' history" and other institutions serving "the incessant need to authenticate the 'real'" (146).[1] Details such as the barometer in Flaubert's story do not communicate reality itself, but instead perform what Barthes calls "the referential illusion" (seeming to *denote* while actually *signifying* reality), and thus create the reality effect (148).

Similarly, what I experience from the environment is not randomness *per se*, but what, modifying Barthes' term, I call "the randomness effect." Randomness and design are better understood as referring to my experience of phenomena than to the phenomena themselves. It is more precise to maintain than to blur the distinction between "I experience it *as* random" and "it *is* random." The former means I do not comprehend the design, the latter that no design exists. The second constitutes a *much* stronger claim, just as atheism amounts to a much stronger claim than agnosticism. My designating something "random" or "designed" does not disclose a feature or quality of the thing in itself, but does indicate something about my subjectivity. Something appears "random" or "designed" to me, not because of how it is, but because of how I stand in relation to it.

Influence Asymmetry

To move from phenomenology to metaphysics, in *metaphysical* terms, our ecological condition realizes what I call "influence asymmetry." Indeed, the randomness effect attends, and draws attention to, the principle that in any system, the subsuming has more influence on the subsumed than vice versa: the influence of a system on an entity within it is relatively strong, immediate, comprehensive, and immitigable; by contrast, the influence of the entity on the system is relatively weak, mediated, partial,

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[1] Photography, exhibitions of ancient objects, tourism of monumental sites, and so on, all contribute to such authentification.

and mitigable. Take as an example the relationship between a sand dune (the subsuming system) and a sand grain (the subsumed entity). The influence of the dune on the grain proves relatively strong (if the dune changes, the grain is changed), immediate (the dune's shift itself does the shifting of the grain), comprehensive (the whole grain is moved with every move of the dune), and immitigable (the grain cannot keep itself from being displaced). The influence of the grain on the dune is relatively weak (the grain's shifting does not noticeably shift the whole dune), mediated (if the grain *did* rearrange the dune, it would do so only *as* part of a group of grains, as in, say, a slide), partial (the shift of the grain is not the whole shift of the dune), and mitigable (the grain might move toward the west as part of the dune's moving east).

The principle of influence asymmetry describes a *relationship*, not *things*. It does not divide things once and for all into categories of system and entity, subsuming and subsumed, influencer and influenced. In the illustration just offered, the sand dune is the system, but it would be entity rather than system if the illustration were of a whole desert. The dune subsumes the grain, but is subsumed by the desert. The asymmetry inheres in the relationship, not in either party to the relationship. In addition, some other strong claims could be made about influence asymmetry. For example, influence asymmetry applies regardless of the *type* of system: it holds for biological systems (e.g. tree/leaf), physical systems (solar system/comet), mechanical systems (internal combustion engine/spark plug), social systems (bee colony/worker bee), and so on. Influence asymmetry applies regardless of how the system is construed: there is influence asymmetry between the sand dune and the sand grain whether I define the dune as a biological system or as a physical system, and influence asymmetry between a Galapagos microclimate and an individual finch whether I interpret them in Paley's terms or in Darwin's. Influence asymmetry holds in system/entity relationships always and everywhere, i.e. at all scales (cell/mitochondria or galaxy/star), and at all times (that sand grain has been more influenced than influencer since the dune originated, and will be until the dune is no more).

I do not make or defend such strong claims here, though. What matters for the purposes of my present meditation of randomness and design is that influence asymmetry holds between the earth's planetary ecosystem and any one human. The effect of the earth's ecosystem on me is relatively: strong (certain weather conditions can kill me); immediate (I see and feel any change in the weather); comprehensive (*everything* about my life is affected by the earth's ecosystem); and immitigable (I cannot stop, or significantly change, the course of the ecosystem). By contrast, my effect on the earth's ecosystem is relatively: weak (I cannot make it rain on my flower garden); mediated (any effect I *do* have, such as climate change, is not only due to *me* but to *us*); partial (my heating my house does not noticeably affect conditions elsewhere); and mitigable (the ecosystem will soon eliminate any difference I manage between the temperature outside my house and the temperature inside). Influence asymmetry is an essential, crucial feature of the relationship between the planetary biosphere and an individual human. To be accurate enough to offer a basis for sound ecological decision, any description of our ecological situation will need to take account of it.

Umbrasubjecvity

If we shift from metaphysics to psychology, in *psychological* terms, our ecological condition reflects "umbrasubjectivity." Just as influence asymmetry leads me to experience the effects of the system as random (this morning was warm, but it turned suddenly cold), so it precludes my imposing my design on the system (I want the climate to remain hospitable to humans, *not* to change, but I cannot make that happen). Influence asymmetry makes nature look random to me, and subjects me to nature utterly. The randomness effect and influence asymmetry together point toward a particular form of subjectivity. If "subjectivity" without any qualifiers refers to the self or individual, and "intersubjectivity" denotes the self in more or less symmetrical relation to a similar self, I propose "umbrasubjectivity" to refer to the self in an asymmetrical relation to a dissimilar. When I am the more influenced than influencing party in relation to influence asymmetry, I am "umbrasubjected." The coinage adds the Latin *umbra*, meaning "shadow," to the existing compound of *sub-*, meaning "under," and *jacere*, meaning "to throw," to highlight the overshadowedness of the more influenced party when it comes to influence asymmetry.

Explorations of subjectivity have tended to elide subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as if subjectivity were exhausted by intersubjectivity. Recent studies of other topics, though, have exposed the need for recognition and understanding of umbrasubjectivity as well as intersubjectivity. N. Katherine Hayles' *Unthought* (2017), for example, asserts and explores the claim that "nonconscious cognitive processes inaccessible to conscious introspection but nevertheless essential for consciousness to function" constitute "a mode of interacting with the world" (1). This fact has implications, Hayles contends, for subjectivity: "human subjects," she says, "are no longer contained—or even defined—by the boundaries of their skins" (2). Instead of being discrete, self-contained subjects that face one another in intersubjective relationship, humans are part of "a *planetary cognitive ecology* that includes both human and technical actors" (Hayles 3-4), and "in which cognition and decision-making powers are distributed throughout the system" (4). Our enmeshment within this planetary cognitive ecology and our inseparability from it both entail that our subjectivity is not as we once thought it, and that descriptions of our intersubjectivity are not complete descriptions of our subjectivity.

Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (2013) attends to material rather than cognitive ecology, but exposes no less dramatically the need for recognition of umbrasubjectivity. Defining hyperobjects as "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1), Morton contends that they have implications for human subjectivity, having "already ushered in a new human phase of *hypocrisy*, *weakness*, and *lameness*" (2) by which terms he means, respectively, that we live without the possibility of a metalanguage, we experience as "disturbingly visible" a "gap between phenomenon and thing," and we experience as conspicuous the fragility of all things (2). By erasing "anything meaningfully like a 'world' at all," hyperobjects, according to Morton,

problematize "what phenomenological 'experience' is" (3). The same follows from Morton's hyperobjects as from Hayles's unthought: our subjectivity is not as we once thought it, and descriptions of our intersubjectivity are not complete descriptions of our subjectivity.

Shifting from Ethics and Economics toward Poetics

Ecological description in terms of the randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity shifts ecological deliberation and ecological decision away from ethics and economics, toward poetics. The three new terms name three different aspects of the same situation. The randomness effect is how the subsuming appears to the subsumed. Influence asymmetry denotes how subsuming and subsumed stand in relation to one another. Umbrasubjectivity conveys how the subsumed is, as conditioned by its influence-asymmetric relationship to the subsuming. The randomness effect is an experiential element of umbrasubjectivity. The condition of a human in the influence-asymmetrical relationship between the planetary ecosystem and one human is a condition of umbrasubjectivity.

Ecology occurs within the situation described by the randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity. If description conditions decision, then the implications of a description of our ecological situation in these terms should be salient to ecological judgment, and so it proves. Even the most partial and provisional sketch of such implications confirms that salience. So let the following eight propositions open (but most certainly not at all complete) a list of "Prolegomena to Any Future Ecology":

Technocracy Cannot Overcome the Ecological Situation of Humans

The randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity do not precisely parallel Felix Guattari's "three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)" (19-20), but Guattari contends that, without addressing itself to all three of his registers, any approach to such challenges as the environmental crisis and intensifying migration movements will be "purely technocratic" (19-20). That contention can be extended to the three "registers" presented here. The randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity are inextricably interconnected, so only an approach that addressed itself to all three could avoid replicating the technocracy that hastened our arrival at the current state of affairs. Technocracy operates on the assumption that influence asymmetry can be "flipped," i.e. that our technology can exert greater influence on nature than nature exerts on us. But humanity is inalterably *within* nature, so not even in principle, much less in practice, can technology reverse the influence asymmetry that defines our ecological situation. Sound ecological judgment will have to concede influence asymmetry: no ecological decision that depends on defying influence asymmetry could be sound.

Ecology Occurs under the Sign of Mystery, Not of Problem

American philosopher Louis Mackey's distinction between a problem and a mystery helps avert default to the technocratic. A problem, Mackey says, "can be solved. The terms in which it is stated define what will count as a solution. Confronted on a math test with a problem that cannot be solved, the student has every right to complain that it 'isn't really a problem'" (247). A mystery resembles a problem in being "an indeterminate situation that begs to be made determinate" (Mackey 247), but, unlike a problem, "its indeterminacy is such that the description of the mystery does not specify conditions of resolution and closure" (Mackey 247). A mystery "cannot be fully described. Faced with a mystery, you can never be sure what will count as a solution, or even that there is one" (Mackey 247). The technocratic can address itself only to problems, but the ecological, as the randomness effect highlights, occurs to us as a mystery. The technocratic seeks a solution to a problem, but the ecological, because it is a mystery, is not offered in terms of problem and solution. Confronted with a problem, I can, in principle, discover a solution. "How do I keep from waking my partner when I read in bed?," I ask myself. "Oh, I know: I'll use one of those little clip-on lights." Problem solved. I need only act in a manner adequate to an occasion. Confronted with a mystery, though, I cannot simply find the right switch to flip. There is no "mystery solved" to hope for or pursue. The shadow over the umbrasubject cannot be removed by technology.

Ecology is a Social Project, Situated in a Social World

As, according to Karl Marx, one cannot be a communist by oneself, so one cannot be an ecologist by oneself. Ecology in the situation marked out by the randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity exemplifies what anthropoligist Elizabeth Povinelli calls a *social project* (7). In her explication of social projects, Povinelli herself is drawing on English philosopher Bernard Williams, for whom, in Povinelli's characterization, projects are "thick subjectivities" that "provide the context of moral and political calculation" (6), but Povinelli shifts away from Williams' focus on "the point of view of individual moral agents" (7) to her own focus on "the point of view of the social worlds in which these projects are situated" (7). She declares particular interest in "those *social projects* that attempt to capacitate an alternative set of human and posthuman worlds" (7). If Guattari's three registers establish a criterion of extension, identifying the ground ecological judgment must cover, Povinelli's concept establishes a criterion of mode, directing us to undertake ecological action "as aggregating practices, incessantly fixing phenomena and cosubstantiating practices" (8) in our "multiply partially organized and thus always multiply partially disorganized" social worlds (8). We the umbrasubjected who can do nothing as individual moral agents will do well to turn toward social projects that attempt to capacitate ecological alternativity.

Ecology Is Interminable

Of the influence-asymmetric relation between state and individual, Chantal Mouffe notes that the impossibility of "a society beyond division and power" (1) entails of every order that it be "the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices" (2), and thus that democratic politics, far from fulfilling a triumphal progress toward ultimate consensus and concord, actually stages "the confrontation between conflicting hegemonic projects, a confrontation with no possibility of final reconciliation" (17). That is, because the state/citizen relation is incontrovertibly influence asymmetric, individuals can never fix or finalize the relation. Where influence asymmetry is *necessary*, the influenced cannot settle *contingencies* once for all. In regard to the state, Mouffe reasons, no critique can be radical nor any revolution total, and therefore "artists can no longer pretend to constitute an avant-garde offering a radical critique" (104). Artists *can*, however, engage in critical artistic practices that operate as "counter-hegemonic interventions" to construct new subjectivities and thus "help subvert the existing configuration of power" (105). However different they are in other respects, the relation between human and nature resembles the relation between human and state in that both are inevitably influence asymmetric. So ecology shares the quality Mouffe attributes to politics, that it can only be provisional, never radical, and it can only be interminable, never ultimate and finalizing.

Market Principles Are Inadequate to, because Irrelevant to, our Ecological Situation

In a global socius saturated with the rhetoric of neoliberalism, market principles are widely assumed to be ideal in regard to all matters, resulting always in "efficiency," the best possible arrangement and outcomes. This includes proposals to shape ecological policy by market principles. Market principles, though, assume a description of the human situation different from, and in contradiction with, the description here proposed. Market principles assume the ultimacy of free exchange between equals. What is fundamental and constitutive is the single, independent, unbound exchange between two equal and free agents. These exchanges precede and generate anything "larger" than themselves (corporations, or the market as a whole). There is no influence asymmetry, because the market is constructed by (is the sum of) the individual transactions. Exchange is not subsumed, and the market is not subsuming. This denial of influence asymmetry (and attendant denial of the randomness effect and umbrasubjectivity) generates various implausibilities, such as the economic agent who acts always and only out of "rational self-interest." What matters here, though, is that the incongruence between the world to which market principles would be adequate and the ecological world in which we live precludes market principles from offering reliable guidance in ecological decision-making. If there is (if there were) any domain such as market principles presuppose, then they might (they would) ground sound judgment in that domain. But ecology is utterly different from any such domain.

Ethical Principles Are Inadequate to, because Irrelevant to, Our Ecological Situation

More surprising (at least to most persons attentive to ecological concerns) than the inadequacy of market principles to our ecological situation is the inadequacy of *ethical* principles. But just as market principles assume exchange between equals, so ethical principles assume interaction between equals. The randomness effect, influence asymmetry, and umbrasubjectivity describe our ecological situation, but not our ethical situation, and that dissimilarity between ethics and ecology precludes unqualified inference from ethics to ecology. This difference results from the relationship between two humans being, in principle, reciprocal: my capacity to help you or be helped by you is (again, in principle) proportional. However, the influence asymmetry that holds, necessarily, between nature and a human (or humanity) does not necessarily hold between one human and another, and in fact the removal of influence asymmetry that proves *impossible* in ecology remains an *ideal* in ethics.

Ecology is not ethical, therefore. Influence asymmetry makes ethics and ecology dissimilar, leaving us unable to assume that ethical obligations and ecological obligations will harmonize neatly, and unable to reason directly from ethical obligations to ecological obligations. If the intersubjective is the realm of the ethical, then our most salient ecological thinking will not be ethical thinking. Nothing guarantees that intersubjective responsibilities or rights or virtues correlate with umbrasubjective responsibilities or rights or virtues. Consequently, we cannot reason immediately from the former to the latter.

The challenge to grounding interpersonal ethics is, as Plato portrayed it in the *Republic*, the Gyges ring problem (Book II, 359c-360d): why should I be good, when it is more profitable to be bad? The challenge to grounding ecology is, instead, the free rider problem: why should I "do my part," when I will receive the same benefit without making any individual sacrifice/contribution? Successful ways of responding to the two challenges will not always, and do not necessarily, correspond.

Ecology More Closely Resembles the Religious than the Ethical

Kierkegaard's articulation and illustration in *Fear and Trembling*, through a reading of the Abraham and Isaac story, of the priority of the religious over the ethical (30) could be formulated in terms of the description proposed here of our ecological situation. Kierkegaard emphasizes that the mandate given by God to Abraham in the story, "Kill your son," is a manifestly *un*ethical mandate (30), and that Abraham's intention to fulfill the mandate is a manifestly *un*ethical intention (31). Abraham cannot rationalize the mandate, or justify his decision to fulfill it, to Sarah or to Isaac.

In the terms proposed here, what Abraham's relation to God shares with the human relation to nature is influence asymmetry. God's influence over Abraham, like nature's influence over a human or humans, is strong, immediate, comprehensive, and immitigable; by contrast, Abraham's influence over God is weak, mediated, partial, and mitigable. Abraham experiences in relation to God what we experience in relation to

nature: umbrasubjectivity. Abraham cannot reason from his ethical obligations, which include the mandate *not* to kill his son, to his religious obligations, which include the mandate *to* kill his son. "In ethical terms, Abraham's relation to Isaac is quite simply this: the father shall love the son more than himself" (Kierkegaard 57). Abraham, like Job, stands as a counterexample to the Deuteronomic theology, which takes for granted the correspondence of ethical and religious, assuming that if I fulfill my ethical obligations, if in other words I am good, God will reward me, and that if I violate my ethical obligations, God will punish me. Job and Kierkegaard's Abraham have to renounce that assumption, and influence asymmetry means that we must renounce the analogous assumption that the ethical and the ecological always and necessarily correspond.

A Redescribed Ecology Also Repositions Ecopoetics

If influence asymmetry makes ethics irrelevant to ecology, it makes poetics timely and valuable. Technocracy, the market, and the ethical all operate in domains governed otherwise than by influence asymmetry. Poetics is (in general, and *self-consciously* in ecopoetics) a mode of seeing, thinking, and doing under the aspect of influence asymmetry, and thus a mode available to us in our ecological situation. If ecology occurred in the realm of intersubjectivity rather than umbrasubjectivity, if our ecological condition were not influence-asymmetrical, then the *techne* that is the ideal of technocracy, the market, and the ethical might suffice. I could expect my decisions to be salient, my actions to be efficacious, my principles to be adequate. I could seek to discover a solution to any ecological occasion. Because ecology is governed by influence asymmetry and umbrasubjectivity, it turns out that *poesis*, not *techne*, is apt. I cannot expect my decisions to be salient (I cannot *decide* not to contribute to climate change), my actions will be inefficacious (my composting will not slow global warming), my principles will prove inadequate (I cannot live up to my principle not to contribute to climate change the way I can live up to my principle not to murder another human). Instead of seeking to *discover* a *solution* to each arising ecological *occasion*, I can and must seek to *imagine* an *alternative* to existing ecological *conditions*. The randomness effect, umbrasubjectivity, and influence asymmetry obligate me to *poiesis* rather than *techne*.

From *Techne* to *Poiesis*

I am not alone in alleging a convergence of the ecological and the poetic. To cite as corroboration only one networked group of Canadian ecopoets, Jan Zwicky (b. 1955) draws on the same Greek *techne/poesis* dichotomy to which I have just appealed, asserting that "To hope for a techno-fix is to imagine, yet again, that calculative rationality can control the world; it is hubris. Humility means recognizing, clearly, that we don't understand everything" (52). Darren Bifford (b. 1977) makes a related case, contending that "poetry is important for the cultivation of ecological responsibility because metaphor enables ontological insight" (192). Bifford adds:

> there is a particular resonance of metaphorical thinking (call it: poetic practice) with the development of a cogent ecological sensibility: by asserting the existence of relationships between things that, spoken nonmetaphorically, are unrelated, metaphor facilitates the deep acknowledgment of a diversity of forms of life. (194)

Don McKay (b. 1942) identifies in a "practice of geopoetry" (10) a different but equally perspective-granting "deep acknowledgment" (Bifford 194), in this case of an earth time that far exceeds the duration of a human individual or the human species, giving as one reason for the ecological urgency of poetry that it introduces "otherness, or wilderness into consciousness without insisting that it be turned wholly into knowledge, into what we know, what we own" (20). The views of Zwicky, Bifford, and McKay are not identical with one another, nor is any of them identical with the case made in this paper, but all three share a sense that ecology calls for *poiesis*.

Without eliding the distinction made between ecopoetics and ecopoetry, and that I have explored elsewhere,[2] it is possible to invoke instances of ecopoetry in support of this paper's claim about ecopoetics. For example, in "Let Me Pause for a Moment" by American poet Jennifer Atkinson (b. 1955), the speaker pauses neither "for the ancient/ Calving ice" nor "for the new ice/ Prickling the salt-bog sedge" (lines 1-2 and 7-8, p. 34); she further suspends concern "for now about the spill,/ The slow recovery, the threat/ of polar meltdown" (lines 13-15, p. 34) For the moment designated in the poem's title, she looks at a block of floe ice that has on it

> Sprawled across its deck, a harbor seal
> And, like sealing wax on a contract,
> Her blood and newborn pup
> Steaming in the cold spring air.
> (Atkinson 34)

The poem's speaker reorients herself to time, making, through the contrasting geological time of the calving ice, the historical time of the new ice and the oil spill, and the immediate moment of seal and pup, a deep acknowledgment of the "earth time" that McKay describes.

Atkinson's ecopoem does exactly what Rachel Blau DuPlessis says "experimental writing of all sorts" does (28): it "exerts a continuous destabilizing pressure and, in both analytic and formal ways, creates an arousal of desire for difference, for hope. If consciousness must change" (DuPlessis 28), as this paper has tried to argue it must, "if social forms must be reimagined, then language and textual structures must help cause and support, propel and discover these changes" (28). "weather or not" by the American poet Evie Shockley (b. 1965) is experimental, and propulsive, along the lines of DuPlessis' insight. In Shockley's prose poem, "generation why-not had voted its con-science and a climate of indifference was generating maelstromy [sic]weather. we acted as if the planet was a stone-cold player, but turns out the earth had a heart and it was melting" (5) starting with the tropical pacific islands and the arctic ice. But "meanwhile, in the temper-temper zone, the birds were back and i hadn't slept—had it been a night

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[2] See H. L. Hix, *Demonstrategy* (forthcoming, 2019).

or a season?" (Shockley 5). Continuing its play on the double entendre of "climate," the poem ends, "there'd been an arab spring, but it was winter all summer in america" (5). Shockley's poem conjoins the reimagining of language and textual structures that DuPlessis invites, along the lines that Bifford describes, namely, with an assertion of "the existence of relationships between things that, spoken nonmetaphorically, are unrelated" (194).

If, as a correlative of the *randomness effect*, there were a *catastrophe effect*, it would appear to us as though there were less than no time left. Which would be, as it ever has been, a call to poetics. Wendell Berry's contention, quoted at the outset, that "A good solution has to begin with a description of the problem that is full, clear, and reliable" (Berry qtd. in Olmstead, n.p.) has for sister this insight, framed by Audre Lorde (1934-1992) specifically in the context of poetics: "The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives" (36).

Submission received 20 October 2018   Revised version accepted 22 March 2019

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ECOZON@

Vol 10, No 1

Slow Pilgrimage Ecopoetics[1]

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Abstract

Focusing on fourteenth-century medieval pilgrimage poems and wayfaring between them and more contemporary texts, this essay explores how the constitutive elements of slow pilgrimage ecopoetics oscillate between the designed and accidental, both on the literal and literary levels. While design seems integral to the concept of pilgrimage—traveling from one's home to a sacred shrine—in actuality pilgrims not infrequently strayed off the official path. Contingency, rather than randomness, acts as a dynamic agent affecting the meanderings of the pilgrim-walker.

The slow walking of pilgrims contributed to a slow ecopoetics: slow travail on the actual road; slow change in the vernacular tongue used to articulate pilgrimage poetry; slow spiritual transformation ideally catalyzed by the acts of pilgrimage, walking or reading; and measured reading itself as a form of slow pilgrimage.

Amendment as a concept and term recurs thematically in such texts, indicating material, spiritual, linguistic, and poetic changes. Actual paths trod upon by historical pilgrims modified over time. Such changes analogously parallel the literary realm, where competing versions of medieval pilgrimage poems were gradually amended and edited by their authors. Literary pilgrimage poems self-consciously commit themselves to promoting the vernacular. The ecopoetics of a specific living vernacular, a topopoetics, used by medieval pilgrimage writers sparks the spiritual change pilgrimage was meant to kindle.

Pilgrim readers undertook textual wayfaring, as do pilgrim-writers through variant texts modified by the poet himself. A strategy of slow ecopoetics authorizes the reader to co-perform the text, advancing alongside the writer to co-create the literary work, responsive to a heterogenous audience. As contingent tenants, not masters of design, of both environment and poetry, pilgrims—historical and literary—contribute to a kind of vibrant resiliency as epitomized by slow pilgrimage ecopoetics.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, vernacular, slow ecopoetics, slow walking, landscape, textscape, contingency, medieval poetry, topopoetics.

Resumen

Centrándose en los poemas medievales del siglo XIV relacionados con la peregrinación y alternando entre eso textos y otros más contemporáneos, este ensayo pretende explorar cómo los elementos constitutivos de la lenta ecopoética del peregrinaje oscilan entre lo diseñado y lo casual, tanto a nivel literal como literario. Mientras el diseño parece ser parte integral concepto de la peregrinación, o viajar desde el hogar a un santuario sagrado, en realidad los peregrinos frecuentemente se desviaban. La contingencia, en lugar de la casualidad, funciona como un agente dinámico que afecta a los desvíos del caminante-peregrino.

El lento andar de los peregrinos contribuyó a una lenta ecopoética: el lento ejercicio de seguir el camino; el lento cambio en la lengua vernácula que se empleaba para articular la poesía de la peregrinación; la lenta transformación espiritual provocada, idóneamente, por los actos de peregrinar, caminar, o leer; y la lectura mesurada en sí hecha como forma de un lento peregrinaje.

La enmienda se repite temáticamente en estos textos como concepto y término indicando cambios materiales, espirituales, lingüísticos, y poéticos—los caminos materiales modificados por los peregrinos históricos que los pisaban y seguían. Estas modificaciones corresponden de forma análoga al espectro

literario, donde algunas versiones rivales de los poemas medievales sobre la peregrinación eran enmendados y editados por sus autores. Los poemas literarios de peregrinación promueven conscientemente lo vernáculo. La ecopoética de una lengua vernácula viva, o la "topo-poética", usada por los autores medievales es lo que motiva el cambio espiritual que pretende provocar la peregrinación.

Los lectores-peregrinos emprendían un deambular textual tal como hacían los autores-peregrinos por medio de los textos variados que el propio poeta modificaba. Una de las estrategias de la ecopoética lenta es permitir que el lector coopere en la interpretación del texto, avanzando así junto al autor para crear una obra literaria que responda a un público heterogéneo. Como resultado del no ser maestros del diseño sino seres errantes y contingentes del medio ambiente y de la poesía, los peregrinos—históricos y literarios—contribuyen a la existencia de una adaptabilidad vibrante, como lo ejemplifica la lenta ecopoética de la peregrinación.[2]

Palabras clave: Peregrinación, vernáculo, lenta ecopoética, lento andar, paisaje, espacio textual, contingencia, poesía medieval, "topo-poética".

> "And you should understand that at each of these steps there is a pause. For this reason it is a great pity and heart-break for the soul that it can only move so slowly, and experience so much pain, and it moves toward God so ponderously. It takes such tiny steps."
> Blessed Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) (Petroff 255)

In describing her spiritual pilgrimage, the Blessed Angela of Foligno relates the interior pain she endures. She must sustain and suffer each small stride forward in her laborious endeavor. Her experience reflects the theological understanding of pilgrimage, a ritual adhering to the belief in spiritual amendment. Medieval Christians like Angela believed that contrition and confession for a sin could be satisfied in part through the arduous task of pilgrimage. The time-intensive commitment which Angela's inner trial demands corresponds to the travails of physical pilgrimage, which, as Christopher Howard points out, "represents a paradigmatic form of slow travel" (17; also Eade n. p.; Maddrell et al. 17, 152, 167; and Lois González 17). The materiality of place as well as the notion of pilgrimage as "slow travel" infuse the metaphor of life pilgrimage in medieval texts. At the same time, these texts can be read as meditations on pilgrimage and as an ecopoetic practice. As such they 1) enable us to recognize and foster connections between the human and more-than-human world; 2) allow us to make associations among landscape, poem, and language—all in the process of becoming; and 3) provoke links with more recent pilgrimage texts in a layered palimpsest. Wayfaring as it does between medieval and modern literary texts, this essay argues that pilgrimage ecopoetics teaches us to contingently respond to unexpected encounters.

Turning to several works written throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages, this essay moves between ecological and literary paths to explore the slow ecopoetics of pilgrimage. During the fourteenth century, the popularity of physical pilgrimage as a vernacular religious practice intersects with the proliferation of late medieval pilgrimage poetry. The years between Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, set during Holy Week in 1300, and Geoffrey Chaucer's death in 1400 witnessed the creation of numerous long poems that used pilgrimage as a structural, thematic, and metaphorical device. In *The*

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[2] Traducción: Margaret Dunaway

Divine Comedy, the Latin poet Virgil—whose own first-century BCE epic, *The Aeneid*, tells the story of a journey from Troy to Rome—guides Dante's pilgrim on an allegorical pilgrimage from the chilly depths of hell, one rising to purgatory and finally paradise. Chaucer's pilgrims in the frame of *The Canterbury Tales* head from Southwark on the bank of the Thames south of London toward the city of Canterbury, whose cathedral became a shrine after the murder of the Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170. In Guillaume de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* [*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*], a dreamer imagines himself as a pilgrim, prone to missteps along the way. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* stretches pilgrimage from the microscopic life of the narrator Will to include Biblical history, governmental chaos, and legal ethics.

Apart from emphasizing the hardships of pilgrimage, all of these texts also evoke details of the more-than-human environment that the pilgrims encounter during their slow traveling. They can thus be used to argue that the connection between ecological exploration and environmental citizenship have intellectual origins extending back into the Middle Ages. The materiality of the spatial practice of pilgrimage—long exercised by devout religious of various faiths on paths trod upon by historical individuals—intersects with literary conjurations of such rituals. Understood within an ecocritical context, medieval pilgrimage literature, an inherently allegorical genre, can be read as an ecopoetics, that is, both a critical practice, meant to understand the intersection between the human and nonhuman, and a literary practice, giving voice to the nonhuman world. Jonathan Skinner describes ecopoetics, including "'slow poetry'" (Hume 755), as a restless "kind of boundary work, about networks and crossing" (Hume 760). Networks, crossing, and slowness constitute pilgrimage as a material ritual, which, like ecopoetics itself, lives "close to the ground" (Hume 765), even emerging out of and on the ground.

By self-consciously promoting living tongues undergoing continual change, slow pilgrimage ecopoetics addresses ritual experience together with ecological, spiritual, and poetic matters. As relatively concrete, localized, commonplace, and oftentimes place-specific, the mutable vernacular as a form of topopoetics was ideally suited to trigger an affective response in a wide audience. Texts and landscapes co-evolve interdependently. Giving vernacular voice to a shared physical and meditative pilgrimage experience, the text engages a continually evolving linguistic organism to record perceptions of the more-than-human world.

Design and randomness—the foci of this special issue—are both at play, albeit to differing degrees, in medieval pilgrimage poems. While design seems integral to the concept of pilgrimage—wayfaring from one's home to a sacred shrine—the temporality of walking is slow, responding to unexpected events. As Rebecca Solnit remarks in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, "[t]he random, the unscreened, allows you to find what you don't know you are looking for, and you don't know a place until it surprises you" (11). Despite what Solnit indicates here, the word "contingent"—stemming from the Latin *contigere*, meaning "to touch"—suggests a slower, more intimate way to describe the unexpected human and nonhuman encounters of pilgrimage and the

insights they inspire than the word "random," whose Germanic origin links it to movement "at speed" (*OED Online* n. p.).

The tension between design and contingency extends beyond the material and embodied realm. While design stems from methodical and deliberate ordering, it simultaneously suggests mastery in its articulation and outline. As with medieval pilgrimage paths, a certain type of design defines a route, sets a pace, and even prescribes a mode of progression. When it comes to medieval texts, design seems more linked to speeding up, whereas contingency aligns itself with slowing down. The speed at which modern transportation now allows us travel over and around the earth thus arguably has damaging consequences even beyond those of carbon emissions and noise pollution. Acceleration impels us to lose touch with the earth's cyclical rhythms, suggesting human actors can *control* earth's forces, an almost violent usurpation of power (Gersdorf 41, 45).

In contrast, medieval Christians like St. Francis urged the role of human interaction with nature as one of *stewardship* and *care*, concepts integrally based on deliberate forethought (design) and sensitive response (contingency). While pilgrims might strive to reach a shrine in time for festival feast days, hurrying to make it *on time*, in actuality many not infrequently wandered from the official path. As Jonathan Skinner points out, the ecopoetical translation of human and nonhuman encounter "doesn't take a linear path—it requires something other than a unitary voice" (Hume 761). Unlike design, this contingency slows things down, allowing for care time, nurturing "the unexpected changes, the events, that other than human creative agencies bring to happen" (Puig de la Bellacasa 214). Analogously, rejecting the domination implicit in following the well-designed path suggests a responsive, even responsible, way of interacting. By resisting appropriation of our *Umwelt*, we fulfill the role of what Michel Serres calls "tenancy" (86), a more ecologically-friendly mode of interaction with the world. In refusing to own the *Umwelt*, we resist possession of it, allowing it to act and develop freely.

Moving Slowly

"Walking is the best way to go more slowly than any other method that has ever been found." (Gros 2)

For the slow ecopoetics of pilgrimage and pilgrimage texts, a leisurely touch—physical on a path, linguistic through the tongue of everyday folk, emotional and intellectual between poem and reader—suggests mindful engagement. Just as pilgrimage ideally kindles spiritual and medical healing in the pilgrim, it sparks physical transformations in the landscape. A slow ecopoetics—slow to walk, slow to write, slow to read—versifies both gradual and sudden changes fashioned by pilgrimage on the material "living landscapes through which pilgrims travel" (Eppig 50). Over time, these spaces keenly respond to human and nonhuman interactions, from weathering to spontaneous soil augmentation through the shedding of leaves (Belloc 93-99). The material pilgrimage path modifies as dirt compacts and landscape incrementally alters.

Indeed, substantial ecological changes took place, transforming the landscape surrounding pilgrimage routes. King Edward I decreed highways be kept clear of brush and other vegetation where thieves could hide, so as to reduce the likelihood of crimes committed against pilgrims and other travelers (Bright 4-5). What is more, in England, clearances were at times extended from established roads into uncultivated land (Oram 314). The pilgrimage road itself was "a strategic point of interaction between human and environment" (Allen and Evans 26). Traveling through a specific landscape both changes that space through, for example, erosion, and transforms the traveler, who encounters unexpected and contingent human and more-than-human entities.

Slow pilgrimage as a processual ecopoetical practice thus manifests itself in four major ways: in the slow somatic travail on the road itself; in the slow change in the vernacular language of fourteenth-century pilgrimage poems; in the slow spiritual amendment pilgrimage is meant to catalyze; and in the act of slow reading as a form of textual wayfinding. Physical pilgrimage acts as one "conceptual domain to reason about another domain" (Pellizzoni 78)—that of the soul's amendment and improvement on its journey to inner healing. Pilgrimage

> was a strong experiential reminder that the unpredictability of human life is not adequately represented by a sedentary lifestyle. Travel over dusty countrysides, steep and slippery mountain passes, through woods, and over hills and valleys was a more accurate representation of human life. Different geography created awareness of the diverse landscapes of the soul, the rocks, sunlight, green growth, and the dust of emotional life. (Miles 169)

Human understanding of the environment eventually enters literary works through somatic interaction. Landscape influences textscape. Analogous to the physical pilgrimage, a literary pilgrimage engages the reader emotionally and spiritually as she undergoes, sees, and memorializes a pilgrimage of her own. Repeatedly using variants of the word *amendment*, poets evoke this religious concept in numerous ways, to indicate material transformation, spiritual growth, and poetic variation. The material practice of pilgrimage through slow walking and fortuitous encounters is also deeply intertwined with the ecopoetics of the vernacular, a persistently evolving language. Indeed, the language of slow pilgrimage poetry reflects the physical slowness of walking to a sacred shrine, the readers' laboring through the text, and the inevitable—often gradual—changes in the vernacular used by authors.

No matter the specific geographies the medieval pilgrims traverse in these texts—from Florence to the Midlands—walking represents and to a certain extent becomes a kind of reading—of landscape, of environment, and of neighboring ecology. As Alec Finlay observes referencing Frédéric Gros' *The Philosophy of Walking*, "the only way slower than walking is *looking*" (248). The pilgrim might be what Catrin Gersdorf dubs an "environmental phenomenologist" (44), decelerating into a measured promenade or amble. This slowness allows the human actor to pay attention to her surroundings—everything "mysterious, incongruous, and unexpected" (Gersdorf 44)—in ways that become environmentally suggestive. Seeping from fourteenth-century pilgrimage poems, a "'love of slow'" inculcates a "learned dependence…" (Northcott 232) on the environment. Pilgrimage, a "*time* dependent" (Northcott 223-24) phenomenology

of perceiving and interacting with the world, enables the pilgrim to focus not (just) on the arrival but also on the meander that takes her there. It is not simply the human creating the road (Allen and Evans 3); pilgrims and landscapes affect each other. Indeed, as Gros has argued, in walking slowly, the "body becomes steeped in the earth it treads. And thus, gradually, it stops being in the landscape: it *becomes* the landscape" (85).

Humans, then, are not the masters, but the vulnerable temporary occupants reliant on more-than-human surroundings. For example, the narrator of Chaucer's "Tale of Sir Thopas" marks and identifies each little aromatic plant, from the "lycorys and the cetewale,/ And many a clowe-gylofre,/ And notemuge to putte in ale" (VII.761-63; "licorice and the zedoary,/ And many a clove-gillyflower;/ And nutmeg to put in ale").[3] The resistance to speed helps the human actor pay attention to everything from path to little herbs, the vernacular language necessary to describe both, and even poetry itself. The slow pace of reading required by medieval pilgrimage poems can be considered a form of poetic wayfaring dependent not simply on design but also on the intimate randomness of contingency.

Material Pilgrimage Practice: Reading the Landscape through Slow Walking

> "[F]inding a pair of sticks/ that fit your stride/ and a walk." (Cockburn and Finlay 125)

One aspect of contingency lies in the unexpected juxtaposition of pilgrimage works from unlike periods. While not planned for through design, the palimpsest of layering disparate texts allows us to attend both to literary artefacts and the environs cultivating those works. While a contemporary Scottish poem and a non-European work dating from several centuries after the European Middle Ages may not seem likely matches, we can trace commonalities with our medieval pilgrimage poems. The recent tour around Scotland described in *The Road North* (2014) by Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn parallels a journey recorded in the seventeenth century, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1694). This Edo-era story of two Japanese travelers, the poet Bashō and his companion Sora, bridges the medieval and modern. Inspired by this influential writing, Finlay and Cockburn arguably use the earlier work as a blueprint, an official design as it were, to creatively spring into action and produce their own pilgrimage text. Contingent encounters and unexpected vistas along the way help shape their poem. Referring to more than just linguistic usage, the vernacular Cockburn and Finlay record extends to material practices (Minnis xi), such as lyrical evening strolls. Their vernacular pilgrimage veers into startling revelations sparked by sudden happenstance, such as the moon washed in the waves.

This generative tension between official and vernacular mapping can also be seen through medieval pilgrimage. In his theories, Rob Nixon transfers the concept of the vernacular from linguistics to topography. He has pointed out the adverse effects that orchestrated, intentional, and designed landscapes can force on organic, unprocessed, and contingent ones, when, by analogy with the standardization of language, the "official

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[3] All Middle English Chaucer references come from the Benson edition, unless otherwise noted.

landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one" (Nixon 17). Nixon indicts this imposition as socially and ecologically deleterious:

> A vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features. A vernacular landscape, although neither monolithic nor undisputed, is integral to the socioenvironmental dynamics of community [...]. By contrast, an official landscape [...] is typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental. (17)

Nixon argues that "imposed official landscapes typically discount spiritualized vernacular landscapes" (13), ones which contingently develop. In the medieval context, vernacular paths springing up in response to religious ritual performance sometimes were in conflict with more conventionally bureaucratic perspectives on the land.

An example of this tension between vernacular and official landscapes can be found in two differing routes to Canterbury. Chaucer's pilgrims travel on the regulated passage of Watling Street, once a Celtic thoroughfare. The first-century CE Roman invasion of Britain imposed its official imprint on the landscape through paving this once vernacular route. Subsequent royal decrees reinforced the imposition of human design. While the passage from Southwark to Canterbury along the Roman Road did not eliminate a more southerly route, it was the product of official regulation and control. In contrast, the Pilgrims' Way along the Downs from Winchester to Canterbury emerged as a vernacular track, evolving gradually since well before the Middle Ages (Belloc 62). While the increasingly common practice of enclosure in England in the Norman period, a practice that only accelerated in the Tudor period, straightened out the natural tendency of the older road system to undulate, vernacular medieval roads tolerated, even encouraged, tarrying or loitering (Allen, "Road" 21). As opposed to being linear and teleological, the actual practice of pilgrimage consisted of contingent actions and reactions as with Chaucer's Wife of Bath, who practiced "wandrynge by the weye" (*The Canterbury Tales* I.467).

A subset within the chronotope of the road (Bakhtin 85, 98, 252), the pilgrimage road is one mode of spatial practice. What is more, the concept of "life as pilgrimage" as promulgated by the official medieval church and through literary texts encouraged human actors to see their own lives in terms of the metaphor of pilgrimage and to enact somatically the physical act of pilgrimage by walking to local and distant shrines. Pilgrimage poems not only *reflected* the historical reality of physical place. Such literature moved readers to undertake place pilgrimage themselves, thus, in turn, *shaping* material pilgrimage practice. Poetry literally altered landscapes where human and the nonhuman intersect. Walking on medieval roads marks the landscape (Allen and Evans 1), which can be viewed as "a palimpsest of human and nonhuman movements: a communally intersecting biography" (Tsing 237). Physical inscription parallels written narrative. At the time when many of the vernacular pilgrimage poems were composed, masses of pilgrims inscribed their marks on pathways to shrines; "human movement naturally leaves a trace," most readily witnessed on non-paved surfaces (Miles-Watson and Miles-Watson 330). The grinding down of the pilgrimage track, reflecting the

"slowness of flat ontology" (Yates 207), occurs over vast expanses of time, causing gradual yet inevitable erosion of terrain. The only reason we do not see dirt evolving is because its changes occur so slowly.

The sacred geography of pilgrimage intersects with dirt paths, built urban spaces, and hallowed shrines—all "socio-ecological landscapes" (Eppig 50). Chaucer's Parson, Dante's pilgrim narrator, and Langland's Will are grounded in "real" locations— the celestial Jerusalem, Florence, London. Dante lodges his fellow Florentines in various levels of the *Inferno*, his specific, local representatives for the generic pilgrim (Westphal xiv). Chaucer's Host comments on the close-lying towns of "Depeford" and "Grenewych" (I.3906-7), urging the telling of tales to pass the time. While medieval pilgrimage poems flag geographically identifiable places, the literary ways vary from the allegorical—hell to heaven (*The Divine Comedy*) or birth to death (*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*)—to the familiar—Southwark to Canterbury (*The Canterbury Tales*) or from the Malvern Hills to London (*Piers Plowman*). Literal or literary, a specific environment grounds each pilgrimage route.

Additionally, each writer's vernacular, location-dependent, varies. A singular linguistic environment, uniquely and contingently germinating within a specific *Umwelt* (Berroth n. p.) of land, culture, and space, emerges from the path plotted and designed cartographically. Chaucer's pilgrims pass "the Wateryng of Seint Thomas" (I.826), a brook close to London and specifically named to identify and distinguish it from other streams. The link with "Seint Thomas" suggests how the brook was an inevitable crossing for pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, a site dedicated to that saint's shocking murder and subsequent sacralization. Even within a particular political entity, like a nation, differing constituents utter varied words. Chaucer's London English, for example, deviates from Langland's West Midland origins. Each articulates a distinctive ideolect. As Sten Pultz Moslund suggests in his discussion of *topopoetics*, the

> vocabulary of a text is affected by, or sometimes produced by, the environment of its setting [...]. [A] topopoetics within a language like English will be particularly sensitive to the presencing of place through the untranslatability of local varieties of English, or englishes [...]. (Moslund 35)

Within topopoetics which adhere to a unique landscape, toponyms—sensitive to the decay of the native ecology—matter. A contemporary poem, Cockburn and Finlay's *The Road North*, moving to and fro as it does between the Scottish present and Japanese past, features striking parallels with medieval pilgrimage models. Like them, it is rooted in the vernacular of place through dialectical idiosyncrasies and a precise and local lexicon. The exact utilization of a distinctive vocabulary parallels the specialized glossary of medieval pilgrimage poets, embedded in a particular setting and locale. For Finlay, "place-awareness" becomes a key means to revealing "a hidden history" (179) of irreplaceable sites. Similarly, Chaucer's *General Prologue* references "shires" (I.15), a uniquely English division of the land stemming from Old English. Rooted in the pilgrimage "langscape" of English, Chaucer utters a topospecific "landguage" (Moslund 39).

The genre of medieval pilgrimage poetry both describes and affects the depiction of the nonhuman world. As Astrid Bracke remarks in relation to yet another contemporary text, Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), the "meandering stories and relatively slow pace" stem from the "oozing and meandering nature of one its most important nonhuman characters: the river Ouse" (227). I see a parallel here to the pilgrimage path in pilgrimage ecopoetics. Doubly shaping the extratextual world through its combination of physical description and textual creativity, pilgrimage poetry, as environmental poetry, intimately entwines with the landscape that the pilgrim passes through and becomes part of. As Nancy Easterlin points out, "an understanding of humans as wayfinders suggests a complex and dynamic interest on the part of humans in the environment, the surround itself is complex and dynamic and is frequently in a state of change [...]" (261).

In medieval poetry, characters observe the interaction, even the mutual shaping, of human and more-than-human actors. The Host in *The Canterbury Tales* knows the time by noticing how "the shadwe of every tree" is as long as his own body (II.7). At the start of *Piers Plowman*, Will, exhausted from traveling—"wery [of]wandred"—goes to rest "[u]nder a brood bank by a bournes syde" (*Prologue* 7-8; "weary of wandering [...] At the bottom of a broad bank by a brook's side").[4] The brook's soporific babblings mesmerize Will. Lulled to sleep, he wakes intermittently for the rest of the long poem. Contingent encounters, such as Will's encounter with the brook, can include man-made objects. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the sudden appearance of an "alestake" (VI.321), a garland-bedecked pole indicating the presence of a tavern, sparks the impromptu suggestion of his fellow pilgrim, the Pardoner, to eat and drink in the "Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale."

Walking in pilgrimage poems occurs at a lingering pace, allowing for contingent meetings between human actors. Dante's pilgrim suddenly meets his mentor, Brunetto Latini, in the circle of hell reserved for sodomites. Swooning at the suffering of Paolo and Francesca, swirling in the buffeting winds of the second circle, Dante's pilgrim is clearly affected emotionally on his hazardous journey. Geoffrey the pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales* "accidently" ("by aventure," I.25; see Mann xxvi-xxx) falls into the company of pilgrims at a hostelry in Southwark. In *Piers Plowman*, the allegorized figure of Hunger rises up against lazy laborers who have disregarded their duty to cultivate the land's soil and, in turn, neglected to tend to their own souls. Deguileville's hapless pilgrim must choose which path to take—that of the honest laboring peasant or of a pretty girl playing with a ball. These unexpected moments halt the pilgrim, interrupting the design that propels both pilgrim and text design forward. Unlike hasty impetus, inertia sparks reflection upon one's position in the mesh of one's surroundings.

One of the slower and more disturbing of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, "The Clerk's Tale" is rooted in the landscape of Italy. The Clerk acknowledges how the original poet (Petrarch) invokes

> Pemond and of Saluces the contree,

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[4] All Middle English references to *Piers Plowman* come from the Schmidt edition; Modern English translations are taken from the Robertson and Shepherd edition.

And speketh of Apennyn, the hilles hye,
That been the boundes of West Lumbardye,
And of Mount Vesulus in special,
Where as the Poo out of welle smal
Taketh his firste spryngyng and his sours,
That estward ay encresseth in his cours
To Emele-ward, to Ferrare, and Venyse. (IV.44-51)

[Piedmont and the country of Saluces,
And speaks of the Apennines, the high hills,
That are the boundaries of West Lombardy,
And of Mount Vesulus in particular,
Where the Po out of a small well
Takes its first springing and its source,
That eastward ever increases in its course
Toward Emelia, to Ferrara, and Venice.][5]

The specific topological and geographical features place the story in a particular environment, in this case, the Po Valley. The nobleman Walter transplants the peasant Griselde, figured as a "flour" ("flower"; *Canterbury Tales* IV.919). Plucking her from her father's humble cottage, Walter dresses her in rich clothes (see IV.385) to make her his proper wife. After years of resiliently enduring her husband's cruelty—falsely making her believe their children have been killed by his orders, etc.—she finally warns him not to inflict the same cruelty on his next wife. Her protest transmutes the vicious brutality she has endured into a—seemingly—happy ending. The reader has, along with Griselda, endured Walter's achingly slow and disturbing machinations for twelve years. This protraction of the tale's plot reflects the deliberate pace of a physical pilgrimage—slow, often agonising, and set within a specific ecological biome.

Taking its time, each section of *Piers Plowman* is called a *Passus*, Latin for step, as though readers walk along with the narrator Will. Langland draws out a wild kaleidoscope with snippets from Abraham's suffering to Christ's crucifixion, and even looks forward to the Apocalypse. All this is embedded in the unremarkable life of the commoner Will, a late fourteenth-century Englishman. Aging from randy—"yeep" ["yeasty" (XI.18)]—youth to impotent old man over the course of thousands of lines of alliterative verse, Will bears witness to all aspects of the world, including animals who mate more reasonably than humans (XI.327-372). The poem slowly takes the reader along on a pilgrimage from the creation of Adam and Eve through Judeo-Christian history. The deliberate and designed pattern of physical pilgrimage infiltrates the action, matter, and plot of this pilgrimage poem with its contingent meanderings provoked by bizarre dreams and puzzling allegorical manifestations. Pilgrims (historical and imagined), fictive tales, and more-than-human entities, like the path itself, work together, as we, to speak with Finlay again, "enter a landscape through the arch of language" (18). Each mutable textscape parallels physical landscape, with slow physical pilgrimage shaping slow poetics.

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[5] Translation from https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/clkpr-par.htm. Accessed February 26, 2019.

The Ecopoetics of "Landguage": A Living and Resilient Vernacular

"[F]inding a language/ in which you feel/ at home." (Cockburn and Finlay 127)

In the Middle Ages, Latin functions within an official, ecclesiastical, and orchestrated linguistic landscape, while the vernacular persists as organic, resistant, and insistent, "significantly [extending] the verbal range" of medieval pilgrimage poetry (Ramazani 17). Within this model, Latin acts as a language of design, while the vernacular, a resilient and responsive tongue, adapting to survive, vibrantly sprouts from contingency. Just as the dirt pilgrimage path alters due to countless footsteps, unplanned changes in languages occur over time. Language endures because it changes, suggesting resilience. After meeting Nimrod deep in the *Inferno* (XXXI.67-69),[6] Virgil tells Dante's pilgrim that a single language cannot suffice (*Inferno* XXXI.76-81). Adam reveals how his tongue became extinct even before Nimrod, informing the pilgrim that "never/ has any thing produced by human reason/ been everlasting […] Such change must be:/ the ways that mortals take are as the leaves/ upon a branch—one comes, another goes" (*Paradise* XXVI.126-138). No human construct can last—not even a linguistic one. But by remaining mutable and adaptable, it can endure in ever new forms. Imagined by Dante as "leaves/ upon a branch," that is, as ephemeral organs helping vascular plants to thrive, the spoken vernacular both reflects and spurs a change in the relationship with the authority of written language.

As it modifies, the vernacular is uniquely suited to express the physical, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of pilgrimage. Vibrant living languages spoken by diverse classes of people stand in opposition to Latin, the official language of authority that carries cultural capital in the late Middle Ages. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* establishes the vernacular precedent for pilgrimage poetry in the fourteenth century. Enhancing its status for poetic and learned discourse, Dante suggests that this vernacular possibly exists "as it were, in exile, on a pilgrimage, among the humble and throughout the Italian peninsula: 'our illustrious vernacular wanders like a stranger and finds hospitality in lowly refuges'" (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* I, xviii, 3, qtd in Ascoli 60). Meandering along with the pilgrim, the vernacular never crystallizes into one singular, permanent form. Vernaculars continue to modify, suggesting endurance through variation.

The vernacular proves an ideal means to link the pilgrim reader with the poetic text. Guillaume de Deguileville's goal, he proclaims, is to help *every* reader-pilgrim to complete the spiritual journey of the text. He thus emphasizes all classes and genders in the opening poem of *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, addressing "men and women, rich and poor, wise and foolish, kings and queens" (de Deguileville 3). His narrator further asserts:

> This vision concerns the mighty and the humble, without exception. I have put it all in [French], so that laymen can understand it. Everyone can learn from it which path to take

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[6] All citations come from Dante Alighieri as translated by Allen Mandelbaum, unless otherwise noted.

and which to leave and abandon. This is something very necessary to those who are pilgrims in this wild world. (de Deguileville 3)[7]

His text must be in the vernacular so layfolk can have access to it. Insomuch as each reader differs, responses to the text are contingent on gender, class, and education. Pilgrimage poetics insist on a vernacularity that accommodates these differences and contingencies. Langland, whose Midlands English differs from that of Chaucer's London English, conjures up a world ranging from the bowels of hell to Christ's passion in Jerusalem. Yet, like Chaucer's poem, *Piers Plowman* remains quintessentially English, with drunken pub-goers and a dysfunctional Parliament. When the humble Everyman named Haukyn requests that Patience explain what Poverty is, Patience's response includes a long Latin quote (XIV.276) that Haukyn cannot understand.

"I kan noght construe al this," quod Haukyn, "ye moste kenne me this on Englissh."
"In Englissh," quod Pacience, "it is wel hard, wel to expounen,
Ac somdeel I shal seyen it, by so thow understonde." (XIV.277-279)

["I can't construe this," Hawkin told him, "you must translate it into English."
"All this in English," said Patience, "is very hard to expound,
But I shall explain some of it, so you may understand."]

After Haukyn asks for an explication in English, he receives one, leading to a scene of contrition, one catalyzed through the vernacular. This use of the vernacular—and by extension, vernacular poetry, capable of amending even the humblest of souls—is necessary, his scene suggests, so that the imagination and devotion of potentially everyone could be affected (Bale 126, note 7).

The vernacular eludes concrete design which crystallizes into one single, permanent form. Tim William Machan, in his exploration of Middle English, carves out a sociolinguistic model to argue for the vernacular language as an ecology (9), characterizing "the relations between a speech community's linguistic repertoire […] and social practices" (Machan 10). As applied analogously to language, the metaphor of ecology suggests that the living, dynamic vernacular constitutes a fertile means for understanding a specific place. Words, palimpsests of historical variation, suggest environmental dynamism: "[A] name opened/ to reveal the hidden/ seed of its meaning" (Cockburn and Finlay 115). When we unearth the etymology of our vernacular tongues, we perceive past iterations of signifiers and, through extension, their future development, should the language thrive. The ideal language in which to express our life's peregrinations is the vernacular, a linguistically dynamic actor and "living organism with its own agency" (Hsy, *Trading Tongues* 57; see 25). Vernacular speakers respond to others, not in a hermetic vacuum, but in a living linguistic biosphere, attested to in medieval pilgrimage poems.

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[7] Unless otherwise noted, all citations come from Guillaume de Deguileville as translated by Eugene Clasby.

Textual Wayfaring: Slow Walking through Pilgrimage Poems

"[A] walk is a path for two." (Finlay 96)

The design of a pilgrimage route responds to unexpected geological features, such as steep inclines or bubbling brooks. Over time, it may subtly alter direction in contingent response to factors like wind abrasion or flooding, storm debris, or diseased vegetation. Pilgrimage poems similarly show evidence of continuous, subtle change. Pilgrimage practice influences poetic practice. Just as walking in traditional pilgrimage "involves slow organic movement through a landscape" (Northcott 215), the literary pilgrim ambles through slow poetry, catalyzing transformation to affect a spiritual cure. While walking carves a path in the dirt and gravel, writing inscribes poetic lines, pondered over and, if necessary, later revised and amended. Initially a product of the poet's design, the verse of medieval pilgrimage poems was edited—slowly—over time. Deguileville himself amends *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (1330s), with a reworked iteration appearing in 1355 (see Clasby xv). At the end of the fourteenth century, Langland edits *Piers Plowman* over twenty years, resulting in the A-, B-, C-, and even -Z versions (Robertson and Shepherd xi). With *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer aims at a prolonged poem so huge, it remains incomplete and in fragments—discrete chunks.

While ultimately amendment must end with the poet's death, the extant variations of a poem suggest a vibrant diversity of possibility. Ecopoetics consists not merely of a final product, the poem or prose work by an author. As Jonathan Skinner points out, "one important aspect of eco-poetics entails what happens off the page, in terms of where the work is sited and performed, as well as what methods of composition, or decomposition, precede and follow the poem—the […] collaboration that the work takes up and generates" (Hume 760). A key concept for slow pilgrimage ecopoetics, literal amendment can be seen in the evolving literary artefact of the pilgrimage poem itself, since post-Dantean poems exist in multiple versions. Just as roads have detours, medieval pilgrimage literature remains unfinished, fragmentary, or multiple.

Vernacularity and amendment remain central to more recent pilgrimage writings, unexpectedly, surprisingly, and contingently linked to medieval pilgrimage poems. Earlier in this essay, Bashō's writing was seen as a design for a twenty-first century Scottish work. Bashō also exercised influence over the Beats, such as Jack Kerouac, whose American icon *On the Road* (1957) gives us an instance of the modern embrace, interpretation, and appropriation of the medieval. Just as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* includes parodies of Northern dialect in "The Reeve's Tale," Kerouac's prose replicates the jaunty rhythms of American patter. David J. Alworth argues that "Kerouac turned to the open road in order to reimagine sociality" (82), which requires the glue of the vernacular. Despite the seductive legend of a spontaneously produced text, Kerouac amended his work considerably, from its initial gestation in 1948 until its publication in 1957. In the unpublished autograph manuscript travel diary dating from 1948-49 (*On*

the Road notebook), Kerouac imagines the novel as a quest tale, thinking of pilgrimage during its gestation. Concerning this early version of the novel, he writes,

> The hero is a man in his late 20's who has lived a lot, and who ends up in a jail, thinking, finally, that he needs to "seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," in the words of Bunyan [author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)]. (*On the Road* notebook, March 25, 1949; see Christy 26)

Four days after this journal entry, Kerouac writes, "*Pilgrimage* […]. My interest in the 'beat': it must be because they're not only poor, but *homeless* […]. Their lives have an exterior air of pilgrimage (wandering + impoverished)[…]" (*On the Road* notebook, Tues. March 29, 1949). Kerouac mentions Chaucer in a letter (June 28, 1949) to Elbert Lenrow: "In Chaucer, by the way, 'bone' is PRAYER" (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 207). In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise, whose name alone evokes Dante, describes his journeys as a "pilgrimage" (Kerouac 139, 303). Though Chaucer was, in the end, but a minor influence on Kerouac, the parallels between the two authors expose how elements characteristic of pilgrimage literature—endorsement of the vernacular and amendment—persist well into the modern period, in a generic resilience of language, process, and form.

Kerouac's iconic novel, influenced both through contingent encounters with authors such as Chaucer and edited by design, serves as a recent example of pilgrimage poetics committed to amendment. The ever-evolving state of land on which physical pilgrimage was imprinted becomes reflected in the ever-evolving state of the pilgrimage poem, obsessively walked over (metaphorically) by the pilgrim poet. Different versions attest to the writer's desire to continue to adapt a work for new audiences. Envisioning collaboration, vernacular pilgrimage poets in the Middle Ages invite—even insist—on the reader's involvement[8] to improve on or amend the text. In John Mandeville's fourteenth-century pilgrimage text, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, the narrator declares concerning his readers: "'Y make hem [them] partyners' (2850-53)" (qtd in Cohen 159). The very meaning of the text lies in its *variance* among recipients. As Jan-Dirk Müller argues in relation to Deguileville's work, "no author […] controls the shape of his texts once they are distributed" (148). The poet's design—while reworked through amendment—contingently responds to each individual pilgrim-reader. The pilgrim-walker through her physical ordeal, the pilgrim-writer through his creative act, and the pilgrim-reader through her act of reading show committed persistence.

Amendment, a contingent act, suggests resilient co-evolution, the ability to flourish both through resistance and gradual change. In Langland's *Piers Plowman*, amendment, which appears dozens of times in the text itself as word and concept, remains an unfinished process. The allegorical personifications of Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction teach how to scrub away filth from Haukyn's coat, an allegory for his soul. Dye this coat, he is told, with good will and "Goddes grace to amende the" (XIV.20) ["God's-Grace-To-Amend-Yourself"]. The dirty Haukyn stands for every fallen soul, each one of us, as witnesses to as well as co-pilgrims on this journey. The good work of the poem is realized if it succeeds in affecting Haukyn—and us. We each have a role in that amendment, spiritual and poetic. At the end of his poem,

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[8] See Moslund 38 on more contemporary works.

Deguileville asks for the reader's/listener's aid: "If I have not dreamed this dream well, I pray that it be corrected by those who can dream better or who can make it better" (185-86). His readers as literary pilgrims perform poetic penance through interpretation. This co-writing functions as a penitential exercise by the reader, just as the writing of the poem does for the poet. Asking the reader to correct the work demonstrates how amendment of a poetic text remains no mere theme, but in fact emerges as an agenda for the active participation, even collaboration, of the reader with the writer. Through their own multiplicity—the multiplicity Deguileville explicitly evokes in his initial address to his readers as noted before—readers contribute to the diversity and resilience of the unfinished, ever-amending poem itself.

The dynamic interchange among author-text-reader creates an animated network. In ecological terms, an organism evolves within a specific biosphere to prosper; in literary terms, poems modify and adjust by interacting contingently with other organisms—in this case, readers. In fact, one might say, only readers' interaction with a poem enlivens the written text. This environment of the literary work exerts agency with and against the reader (see Bastian 106-7), who co-writes his or her own slow poetic journey. The strategy of slow poetics authorizes the reader to co-perform the text, making author, reader, and text all kin, "shar[ing] equal status as co-participants" (Hsy, "Queer environments" 299). Though these medieval pilgrimage poems emerge in landscapes—literal and literary—from hundreds of years ago, they remind us that bearing close attention to this poetry becomes synonymous with the slow attention we need to pay to our ecological home. Such works, teaching us to scrupulously focus on our surroundings, enable us to become ethical actors who share the world with fellow humans and more-than-human entities.

"As you walk, you make your own road"

<div align="right">Antonio Machado, "Traveler, your footprints" (n. p.)</div>

Taking a long view of ecopoetical practice allows us to consider how poetry from the distant past can suggest fresh ways to deepen our appreciation of early ecopoets, help us understand contemporary literary works, and texture our endeavors into the future. By promoting slowness, medieval pilgrimage poems can help supplement contemporary eco-theory and eco-literature. Precisely by its very alterity, medieval poetry promises alternative ways to get off the beaten track, so to speak, of ecopoetics. In pilgrimage literature, authors in the Middle Ages anticipated a responsive engagement with the world, an engagement that depended on slowness as a pace that answers to contingency, shapes ethical design, and cultivates ecological agency. Rather than constituting a reading of mastery, the pilgrim-reader's "flashes of understanding" in "the active work of reading" only "come by chance, or by accident" (Bastian 107). As living beings, we constantly have to adapt to continually modifying political, social, cultural, and environmental contexts. As tenants of the language we voice, our adaptations and amendments sustain the vitality of speech.

Walking and reading emerge through time slowly. We make our way around stones, clamber up hillsides, and forge streams, just as we contemplate words, savoring them on our tongue or looking them up in glossaries. The pilgrim poet's slow verse cures spiritual restlessness, forcing readers to decelerate and make "[themselves] at home" in the world (Bergmann and Sager 1). Continually dynamic, pilgrimage poems—literary works of slow process, indeterminacy, and contingent openness—correspond to an understanding of the world according to which "[h]uman beings live in the world, not on it" (Ingold 333). Pilgrimage poems, sanctuaries of linguistic diversity and development, much like nature preserves reserved to foster and protect biodiversity, enact radical resilience (Haraway 162) by encouraging us to think about and revise human-nature relations. Understood as vibrant actants open to amendment, "not merely as inert objects but as things with dynamic agency" (Hsy, "Queer environments" 298), pilgrimage poems, sparking contingent readings and responses, continue to thrive along with the receptive reader, adapting and open to amendment and change. Just as the historical pilgrim presses ahead, the pilgrim reader advances alongside the writer, co-creating a resilient literary work.

While design can gesture toward action and suggest goals, contingent response alerts us to our supple and reciprocal interaction *with*—not over—our world. Allowing for welcoming and caring hospitality—even tenderness (Solnit 21)— on the part of the reader, contingency vibrantly textures and thickens the design of physical and literary slow pilgrimage. Like the attentive walker, the slow reader adjusts her pace to her breath, becoming aware of the poetic space into which she is integrated. Slow pilgrimage ecopoetics represents a dynamic model for how we should perceive and approach our contemporary world—through mindful attention to our fellow human and nonhuman actors, by acting and responding with deliberate pace, and by acknowledging our participation in the ecological home in which we all—human and more-than-human— are embedded.

Submission received 7 June 2018   Revised version accepted 17 March 2019

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Measured Chaos: EcoPoet(h)ics of the Wild
in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

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Abstract

Ecopoetics forms a human expression of the naturecultures that sustain us, enfolding us within an earth that is much more than a mere environment. In consequence, the ecopoet serves as a mediator between the multitudinous voices and lifeforms that take part in the song of the world. Weaving its way into the matter and texts of the world, human language—I argue in the wake of new materialism—provides the measure of and seeks inspiration in the apparent randomness and underlying design motivating the evolution of complex systems in the universe. I interweave approaches originating in Anglophone ecocriticism and ecophilosophy with ecopoetics—as Jonathan Bate and Scott Knickerbocker have defined it—with its close attention paid to the complex, interlaced fabric of the text. Barbara Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics draws from chaos theory, inviting readers to shift interpretative paradigms, moving away from linear, binary grids of logic and reading, toward integrating complex, overlapping systems of meaning. Focusing on Kingsolver's novel *Prodigal Summer* (2000), this paper argues that, as Snyder once put it, art is not so much "an imposition of order on chaotic nature, freedom, and chaos;" rather it is "a matter of discovering the grain of things, of uncovering the measured chaos that structures the natural world," of revealing "the way [wild] phenomena actualize themselves," including within a wild ecopoetic language.

Keywords: Ecopoet(h)ics, ecofeminism, wildness, enchantment, multispecies entanglements, chaos theory.

Resumen[1]

La ecopoética constituye una expresión humana de las naturaculturas que nos dan sustento y nos sitúan en relación a una tierra entendida como algo más que un simple medio ambiente. En consecuencia, el ecopoeta funciona como un mediador entre las numerosas voces y formas de vida que configuran la canción del mundo. Abriéndose camino a través de la materia y los textos, sostengo que el lenguaje humano, visto a partir de los nuevos materialismos, proporciona la medida de y busca inspiración en la aparente aleatoriedad y el diseño subyacente que motiva la evolución de los sistemas complejos del universo. Aquí combino diferentes enfoques originados en la ecocrítica y la ecofilosofía anglófona con el concepto de ecopoética (siguiendo la definición de Jonathan Bate y Scott Knickerbocker) prestando particular atención al complejo entramado del texto. La ecopoética de Barbara Kingsolver se basa en la teoría del caos e invita a los lectores a cambiar paradigmas interpretativos, alejándose de las lógicas de lectura lineales y binarias, para integrarse dentro de complejos sistemas de significado. Centrándose en la novela *Prodigal Summer* (2000) de Kingsolver, este artículo plantea que, como ha señalado Snyder, el arte reside no tanto en "una imposición de un orden en la naturaleza caótica, la libertad y el caos, "sino que representa más bien "una cuestión de descubrir el grano de las cosas, de revelar el caos medido que estructura el mundo natural", mostrando "la forma en que los fenómenos [naturales] se actualizan a sí mismos", a partir de la inclusión de un lenguaje ecopoético salvaje.

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[1] Many thanks to Mariana Avilano for her Spanish translation of my abstract.

Introduction

> *Poetry [...] exceeds the poem.*
> *It first lies short of it–an ethical stance as much as a raw state of consciousness. [... Poetry] frees reality of limits; it does justice to reality's unfathomable depth, the infinite proliferation of sense it encapsulates. [...] It is a matter of taking poetry seriously, of helping the political integrate the poetic–the uncompromising project of which is to seek everywhere the right coincidence between humans and life as it is given to them, as it offers itself up to their necessity, a coincidence that will not bear a closed and fixed form since humans and life are open instances [...].*
> *There's no way around it: the future will be poetic or it will not be–or it will be the disastrous continuation of an unavoidable defeat.*
> *(Jean-Pierre Siméon, « La Poésie sauvera le monde »,* my translation*)*

How can one ponder notions of randomness and design in relation to ecopoetics? One fruitful terrain may very well be laid out in Barbara Kingsolver's environmental writing, carefully crafted to take part in what Karen Barad calls the "exuberant creativeness" of the world (177). With the advent of chaos theory in the 1960s, scientists have reconsidered the very idea of randomness. In great part thanks to meteorologist Edward Lorenz, it was discovered that linear mathematics erroneously called onto randomness to account for unpredictable evolutions of complex systems. Rather than being purely random, it turned out, complex systems followed underlying patterns of self-organization invisible to humans' conventional reading grids, making scientists blind to interactions between various, dynamic systems and their most infinitesimal, initial conditions (Gleick 24). While many have long thought of literature as the result of uniquely human design and agency, Cheryll Gloftelty argues that "literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter, and ideas interact" (xix). To substantiate my hypothesis that ecopoetics forms a human expression of the naturecultures that sustain us, enfolding us within an earth that is much more than a mere environment,[2] this paper looks for evidence that the ecopoet serves as a mediator between the multitudinous voices and lifeforms that take part in the chaotic song of the world.

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[2] My take on the concept of "environment" is prismatic, transcultural, and transdisciplinary, shaped by North American, Native American, and French thinkers, from philosophy and ecocriticism to multispecies ethnography and ecology. It relies for instance on Lakota writer Paula Gunn Allen's concept of "the sacred hoop", on Native American writer Jack Forbes' dismantling of the European concept of an environment (*Columbus and Other Cannibals*, 1972), and on Michel Serres' undermining of the concept: "Oubliez donc le mot environnement, usité en ces matières. Il suppose que nous autres hommes siégeons au centre d'un système de choses qui gravitent autour de nous, nombrils de l'univers, maîtres et possesseurs de la nature. [...] De sorte qu'il faut bien placer les choses au centre et nous à leur périphérie, ou, mieux encore, elles partout et nous dans leur sein » (Serres 60).

Kingsolver's poetic prose draws from chaos theory,[3] inviting readers to shift interpretative paradigms: moving away from linear, binary grids of logic and reading, one must integrate complex, overlapping systems of entangled matter and meaning. However, in connection with chaos theory, Kingsolver's sensuous, poetic prose and its texture represent aspects of her writing that have not received enough attention and that have not been analyzed from an ecopoetic perspective. My work in the field of ecopoetics precisely delves into the poetic texture of language to retrieve the material inspiration at the roots of it. As I unravel the fabric of poetic language, my aim is to reveal the craft of the ecopoet singing her way into a poetic inhabitation of the world. Furthermore, the ecopoetic texts I immerse myself in are so inextricable from an ethical, biocentric stance that, following the coinage ventured by French writer Jean-Claude Pinson, my research dwells on "ecopoet(h)ics," i.e. "poet(h)ics" that aim for that "different light", that "different language which may give meaning to our dwelling within the earth" (Pinson 11; translation mine).[4]

Ecofeminist novelist, short story writer, poet, and essayist Barbara Kingsolver writes of the wonders of the wild in a way that is informed by her training as a biologist and zoologist. "I think biology is my religion," says she in an interview (Perry 147). "Understanding the processes of the natural world and how all living things are related is the way that I answer those questions that are the basis of religion" (Perry 14). In keeping with Kingsolver's oxymoronic style of writing, her ecopoetics arises from a way of dwelling in the *oikos* that is open to the wild energy circulating through it and us, while highly cognizant of the complex mechanisms ecology and biology have shed light upon. Designed at a crossroads between several of the systems humans have developed to try and conceptualize the world, her writing grapples with science, myth, and poetry. Hence Kingsolver's preference for novelistic discourse that allows her in its dialogism to cross-pollinate various types of discourse. Cultivating the fertile soil of ecopoetic prose, Kingsolver meanwhile prompts us to question the soundness of our ethical stances regarding our relationships with the nonhuman. Compenatrating the world, her ecopoet(h)ics forms "intra-actions"—to take up Karen Barad's coinage and her theory of agential realism—with the myriad lifeforms that co-constitute our "naturecultures" (Donna Haraway). Following in the steps of Serpil Oppermann's thorough investigation, of creative materiality and narrative agency,[5] I propose that Kingsolver's ecopoetics both rests on and reflects the notion of *measured chaos.* "Measured" has to be understood here in the double sense of being marked "by due proportion" and "[regularly recurrent] rhythm" (*Merriam-Webster* n. p.). Be it at the level of content or form, this measured chaos takes part in a larger, contemporary project of

reenchantment (Bennett, and Iovino and Oppermann 78, 88). In the case of Kingsolver, this project of reenchantment calls attention to the relational processes through which matter and meaning are entangled, constantly interwoven within fields and fluxes forming patterns that call for paradigmatic, transdisciplinary reading grids.

In many interviews and essays, Kingsolver goes back to her childhood growing up in the wild woods of Appalachia, in Kentucky. This, she insists, formed her education and her special breed of pantheism, combining science with a mystic reverence for the wonders of the world we wordy humans are enmeshed with. Kingsolver still relishes the taste of the wild—a concept referring to the instability of the material world as it eludes human design. In a typically ecofeminist way, Kingsolver invites us to savor the wild via her synesthetic recall of the corporeal experience of blending with the nurturing world around:

> We knew just enough of our world to eat it alive, swallowing wildness by the mouthful, our hearts trembling with gratitude. We tasted the soft green stems stripped from tall grass stalks; like new asparagus. We picked blackberries that stained our tongues and colored our insides, we imagined, with the juiciness of July's heat. We ate cattail roots and wild onions and once captured a bucketful of the crayfish that scrabbled through the creek. [...] Years earlier [...] I remember delicately tasting even moss and mud, so intense was my desire for union with the wildness of the woods. (*Last Stand* 13)

Lawrence Buell's assessment of Kingsolver's essay "The Memory Place" as being sentimentalized and stereotyped suggested wrongly that Kingsolver imagines places she has had no true intimacy with (*The Future* 72-76). Countering such a misprision of Kingsolver's work, this essay seeks to do justice to the ecopoet(h)ic value of her writing—to be experienced via her poetics as much as via the ethical responsibilities that stem from it[6]—writing that in fact springs from interconnections with the land and ecosystem it is embedded in. In the course of this paper, I will first tackle the ethics that pervades Kingsolver's novel, focusing on interspecies entanglements that reveal randomness and design. I will then turn to the reclaiming of human wildness and animality at play in this novel, which negotiates the design of genetic programming with the randomness of human liberty and free will. Finally, I will touch upon ecopsychological aspects of Kingsolver's "earth-based spirituality" (Starhawk 73) that materializes into an ecopoet(h)ics of measured chaos, directly inspired from the breath of Gaia.[7] Throughout, my analysis of Kingsolver's ecopoetic writing as a response to contact with the "flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 280) is informed by the ecophenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and by David Abram's work (*The Spell*, *Becoming*).

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[6] For a cogent analysis of the relational ethics at the heart of Kingsolver's fiction, see Ceri Gorton's PhD thesis, (2009) *"The Things that Attach People": A Critical Literary Analysis of the Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver.*

[7] My understanding of Gaia theory I owe to ecofeminist scholar Riane Eisler ("The Gaia Tradition and Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto," 1990) and ecopsychologist Theodore Roszak (*The Voice of the Earth* [1992] and "Where Psyche Meets Gaia" [1995]), both of whom refer to the then controversial work by biochemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis. I am also indebted to writers such as Starhawk or Gary Snyder, as well as to Bruno Latour's recent rehabilitation of the Gaia hypothesis in *Face à Gaïa* (2015)—although I do regret that Latour's encompassing study neglects the seminal contributions of ecofeminists and ecopsychologists.

Kingsolver's work displays a sense of sacred organicity, an enchanting perception tied to the principles at the heart of both ecology and religion—inasmuch as religion can be understood at its core via etymology. The roots of the word "religion" can be traced to Latin, *relegere*, which means to read over, or to reread, and/or *religare*, meaning to relate, to bind or tie. Religion as a human concept may then well be reinvested from an ecopoet(h)ic and materialistic stance as an invitation to translate the book of nature, in search for what binds all lifeforms together, thereby dovetailing with ecology. Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics composes what Gary Snyder might have termed a "wild language," as fundamentally wild as "consciousness, mind, imagination," that is "'[wild]' as in ecosystems—richly interconnected, interdependent, and incredibly complex" (168). Focusing on Kingsolver's novel *Prodigal Summer* (2000), this paper argues that, as Snyder once put it, art lies not so much in "an imposition of order on chaotic nature, freedom, and chaos," but, rather, is "a matter of discovering the grain of things, of uncovering the measured chaos that structures the natural world," of revealing "the way [wild] phenomena actualize themselves" (168).

Revealing Randomness and Design through Multispecies Entanglements

Orchestrated as a novel with three intertwined, third-person narratives, *Prodigal Summer* follows the lives of three sets of characters, mainly connected by land and place in Southern Appalachia, North Carolina. Their relationships to nature are filtered through their activities, i.e. farming, hunting, gardening, animal watching, and preservation. Manifestly, these focalizing agents carry the voices, diverging points of view, and perceptions that can make readers sensitive to ecological principles. Dialogism thus takes place, first through the voice of Deanna Wolfe, a wildlife biologist specialized in coyotes, who lives as a recluse and works as a National Forest keeper in a game-protection area. She serves to instill basic notions of ecology, synthesizing readings such as Jonathan Roughgarden's *Theory of Population Genetics and Evolutionary Ecology*, or R. T. Paine's concept of keystone species. Kingsolver thus uses her characters to instruct readers about coyotes, how they eat, live, sense, raise their cubs, communicate, and, mostly, how as "keystone predators" they play an irreplaceable part in preserving a balance between species within an ecosystem (62), keeping all sorts of rodents and pests in check. The second set of characters in *Prodigal Summer* voices environmental concerns related to farming alternatives, as they move from tobacco farming to goat-raising. It focuses on entomologist Lusa, with a keen eye for moths, who has married into a rural family. Finally, the third main narrative thread pits ageing Creation Science upholder Garnett Walker against his neighbor, a hippyish organic apple farmer called Nannie Rawley, strongly opposed to pesticides. Their dialogues and epistolary exchanges introduce dramatic irony, tackling ethical debates related to our concepts of and dealings with nature, including ecological notions such as the Volterra principle (216): when a biocide aimed at one species also destroys that species' predator population, what may occur in the end is an increase in the initially targeted prey population—a phenomenon that may seem random if observed through the lens of

linear logic. Nannie Rawley's fight against Garnett's agricultural methods thus casts light on the chaotic, unforeseen counter-effects that pesticide-spraying, as well as other anthropic activities, may engender through negative, retroactive loops.

From the title of the book, *Prodigal Summer*, the novel at hand places the abundant yielding of life in the natural world at the heart of the matter. As the story covers one spring and summer, it brings attention to a myriad of species, whether animal, fungi, or vegetal. These interdependent lifeforms are prompted by an irresistible, more-than-human reproductive drive induced by the change in seasons. The titles of the three intertwined stories gesture toward a motif of interspecies connections. Although they revolve around human characters, these stories are entitled "Predators," "Moth Love," and "Old Chestnuts," connecting humans with animals, insects, and plants. In the course of the story, all these characters' actual present and potential fates turn out to be entangled, just as they are entangled with the lives of all the beings populating their Appalachian valley. Those seemingly random knots linking characters within one complex ecosystem give away the authorial, rhizomatic design underlying the novel. Moreover, it prompts us to consider the ways in which each and every one of our choices might later connect with and influence the trajectories of others, as well as, in turn, the evolution of greater systems. Such are the fates of the red wolf, the Cerulean Warbler, or the American chestnut, who have been wiped out in the wake of overhunting, deforestation, coal-mining, and of the human-introduced chestnut blight from entire regions in Appalachia. Such is also the potential fate of the entire forest in Kingsolver's novel, which could be restored by the migration and protection of coyotes moving into the ecosystem, or by the introduction of a hybrid, genetically modified chestnut that might resist the blight.

Highlighting the seeming randomness linking humans and nonhumans, the alleged chance encounter between Deanna Wolfe and Wyoming hunter Eddie Bondo turns out to be one of the main hinges of the characters' fates, influencing the potential courses of life of both the humans and the nonhumans populating Zebulon valley. Hence the recurrence in their strand of the narrative of images evoking "mortal world-making entanglements," to use Donna Haraway's phrase (*Species* 4). Let us take for instance Deanna and Eddie's "tangled" clothes lying in the mud, her "tangled" hair after their love-making, with beech leaves caught inside it, or else the phoebes pulling out white shreds of stuffing from Deanna's dilapidated armchair to line their own nests (24-27). Just as each individual human life in the book turns out intricately enmeshed with other humans' choices, human lives are revealed as inextricably interlaced with nonhuman lives, be they chestnuts or coyotes, birds or vine, moths or moss.

Moving away from notions of human separateness, Deanna tracks the not-so-random environmental damage wreaked by widespread use of pesticides and forest clearing in agribusiness:

> Most people lived so far from it, they thought you could just choose, carnivore or vegetarian, without knowing that the chemicals on grain and cotton killed far more butterflies and bees and bluebirds and whippoorwills that the mortal cost of a steak or a leather jacket. Just clearing the land to grow soybeans and corn had killed about

> everything on half the world. Every cup of coffee equaled one dead songbird somewhere in the jungle she'd heard. (323)

Deanna serves as an advocate for responsible consumerism. She reinstates the importance of all animals in the food chain all the way down to shrews, voles, worms and termites—the latter being a nearly invisible force that nonetheless plays an essential part in engineering soil fertility.

Prodigal Summer displays its female characters' ingrained sense of interdependence with all lifeforms around them.[8] This is made clear by the repetition between the opening and closing chapters of the novel, which frames the 444 pages of the book with a biocentric view of the world. Debunking the Cartesian notion of human exceptionalism, the narrative thus posits that humans do not exist apart from nature, but as agents taking part in nature's evolution. The closing paragraphs echo the *incipit* on the very first page *verbatim*. Whereas the heterodiegetic narrator in the opening follows Deanna's perspective, the last chapter subtly shifts to a female coyote's point of view. With rifle-toting Eddie Bondo surreptitiously watching her, the animal quickly moving up a forest trail behind other coyotes recalls the very first chapter in which Bondo watched Deanna in the same position: "Solitude is a human presumption. Every quiet step is thunder to beetle underfoot, a tug of impalpable thread on the web pulling mate to mate and predator to prey, a beginning or an end. Every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (444). This salient system of echoes in the open-ended novel creates tension: whether Deanna has managed to win Bondo over to her view of the world— grounded in the interrelatedness and intrinsic value of all beings and emphasizing the ensuing absurdity of killing large predators gratuitously—remains for the reader to decide. With the female coyote's life hanging on Eddie's unpredictable decision as to whether to pull the trigger or not, there comes a crucial sense of liability for the choices we make, and for the apparently random consequences that might follow. The implications of either choice seem all the direr since the female coyote, the reader learns, is on the tracks of another coyote clan, which could be crucial in restoring coyotes into the mountains. Here, animal and human lines of flight intersect, one holding the power to put an end to the other. The suspended ending does not explicitly lead toward either a tragic or a happy ending. Nonetheless, the reader is aware that letting the coyote live would finally fulfill Deanna's dreams:

> She believed coyotes were succeeding here for a single reason: they were sliding quietly into the niche vacated two hundred years ago by the red wolf. […The] coyotes were insinuating themselves into the ragged hole in this land that needed them to fill it. The ghost of a creature long extinct was coming in on silent footprints, returning to the place it once held in the complex anatomy of this forest like a beating heart returned to its

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[8] In Kingsolver's sometimes stereotypical, ecofeminist and utopian pluriverse, women struggle to help men resist their tendency toward hubris and become more critical of the ideologies and stories pitting Man against Nature. Her characters serve to deconstruct literal readings of the Bible and fairy tales. They criticize Hollywood's mainstream imagery, reminding us that in the cultural construct of nature as wilderness, humans are encouraged to dominate and subdue all other species, while they are taught to fear and loathe predators such as the wolf or again the shark, both of which are often constructed as the arch-enemy of humankind.

body. This is what she believed she would see, if she watched, at this magical juncture: a restoration. (63-64)

In this passage, the coyote stands as a synecdoche for the life of the entire mountain, here presented as an organism ("like a beating heart returned to its body"). Rather than being random, the coyotes' wanderings, Deanna's thinking reveals, are caused by the larger design of an ecosystem in which vacated positions will eventually be filled by another species. If left undisturbed, these seemingly random encounters could help reestablish the balance of the ecosystem, a horizon that might have dawned onto Bondo too, raising the stakes at play. In a way typical of Kingsolver's fiction, this ending confronts us with the burden of individual liberty and accountability. Incidentally, this is one of the ways in which chaos theory has impacted ethical and moral beliefs related to notions such as fate and individual responsibility. Whereas purely deterministic science entailed a sense of cosmic fatality, the advent of chaos theory with its different take on the notions of randomness and pattern design has helped restore a sense of individual choice (Gleick 251). The principle of sensitive dependence on initial conditions that chaos theory has shed light upon in the evolution of dynamic systems is encapsulated in the famous metaphor of "the butterfly effect" (Gleick 25-51). It reveals that what may seem as the smallest matter matters on a much larger scale. Consequently, the slightest of our choices might in its wake propel all sorts of unforeseen developments and later prove to have significantly influenced some unfolding ecological design of interrelatedness.

Bondo's name and its reliance on paronomasia give away Kingsolver's implicit design. Evoking the notion of bonding, his name is a clue that Bondo should turn out to be one of the protectors of the web of life, one that takes heed of the alliances between various lifeforms in their co-becoming. Along similar lines, Nannie Rawley, one of Kingsolver's ecofeminist spokes-characters, lectures her pro-pesticide neighbor: "Everything alive is connected to every other by fine, invisible threads. Things you don't see can help you plenty, and things you try to control will often rear back and bite you, and that's the moral of the story" (216). Nannie's comment endorses the ecological ethical stances worked into Kingsolver's environmental fiction, underscoring the blind spots in a binary thinking of randomness and design.

As if metonymically, the three interlaced narratives constituting the novel are textually linked, forming knots and rhizomes at various points. For example, the somewhat oxymoronic phrase "moth love," which conflates insect life and human feelings, appears at the end of the first chapter in the "Predators" narrative (28). On the threshold of the second chapter, the reader is returned to the phrase "Moth Love," a kind of run-on-line between the two chapters. This time, the phrase is capitalized as a title identifying the chapters focalized through Lusa, the entomologist. It thus foreshadows one of the autographic , intertextual threads woven into the text. As Deanna tracks a yet unidentified canid or feline predator in the opening chapter, she examines "a spot where it [has] circled a chestnut stump, probably for scent marking. She [studies] the stump: an old giant, raggedly rotting its way backward into the ground since its death by axe or

blight" (2). This early passage concatenates the lives and deaths of humans, animals, plants, and elements in a way that then runs through the three enmeshed narratives. The image of organic matter decomposing and going back to the earth furthermore encapsulates the ongoing cycles of life and death, of destruction and renewal that characterize a forest's capacity to feed from death and regrow. The old, gigantic chestnut here points to yet another textual rhizome, connecting this time with the title of the third narrative thread, "Old Chestnuts". The title refers to the extinct trees Garnett is obsessed with, and, metaphorically, to the two elderly and somewhat nutty characters that come alive in these chapters.

Making us sensitive to the existence of "earth others," as Val Plumwood would have it (154-55), this novel presents many intersecting points between the trajectories drawn by humans, animals, plants, and all earth others in their co-evolution, including mushrooms, moss, as well as elements, such as water, air, and soil. Forming a literary tapestry inspired by ecology—a science that foregrounds the many interrelated threads within an ecosystem between organisms and their environment, including other organisms—Kingsolver's rhizomatic interweaving of narratives, plots, and existences reveals humans' responsibility in preserving or despoiling the harmony of the whole, in strengthening or severing the ties intertwining all individuals and multitudes. The opening and closing chapter—together with everything in between—insist, that, as Donna Haraway put it, "[to] be one is always to become with many" (*Species* 4). In other words, Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics of measured chaos foregrounds the knots that bring apparently random phenomena into the sympoietic design of a self-regulating ecosystem reacting to outside perturbations.

Biological Design and Biosemiotics in the Human and the Nonhuman

The measured chaos characterizing the ongoing interplay between individual organisms and multitudes of different lifeforms particularly comes to the fore in the episodes involving encounters between humans and other animals. The phrase "moth love" first occurs in a scene where Deanna, the zoologist, is paying careful attention to the critter's response to circadian rhythms:

> The creature had finished its night of moth foraging or moth love and now, moved by the first warmth of morning, would look for a place to fold its wings and wait out the useless daylight hours. She watched it crawl slowly up the screen on furry yellow legs. It suddenly twitched, opening its wings to reveal the dark eyes on its underwings meant to startle predators, and then it flew off to some safer hideout. (28)

Such close observation of nature, mingled with understanding of biosemiotics and ethology, flourishes throughout the novel, cross-pollinating fiction with naturalist descriptions of lifeforms and behaviors that present many telling analogies with the human characters in the novel. Kingsolver's prose indeed constantly reminds us that no amount of culture can ever effectively remove humans from the measured chaos they have evolved from and continue to take part in. Humans have come to think of themselves as cultural beings in control, moved by rational knowledge and thinking,

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rather than by the instinct and mechanistic behaviors that drive nonhumans. Yet, Kingsolver insists, many of our bodily and psychological responses to the world are nevertheless triggered by natural, complex design and intra-actions. These intra-actions affect what goes into our genes (one character has buried a daughter born with Down syndrome, a couple die or have died from uncurable types of cancer), into our reproductive and growth faculties and patterns, our perceptual and hormonal systems, our flight behaviors, and physical attractions. As a result, it is only by analytically reflecting on these processes that govern the natural world—both human and nonhuman—that we can measure some of the chaos in which we are enmeshed, and thus reclaim some sense of human agency and responsibility.

Admittedly, Kingsolver's presentation of nonhuman nature is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is self-consciously anthropomorphic in a way that foregrounds the inevitable human subjectivity that mediates our contact with all others. On the other hand, it also acknowledges the otherness of animals, forever ungraspable and co-existing with us in a pluriverse of multitudinous co-evolutions. Despite this acknowledgment of otherness, Kingsolver's anthropomorphism genuinely induces empathy for animals' plights and emotions, referring, for instance, to the "human-sounding anguish" of a bobcat's "cries" like "icy shrieks in the rain, like a woman screaming" (3). Deanna's point of view encourages identification with coyotes' social and family rites, resembling human naturecultures in certain respects. It arouses feelings of sympathy for the coyotes' motherly ways, their yodeling and yipping sounds, thus working against archetypal fear of wolves and other wild predators in the collective unconscious. Far from feeding into the long-held illusion that humans may ever fully grasp the essence of nature and capture it in various forms of discourse, Kingsolver's focalizing agents approach nonhuman signs and recognize the elusive quality of an animal's mind from a human standpoint: "Male or female, [a coyote] had paused by this stump to notice the bobcat's mark, which might have intrigued or offended or maybe meant nothing at all to it. Hard for a human ever to know that mind" (7). Note the hypothetical modality ("might," "or maybe") underscoring how difficult it is for a human being to conjecture as to the possible perceptions, emotions, and thoughts of the coyote. The gap forever barring humans direct access to an animal mind is also translated by the deictic "that" in this passage, implying distance, and recognizing the animal's specific, perceptual world.

If the notion of "moth love" may at first sound anthropocentric, humans are as a counterpoint constantly shown as being partly driven by animal instinct: "Deanna felt the same impulse to bolt—to flee this risky mate [Bondo] gleaned from her forest" (28). In that sense, Kingsolver's characters are engaged in a process of "becoming-animal" in the way that David Abram uses the concept in his eponymous book: "the phrase speaks first and foremost to the matter of becoming more deeply human by acknowledging, affirming, and growing into our animality" (*Becoming* 10). Only by measuring how much of our own seemingly chaotic behaviors are indebted to our animal naturecultures, can we try to curb or cherish this animality. Thus may we rethink what could make for less destructive ways of inhabiting our *oikos*. Thus too may we fully intentionally venture

into more sustainable relationships with the nonhuman environments and organisms that we must necessarily co-evolve with. Kingsolver underscores that human agency and design will always intersect with the chaos running the biosphere's many complex systems. Forever unfolding in partly unpredictable ways, the manifestations of chaos and design she presents in her novel reveal the ecosystemic ties between anthropic activity and the many nonhuman lifeforms and systems of the Earth.

As another facet of the measured chaos that pervades the material universe, Kingsolver writes about an interconnected web of living beings, with an inherent and intelligible order. The web is colorful, luscious life designed to breed more colorful, luscious life:

> [....] rhododendrons huddled in the cleft of every hollow. [...] But for now their buds still slept. Now it was only the damp earth that blossomed in fits and throes: trout lilies, spring beauties, all the understory wildflowers that had to hurry through a whole life cycle between May's first warmth—while sunlight still reached through the bare limbs [...]. On this path the hopeful flower heads were so thick they got crushed underfoot. In a few more weeks the trees would finish leafing out here, the canopy would close, and this bloom would pass on. Spring would move higher up to awaken the bears and finally go out like a flame, absorbed into the dark spruce forest on the scalp of Zebulon Mountain. But here and now spring heaved in its randy moment. Everywhere you looked, something was fighting for time, for light, the kiss of pollen, a connection of sperm and egg and another chance. (8-9)

The buoyancy of spring here manifests the randomness and design that goes into the birth and death of any lifeform. Each follows its genetic code urging for survival and reproduction while simultaneously depending on chance encounters with other micro- or macro-organisms engaged in their own evolutions. Striving toward that ever-elusive ideal of "thinking like a mountain" (Leopold 137), Kingsolver's voluptuous descriptions use a language as lush as the vegetation she describes, while highlighting the sensuous connections between plants, animals, elements, and humans that rhizomatically form both the "under-story" and the "upper-*story*" of the life of the mountain. Both the mountain and its vegetation are personified. The mountain possesses a "scalp," and the plants "huddle"; buds "sleep," tree branches have become "limbs," and flower heads are "hopeful." Animal and human romance and sexuality are likened to botanical reproduction, with "the kiss of pollen", and spring "heaving in its randy moment." The repeated modal "would"—both epistemic and radical here—points toward a driving life-force, the will to live ingrained in DNA that moves individuals, packs, and entire species, as well as the whole ecosystem of a mountain. On a larger scale, one might say that Kingsolver's writing coalesces with Theodore Roszak's claim that "Gaia, taken simply as a dramatic image of ecological interdependence, might be seen as the evolutionary heritage that bonds all living things genetically and behaviorally to the biosphere" ("Where Psyche Meets Gaia" 14).

Eroticizing interspecies connections, Kingsolver recycles Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the symbiosis between the orchid and the wasp (17), central to their concept of becoming-animal, and calling attention to the complex design of lifeforms that sustains interspecies alliances: "[Deanna] bent to see, aware of her own breathing as she touched the small, raised knob, where this orchid would force its pollinator to drag its

abdomen before allowing him to flee for his life. She felt a sympathetic ache in the ridge of her pubic bone" (22). Transcending conventional gender metaphors, Bondo and Deanna come across so-called "lady-slippers," and mock the patriarchal narrow-mindedness of early botanists, systematically associating flowers with the feminine. Shifting perspectives, the "lady's slipper" is described in terms evoking male genitalia: "dozens of delicately wrinkled oval pouches held erect on stems, all the way up the ridge. She pressed her lips together, inclined to avert her eyes from so many pink scrota" (21). Together, the two characters laugh at "whoever had been the first to pretend this flower looked like a lady's slipper and not a man's testicles. But they both touched the orchid's veined flesh, gingerly, surprised by its cool vegetable texture" (21). Collapsing flesh, veins, and testicles with the "vegetable texture" of flowers makes for an eco-erotic textuality where human, animal, and vegetable sexuality, corporeality, and semiotics converge. By challenging the human languages that separate those realms, Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics explores biomimetic and biosemiotic designs that perpetuate the interspecies connections conducting measured chaos.

The biological drive moving all life-forms toward reproduction is encapsulated in the seasonal rhythms, as the eloquent observations of Deanna Wolfe in her Appalachian Mountains suggest:

> [...] a fresh hatch of lacewings seemed to be filling up the air between branches. [...] They were everywhere suddenly, dancing on sunbeams in the upper story, trembling with the brief, grave duty of their adulthood: to live for a day on sunlight and coitus. [...Their] new, winged silhouettes rose up like carnal fairies to the urgent search for mates, egg laying, and eternal life. (16)

The same force urges animals, plants, and humans, perceptible in the initial bonding and attraction leading to intercourse between Deanna and Eddie Bondo: "[There was] this new thing between them, their clasped hands, alive with nerve endings like some fresh animal born with its own volition, pulling them forward" (20). Whether human love or reproduction instinct, the life-drive Kingsolver evokes gets nearly fleshed out ("this new thing [...] alive with nerve endings like some fresh animal"). It gets endowed with a corporeality and agency of its own that will influence the courses of both characters' lives, while it foreshadows Deanna's unexpected pregnancy. With Haraway's formula in mind, according to which "[s]pecies is about the dance linking kin and kind" (*Species* 17), one might say that Kingsolver's text performs a coinci-dance while pitching a lyrical hymn that reweaves word to world. The ritual mating of hawks is presented as co-choreographed by the birds and the elements, producing an uplifting dance and euphonic song:

> A red-tailed-hawk rose high on an air current, calling out shrill, sequential rasps of raptor joy. She scanned the sky for another one. Usually when they spoke like that, they were mating. Once, she'd seen a pair of them coupling on the wing, grappling and clutching each other, and tumbling curve-winged through the air in hundred foot death drives that made her gasp, though always they uncoupled and sailed outward and up again just before they were bashed to death in senseless passion. (17)

First, the zoologist here acknowledges animal language and communication ("calling out," "when they spoke like that"), as well as animal emotions ("raptor joy"). Second, the

poetic language communicates a sense of ecstasy ("rose high") and thrill ("calling out shrill, sequential rasps of raptor joy"). The alliterations in voiced and unvoiced plosives, or stops (in [p, t, k, b, d, g]) together with sibilant ([ʃ, s]) and liquid sounds ("[r]" and [l]") produce smooth gliding and rolling of the tongue, air flows like the air swishing by and a vibration of the vocal chords that emulate the movement and sensations evoking flying and air currents. The balanced iambic rhythm ("sequential rasps of raptor joy" [-/-/,-/-/]) moreover cues the reading into a rapping that echoes the bird's rasping.

Parallel to this mating ritual, like a choreography worked out by nature and relayed by the ecopoet, Deanna and Bondo soon surrender to a similar pull and tug of sexual attraction, "falling together like a pair of hawks" (22). Working against speciesism, courting rituals between humans and animals are likened: "[Bondo and she]'d had their peculiar courtship: the display, the withdrawal, the *dance* of a three-day obsession" (26, emphasis added). Kingsolver's human animals indeed behave just like other species, falling or rising in love, "yielding to earthly gravity" (22) and thus to the same will to live that drives Gaia as a whole. Whether becoming-animal through the alliances that she forms with animals, or reawakening to her own, intrinsic, animal nature, Deanna follows on animal tracks in many ways.

The opening chapter foregrounds the animal manner in which she moves, elegant yet unencumbered with social self-consciousness. Her gait and bodily countenance engage her in a corporeal relationship with her environment: "her body was free to follow its own rules" (2). True to the ecofeminist philosophy that informs her writing, Kingsolver's approach of femininity constantly walks the fine line between genetic design and cultural determinism. From the start, Deanna's "long, unfeminine stride" does not match cultural stereotypes of femininity (16). So as not to be detected by the animals that she tracks, she uses neither perfume nor soap. Thus, it is inferred, she might actually smell like a female, accounting for Bondo's attraction to and tracking of her on her ovulation day: "'I sniffed you out, girl. You're a sweet, easy trail for a man to follow'" (92). Conversely, Deanna's gaze focuses on "the glossy animal movement of [Bondo's] dark hair and the shape of his muscles in the seat of his jeans" (15). The language applied to his physique, described as "ferociously beautiful," exhibiting "pure naked grace" (29), recalls terms often used for wild animals, or for women for that matter. Such descriptions correct the patriarchal assumption that wild phenomena actualize themselves more in women than in men, a claim that has been instrumental in much domination and oppression of women. Rather than antagonizing purely culturalist and essentialist views of women and men, Kingsolver's female characters unravel these strands to negotiate a form of re-empowerment that braids genetic programming together with social environments and individual, free will. Reclaiming one's embeddedness in naturecultures thus propels a liberating movement, inducing subjects to take responsibility for situating themselves within the measured chaos of worldly existence, and, subsequently, for their individual choices in defining their own identities and relational practices and values.

Underlining humans' biological responses to human and nonhuman naturecultures, Kingsolver, like Haraway, highlights not only our responsibility as

stewards of the earth, but also our wonderful response-ability when attuned to our natural environment (Haraway, *Species* 71). Contact with natural beauty indeed seems to inspire a sense of bonding, not only with the landscape and fauna and flora, but also with one's co-participants in these moments of open contemplation. Such a sense of bonding is expressed, for instance, when Bondo, blown away by the spectacle of Zebulon valley, reaches out for Deanna's hand: "Touching her as if it were the only possible response to this beauty lying at their feet" (20). Kingsolver's characters acutely respond to contact with earth others. Moreover, they invite us to follow in on their tracks as they read the world through more than just a visual lens, reactivating other animal senses such as touch, smell and hearing.

Staying Attuned to Gaia and its Measured Chaos: Ecopoetics of En*chant*ment

In this last part, I mean to delve into the poetic impulses (*poiesis*) that vibrate through Kingsolver's sensual prose and reen*chant* (or sing along with) the world as a precious, living home (*oikos*) to wildly different, yet interconnected species. If we can indeed be attuned to our environment, then the question arises whether human beings might be able to pick up the tunes of the world and its measured chaos. This is the argument at the heart of Joachim-Ernst Berendt's ground-breaking study of the physicality of matter's music in the light of which it can scientifically be claimed, as goes the title of his book, that "the world is sound." Negotiating "the formation of chaotic rhythms" (121) within "the harmonic structure of the universe" (127), Berendt argues that "the tendency toward harmony, immanent in music, in a way is nothing else but a reflection of the same tendency outside of music, in almost all fields" (116). It is a tendency "of everything that vibrates […,] a tendency of the universe to share rhythms, that is, to vibrate in harmony" (116-17). It is a tendency, one might say, of measured chaos.

In a strikingly synesthetic metaphor, Deanna heeds the high-pitched howling of coyotes in the night, a "long blue harmony against the dark sky" (435). The poetic formula performs what Knickerbocker calls "sensuous poesis" (2). It highlights the ecopoet's role as mediator between her readers and the land's chaotic music. As with the ecopoets Knickerbocker studies, Kingsolver's writing does not aim solely at providing "a mirror of the world" (13); rather, it further "[enacts] through formal devices such as sound effects the [implied writer's] experience of the complexity, mystery, and beauty of nature" (13). In doing so, Kingsolver's novel corroborates Berendt's approach of the human ear, body, and mind as predisposed to follow the harmonies of the cosmos, through the physical laws of resonance (51-71). It furthermore falls in line with Abram's defense of "the power of language": far from a purely human-made structure of random, arbitrary signs, language evolved from the "vital *presence* of [the] world," as "a way of singing oneself into contact with others and with the cosmos" (*Becoming* 11).

Narrated—if not chanted—in a lyrical tone when revering the miracles of nature, the web of life interwowen within the text forms a sacred hoop.[9] This hoop resonates with Jean Giono's "song of the world," Jonathan Bate's "song of the earth," or what Mark Tredinnick describes as "the land's wild music."[10] Attentive to bird calls, Deanna listens "to the opening chorus of the day": "In the high season of courtship and mating, this music was like the earth itself opening its mouth to sing" (51-52). The living world in Kingsolver sounds.[11] Birdcalls, "forests of dripping leaves" and "sibilant percussions" (1) articulate with human language. They speak to the human ear, heart and brain in cadenced words, phrases, and music, as if inspired by some sort of great volition orchestrating the many instruments of the world:

> Its crescendo crept forward slowly as the daylight roused one bird and then another: the black-capped and Carolina chickadees came next, first cousins who whistled their notes on separate pitches, close together, distinguishable to any chickadee but to very few humans, especially among the choir of other voices. Deanna smiled to hear the first veery, whose song sounded like a thumb run down the tines of a comb. […]
>
>   The dawn chorus was a whistling roar by now, the sound of a thousand males calling out love to a thousand silent females ready to choose and make the world new. It was nothing but heady cacophony unless you paid attention to the individual entries: a rose-breasted grosbeak with his sweet, complicated little sonnet; a vireo with his repetitious bursts of eighteen notes and triplets. And then came the wood thrush, with his tone poem of birdsong. (52)

Apart from evoking the lexical field of musicality merged with voices, the language itself here produces a kind of musical score. Musical consonance is produced by the marked alliterations and assonances (in [k], for instance, as in "the black black-capped and Carolina chickadees came next," or in the diphthong [əʊ] and the long [i:] as in "a rose-breasted grosbeak with his sweet"). The veery's song is sounded with monosyllabic words that imitate the noise it is compared with ("like a thumb run down the tines of a comb"). The lyricism of the prose thus euphonizes against the potential dissonance ("nothing but heady cacophony") picked up by human ears that might be ill-attuned to the various pitches and rhythms of these many forest calls, untrained ears that might otherwise perceive chaos instead of the measured songs relayed by the ecopoet. On reading Kingsolver's text, one experiences a becoming-bird through the phonemes and rhythm sounding in one's body and mind, via actual or imagined speaking and hearing. The ecopoetic text de-ciphers the vibrant languages of the earth, via sensuous poetics that speak directly to the senses. In so doing, it may well be that the reader's mouth, tongue, ears, phonatory organs, and brain become entangled with the images, sound effects, cadences, and poetic devices of the text, participating in the becoming-animal, becoming-vegetable, becoming-elemental, and becoming-musical at play.

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[9] I am here taking up the biocentric concept of "the sacred hoop" as strung together in writing by ecofeminist scholar Paula Gunn Allen, of Laguna Pueblo and Sioux heritage: "The concept is one of singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life" (56).

[10] See the "Works Cited" section for the eponymous books by these authors.

[11] Barbara Kingsolver's husband, Steven Hopp, is an ornithologist and a musician, and Barbara herself is also a   zoologist and musician.

Kingsolver moreover taps into the ecological intuition poetically entwined in Appalachian vernacular idioms:

> People in Appalachia insisted that the mountains breathed, and it was true; the steep hollow behind the farmhouse took one long slow inhalation every morning and let it back down through their open windows and across the fields throughout evening—just one full, deep breath every day. (31)

Not only is the local saying accurate, with mountain vegetation breathing oxygen into our lungs during the day and rejecting CO_2 at night; in addition, it reveals how attuned to their natural environment vernacular idioms can be. Sensitive to the breath of life on the level of a whole mountain forest, these characters' involvement with nature goes so far as to be translated not only as a sensuous but as a sensual relationship:

> …the inhalations of Zebulon Mountain touched her face all morning […]. She learned to tell time with her skin, as morning turned to afternoon and the mountain's breath began to bear gently on the back of her neck. By early evening it was insistent as a lovers' sigh […]. She had come to think of Zebulon Mountain as another man in her life, steadier than any other companion she had known. (32)

In the synesthetic process of reading, assonants in bilabial [b] phonemes feel like engaging one's lips into giving light pecks, like kisses, and the many sibilants and fricatives ([ʃ]; [Ө], [ð], [s] and [z]) convey the airflows of breathing into one's mouth, with an alternation between voiced and unvoiced phonemes engaging the vocal chords in a process evoking the sighing and breathing described. The pathetic fallacy turning the mountain into a lover points to elements and vegetable beings as companion species for humans, thereby broadening Haraway's notion of the ties between humans and the animals we share our lives with.

In line with Berendt, who insists that to better understand the complex patterns making for musical harmony in the universe, humans' "ocular hypertrophy" (5-7) needs correcting, David Abram argues that we humans would benefit from "[tuning] our animal senses to the sensible terrain" (*Becoming* 3). The sense of smell in *Prodigal Summer* is also central to understanding the interconnections between the earth, its many dwellers, and their creative and procreative inclinations. Smell is one of the ways in which, to take up Abram again, "beings have the ability to communicate something of themselves to other beings" (*Becoming* 172). Put differently, it may be one of the ways in which natural designs charm humans into interaction with nonhumans. As a result of her becoming-animal, Deanna exhibits a sharp sense of smell that allows her to identify and track canids versus felines: "She squatted, steadied herself by placing her fingertips in the moss at the foot of the stump, and pressed her face to the musky old wood. Inhaled. / 'Cat,' she said softly to nobody" (3). The same animal reading of the world suddenly takes over Lusa, also endowed with an acute sense of smell that works its way through her brain to both trace and name the source of the scent: "Lusa was alone, curled in an armchair and reading […]–when the power of a fragrance stopped all her thoughts. [… She] was lifted out of her life. / She closed her eyes, turning her face to the open window and breathing deeply. Honeysuckle" (30). Far from randomly, words come to these characters as directly inspired—in both the literal and figurative meanings of

the verb—by an enchanting contact ("she was lifted out of her life") with the earth. The latter is enchanting, shifting her awareness of the world around. Just as the very name "honeysuckle" seems to originate in the concrete, sweet fragrance sucked into one's nostrils when in contact with the vine, the words "bobcat" and "honeysuckle" pop into the characters' minds as a direct result from the rush of olfactory perceptions, channeled through one's nose directly to the brain. Connecting the mind to the tangible, worldly lifeforms, the power of scent transcends both pure logos and visual absence. The bobcat and the honeysuckle thereby make themselves present, traceable through their scent from which the words arise, with the power to connect beings *in absentia*. This constitutes, in the world conjured by Kingsolver's novel, a magical, enchanting phenomenon that is reiterated by the immersive experience of reading, reversely bringing the scent and awareness of the animal and the vine's existence to our own bodyminds as we experience the wor(l)ding on the page.

From Old French *inspiracion* ("inhaling, breathing in, inspiration") and Latin *inspirare* ("to blow into, breathe upon; inspire, excite, inflame") the polysemy of the word "inspiration" covers the bodily sense of inhaling, while figuratively, it may also mean "to animate or influence; to affect, guide or control, especially by divine influence," "to breathe life or spirit into the human body," and "to impart reason to the human soul" (Merriam-Webster). In Kingsolver's novel, not only do linguistic signs spring into the human mind purely from smell, life itself springs from the ground up, inspired by odors: "Toadstools dotted the humus at its base, tiny ones, brilliant orange, with delicately ridged caps like open parasols. The downpour would have obliterated such fragile things; these must have popped up in the few hours since the rain stopped–after the animal was here, then. Inspired by its ammonia" (3). Just as these mushrooms have been inspired into life by the earth's response to the bobcat's urine, human existence may well be interconnected with all other earth beings, responding to the presences in their environment in equally measured and chaotic ways. Furthermore, propagating synesthetic poetic prose inspired from the lives of toadstools, moths, and legion species of insects, plants, and higher animals, the ecopoetics arising from Kingsolver's ecological tapestry also gestures toward the etymology of the word "humus," which is connected to smell ("humer" in French, to enjoy a delicate smell, to sniff), but also to the words "human," and "humility."[12]

Flowering from the delicate and fragile mushrooms inspired by animal urine, the wonderful and biocentric view at the heart of Kingsolver's text inspires humility. Stooping down to read and smell scat and urine, her characters call attention to the most extraordinary wonders of even the tiniest, lowest, lifeforms. The hierarchy of species and languages white patriarchal societies have long upheld is thus unraveled, reweaving instead the world and words that have sprung from it in a non-hierarchical, sacred hoop

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[12] Josh A. Weinstein draws conclusions that particularly resonate with my analysis here: "The 'great chain of being' is replaced by a perhaps infinite net of interconnection; the outdated concept of a 'food chain' is replaced by the more dynamic and complex metaphor of a 'food web'. [… We] find the root of 'humility' is the same as that of 'humus,' the dark material in soil derived from decomposing animal and plant material that is a crucial pathway in the flow of energy and materials within and between different species and indeed different kingdoms of organisms" (771).

of interconnected, enchanting beings. Meanwhile, Kingsolver's ecopoetics forages into human language and concepts, striving to get to the heart of the words with which we *make sense* of the world, reawakening us to the knowledge that thinking and speaking are, first and foremost, embodied activities practiced via our incorporation into the flesh of the world, to take up Merleau-Ponty's phrase. Brought by our sensory perceptions into a complex matrix of co-becoming that follows the sometimes-unpredictable oscillations of measured chaos, Kingsolver contends, we humans can never extricate ourselves from the unfolding designs that incorporate us.

Celebrating the wonders of life, Kingsolver's reenchantment of the world consecrates Buell's claim that the "the power of imagination" (*Writing* 22) can break through the limits imposed by the modern human mind. It validates his concept of an "environmental unconscious," perceived as both a foreshortening of perception and a "residual capacity […] to awake to fuller apprehension of physical environment and one's interdependence with it" (*Writing* 22). In Kingsolver's writing, this is often achieved via a non-phallogocentric rapport with the world, but, rather, through a sensitive, biocentric engaging with the world that relies on intuition and uninhibited perceptions. Semiotically ordered and worded, these perceptions reassert the power of touch, smell, taste, and hearing, interlinked within our embodied consciousness and responses to contact with the world. They provide random, intuitive sources of knowledge that can short-circuit the logocentric channels that tend to direct our incursions into the chaotic yet also measured world outside of our thinking minds.[13]

Conclusion

Co-orchestrating the measured chaos that designs the web of life, itself entangled within the web of human and nonhuman languages, Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics responds to the multitudes dwelling within sympoïetic Gaia (Haraway, *Staying* 58). Earth herself, like any dynamic system, possesses the capacity to integrate outside perturbations into her own design. Kingsolver's writing in this sense ties in with many ecofeminists and ecopsychologists' analyses of the ongoing ecocide—a situation that will engender unforeseen chaos if humans remain deaf to the voices of the Earth beyond certain tipping points. According to Sarah Conn, "[the] world is sick […;] its needs healing; it is speaking through us, and it speaks loudest through the most sensitive of us" (qtd in Roszak, "Psyche" 12-13). As a matter of fact, Kingsolver's ecopoet(h)ics of measured chaos could be said to substantiate Roszak's hypothesis that "the self-regulating biosphere [might 'speak'] through the human unconscious, making its voice heard even within the framework of modern urban human culture" ("Psyche" 14). Kingsolver's work indeed contributes to reawakening humans' environmental, collective

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[13] For a more detailed account of embodied cognition, see Antonio Damasio's ground-breaking work on "the somatic marker hypothesis" (xi), tackling the inseparability of reason and emotion in the bodymind: "feeling may not be an elusive mental quality attached to an object, but rather the direct perception of a specific landscape: that of the body" (xix); "mental phenomena can be fully understood only in the context of an organism's interacting in an environment" (xx-xxi).

unconscious, that is our "ecological unconscious," more radically defined by Roszak as "the 'savage' remnant within us" (*The Voice* 96), a "collective unconscious" that "shelters the compacted ecological intelligence of our species, the source from which culture finally unfolds as the self-conscious reflection of nature's own steadily emergent mindlikeness" (*The Voice* 304). It may be hoped that as the sciences and the arts further the conversations about the meaning of our dwelling within the earth, they may cast better light on the interplay between consciousness and unconsciousness as well as between the randomness and design in the DNA of all living beings from which matter, mind, and the many vibrant languages of nature co-emerge. Making us aware of the measured chaos at play in living, feeling, perceiving, speaking and writing, Kingsolver's ecopoetics of randomness and design demonstrates that "[human] chatter erupts in response to the abundant articulations of the world," and that "human speech is simply our part of a much broader conversation" (Abram, *Becoming* 172).

Offering language that tries to reconnect us sensually with the animal, vegetal and elemental wildlife that we humans come from and depend on, *Prodigal Summer* seeks to restore us to our home, the earth. It reminds us both of our lowly position as human individuals, and of the sacred ties interlacing our naturecultures within Gaia—ties that are sacred precisely because they form an ecological design humans cannot extricate themselves from or entirely understand, much less even control. Like the old, giant chestnut rotting its way back to the ground, Kingsolver's novel at once highlights how brief and small one individual life might be, how much of its course may sometimes seem random but, conversely, how each life plays a part in the larger web of life that animates our home planet, forever inclined to renew itself, breathing the song of the "Eairth" (Abram, *Becoming* 271) through our every pore.

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Confronting "Unforeseen" Disasters:
Yōko Tawada's Surrealist and Animistic Poetics

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Abstract

If our current environmental predicament, and recent catastrophes such as the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima in 2011, can be diagnosed as partly a crisis of the imagination, then radical action is needed. Ecopoetics can help by directing attention to the agentic properties of matter, and to the sometimes unexpected ways in which chains of events are brought about, through principles of both randomness and design. In Yōko Tawada's literary work, chance intra-actions between human and material agencies lead to a variety of surprising, surreal scenarios. Focusing on an array of Tawada's texts, with particular attention to her post-Fukushima novel, *The Last Children of Tokyo* (US title *The Emissary*, 2018, Japanese original *Kentōshi*, 2014), this article argues that Tawada's emphasis on the random and unexpected can provide a valuable ecopoetic perspective, serving both as political critique and as contribution to new materialist thought. Attention to material and linguistic agency is central to Tawada's surrealist and animistic poetics, which foregrounds what she describes as "language magic"—language as an agentic force of its own with a propensity for generating unexpected effects. By situating Tawada's post-Fukushima writing in the context of her wider work, I argue that her approach can help us to move to a less anthropocentric and agent-centric perspective through paying attention to the creative potential of language and matter, and to how these generate effects through processes of both randomness and design.

Keywords: Yōko Tawada, environmental disaster, ecopoetics, animism, surrealism, randomness, design, materialism, agency.

Resumen

Si los actuales problemas medioambientales y las recientes catástrofes tales como la fusión nuclear de Fukushima en 2011 pueden ser diagnosticados en parte como crisis de la imaginación, entonces es necesaria una acción radical. La ecopoética puede ser útil llamando la atención hacia las propiedades agentivas de la materia y las a veces inesperadas maneras en que se producen cadenas de acontecimientos por medio de aleatoriedad y de diseño. En la obra literaria de Yōko Tawada, las intra-acciones entre agentes humanos y materiales conducen a una variedad de escenarios sorprendentes y surrealistas. Centrado en una variedad de obras de Tawada, prestando especial atención a su novela post-Fukushima, *Los últimos niños de Tokio* (*The Last Children of Tokyo*, 2018; título US *The Emissary*, 2018, original japonés, *Kentōshi*, 2014), el presente artículo defiende la tesis de que el énfasis de Tawada sobre la aleatoriedad y lo inesperado puede facilitar una valiosa perspectiva ecopoética, sirviendo tanto como crítica política y como contribución a un nuevo pensamiento materialista. Central a la poética surrealista y animística de Tawada es la atención a la agencia material y lingüística, que ofrece un primer plano a lo que la autora describe como "magia del lenguaje"—el lenguaje como fuerza agentiva en sí misma y con propensión a generar efectos inesperados. Al situar la obra post-Fukushima de Tawada en el contexto de su obra general, mantengo que su enfoque puede sernos útil para acceder a una perspectiva menos antropocéntrica y menos centrada en la agentividad, prestando atención al potencial creativo del lenguaje y la materia, y a la manera en que dichos aspectos generan efectos a través de procesos tanto de aleatoriedad como de diseño.

Palabras clave: Yōko Tawada, desastre medioambiental, ecopoética, animismo, surrealismo, aleatoriedad, diseño, materialismo, agencia.

"It is absolutely safe to start the nuclear reactor as long as nothing unforeseen happens."

The quote above, from Yōko Tawada's short story "The Far Shore" (n. p.; Japanese original "Higan," 2014), recalls a line of critique that was prominent in the weeks after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown at Fukushima power station. Following the catastrophe, the media repeatedly quoted politicians and scientists using the word "unforeseeable" to describe these events. This word choice led to an uproar among the general public, who criticised the politicians and scientists for their serious lack of foresight and imagination (Angles n. p.). "The Far Shore," Tawada's story of fictional nuclear disaster, imagines how things might go wrong. A nuclear meltdown is brought about through the banal situation of a sparrow flying into the motor of a military plane, which then crashes into the power plant: "You could hardly get more unforeseen than that" (n. p.), the narrator says, explaining, "Wars are not unusual in today's world. If a fighter jet had crashed during a battle, no one would have considered that unforeseeable" (n. p.). The narrator highlights an irony of modern life, which makes us accustomed to the risks of warfare, but less inclined to anticipate chance processes that lie outside human control. As he crashes to his death, the pilot himself thinks about the tragic irony of the situation: "It's so stupid I can't even laugh about it. What a meaningless way to die" (Tawada, "Far Shore" n.p.). Such reflection upon the randomness of events constitutes an ecopoetic intervention by destabilising paradigms of human control and conscious design.

By emphasising the surprising effects of often absurd chains of events throughout her literary work, Tawada poses a challenge to anthropocentric views of agency. By ignoring other agencies—the non-human actants in our environment—we can fail spectacularly in the very act of imagination that may ensure our survival: the act of foreseeing possible consequences of our actions, especially where they interact with other agencies. Such short-sightedness gives rise to irresponsible assurances that we are "ready for any unforeseen event that may or may not occur" (words attributed to former US Vice-President Dan Quale). Ecocriticism frequently diagnoses our current predicament as at least partly a "crisis of the imagination" (Buell 2). To remedy this crisis, one recent approach within ecocriticism is to highlight the "vitality" of matter (Bennett xiii). Instead of thinking of agency as something "necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality" (Iovino and Oppermann, *Material Ecocriticism* 3), new materialists invite us to think of vitality as "a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter, as part and parcel of its generative dynamism" (ibid.). In responding to environmental crisis, therefore, materialist approaches invite us to expand our attention to the multiple interchanges between human and non-human agencies. Attending to these interchanges often means attending to processes that occur randomly, without apparent pattern or predictability. Such random processes play a particularly important role in literary work that does not assert authorial design as primary, but that is attuned to the fluctuations of language and matter.

Yōko Tawada's work centres upon language and materiality, which she explores in surprising and productive ways. She writes in Japanese but also German, a language she acquired as a young adult, and which serves as creative inspiration for much of her literary output. Reflecting on the sounds and composition of words and the cultural assumptions lying behind language, Tawada's work is open to creativity as a process based on the making of random connections. Since her first publication in 1987, Tawada has amassed a substantial body of work in both languages, encompassing poems, short stories, plays, novels and non-fictional work such as essays and reflections on literary aesthetics. Her work has garnered acclaim not only in Germany and Japan, but also further afield, with her work translated into numerous languages.[1] Her playful and yet astute critical perspective has inspired a large body of international scholarship that approaches her work from various perspectives. Leslie Adelson identifies three main trajectories of Tawada scholarship: that which situates Tawada's work in relation to contexts of cultural globalisation; that which discusses it in connection to traditions of surrealist aesthetics; and that which considers it in relation to translation studies (158). While inter-cultural dynamics and language play are often prominent topics within existing scholarship on Tawada's writing, her attention to the animate properties of both language and matter has not yet been brought systematically into connection with material ecocriticism and ecopoetics, though it offers an illuminating contribution to these fields. The generative potential of language and matter in Tawada's work is a product of both randomness and design, something that Tawada foregrounds thematically and demonstrates stylistically.

In order to explore how Tawada's work might contribute to ecocritical discourse, this article will take as a starting point some of Tawada's post-disaster texts, which emerged in response to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami and meltdown at Fukushima nuclear power station. At the time, Tawada was due to give a set of poetics lectures in Hamburg, in which she planned to discuss Hamburg as a harbour city and water as a connecting force. After the disaster occurred, Tawada changed the content of her lectures—eventually published in the collection *Fremde Wasser* (*Foreign Waters*, 2012)—to engage more directly with the events in Japan.[2] In her subsequent literary work, Tawada imagined post-disaster scenarios in a couple of dystopian short stories written in Japanese. In "Fushi no Shima" (2011, translated as "The Island of Eternal Life," 2012), the narrator, who holds a Japanese passport, is unable to travel to Japan. The country has been cut off from the rest of the world following political unrest and massive contamination from nuclear fallout after a catastrophic earthquake. Her story "The Far Shore," as discussed earlier, envisions an "unforeseen" disaster at a nuclear reactor, which leaves many dead, and many on ships bound for China. Tawada has also explored the disaster in German texts that are as yet unpublished: the play *Still*

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[1] Tawada's literary awards include the Akutagawa Prize, the Tanizaki Prize, the Noma Literary Prize, the Izumi Kyōka Prize for literature, the Gunzo Prize for New Writers, the Goethe Medal and the Kleist Prize.
[2] Kathrin Maurer has discussed these lectures, along with Tawada's story "The Island of Eternal Life" in her article 'Translating Catastrophes: Yoko Tawada's Poetic Responses to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, the Tsunami, and Fukushima" (2016).

Fukushima: wenn die Abendsonne aufgeht (*Still Fukushima: When the Evening Sun Rises)* and the collection of poetry entitled *Neue Gedichte über Fukushima* (*New Poems on Fukushima*), which accompanied an exhibition of photography by Delphine Parodi-Nagaoka.[3] Tawada's most extensive engagement with post-disaster scenarios, however, is through her short novel *The Last Children of Tokyo* (2018, titled *The Emissary* in the US edition, and published originally in Japanese in the prose and poetry collection *Kentōshi*, 2014).[4] Though this article engages with an array of texts by Tawada, including her pre-Fukushima work, particular attention will be paid to *The Last Children of Tokyo*. As well as imagining ecological disaster, this novel shows how ecopoetic attention to random material and linguistic intra-actions can invite attention to the multiplicity of agency. The novel will be examined through the English translation of Margaret Mitsutani, with reference to the Japanese original where helpful.

The Last Children of Tokyo* is set in a future Japan ravaged by environmental crisis and an oppressive political regime. Japan has reverted to a state reminiscent of the pre-Edo era, without cars or electricity, and has closed itself off to the rest of the world. The novel follows Yoshiro, who is over a hundred years old, and like others of his generation appears unable to die. By contrast, the children of this country, including his great-grandson Mumei, whom he looks after, are frail and grey-haired, barely able to survive. The only hope is for a select few children to be smuggled out of the country as emissaries, to help the world learn from Japan's example. While apocalyptic narratives typically "[play] on fears and [convey] a sense of the extreme urgency of radical action" (Goodbody, "Climate Change" 297), Tawada's dystopian fiction instead uses wit and surprise, not so much in order to enjoin us to act, but to invite us to re-think concepts that we take for granted. In foregrounding the random and unexpected, Tawada's post-disaster texts also serve as political critique, problematising assurances of human control over nature and society's capacity to design effective environmental policies.

This article first addresses Tawada's political critique in her post-disaster texts, in which she places emphasis on the "intra-actions" between politics and material agencies, highlighting the unintended effects that play out on a global scale. I use the term "intra-action" as proposed by Karen Barad, as a way of signifying the "mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (33). The entanglement of agency is explored further in the second section of this article, which examines how the random and unexpected is articulated through Tawada's surrealist poetics. I argue that Tawada's *animistic* and *aleatory* approach to writing shifts attention from authorial agency to the vibrant matter

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[3] The play *Still Fukushima: wenn die Abendsonne aufgeht* was staged at a number of theatres and cultural institutions, for example in Berlin and Beijing. Tawada's *Neue Gedichte über Fukushima* were written for the exhibition *Out of Sight. Gedichte – Fotographien* at the Japanisch-Deutsches Zentrum Berlin in February - March 2014. Since the poetry collection is as yet unpublished, apart from one poem (which this article discusses), the focus will be primarily on other, published texts.

[4] The Japanese title, *Kentōshi*, is closer in meaning to the US title *The Emissary*.

that shapes the narrative. The third section shows how material dynamism is linked to Tawada's conception of linguistic dynamism or "language magic"—language as an agentic force with its own propensity for generating unintended effects and opening up worlds. Finally, I examine reflection on language in Tawada's post-disaster texts, particularly the loss of words as part of a wider ecological crisis, a reduction in attention to the surrounding world. The article thus examines Tawada's ecopoetics of randomness and design by highlighting the nexus between material and linguistic dynamism, and the shift from conscious authorial design to exploring the random, unique and surprising properties of words and things.

Failures to Foresee: A Political Critique

Tawada's post-disaster texts offer a pointed political critique of the decision-making processes and risk assessment surrounding the use of nuclear power, issues much discussed in the aftermath of the Tōhoku disaster. For example, in "The Far Shore," the controversial decision to restart an old nuclear reactor is made at an international conference:

> Their conclusion: "It is absolutely safe to start the nuclear reactor as long as nothing unforeseen happens." The participants were all experts who had gathered from twenty-two nations. They were known to have divergent views on the project, so it was hard to imagine that someone had bought them all off. Even so, their conclusion hardly seemed objective or scientific. Anymore [sic], political decisions seemed to happen of their own accord without any regard for individual will. (n. p.)

The passage highlights the disparity between the global experts tasked with making the decision, and the local community, who have not been consulted. Moreover, the experts' divergent views make reaching a conclusion seem unlikely. The narrator considers corruption, but settles for an explanation that relies on a mysterious agency:

> A new form of global economics had taken root. Invisible signals flew from brain to brain, and before anyone knew what was happening, people began to assume identical opinions. Once they had, a certain amount of money was automatically deposited in their bank accounts. To this day, biologists and economists have not been able to offer positive proof of this new mechanism of corruption, but there are many people, especially among poets, who cannot help suspecting that is how things work. ("The Far Shore" n. p.)

The satirical scenario envisions a corrupt form of political decision-making, based not on individual will, but on "invisible signals" coupled with financial reward for intellectual conformity. A wider agency seems to be involved here: the "invisible signals" might be variously envisioned as mysterious non-human forces or as the subtle workings of linguistic messages reproduced in global media. Either way, this process limits diversity of thought. It is only those who stand outside the system, particularly poets with their skills of observation, who suspect ways in which independent thought may be corrupted, and thereby play the role of critical onlookers and commentators.

Tawada's political satire is particularly levelled at the ways in which local communities and individuals are subjected to the whims of international politics. Tawada's ecocritical contribution operates from what Ursula Heise terms an "eco-cosmopolitan" position (50-63). In Tawada's work this means attending to the power

dynamics between the local and the global, as well as focusing on the national and international politics surrounding environmental crisis. Like her short story "The Far Shore," Tawada's novel *The Last Children of Tokyo*[5] explores ways in which individual will is subject to political decisions that seem to be made randomly, or at least show no principles of rational design that the public has access to. Corporate greed and political corruption appear to play a role, however. In this novel, the Japanese government has been privatised, though it is not clear whether the newly elected members of the Diet of the Supreme Court really exist or are simply photographs with names. As the narrator explains:

> The Diet's main job was to fiddle around with the laws. Judging from how often the laws changed, someone was definitely fiddling with them. Yet the public was never told who made the changes, or for what purpose. Afraid of getting burned by laws they hadn't heard of everyone kept their intuition honed sharp as a knife practicing restraint and self-censorship on a daily basis. (*LCT* 89)

This Kafkaesque situation positions the individual as helplessly subjected to constantly changing state regulations. Reducing individual autonomy means that unknown agencies assume greater prominence. Tawada's political critique works by satirising the idea of political decisions being the outcome of rational design and a reflection of individual will. The design process, if there is one, is governed by at most a select few individuals whose interests are not those of the general public. Moreover, by removing the design process from view, occurrences appear to the public as random. This sense of randomness is based on a lack of access to processes operating at wider levels, for example in national and global politics, and on a failure to envision how these processes may intra-act with local environments.

Attending to the relationship between individual, local behaviour and large-scale global effects is central to any understanding of environmental crisis. Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood demonstrates how private interests may set off a chain of unintended effects through her moving account of an ecological disaster she witnessed. Walking along the beach in Tasmania, she encountered daily the bodies of dead Fairy Penguins washed up on the beach. Only much later did she discover the reason for the penguins' deaths. Fish farms thousands of miles away along the Western Australian coast had acquired permission to import wild South African pilchards to feed their salmon rather than relying on local pilchards. These South African pilchards were just marginally cheaper than the local variety, but ended up spreading disease into local stocks which lacked immunity. Millions of Western Australian pilchards died, while those marine creatures whose diet relied upon them, including Fairy Penguins, starved (14). Plumwood sees the unintended consequences as the product of an ecological crisis of reason—a form of rationality in which the "simple, abstract rules of equivalence and replaceability do not fit the infinitely complex world of flesh and blood, root and web on which they are so ruthlessly imposed" (14). An anecdote in *The Last Children of Tokyo*,

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[5] This title will hereafter be abbreviated as *LCT* in parenthetical documentation.

reminiscent of Plumwood's tale, highlights precisely such a complex chain of global circumstances behind the production of food:

> Though [Yoshiro] was always on the lookout for food Mumei could eat without trouble, he never bought products unless he knew where they came from. Once thousands of dead penguins had washed up on a beach in South Africa, and a company run by an international pirate gang had dried the meat, which it then ground into powder to make meat biscuits for children. According to the newspaper, another company was smuggling the biscuits into Japan, making a killing. The biscuits reminded Yoshiro of dog food, but having heard they were an ideal protein source for children he definitely wanted to buy some. The meat of penguins who had lived in Antarctica would probably not be very contaminated, though such a mass death might mean that an oil tanker had sunk nearby, which was worrying. (94-95)

The narrator describes in a matter-of-fact tone a situation in which mass extinction, contamination and pollution, children's health problems, and food shortages have become a daily reality. Under these circumstances, Yoshiro's primary concern is for his great-grandson. While his ethics of care extends as far as Mumei, he has little scope to alter the realities of his world, and to address the problem that Plumwood diagnoses as a "lack of fit or adaptation of societies structured by hegemonic rationality to their ecological and social realities" (15). Something must have gone wrong for Yoshiro and Mumei to be forced to live in an environment in which they perhaps will no longer be able to leave the house in a few years' time (*LCT* 10); and as Mumei's teacher points out, the problem is not just earthquakes and tsunamis: "if natural disasters were the only problem, we certainly would have recovered long before now" (*LCT* 122). The ecological crisis of reason in this society consists in an inability to see and foresee wider chains of effects resulting from intra-actions between local and global occurrences.

Yōko Tawada's Animistic Ecopoetics

Tawada's attention to surprising chains of events and unintended effects places her work in the tradition of surrealism. In surrealist literature, protagonists regard extraordinary occurrences with bland indifference (Jackson 21). Random and inexplicable processes are accepted as the norm. Bettina Brandt argues that Tawada uses surrealism as an aesthetic strategy, which "interrupts our debates and in doing so insists on the unknown character," that is, it leaves us with enigmatic images which remain ununifiable (120). Surrealist writing is often both surprising and humorous, but also demands that we confront the question of what we take to be "normal" and "foreseeable." When it comes to averting ecological crises, an examination of our horizons of expectation proves vital, as does an expanded awareness of possibilities. Though Tawada is not typically positioned as a writer of ecopoetry, her post-disaster work can be considered a form of ecopoetics in the sense of being a creative literary engagement (*poiesis*) directed at ecological issues. As Scott Knickerbocker argues, the "same imaginative and intellectual muscles we exercise in our deep consideration of poetry are needed in meaningfully relating to nature—and vice versa" (18). In this sense, poetry in general can help to build better capacities for environmental engagement; even more so, where poetic practice or critical engagement intersects with

attention to the environment. While Tawada's surrealist techniques are productive in disrupting normality and expanding the imagination, her post-Fukushima texts also offer more specific engagement with political and cultural responses to environmental crisis.

In Tawada's texts, literary writers have the role of communicating and critically reflecting on environmental crises. By doing so, they counteract the kind of intellectual conformity that led to the decision to re-open the nuclear power-plant. For example, in *The Last Children of Tokyo*, there is widespread support for a policy of Japanese isolation, reminiscent of the isolationist foreign policy of Edo-era Japan. In the novel, the policy is announced by the government after having already been put into practice, spurring a wave of articles in support of the policy:

> [...] many of the public intellectuals who wrote these articles—though actually opposed to isolation—found the humiliation of having the policy so suddenly sprung upon them unbearable, as if they were being made to eat dirt; besides, if they admitted they'd been duped like everybody else their careers would be ruined, so now, in an about-face so obvious it would have amazed even Aesop's grape-loving fox, they all insisted that they had supported isolation all along and in fact had been just about to recommend it to the government. (*LCT* 89)

The scenario satirises self-promoting intellectual conformity, showing opinions to be formed not on the basis of considered judgement, but as dubious responses to uncomfortable affects such as humiliation. Within this society, there is little scope for individual autonomy and independent, divergent thinking. Those who might be able to provide non-conformist perspectives are poets and writers, such as Yoshiro. Yet after Yoshiro submits an article entitled "Japan Was Not Isolated," to show how strong Japan's connections to the outside world had been during the Edo period, requests from magazines dry up (*LCT* 89-90).

If literary writing is necessary, since it encourages divergent thinking, according to Tawada, then a writing practice or poetics that emphasises randomness and the unexpected may be particularly productive. Greater attention to the material world, and to material agencies, Tawada implies, is also vital in developing capacities to foresee diverse occurrences. Tawada's attention to material agencies expands her surrealist poetics into an ecopoetics based on the animism of words and things. The concept of animism has been understood in varying ways. Victorian anthropologist Edward Tylor's definition of animism as "belief in spirits" found in "primitive culture" has been particularly influential. But more recent engagements with what Graham Harvey calls "the new animism" (5), take a different approach, influenced in particular by the work of Irving Hallowell.[6] Harvey explains the new approach: "this animism refers to ways of living that assume that the world is a community of living persons, all deserving respect, and therefore to ways of inculcating good relations between persons of different species" (5). Animism can be understood not only as a world view, but also as a poetic practice. An animistic ecopoetics can be understood, according to such a view, as a process of artistic creation that does not just attribute feeling to inert matter, but as one

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[6] See Hallowell's "Ojibwa Ontology, Behaviour, and World View" (1960).

that is responsive to the intricate and complex ways in which things act and change. Tim Ingold describes such a model of creation as one based on an "ontology of animism," which, he argues, is not a way of "thinking *about* the world, but of being alive to it, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is in perpetual flux, never the same from one moment to the next" (214). By writing a novel that is not only concerned with environmental crisis but also with the acts of writing about environmental crisis, Tawada embraces such an ecopoetics.

An "ontology of animism" stands in opposition to what Ingold terms a "hylemorphic model" of creation, in which an active agent, with a particular goal in mind, imposes form (*morphe*) on supposedly passive, inert matter (*hyle*) (213). Tawada has discussed her approach to literary writing in similar terms. For her, an author is not someone who—authoritatively and purposefully—imposes form on inert matter, but rather someone who responds to things, ideas, stories or words that are already in the world, and allows them to lead the act of writing into new directions. Her favourite Japanese word for writer, she claims, is "*monogaki*" ("writer of things"):

> The "thing" of monogaki, the "writer of things," is semantically connected to mononoke, a "changeling." Which means that this "writer of things" also describes a person in the clutches of changelings and shapeshifters, a person under the spell of things. The writer takes what the things have said, and carves them into shapes by scratching out lines, making the wounds and scars on paper that we call texts. But when these writers begin writing they have no clear idea what sort of tale it will turn into because even as they write, the "ling" underlying these changes takes charge and decides how the tale will progress. ("Tawada Yōko Does Not Exist" 14)

Tawada adopts an *aleatory* approach to literary writing—letting the things and words direct the narrative, and lead the narrative into unknown directions (see Beaney 135-36). The author, in her conception, does not stand in an exploitative relationship with the story, but helps readers shift their attention towards the vibrant or agentic properties of language and matter. Rather than attempting to manipulate language into expressing particular ideas, and to select and control the subject of the story, the animistic writer understands language as already part of the fabric of the world with a host of pre-existing and possible associations. Like the materialist concept of "storied matter," which seeks to replace a concept of inert matter with attention to matter as the site of narrativity (see Cohen ix.), language is not so much a tool for the writer as literature's generative source.

Tawada's poetry exemplifies her approach to language and matter particularly clearly. The series of short poems *Neue Gedichte über Fukushima*, which accompanied photographs of Fukushima by Delphine Parodi-Nagaoka,[7] each build upon an image, observation or linguistic utterance, and explore their poetic potential. In the final poem of the cycle (number twenty-four), a phrase encountered on the door to a hairdressing salon serves as the basis for poetic reflection:

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[7] See footnote 3. Both Parodi-Nagaoka and Tawada had visited Fukushima after the disaster, and the exhibition is the product of their collaborative reflection upon the situation of Fukushima inhabitants after the catastrophe.

Fukushima 24	*Fukushima No. 24*
„Heute Ruhetag" steht an der Tür eines Friseursalons. Seit drei Jahren hört der Tag „Heute" nicht mehr auf und die Haare wachsen woanders.	*"Closed Today" says the* *door of the beauty salon. For* *three years now the day* *called today has lasted* *and all the hair* *is growing someplace else.*

(Translated by Susan Bernofsky)

Three years on from the Fukushima disaster, with shops and businesses still closed, the phrase "closed today" evokes the wider absence in the local area. Language expands beyond its original intention, taking on new resonances. In her article on animism in modernist poetics, Irene Albers draws attention to André Breton's references to words as "germinating," "playing," or "making love," and Michel Leiris's view of words as "humus or fertile soil, from which books grow" (Albers 243). This depiction of language as vegetation, Albers argues, is the euphoric version of what might be termed the "animism of language" in modernist literature (243).[8] In the poem above, the sudden incongruity of hair "growing" someplace else (rather than being cut someplace else, as might be more readily evoked by the closing of the hair salon), reiterates the sense of expansion, continuation and growth conveyed in the idea of the day "today" never ending. At the same time, "Haare wachsen woanders" underscores the lack of growth in the Fukushima area. While Tawada's poem plays with the kind of disjointed and incongruous imagery cultivated by surrealism, and perhaps also with the haiku's fertile gap between images, it is helpful to see her surrealist poetics as part of a broader animistic perspective, in which words have animate properties, rather than simply being tools that the writer uses. Thus, the surrealist use of "free association" is not simply a projection of the writer's subconscious, but proves dependent on the properties of language itself, including its sounds and associations. Following Karen Barad's notion of "intra-action," we might claim that the poem emerges in intra-action with the writer's design, where the design process means "reading" words and things rather than imposing form upon them. The sense of incongruity and randomness in Tawada's work is a result of allowing words and things to enter into new and unexpected connections through attending to them as agents rather than as mere signifiers or inert matter.

The Animism of Language

In Tawada's work, sensitivity to the "animism of language" and to material animism are part of the same impulse. In an interview in which she discussed her novel

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[8] In using the term "Animismus der Sprache" (which I translated as "animism of language"), Albers is drawing on a phrase used by Pierre-Henri Kleiber in his book on Michel Leiris, in which he speaks of an "animisme langagie[r]" (105).

Memoirs of a Polar Bear (2017), Tawada commented: "animism is second nature to me, and it has something to do with language itself: in words, all objects are as much alive as animals. They have a soul—stones or iron, as much as birds" ("The Fabulist" n. p.). The title of her doctoral dissertation reiterates her interest in both linguistic and material animism: *Toys and Language Magic: An Ethnographic Poetology (Spielzeug und Sprachmagie: eine ethnologische Poetologie,* 2000*)*. Tawada's concept of "language magic" involves an animistic perception of words as capable of generating narrative possibilities. For example, in her discussion of Kafka's unfinished story "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor", Tawada reads the unexpected appearance of two balls bouncing independently around Blumfeld's room—a seemingly random element in the narrative—as a process based on both homophony and metonymy. First, while Blumfeld is walking upstairs, he is thinking about a dog and its "Bellen" ("barking"), which raises an acoustic association with "Bällen" ("balls," a homophone). Secondly, Tawada claims, a metonymic process is at work based on dogs liking to play with balls (140). These musings give rise to what happens next: the unexpected appearance of two balls in Blumfeld's room. In Kafka's text, language is 'magically' transformed or animated, becoming a new material element within the narrative, just as in his more famous *Metamorphosis*, the insult "Ungeziefer" ("vermin") becomes physical reality. Like Kafka, Tawada uses word play to shape the narrative at a material level, thereby allowing randomness, as well as design, to be part of the creative process.

Tawada's own use of "language magic" can be traced in the ways in which she plays with the surface of language and uses sounds to generate unexpected associations and ideas. Thus, the German title of one of her story collections, *Überseezungen*, plays upon the word "Übersetzungen" ("translations") and references "übersee Zungen" ("over-sea tongues") as well as "über Seezungen" ("about soles"—a fish mentioned in the book). Similarly, the Japanese title of "The Island of Eternal Life"—"Fushi no shima"—plays on the place name "Fukushima," but uses the new association generated by the title, that of an island of "fushi," meaning "undead" or "immortal," as an idea in the text (Suter 158). The same idea is revisited on a larger scale in *The Last Children of Tokyo*, in which the older generation are unable to die. Susan Anderson has argued that Tawada's "translation of the surfaces of language—that is, her focus on letters, sounds, discrepancies between words and images, and on other aspects of linguistic form—ultimately makes both German and Japanese enigmatic, animated, and multivalent" (50). The concept of "surface translation" elucidates Tawada's poetic approach more broadly, which brings in elements of randomness through attending to the creative potential of language.

The increasing critical attention to matter, and to what Jane Bennett calls the "vibrant" properties of matter, has sometimes been characterised as a turn away from an exclusive emphasis on language and discourse. Iovino and Oppermann, for example, write: "Resisting the emphasis on linguistic constructions of the world, formulated by some trends of postmodern thought, the new materialist paradigm is premised on the integral ways of thinking language and reality, meaning and matter together" (*Material Ecocriticism* 4). As they suggest, attention to materiality does not mean ignoring the

linguistic, but it does mean thinking both about the ways in which matter produces dynamics of meaning and about the ways in which language shapes the material world. Writers who perceive language as animate do this extensively. In Tawada's work, unexpected elements are frequently the result of transformations between language and matter. This is illustrated by a short text about a computer programme that allows the narrator to write in both German and Japanese. While typing in German, occasionally a "letter spirit" ("Buchstabengespenst") would arise and a combination of German letters would turn into a Japanese character, with meanings such as "cheering," "tormenting" or "sneezing." The narrator comments: "it was as if the small spirits that live under the surface of the text wanted to torment me and at the same time cheer" (*Verwandlungen* 41, my translation). As well as exploring language transforming into animate matter, Tawada also explores matter as language. A staple remover ("Heftklammerentferner") thus becomes the basis for exploring language: "In one's mother tongue, words are stapled together so closely that you can rarely enjoy playful pleasure with language [...]. In a foreign language you have something like a staple remover: it removes everything that is collected and stapled together" (*Talisman* 15, my translation). Though Tawada's animistic view of language and matter might be seen as rooted in her Japanese heritage, particularly in Shintoism, she discourages cultural essentialism, subtly challenging the idea of animism as absent in Western culture. For example, a Japanese narrator sees her German colleague getting angry with a pencil, and comments: "In Japan I have never heard a person get angry with a pencil as if it were a person. That's German animism, I thought" (*Talisman* 10, my translation).[9]

As well as using language magic as a poetic principle, Tawada's texts often deal thematically with the intra-actions of language and matter. In "The Far Shore," politician Sede experiences a surprising physical effect after he responds to a reporter's questions about foreign policy by saying something nasty about China. Withdrawing to a back room, Sede discovers that the problem that has troubled him for years has gone—he has been freed from impotence. His outspoken remarks lead to him getting more votes than ever, and he concludes: "this just goes to show that I'm not really a man unless I'm on the offensive. I've got to act like I'm going to take down any big thing that stands in my way" ("The Far Shore" n. p.). Tawada's narrative figures language as having a powerful physical effect on the body, engendering the affects that shape political discourse. As critique of macho politics, the anecdote imagines how sound decision making is replaced by bigotry, since it offers the politician a means of overcoming personal inadequacies. To understand the politics of environmental discourse, the text suggests, we would do well to attend to ways in which individuals are traversed by the hidden agencies of language and affect. This means imagining the subject not as fully autonomous, but as co-constituted by linguistic and material processes. As Axel Goodbody argues, referencing Timothy Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, engaging with an expanded sense of self is the

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[9] Though the "animism of language" in Tawada's work offers a valuable perspective with which to approach new material ecocriticism, her animist approach has a much longer literary history. In *Toys and Language Magic*, Tawada engages with the work of German Romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, a master in the art of bringing things to life—toys, inanimate objects, or people who take on nonhuman forms.

ultimate conundrum for the novelist in the Anthropocene ("Epilogue" 319). One way of re-imagining the self in light of new materialist emphasis on entangled agency is to highlight intra-actions both between and within human bodies: "If embodiment is the site where a 'vibrant matter' performs its narratives, and if human embodiment is a problematic entanglement of agencies, then the body is a privileged subject for material ecocriticism" (Iovino and Oppermann, "Material" 84). Affects alter bodies in material ways, and thereby pose a challenge to the idea of identities as fixed, as well as to the anthropocentric idea of agency as an exclusively human attribute. Tawada's work assumes multiple agencies, none of which are entirely predictable. By highlighting "other" agencies, through an animistic poetics of random intra-actions, Tawada offers an ecological critique.

The Ecological Crisis of Language

While Tawada's ecopoetics is based on a concept of matter and language as animate, her work also *thematically* foregrounds reflections upon the intra-actions of matter and language. *The Last Children of Tokyo* constantly reflects upon language, particularly ways in which language use has changed following environmental collapse and radical political change. For example, the novel begins with Yoshiro coming back from his run with a rent-a-dog, a practice previously known as "jogging," as the narrator informs us (*LCT* 3). Yet with foreign words falling out of use due to the xenophobic political climate, the activity has come to be referred to as "loping down," which evokes associations with the word "eloping." The translator, Margaret Mitsutani, has used "loping down" for the Japanese *kakeochi*, meaning to run away or elope. The narrator explains that the term "loping down" originated as a joke, via the expression "if you lope, your blood pressure goes down" (*LCT* 3). In written Japanese, the kanji which make up the word *kakeochi,* 駆 and 落, convey the meaning of running (translated as "loping") and falling respectively.[10] The randomness created through chance linguistic association as well as changing social and environmental conditions both play a role in linguistic evolution. Similarly, the English words written on Yoshiro's shoes—"Iwate made" ("made in Iwate prefecture")—are interpreted in a different way by the younger generation, who read "made" (written in *katakana*[11]) as the Japanese word meaning "to" or "until," since they no longer study English (*LCT* 5).

Language use is not only evolving, but, like the environment depicted in Tawada's novel, it finds itself in a state of crisis, with words and expressions constantly becoming obsolete. Val Plumwood's concept of an ecological crisis of reason—reason that fails to acknowledge the complex interactions of the living world—also coincides with a crisis of language. By failing to acknowledge the complex interactions of the living world, we are also losing the words with which to do so, and failing to create new language adequate

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[10] I would like to thank Maria Römer for assistance with my reading of the Japanese text.

[11] Japanese combines three writing systems: next to *kanji* (or ideograms) and *hiragana*, the syllabics used for native Japanese words*, katakana* is the syllabic system employed for terms imported from languages like English.

to respond to the reconfigured conditions. Reflecting on Yoshiro's use of the outmoded expression "to go for a walk," the narrator of *The Last Children of Tokyo* comments: "the shelf life of words was becoming shorter all the time—it wasn't only the foreign ones that were falling out of use" (4). The loss of the phrase "to go for a walk" suggests the loss of leisure walking, an idea supported when Mumei wants to have an indoor picnic since they are unable to spend time outdoors (*LCT* 10). The crisis of language exposes the wider social and environmental disintegration.

Language crisis is countered in the novel, however, through an insistence on language play as the basis for new perspectives and ideas. For example, Yoshiro is reminded of an exercise class called "Learn to Limber Up from the Octopus" when the baker mentions "tendons," which is written with a similar-looking kanji to "octopus." This random visual association sparks the following dialogue:"'I'd like to see everything from an optical point of view.' 'Optical?' 'No. I meant octopi. I want to see through the eyes of an octopus'" (*LCT* 15). The translator, Margaret Mitsutani, has played on the similarity between "octopus" and "optical." In the Japanese text, Tawada plays on "tasha no me" ("the eyes of another") and "taco" ("octopus"), thereby using linguistic association to introduce incongruous images. A similar example can be found when Yoshiro takes Mumei to the dentist because his baby teeth are all dropping out at once. Yoshiro says "Fall out," and quickly corrects himself, "hoping the dentist didn't think he'd said *fallout*," a word suggesting nuclear pollution (*LCT* 16-17). In playing on the word "fall out," Mitsutani introduces a reference to an unspoken environmental crisis, which fits with the overall content of the novel. However, she departs from the word play in the original Japanese text, which is based on the homophone 欠ける (*kakeru*, meaning "to fall out") and 書ける (*Kakeru*, meaning "to write"). While Mitsutani's translation allows for the generation of new associations and ideas, Tawada's play with language goes further: it enables subtle acts of resistance against forces of linguistic censorship and reductions in ways of thinking.

An awareness of linguistic heritage and diversity is indeed important in countering the crisis in language that has accompanied ecological decay. As centenarian and member of one of the generations that are unable to die, Yoshiro remembers words that are no longer used, storing in his head what Mumei refers to as "dead words" (114). While Yoshiro's linguistic memory acts as a link to a time before the extreme ecological disasters, Mumei is constantly being encouraged to adapt his use of language to the current way of life. His teacher, Mr. Yonatani, for example, explains:

> We don't talk about *putting people to a lot of trouble* any more—that expression is dead. A long time ago, when civilisation hadn't progressed to where it is now, there used to be a distinction between useful and useless people. You children mustn't carry on that way of thinking. (*LCT* 118)

The reference to "dead" expressions underscores the radical changes that the country has undergone, which are seen to necessitate an entirely different lexis. The new vocabulary mirrors the fact that children are no longer expected to be able to contribute physically to society. Similarly, "Labour Day" is changed to "Being Alive Is Enough Day" (*LCT* 44). Many of the linguistic changes are an attempt to avoid the older generations'

feelings of guilt and shame at their role in the country's demise. Thus Mr. Yonatani explains: "These days it's popular to shout *graaaateful* as an expression of thanks […] but don't you think it might sound strange to the young elderly, the middle-aged elderly, and most of all to the aged elderly? It makes them uncomfortable, don't you see?" (*LCT* 118). For the older generations, it seems inappropriate for the young to be expressing gratitude towards those who bear responsibility for the severely impaired health and living conditions that the young now experience.

Yet while Yoshiro struggles with a sense that he no longer has anything relevant to teach young people (*LCT* 38), Mr. Yonatani still has hope that expanding children's language will be of value: "All he could teach them was how to cultivate language. He was hoping they themselves would plant, harvest, consume, and grow fat on words" (*LCT* 121). Since the children are unable to exercise the physical labour needed to literally plant and harvest crops, and since they struggle to chew and digest food, the cultivation of language is one of the few ways in which they can effectively participate in society and unlock possibilities for change. Sensitivity to language is vital in expanding capacities for thought and developing ethical awareness. As writer Jay Griffiths puts it: "to lose linguistic biodiversity is to lose untold ways of thinking and varieties of thought; to lose biodiversity of the mind" (221).

Addressing the environmental crisis thus requires engagement with alternative modes of thought, thereby countering the ecological crisis of language as well as inward-looking politics. In the novel, the only hope of improving the children's prospects is the secret project of sending a few select children out of Japan as emissaries, leading the narrator to muse:

> It was clearly necessary to think of the future along the curved lines of our round earth. The isolation policy that looked so invulnerable was actually nothing but a sand castle. You could destroy it, little by little, with those plastic shovels kids use at the beach." (*LCT* 130)

Thinking the future "along the curved lines of our planet earth" is not only an appeal for global conversation on ecological crisis, but belongs to Tawada's ecopoetic emphasis on playful intervention through circularity, randomness and surprise as a way of countering the limitations of linear thinking.

The end of the novel demonstrates these ecopoetic principles in action. Mumei, now fifteen years old and in a wheelchair, meets a girl, also in a wheelchair, who was once his neighbour, and finds himself attracted to her. The novel ironically plays with the narrative convention of the temporal jump to get to this point: "[Mumei] clearly remembered fainting one day when he was in elementary school while looking at a map of the world. At that moment, he had apparently leaped across time, propelled into the future" (*LCT* 126). Temporality runs according to the laws of narrative possibility, which are stretched here in surprising and unexpected ways. Mumei and Suiren roll towards the sea in their wheelchairs. In a dreamlike scene, their gender becomes fluid, and when Mumei looks at Suiren, her eyes blur into blotches that look like lungs, then broad beans, then human faces. Mumei sees Mr. Yonatani on one side and his great-grandfather on the other, and wants to reassure them; yet at that point "darkness, wearing a glove, reached

for the back of his head to take hold of his brains, and Mumei fell into the pitch-black depths of the strait" (*LCT* 138). This has been read as a reference to the 2011 tsunami, an event that sparked the novel's creation but is never explicitly alluded to in the text (De Pieri n. p.). The ending foregrounds the intra-action of agencies, with Mumei's free association and then the dark water itself taking charge of the narrative, in an act of randomness that draws attention to the uncertainty of the future.

The depiction of agency as distributed does not mean relinquishing ethical responsibility, however. As Karen Barad put it in her "agential realist" account of entangled matter and meaning: "We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world's differential becoming" (396). While the future might seem hopeless to the older generation in the novel, relationships of care provide a source of hope: Yoshiro's physical care for Mumei, Mr. Yonatani's linguistic nurturing, and Mumei's emotional support for Yoshiro. Even in a world of random possibilities, taking responsibility for our actions and adopting an ethics of care remains vital.

Conclusion

Materialist approaches within ecocriticism have stressed the need to think matter and language together, as part of a dynamic network of intermingling agencies whose surprising intra-actions can be read as stories. Yōko Tawada's writing contributes to this approach. Her work starts with things and with words, which often lead in surprising directions. Abandoning the concept of authorial design as the imposition of form on inert matter, Tawada's surrealist poetics generate narrative possibility by paying attention to the agency of language and matter, allowing randomness to act as poetic principle. The depiction of absurd chains of events also highlights "hidden" agencies, and undermines the assumption that we can foresee all possible effects of our exploitation of nature. By placing emphasis on the random intra-actions of language and matter, Tawada's work decenters the human, but not without losing human concerns altogether, or relinquishing any form of human design. The design principle that Tawada's ecopoetics adopts is one that involves reading the complex and dynamic material environment, and allowing things to tell their own, often random and unexpected, stories. By entering into this process, we too may learn to listen to the animate world around us.

Submission received 14 July 2018　　　　　　Revised version accepted 9 March 2019

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The Ecopoetics of Survival: The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* and *The Desert Survival Series*[1]

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Abstract

The Desert Survival Series (2010, 2014) by Amy Sara Carroll, a set of poems that forms part of an activist project called the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, departs from the methods of both radical political poetry and some avant-gardist forms of aesthetic resistance that rely on a poetics of randomness to challenge the prevailing order. Instead, the *DSS* employs design—the design of the poetic object revealing other designs—as a political resource. It addresses a group endangered and abjected by the United States government: migrants crossing the Sonora desert. In doing so, it recalls traditional forms such as the pastoral and the georgic in order to reimagine earlier attitudes toward poetic making, hierarchical politics, and the environment. Orienting in their address to migrants, disorienting and counterintuitive with reference to their contemporary poetic context, the poems are of interest for debates around ecopoetics, because they make an intervention in the domains of environmental poetry as well as political activism of the border.

Keywords: Design, randomness, poetry, poetics, ecology, georgic, pastoral, border, desert, migrants.

Resumen

La serie *Desert Survival* (*Supervivencia en el desierto*) (2010, 2014) de Amy Sara Carroll, un grupo de poemas dentro del proyecto artivista llamado *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (La Herramienta del Inmigrante Transfronterizo), se aleja de los métodos de tanto la poesía política más radical como de algunas formas de vanguardistas de resistencia estética dependientes de una poética de lo aleatorio para desafiar el orden predominante. En su lugar, la serie *Desert Survival* utiliza el diseño—el diseño del objeto poético que revela otros posibles diseños—como una herramienta política. Se dirige a un grupo en peligro y vilipendiado por el gobierno de Estados Unidos: los migrantes cruzando el desierto de Sonora. De esta manera, recupera formas tradicionales como el género pastoril y las geórgicas para reimaginar actitudes pasadas hacia el hacer poético, la política jerárquica y el medio ambiente. Los poemas están dirigidos a orientar a los migrantes, aunque su vocación en el contexto poético contemporáneo es desorientadora y contraintuitiva. Son poemas interesantes en los debates de lo ecopoético, pues postulan la intervención de la poesía sobre el medio ambiente al igual que sobre el activismo político en la frontera.

Palabras clave: Diseño, aleatoriedad, poesía, poética, ecología, geórgicas, pastoril, frontera, desierto, migrantes.

> The ecopoem is connected to the world, and this implies responsibility. Like other poetic
> models that assume a connection and engagement (feminism, Marxism, witness, etc.),

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> ecopoetry is surrounded by questions of ethics. Should the ecopoem do something in the world? But how can a poem be said to accomplish anything?
> James Engelhardt, "The Language Habitat: an Ecopoetry Manifesto" (n. p.)

> Maybe the development of environmental literacy, by which I mean a capacity for reading connections between the environment and its inhabitants, can be promoted by poetic literacy; maybe poetic literacy will be deepened through environmental literacy.
> Forrest Gander, "The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Ecopoetics" (216)

Introduction: Civil Disobedience, Randomness and Design

This paper discusses *The Desert Survival Series*,[2] a group of poems written by Amy Sara Carroll, a professor at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), and "published" in an unlikely place: on a computer GPS program called the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*.[3] Designed to be downloaded onto cheap phones, the program was created to lead desert crossers to water caches provided by humanitarian NGOs.[4] The program, which includes Carroll's twenty-four poems (readable as text or playable as audio files), was created by the *Electronic Disturbance Theatre*,[5] a civil disobedience and performance art group at UCSD led by Carroll's colleague Ricardo Dominguez.[6] The EDT's "artivist" performances (Nadir n. p.) generally use cyber-disruptions to produce political resistance, marshaling chaos and randomness in the service of unsettling the *status quo*. The poetic series, in a departure from this strategy, deploys design—the design of the poetic object—as a political resource in aid of a group endangered and abjected by the United States government. Addressed mostly to migrants from Latin America, the poems are given in Spanish as well as English, providing advice on how to avoid the specific natural dangers of the Sonoran Desert on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. The program and poems also are meant to publicize the humanitarian crisis in which thousands of migrants have died of dehydration on their journeys. They address too, obliquely, what Gilberto Rosas calls the "managed violence" (401) of current border policies that send migrants to the most threatening landscapes for crossing. In her poetic exploration of overlapping environmental and socio-political borders, Amy Sara Carroll has committed herself to the "connection and engagement" by which James Engelhardt defines the ecopoem (216).

Connection and engagement also characterize the political work of the EDT which largely consists of provocations towards the goal of social justice. Their forms of subversion create disruption, such as when they employed tactics of disorientation and

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[2] Hereafter abbreviated as *DSS* in both the text and parenthetical documentation.

[3] Hereafter abbreviated as TBT in the text.

[4] While the program has never been distributed on phones, the poems are readily available, online and in print. Ricardo Dominguez, one of the group's members, cites a variety of reasons, including politically motivated investigations of the EDT and the changing narco-politics of the region, for the group's failure to distribute the GPS program (see Nadir). Perhaps the group never really expected distribution. Alison Reed's essay on the avant-garde nature of this apparently impossible enterprise sees the "generative failure" of the TBT as deliberate, a "queer provisionality" that highlights the dystopian nature of the United States' power structures.

[5] Hereafter referred to as EDT in the text.

[6] The full program, including the code and the poems laid out in graphic typography, is accessible via http://www.collection.eliterature.org/3/works/transborder-immigrant-tool/transborder-immigrant-tool.pdf. *The Desert Survival Series* begins on page 44.

upheaval in their exhibitions of the TBT. At the same time, both the "disturbance" and the sophisticated design of the group's actions offset a different, malign unpredictability and disorder imposed upon the lives of migrants by the state. As a computer program providing what may be life-saving orientation with the help of (audio) poetry, the TBT balances careful planning with occasional randomness.[7] A mapping aid, it nonetheless proclaims itself as "dislocative": opposing the governmental GPS systems that track migrants, but also dislocating systems of power and meaning. Whether with the TBT or through other means, the EDT makes different interventions for different occasions, with appropriately specific strategies for disturbing the powerful and for supporting the disenfranchised.

DSS not only intervenes in debates about the nation and its borders, it also participates in the always-ongoing revision of the Euro-American poetic tradition, a revision constantly responding to any moment's political context. Though not obviously experimental in form, it articulates an avant-garde poetics that breaks new ground in setting, context, purposes, and language(s). Perhaps counterintuitively, *DSS* also calls on the resources of poetic traditions and counter-traditions that may look at first glance too conservative for Carroll's revisionist aims. Her avant-gardism and revisionism converge in a noticeable effort to renew and query the modes of poetry about the (post)natural environment. This form of inquiry evokes the postpastoral, a mode not anti-pastoral but thinking beyond the pastoral. Put differently, these poems are not only an intervention in the politics and ecology of the border, but also in the poetic field and in poetics.

A politically charged object, the TBT device has been shown in exhibitions around the country, and has helped improve awareness of the humanitarian crisis, as it was intended to do. It has been the focus of fierce debates about the rights of undocumented migrants, about militarization of the border, about funding by state universities, about the value of higher education, about what professors (in general, and these specifically) think they are doing. What I will focus on, however, is what has not been seriously discussed about these poems: their status as the poetic project of a specific poet (though in consultation with other members of the group) with interesting implications for activism and ecopoetics, for the strategic employment in poetry of principles of randomness and design, and for writing and its allegiances to pleasure and to usefulness. In this article, I shall therefore not mainly examine the relation of Carroll's poems to computer programming, as that has been covered at length, and much better than I could do.[8] Instead, I shall show that her poems form an integral part of the tool—one that creates a powerful verbal complement to its digital component. Moreover, I shall explain that though raising questions about the nature and uses of poetry in contemporary contexts,

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[7] Even its programming incorporates some randomness; the line of code indicates the (non)order in which the audio should deliver the poems: "// this thread to randomly play audio file" ("TBMIDlet.java" 33). In other computer-assisted actions, the EDT has created "virtual sit-ins" in which followers overwhelm official websites with simultaneous log-ins. Their acts of civil disobedience thus depend upon a certain amount of chaos (Schachtman, n. p.).

[8] To my mind, Sergio Delgado Moya's beautiful essay best relates the poetry of the TBT to its computer program.

particularly national and ecological, Carroll's poems, paradoxically, also go back to much more ancient forms of poetics such as the pastoral and the georgic.

Instruction and Care, or Substituting Legibility for Randomness

According to the EDT, the poems are intended to provide not only important information but also solace in the form of human companionship. They establish a human relationship between the TBT's creators and the migrants whom the "artivists" mean to address with respect and care. "Of Ecopoetics and Dislocative Media," Carroll's foreword to the poems, provides some background about how she envisioned the series. The TBT's poems needed to "engage or expand upon our collective vision of the tool as sustenance" ("Of Ecopoetics" 4), Carroll notes, and to avoid writing "that functioned best in museum, gallery, and university" ("Of Ecopoetics" 3). The poems had to alert migrants to the many risks in the desert but not subject them to the panic that, so many survival manuals insist, endangers survival. At the same time, the series needed to raise awareness about the extreme dangers of desert crossing for non-migrants. The poems therefore had to attend to a reality far more dynamic and mobile than that of institutional cultural settings.

All the same, Carroll had written an earlier set of poems for the TBT, one that she eventually decided was suited to galleries and universities rather than to the desert. Both that first series and its gallery setting, though highly developed, were much closer in affect to a poetics of randomness than the final series:

> It is included on phones in exhibition displays of the work. [In one we] created a sound installation wherein the recordings of approximately 65 poems sounded off in a timed sequence across six phones. The poems included were from both series and were in 14 languages. (The idea was one of disorientation—that few to no museum-goers would understand all of what they heard). (Carroll, Email 1 Nov. 2018, n. p.)

While the migrants required poems furthering an intense focus on surviving the desert, with Carroll's poetry crucially urging its addressees to walk the desert reading its shifting clues,[9] the EDT wanted museumgoers to experience disruption and disorder, that is, the chaos from which they hoped to help the migrants escape. Using fourteen simultaneous languages, the Babel-like linguistic discordance of the museum version of the TBT evoked the global disturbances that have already forced so many migrations in this century.

The *DSS* sequence is thus very much an ecopoetic product of its time, the poems having at least three audiences—the migrants themselves; the presumably progressive viewer-readers who see them online or in museum exhibitions and may be moved to intervene in the humanitarian crisis they speak to; and the governmental actors responsible for this crisis. How could the poems be meaningful to a group of endangered Mexican citizens, some, at least, illiterate, but all coming from a culture steeped in song and poetry? How could they address the humanity of these migrants who are abjected and depersonalized as illegal aliens? Carroll confronts these many different demands, drawing a poetry from her own political and literary understanding, from Latin American writing

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[9] Unlike walking in the great classical, Romantic, and Transcendentalist traditions, this walking is not leisurely, pleasurably introspective, a source for happy and creative after-reflection.

and performance art, from her own experience of the desert, from autobiographies of desert survivors, and from "texts about desert survival: handbooks, military manuals, [and] a guide for border-crossers briefly distributed by the Mexican government" ("Of Ecopoetics" 4). In certain understated allusions, Carroll goes further afield, importing into her poems the desert fiction of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965),[10] or cult cinema and its depiction of the desert as a place of lawlessness and fight for survival.[11]

By invoking different traditions of desert writing, the poet is embedding her advice in a larger geographical and historic frame, large enough in fact to engage the reader or hearer in a multi-faceted meditation upon the desert. Her epigraph to the foreword ("Of Ecopoetics" 1), taken from Raúl Zurita, sets the tone of the series: "Quién hablaría de la soledad del desierto": "Who would tell of the desert's loneliness" (Zurita 50). In poem 8 of *DDS*, Carroll associates the desert not merely with loneliness, but with loss and death. "According to Herodotus," she writes, "King Cambyses, twenty-five hundred years ago, lost his entire Persian army (fifty thousand men) in an Egyptian sandstorm. Deserts guard their secrets; no archaeological evidence corroborates Herodotus's account" (52). Addressed primarily to US-Americans interested in the TBT, the reference to Herodotus draws attention to the countless migrants who are losing their lives while trying to reach the U.S. via the desert. For desert crossers, by contrast, it makes more sense to write not only about why sandstorms are dangerous but also about how to survive them. This is why Carroll presents the desert crossing not as a heroic victory over a challenging environment, but as an attempt to understand it. Deeply concerned with the ecologies and discourses of the desert, the poems attempt to engage with the natural world without appropriating, demonizing, or idealizing what they describe. Instead, they crucially impress upon first the poet and then the desert crosser new depths of focus and perception. The aesthetic and practical overlap in this regard: both poets and travelers depend on being able to perceive, to read the world.

More specifically, in the case of *DSS*, a politics of care motivates the work of replacing the potential randomness of the desert crossing with aesthetic and practical design, i.e. illegibility with legibility. Carroll's poems show their audience how to read in a way that goes beyond superficial understanding. The *DSS*'s introductory poem begins by insisting that the desert is readable and navigable, if one knows how:

> [...] an ecosystem, with a logic of sustainability: of orientation, unique unto itself. For example, if the barrel cactus—known otherwise as the compass cactus—stockpiles moisture, it also affords direction. As clear as an arrow or a constellation, it leans south. Orient yourself by this mainstay or by flowering plants that, growing toward the sun, face south in the Northern Hemisphere. (*DSS* 45)

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[10] Frank Herbert's "Fremen" are mentioned in poem 17 (*DSS* 62). As aquacentric beings whose entire planet is a desert, the Fremen's whole culture revolves around conserving their own bodily moisture. They do so in an "arrhythmic" desert crossing that allows them to avoid the ferocious sandworms that live in tunnels marked by holes in the sand. Carroll's allusion is humorous, but it also relays a warning: the walker must remain as focused on hydration and desert dangers as these science fiction warriors.

[11] When Carroll's speaker counsels the traveler that "[s]and and rock reflect warmth and light as if you were walking on a metallic liquid or 'ashes of time'" (poem 21, *DSS* 66), she playfully names the title of a 1994 Taiwanese film directed by Kar-Wai Wong, in which a hitman operates from the desert in ancient China (IMDB).

Nonhuman life, the poem reveals, has an orientation of its own that can aid humans if we can learn to decipher its—sometimes elusive—clues. Sophisticated reading skills, Carroll insists, are crucial here: "Proceed from the simple premise: The desert caches water in unlikely places that it resists divulging" (poem 3, *DSS* 47). The poems are full of injunctions to read signs: in poem 7, the speaker notes that "[t]he flight paths of birds, like pigeons and doves, indicate the proximity of an oasis. They drink in the evenings. If they are flying low and slow, follow their direction. Where they came from may be where you need to go to refill bottles or canteens" (*DSS* 51). Poem 13 notes: "Found in dead wood and debris, the brown recluse carries a dark, violin-shaped trademark on its back" (*DSS* 57). Even for the migrant following these directions perfectly, contingency can be fatal: make it to the water barrel, and you may find a hive of killer bees inside the lid (poem 9, *DSS* 53). The poet knows better than to provide guarantees; sometimes the signs are misleading, or tricky: poisonous saguaro cacti can look like safe-to-drink barrel cacti (poem 4, *DSS* 48). Nonetheless, the survival manuals Carroll studied and worked into her poetry urge their readers to think of the desert, lethal as it so often proves, not as the enemy but as an entity or system of which one is part. More deeply integrative than the TBT computer program, the poems seek to know the desert, rather than simply give advice on how to survive it.

The instruction in the series, specific though it may be to the particular situation of migrants, also fosters general skills in reading the environment. Most urgently, these skills are in aid of immediate survival for migrants, but in light of escalating environmental crisis and world-wide water shortages, they prove relevant for everyone else as well. Going beyond the immediate socio-political context of the project, Carroll's poems address a general lack of awareness some scientists call "plant blindness," that is, "the inability to see or notice the plants in one's own environment, leading to the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs" (Wandersee and Schussler 84). Combatting such blindness entails disparate strategies, all pointing to *reading as revelation*: intense observation of the desert environment, a review of literary and cultural approaches to the natural world, and an appreciation of local environments as part of a larger, dynamic, global politics and ecology. Human survival depends on this learning, and guidance in reading allows the illegible—that which registers as random and chaotic, experientially and epistemologically—to become legible. Ecopoetics as a literary practice investigates these processes of encoding and decoding as well as their consequences, both critiquing and displaying the conflictual ideologies built into language when it is used to "represent" the world. Even when ecopoems use language instrumentally, as in the advice of Carroll's poems, they unmoor words from univocal meanings. Carroll's puns, anagrams, and allusions return us, as we shall see, to both the materiality and the unreliability of language. The act of both writing and reading, then, takes place in a cultural-material "mesh" (Morton 29) replete with extra-textual as well as literary references. In the case of poetry, these references often center on the evolution and revision of poetic genres such as pastoral and georgic, a point I shall come back to later.

Contemporary avant-gardist aesthetic discourse about randomness and design frequently privileges the former as the more emancipatory and innovative mode.[12] Randomness as a creative principle has often been seen by both modern and postmodern artists as a refusal of cliché, a way to defamiliarize the everyday, to leap beyond ordinary habits of perception, and often, by extension, to think beyond current social and politic structures.[13] It can, of course, work that way. Design in the life-and-death situation of the desert borderlands, however, also forms part of planning and organizing for greater social justice. The TBT brings restorative design, both aesthetic and practical, to bear upon a situation and an environment singularly lacking in design, at least at first glance: the chaotic, risky environment of the Sonoran Desert. Carroll provides design in the deliberateness of her poetic series—an offer of conscious succor to the migrants it addresses—and in the way the poems urge attention, perception, and understanding upon those migrants. The whole program and most particularly the poems represent an attempt to use design as part of an ecopoetic practice—and an ethics—of support, care, and welcome. In this instance, ethics and aesthetics align, and design is emancipatory.

Carroll's writing is attuned to two perspectives: that of the migrant, for whom the desert is terrifying randomness, and her own, that of a scholar of the desert, who, through study and experience, can detect patterns that help the traveler to master contingency and irregularity. In her poetry, she enjoins herself, her reader, and her listener to observe, to elicit what is patterned and productive in a seemingly unlivable situation. To focus on perception of natural phenomena (including humans) and their interrelatedness makes human survival more possible. For instance, if the sun causes heat stroke, the sun nevertheless also makes plants in the Northern hemisphere point South, offering legible sign-posts for the initiated. Such attention, I would argue, diminishes fantasies of control. Like advice from a loving but very realistic friend, the poems instruct, alert, soothe, and urge survival. In poem 14, for example, Carroll repeats the most important advice: "Drink water, rest in the shade, seek water at twilight. [...] Redux: Drink water, rest in the shade, seek water at twilight" (*DSS* 58). She praises the most resilient of the desert's flora and fauna: the creosote bush that comes back unperturbed from a thermonuclear blast (poem 17, *DSS* 61); the cactus that saves moisture (poem 1, *DSS* 45); the peccaries that can "divine permanence" (poem 7, *DSS* 51), another way of reading the landscape, in the water supply; even the tarantulas who have more than one line of defense (poem 11, *DSS* 55).

The history of other desert crossers can also suggest lifelines for migrants at the U.S.-Mexican border: poem 3 tells how "just before sunrise, Bedouins turned over half-buried stones in the desert to catch the dew that the night's coolness had condensed on the stones' surfaces" (*DSS* 47). Carroll never openly addresses the terrible pressures

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[12] Matthew J. Koehler and Punyashloke Mishra, for example, discuss a twenty-first century resurgence of randomly-generated computer art framed by a history of modernist and postmodern works incorporating contingency and randomness (n. p.). These include, for instance, Marcel Duchamp's random dropped-string painting, "Network Stoppages," and Kurt Schwitters' chance-formed collages, which both seemed to promise access to forms of creativity not normally available to the conscious mind.

[13] Schapiro, for example, believes that "[r]andomness as a new mode of composition, whether of simple geometric units or of sketchy brushstrokes, has become an accepted sign of modernity, a token of freedom and ongoing bustling activity" (65).

migrants must be under if they are willing to risk their lives to come to the U.S., but her matter-of-fact description of the dangers migrants face in the desert makes these pressures implicit. Every poem in the series acknowledges the direness of the migrants' circumstances without sensationalizing them, while also expressing the speaker's wish that the listeners on the move prevail against them. Carroll emphasizes the need for care in deadly surroundings, her own care for the migrants through the poem and theirs for themselves in self-preserving attentiveness. As James Engelhardt suggests in "The Language Habitat: an Ecopoetry Manifesto," acknowledging responsibility is not enough: you need first to care for, and then to take care of, people and the environment (n. p.). Carroll brings this matrix of concerns together in a self-reflexive environmental poetry that reviews the options for nature poetry in the post-natural—that is to say, 'Anthropocene'—world. Her poetry demonstrates what Forrest Gander suggests in "The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Ecopoetics," namely that environmental literacy and poetic literacy can promote one another (217).

Aesthetics Aligning with Politics

In a strategy central to the more experimental forms of ecopoetry, which ponder the relationship between the world and the way writing is brought into being, the design Carroll calls attention to is often that of writing itself. Her imagery moves in unexpected formations between the desert, the world surrounding it, and the landscape's literary potentiality. Said differently, her imagery calls attention to a political consciousness that overlaps with a consciousness of the very act of writing. In poem 2, Carroll urges:

> Climb or walk in the morning. Rest midday beneath creosote bush or mesquite, insulating yourself from the superheated ground. Remember—even the sidewinder hovercrafts, the bulk of its body above the scalding sand as it leaves its trademark J-shaped tracks across the desert dunes. (*DSS* 46)

The tonally anomalous phrase "trademark J-shaped tracks" catches the attention, highlighting both the language of production and advertising and the letter J of written language. Such forms of word-play are unexpected in this pared-down message of instruction, but they will be picked up in later poems, where they hint, as they do here, at the consumption of nature and humans by the economic forces that drive people into the desert, lined with *maquiladoras*, in the first place.[14]

Poem 4 for example repeats the phrase "J-shaped" as Carroll gives rules for distinguishing between edible and poisonous cacti, the deadly saguaro and the safe barrel cactus: "So don't just look for squat, rounded cacti," the poem warns, "differentiate, think fishhook. J-shaped outer 'fishhook' spines, literally used by the Seri Indians for fishing, mark and distinguish the true rescue cactus from its peers" (*DSS* 48). In calling attention to the letter J, the poems suggest a writing consciousness, and even pay a low-key homage

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[14] Mark Marino comments helpfully on Carroll's frequent shifts of diction and register: "Abruptly, the sentence switches its frame [from talking about cacti] with the metaphor of 'stockpiles,' an industrial term more often used not in survival but in accumulations of destructive materials. And again, she shifts registers with 'affords,' a term with deep resonance in the realm of tool design, programming" (paragraph 18, n. p.).

to writing itself. This strategy evokes what Linda Russo describes as ecopoetic "engagement [...] through a poetry that is also aware that it is mediating, is marks on a page" (n. p.). The next-to-last poem of the series, for instance, uses typography to create an X-shape on the page, forming what Carroll describes in the piece as the universally known shape of an emergency flare (*DSS* 69). In poem 19, she urges the post-floodwaters traveler to "criss-cross [the dunes'] artistry—patterns in the sand, sculpted as a topographic map or an open book in Braille" (*DSS* 63). In poem 11, in turn, she calls the tarantulas "book-lunged arachnids" who blow "missives," their silvery hairs, at enemies (*DSS* 55). "Book-lunged" is a scientific term based on the folded tissue of some arachnids' lungs, but within the poem, the spiders seem to refer us to the library. Finally, poem 8 ends with what is practically a tribute to reading, though perhaps an equivocal one, as writing can do damage as well as good: "Tuck your eyeglasses into your shirt or jacket pocket (so the wind will not etch its soliloquies into them)" (*DSS* 52).

Refusing, as they do, to center on the praise of natural beauty, these poems differ from "nature poems" in earlier poetic tradition. At the same time, Carroll accords beauty and pleasure, expression and value to the desert surroundings: "In the summertime, pitahaya dulce, the fruit of the organ pipe cactus, ripens to red and drops its spines. The prickly pear cactus' tuna reddens to purple, but never loses its needles. Dethorned, dethroned, both are delectably edible. Peel their skins" (poem 5, *DSS* 49). Naming color and flavor, Carroll creates one of the few sensually appealing moments in the series. "Dethorned, dethroned" generates a pleasure consisting in sight and taste, but also in ear and mind, in a word-play that indicates the transformations of language as well as its own power to transform. The play on syllables, the beauty of the cactus fruit, the revolutionary pleasure of deposing a king, these all act as a flash of relief in a poem that concentrates on warning against death and injury. Effecting a relationship with the materiality of poetry, Carroll's work performs here what Peter Jaeger sees in the poems of Fred Wah: "simultaneously foregrounding the shared materiality of language, subject, and the ecosystem [...] ecopoetical writing does not speak about the environment, it is the environment" (200, 207).

The aesthetic seriousness of Carroll's work in the TBT has not always been understood, as the poet reveals in an interview with *San Diego CityBeat*:

> When there's been mention of poetry, it's been rather derisive in the popular press coverage. [...] There's also a way in which the poems have stunned certain opposition into silence. For instance, we were on MSNBC Live—Ricardo and I, right after Christmas—[with] this person, Bob Dane from the Federation for Immigration Reform. So we got asked by Contessa Brewer, "Is this really poetry?" and I just said, "Yes." And then there were, like, 20 seconds of silence. (Morlan n. p.)

The bafflement and suspicion about the poems in the MSNBC interview mentioned here was a mild precursor to the furor about *DSS* occasioned by another unlikely television moment. In the autumn of 2010, Glenn Beck, a famous conservative political commentator and conspiracy theorist, read aloud an excerpt from the series on his then new online program, *TheBlaze* (Moyers n. p.). In what Maryam Gharavi calls "his own brand of sublime hysterics" (n. p.), Beck created this headline for the TBT program: "UCSD

Professors Dissolve U.S.—Give GPS Phones With Explicit Poetry to Illegals for Border Crossing" (*TheBlaze* n. p.). In his view, the TBT constituted a deliberate attack on the nation as a structure whose cohesion and order supposedly depends on the control of its borders.

Beyond Beck's outburst very little attention was paid at first to the TBT poems themselves or their relation to the more clearly functional aspects of the program. In fact, very little has been written about the poems as poems, though they are generally mentioned in descriptions of the overall project. The EDT, however, clearly stresses the importance of the program's poetry for its overall mission: "[i]ts code is executable when and if one adds the coordinates of functional water caches to its poetic program. Its poetry, another executable code [is] included here after our project statement" (Carroll and Dominguez, n. p.). To define the language of poetry this way is witty, but it also creates a productive strangeness: to describe the aesthetic object as an "executable code" produces a jolt, a question about what poetry really is. If "executable," what does poetry do? And if it is code, in what would the decoding consist? For Carroll, the decoding begins with the poems' object, the desert. In "Of Ecopoetics and Dislocative Media," she comments: "At base, I worked from two assumptions. A desert is not just a desert. And, poetry-becoming-code/code-becoming-poetry could transubstantiate, translate into a lifesaving technology, sounding off" (4). "[S]ounding off" suggests a chance to vent some political anger, or a way to utter that's "off," askew from normal discourse. Transubstantiation allows the TBT to become something more than its elements, and translation reveals meaning to both migrant and creator. To transform in this way, binary code needed to cede precedence to words.

Most people would probably not readily associate the term "poetry" Carroll names in these remarks with the kind of prose that forms part of poem 15 of the series:

> Cholla, or jumping cactus, attaches. A bud of spines breaks off at the slightest hint of touch. Remove cholla from your skin and clothing in increments, with a rock, a stick, a knife: the bud... large spines left behind... small spines or glochids. Needling needles that remain will work themselves out in the days ahead. (*DSS* 59)

Currently, poetry is not generally thought of as a literary genre whose primary purpose is to provide instructions or information. One can only imagine the unwillingness of a morning news show to take any truly avant-gardist poems seriously; for contemporary innovative poetry and its discussion do not have the pace of "breaking news," artificial as that pace must be. So, if Carroll's series is not particularly innovative but, nonetheless, news-breaking poetry that can make things happen, what makes it so and what cultural relevance does it obtain?

The direct purposefulness of Carroll's poems opposes a popular idea of poetry as emotionally discursive, even aimless, decorative, and primarily sentimental. Lacking, as it does, rhyme and meter, why is the "Cholla" passage above a poem and not a prose fragment or a form of free verse? Syntactically, the works in the series do not announce themselves as "poetic": they are not particularly hypotactic, nor do they introduce much subordination or complex sentence structure. But if one way of describing a poem is as a creative work that considers its own relationship to language and that has meaning in

relation to a poetic tradition, these are indeed poems. In fact, *DSS* mediates between several traditions. For one, Latin American political poetry responding to histories of political oppression makes a clearly appropriate context for the series, and an epigraph from the Chilean dissident poet Raúl Zurita places Carroll's work in this tradition. Furthermore, like most if not all twentieth-century U.S. poets, Carroll is an heir of modernism. Indeed, the minimalism of some of the poems in the original version of the series recalls pared-down works by writers like W.C. Williams, H.D., and Ezra Pound in his haiku phase.

Desert Poetics as Didactics of Post-Pastoral and Neo-Georgic

Strikingly, however, Carroll's are also poems of instruction, linking themselves to Anglo-American traditions of pastoral and georgic poetry that can seem unlikely precedents for politically radical contemporary writing. Indeed, the *DSS* shares the goal of these two traditions to revise received wisdom and situate itself in a larger literary world. Some recent scholars of pastoral and georgic have been at pains to distinguish them. Michael G. Ziser, for instance, refutes Lawrence Buell's contention that any primarily rurally invested literature is pastoral, seeing a difference in georgic's refusal to de-realize nature (175, note 1). I would argue, however, that the two modes are frequently coextensive, particularly in modern revisions. Even more crucially, my contention here is that *DSS* can be seen as employing the instructive, nature-directed aspect of georgic in a non-agrarian, remotely placed landscape closer to that of pastoral. By drawing on the resources of ongoing poetic traditions and counter-traditions such as the pastoral or the georgic, the TBT poems emphasize principles of design that call up older genres, but significantly revise them for our times and its specific purposes. Their shadow-drama portrays poetic inheritance and negotiations with literary tradition in the context of late twentieth and twenty-first century politics and geographies. Carroll reads both poetry and landscape attentively in order to understand the physical environment, but she also reads both of them together to connect the worlds of Virgil and Zurita.

Although the similarities may not immediately be obvious, Carroll's poems can indeed also be read in the lineage of these two poetic modes that have very little to do with the desert, at least traditionally: the pastoral and georgic, two versions of the idealized classical rural. Both pastoral and georgic are associated with retreat, and thus, on the one hand, with what Victoria Silver refers to as an "instrumental fiction […] whose efficacy at ordering the world requires that it too stand outside of time and the actual contingency of things" (36), and on the other hand, with what Raymond Williams describes as "a myth functioning as a memory" (43). For both scholars, the pastoral especially evokes a simpler, less existentially fraught set of mind and way of life, a fantasy operating in the vision of a self-sufficient, hierarchically stable nation of appropriately employed citizens. Not all pastoral and georgic idealizes, however. It is important to recognize the additional presence of a more negative and critical strain. In classical pastoral, the shepherds complain not only about love troubles, the weather, the need to feed and water their flocks, and the sheep's illnesses, but also about death and exile.

Similarly, in classical georgic, farmers may lose their hives or their crops, disasters that reflect larger realities of war, loss, and mortality. It is these more negative and critical strains of the pastoral and georgic tradition that Carroll's *DSS* foregrounds.

Recent environmentally focused discussions and poetic practices of pastoral have refused an idealized worldview, especially relative to environmental degradation. Terry Gifford, for example, reflects that "a Greenpeace supporter might use the term [pastoral] as a criticism of [a] tree poem if it ignored the presence of pollution or the threat to urban trees from city developers" (2). Joshua Corey uses the term "post-pastoral, for the sense that the prefix 'post-' gives to the object it modifies as that which is conditioned by that object but which also struggles with it, trying to become something new" (n. p.). Carroll's series is a desert post-pastoral, foregoing the utopian brightness for a darker, death-haunted manner, in which the exigencies of nature require song for solace. In poem 7, Carroll writes: "Cottonwoods spread a welcome shade. Clusters also indicate a desert stream or an underground spring close to the surface" (*DSS* 51) These lines provide excellent advice for those trying to survive while crossing the desert, but they also recall Virgil's *Eclogue One*, in which Meliboeus, about to be exiled, reproaches the friend who can devote himself to beautiful song while his own world is in tormented upheaval:

> You, Tityrus, lie under the canopy of a spreading beech, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country's bounds and sweet fields. We are outcasts from our country; you, Tityrus, at ease beneath the shade, teach the woods to re-echo "fair Amaryllis." (Virgil*, Eclogues* 25)

The woes of Meliboeus are political and historical: by order of Augustus, who rewards his veterans with land wrested from owners, Meliboeus has been forced from his home and sent on the road. Like the Sonoran migrants, Meliboeus and his comrades will suffer painful journeys, longing for the relief of shade and a safe place to live. Carroll may not have these precedents specifically in mind, but they are sufficiently foundational for poetry about nature to have been absorbed and replicated throughout that tradition, a pastoral legacy that current ecopoetry writes after, through, with, and against.

In turn, Carroll's poems—which give step-by-step instructions for methods of survival, though in a landscape very far from that of the European tradition—can be read as georgics in an altered sense, or even as a kind of *subversive* georgics. Originally a detailed verse manual of agricultural knowledge, the georgic from Virgil onward has promoted the development of agriculture, of community, and most significantly of a politics of order and *status quo*. It could not have accounted for the kinds of population flows catalyzed by late capitalism. Unlike the conventional georgic, then, Carroll's poetry attends to displacement rather than to settled cultivation. It also refuses, or sidesteps, the equation of dedication to labor with moral value. As Margaret Ronda argues, georgic poems are grounded in a "dialectic of pain and gain, dehumanizing burden and humanizing virtue" (864). By contrast, what I would call "resistant georgics" (such as the georgics Ronda considers by Afro-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar [1872-1906]) "highlight the minimal quality of manual labor, its association with bare survival, material frailty and suffering" (Ronda 873). Carroll's poems, in reverting to poetry of instruction, think beyond the georgic, refusing the older form's emphasis on ensuring a productive

labor force and recasting it as a means of providing care and solidarity. This earlier poetic and social design, by its stasis and conservatism, could not answer Carroll's purposes without significant revision.

Again, a comparison with Virgil clarifies the differences and similarities. One of the main activities in georgic is beekeeping, and Virgil sees it, humorously but also seriously, as a reflection of state preoccupations, since bees offer

> A marvellous display of puny powers,
> High-hearted chiefs, a nation's history,
> Its traits, its bent, its battles and its clans,
> All, each, shall pass before you, while I sing. (Virgil, Book IV, *Bucolics* 50)

Carroll's Poem 9 discusses bees too, and she also reads them politically, specifically in relation to the kind of (nation) state that Glenn Beck believed endangered by the migrants that the TBT sought to help:

> [...] "killer," or "assassin bees," the descendants of migrants (themselves the descendants of twenty-six Tanzanian bees accidentally released in southeast Brazil), are aggressively territorial. Almost identical in appearance to kinder and gentler bee populations, Africanized bees—now the reigning queens and workers of the Sonoran Desert—congregate near water holes and flowering cacti. Killer bees will defend their hives against perceived threats, attacking by the thousands. Do not pass within thirty meters of their colonies (eminent domains), constructed in veritable earthworks (mounds and cavities), cacti trunks, creosote, mesquite, former travelers' lay-up sites. (Poem 9, *DSS* 53)

Moreover, almost imperceptibly, sinister suggestions of a disordered and rapacious state are brought together in this passage: echoing the power of the government to take private property, the bees have become "assassins" who defend their "eminent domains" and establish colonies. The purportedly benign social organizations of bees have gone murderous and so, the poem implies, has the U.S., a nation of "descendants of migrants." too. Although the ancestors of those who live above and control the Mexican-American border—the majority white population—came to North America because of different historical, sometimes random events, their descendants have, like the migrant bees, become "aggressively territorial."

Poem 9 offers perhaps the most complex of the interactions between what one might describe as the mobile ecology of the poems and the border politics of Carroll's series. At the same time, it also suggests a new range of revision of earlier tropes. The ideas expressed through these older forms reappear as nightmare versions in Carroll's poems. In pastoral, the shepherds must keep their flocks watered and fed, and generally manage to do so, whereas in *DSS*, access to water and food is rare. Georgic, meanwhile, focuses on bee keeping and on tending and harvesting crops. In the desert, by contrast, both bees and plants can prove lethal. As Leonie S. Joubert writes, "deserts are only bad news to creatures that have not evolved there. They provide a niche for any plants and animals entrepreneurial enough to adapt and make this place home" (158). Carroll makes clear that humans have not been among the adaptive creatures, but may still survive the desert with the help of poetry that relies on ecopoetics as an adaptative tool and a

mapping device (see Carroll xix-xxii), finding life-saving patterns even in the apparent randomness of shifting sands.

Conclusion: From Art to Activism

In Carroll's poetics, history, language, and literature become part of the landscape, even part of the eco-system. She thus replaces an abstracted or symbolic landscape with a historical and material reality that will have various but specific outcomes, rejecting the romanticized terms in which Euro-American poetry has traditionally represented landscape. To Carroll, the desert is anything but empty, and the perceiver who will read it attentively finds it very full. As she puts it: "Ecology holds trauma and promise simultaneously, is neither beautiful nor sublime per se, but becomes part of a larger built environment that regulates the policing and disciplining of ungrammatical bodies" ("Of Ecopoetics" 2). Her reference here is to Hortense Spillers' notion of an "American grammar," that is, a symbolical order predicated on racist violence (Spillers 68). As Carroll's *DSS* suggests, the bodies of migrants trying to cross the U.S.-Mexican border, because they are brown and not rooted in any specific soil, do not fit into such a racist North American grammar. In the TBT's desert poems, no possibility exists for framing the landscape as an idyllic retreat or the lives of workers in idealizing agricultural terms, because the migrants' sole objective is to move through it. Even the ground moves: in sandstorms, "winds transubstantiate the landscape into unidentified flying objects" (Poem 8, *DSS* 52). In the EDT group's essay "The Water Witching Tool," the authors argue that the way in which "the Mexican/US border, and all borders perhaps" (n. p.) are currently enforced, has interlocking environmental and political effects. "The border participates," they insist,

> in what Rob Nixon has termed the "slow violence" of the neo-liberal dismantling of bio-citizenship [...] that crosses between multiple forms of life: from black bears to plants to water to global labor as borderized-entities that are blocked from geographic movement, which is the blocking of life itself. (EDT, "Water Witching" n. p.)

What, then, echoing Engelhardt, might a poem accomplish? Against the background of "[n]ature actually turn[ing] out [...] to be one of the most ineluctably transnational realities of all" (Bellarsi 72), *DSS* engages with that question in several ways. The practical purpose of sharing knowledge with migrants about how to survive in the desert is the most obvious answer. In post-pastoral and neo-georgic meditations upon the desert, employing an ecopoetics of randomness and design, Carroll revises earlier evocations of a transcendent nature and idealized human labor. Yet another purpose of this poetic sequence is related to readers' pleasure. And finally, centrally, as I have intimated throughout this essay, the poems retrain the physical and mental eye towards perceiving in more profound ways. In a perhaps unexpected re-affirmation of the poetry-environment continuum, these didactic pieces suggest that poetry might be read as the desert is read: finding pattern in randomness; registering minute but significant details of difference; learning to interpret repetitions; seeking guideposts; negotiating technologies; and standing within, rather than outside, its space. If, as Horace maintained

in his *Ars Poetica* (c. 19 BCE), poetry must blend "*utile dulci*," the profitable and the pleasurable, the delightful and the instructive,[15] *DSS* attends to pleasure but, given the circumstances of its making, leans more towards the *utile* side of the poetic equation.

Such pedagogy has environmental as well as sociopolitical implications. The environmental blindness I referred to earlier comprises, among other things, the inability to see pattern and design in natural systems. In the case of the desert, this blindness, in general a deficit characteristic of the human animal, encompasses natural creatures and processes—from insects and other non-human organisms to plants and the weather. Carroll's poetry addresses not only migrants on their way to the U.S. who are in desperate need of her advice, but all humans unaware of their ecological dependencies and relationships as a group. Sergio Delgado Moya asks "[h]ow can a cultural practice, an aesthetic intervention, a poem, or a work of art orient our attention, putting into focus people and phenomena previously unseen? How, in short, can art be activism?" (40). *DSS* suggests that it is not only the reader's or the migrants' perception that needs retraining; a government, a country, and even a world need to learn to focus on the great, dislocating, transnational changes affecting people as well as the environment. Orienting in their address to migrants, but simultaneously counterintuitive and disorienting with reference to their poetic domain, the poems of the TBT are of great interest in debates surrounding ecopoetics, in that they (re-)cast eco/poetry as a means to counteract a racist/nativist American grammar and as a medium of political activism—of ecology, of the border, of border ecologies.

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[15] "Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,/ lectorem delectando pariterque monendo" (l. 343; Horace 478), which H. Rushton Fairclough translates as: "He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader" (Horace 479).

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The Postcolonial Ecopoetics of Patricia Grace's *Tu*: The Compost and The Labyrinth

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Abstract

This article argues that renowned Māori/New Zealand writer Patricia Grace devises an ecopoetics of randomness and design in her novel *Tu* through the manifold image of the labyrinthine compost. The biological processes of the compost and the spatial dynamics of the maze complement one another in this narrative. Both the maze and the compost foreground the liminality, the ordered and chaotic aspects, of physical dwelling places and social structures. The tortuous layout as well as the putrefying and recycling dynamics characterising the war-torn environment of *Tu* are mirrored in the intricate prose of the main protagonist's diaries. His complex psychological regeneration is also influenced by composting processes. Grace's labyrinthine compost evokes a "postcolonial ecopoetics" that debunks the loaded associations of randomness with life-threatening wildness, and of design with ordered civilisation, associations which characterised much of the colonial ideology. Whether construed as biological, spatial or cultural concepts, chaos and order in the maze-like compost of *Tu* appear as complementary rather than completely opposed processes.

Keywords: Ecopoetics, postcolonial fiction, New Zealand/Māori literature, human/non-human mesh, labyrinth and compost, the mind and the world, environmental liminality.

Resumen

Este artículo sostiene que la reconocida escritora maorí de Nueva Zelanda Patricia Grace concibe una ecopoética de aleatoriedad y diseño en su novela *Tu* a través de la imagen múltiple del compost laberíntico. Los procesos biológicos del compost y las dinámicas espaciales del laberinto se complementan entre sí en esta narrativa. Tanto el laberinto como el compost ponen de relieve la liminalidad, los aspectos ordenados y caóticos de las viviendas físicas y las estructuras sociales. El diseño tortuoso, así como las dinámicas de putrefacción y reciclaje que caracterizan el entorno devastado por la guerra de *Tu* se reflejan en la intrincada prosa de los diarios del protagonista principal. Su compleja regeneración psicológica también está influenciada por los procesos del compostaje. El compost laberíntico de Grace evoca una "ecopoética postcolonial" al desacreditar las asociaciones cargadas de aleatoriedad con el salvajismo que amenaza la vida, y de diseño con civilización ordenada, asociaciones que caracterizan gran parte de la ideología colonial. Ya sea que se interpreten como conceptos biológicos, espaciales o culturales, el caos y el orden en el compost laberíntico de *Tu* aparecen como procesos complementarios en lugar de completamente opuestos.

Palabras clave: Ecopoética, ficción postcolonial, literatura maorí/de Nueva Zelanda, malla humana/no humana, laberinto y compost, la mente y el mundo, liminalidad medioambiental.

As one of the most famous twentieth-century New Zealand writers, Patricia Grace is frequently referred to as the first Māori woman to have published fiction in book form, namely a collection of short stories *Waiariki* (1975) (e.g. Della Valle 135). Her reputation for her crafted and subtle prose bordering on the lyrical, and for her

humble, yet round, human protagonists is well established (e.g. Sarti, Hereniko, Della Valle). Grace exclusively published novels and short stories for both adult and younger audiences, admitting that only in this genre can she more freely investigate the characters' motivations and their manifold interrelations (Hereniko 157, 159). Because of this generic preference, as well as Grace's interest in the characters (Sarti 52), it may seem strange at first sight to discuss her work in relation to ecopoetics, a biocentric field of enquiry that examines and foregrounds non-human creativity (*poiesis*) in the aesthetic make-up of texts, usually poetry. Published in 2004, Grace's *Tu* has been studied predominantly for its cultural, political, and social (traumatic) aspects within the local context of Aotearoa New Zealand (namely the issues of Māori sovereignty, national identity, and Pākehā-Māori relations) and that of the country's transnational relations with the global world (Coates, Wilson, Suzuki). Only DeLoughrey's examination of the concept and aesthetic motif of the spiral in Grace's other works opens up promising avenues by which the writer's input might be discussed through the lense of ecopoetics. Thus, this article seeks to add to the scholarship devoted to *Tu* by investigating its potential as an ecopoetic novel that highlights the complementary processes of randomness (chaos) and design (order). It argues that, to do so, the narrative incorporates interconnecting dynamics based not only on the spiral, but also on the images of the compost and the labyrinth.

In *Tu*, Grace recounts the real-life hardships of New Zealand's 28th Battalion during the Second World War. This polyphonic and multidimensional narrative in part focuses on soldier Tu's depictions of the horrific battlefields on the Italian front. In these, the ravaged environment shows signs of both randomness and design, order and chaos. Regularly destroyed by bombings and infantry raids, the rural landscape appears as a giant compost heap made of superimposed layers of dead soldiers' putrefying bodies and inorganic debris. In the nightmarish context of the bloody frontline, Māori character Tu comes to the unsettling realisation that his surroundings are a concrete "wasteland," in which all forms of life are liable to be killed and literally composted. The multi-layered and unstable structure of this disintegrating environment also proves a confusing maze for the surviving soldiers. The notion of the world as a concrete labyrinthine compost heap highlights the physical enmeshment between human and non-human life forms, which together must navigate liminal (ordered and chaotic) topographies. Entangled physically and culturally by the common traumatic experience of war, both European nature and the surviving soldiers must go through the process of self-renewal.

In this article, my association of the labyrinth with the compost aims at recasting the human-centred perceptions of the maze within the more encompassing, i.e. trans-species, dynamics of the compost. Although not entirely similar, the biological processes of compost and the spatial dynamics of the maze complement one another in this novel. Admittedly, placing Grace's work in relation to such Western models seems dangerously like a Eurocentric imposition on a postcolonial, Indigenous text. Yet, while this may be especially true of the age-old

European archetype of the maze, the flexible openness of compost as an ecological/poetic process—which is perhaps less culturally-determined than the labyrinth—allows for a fruitful dialogue with Grace's poetics and subtle deployment of Māori cosmology in *Tu*.

Furthermore, by showing how the human/non-human enmeshment during the war echoes the ambivalent dynamics of a maze-like compost heap, Grace connects ecological/poetic and postcolonial issues from cultural and materialist perspectives. The negotiation of randomness and design, labyrinth and compost, decoded in abstract or figurative terms is also relevant to apprehend the cultural background of the novel, which recalls the complexity of the local postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand and the complexity of its global ties with the rest of the world. This article thus argues that the ecopoetic focus of *Tu* is one that strives to transcend the old colonial conceptions of "wildness" and "civilisation" forged along the lines of chaos and order, so as to favour a navigation of the world and the mind that can fruitfully accommodate these allegedly opposed dynamics. Indeed, the ecological, processual nature of compost and the spatial dimension of the labyrinth also connect to the wider concern of ecopoetics, understood as a reflection on human beings' relation to their dwelling place (both on local and global scales) and to their non-human neighbours, and as the attempt to translate this fluctuating relationship on paper.

To this end, the first part of this article reflects on the complementary paradigms of the labyrinth and the compost. When placed in dialogue with Māori cosmology, the processual dynamics of the labyrinthine compost also share interesting points of connection with the spiral motif. Moving to a close-reading of *Tu*, the second part examines how the labyrinth and the compost manifest in Grace's prose as concrete and spatial constructions. The third part deals with the psychic dimension of this labyrinthine compost, which impacts the troubled mindscape of the protagonist, the structure of the text, and the reading experience. The fourth part explores how Grace's aesthetics of randomness and design constitutes a postcolonial ecopoetics; and finally the article concludes with a reflection on how this piece of fiction might contribute to ecopoetics at large.

The Compost and the Labyrinth

Understood as tangible constructions, the compost and the maze display a multi-layered and convoluted layout respectively. In its literal or ecological definition, the compost signifies "a mixture of various ingredients for fertilising or enriching land"; more generally, it is "a composition, combination, compound" (from Latin "componere"—"to put together") (OED n. p.). This accumulation and combination of layers of organic waste structurally echo the numerous meanders, convolutions, and zigzagging patterns of the labyrinth (especially in its multicursal

form[1]). These two models of mishmashed jumble or criss-crossing pathways evoke a sense of chaotic multiplicity. The resulting walking pattern of the maze—the individual's physical roaming—further associates its processual navigation with the concept of randomness. Thus, for the maze-walker, the whole structure seems utterly disorganised; for the lay-observer of compost, the composting process may appear as relying more on chance than on careful design.

Nevertheless, both the labyrinth and the compost are also driven in some degree by order or planned organisation: the intricate structure of the maze must be skilfully elaborated by an architect in order to kindle the wanderer's mixed feelings of confusion and somehow pleasurable anticipation of navigating the labyrinth's innumerable meanders (Doob 66). Similarly, a human-made compost pile is regularly monitored: dry and wet layers of organic waste are more or less evenly distributed so that they may decompose and "bind" together into a nutritive fertiliser. By contrast, the natural compost, which for instance develops beneath the forest floor without human management, has a more random formation. In both types of compost, however, the basic composting process arguably remains similar: in a nutshell, under the right environmental conditions, the juxtaposition of various forms of organic matter favours the emergence of microorganisms (e.g. bacteria and fungi), which in turn help break down those materials. Thus, both the compost and the maze integrate randomness and design in terms of their spatial, internal composition. Nevertheless, chance is a crucial determining factor for the compost (the right environmental conditions must be met), so that it remains a highly volatile structure, in contrast to the physical labyrinthine construction whose dynamics is more confined.

Furthermore, this tension between randomness and design crucially produces the ambivalent effect of both the compost and the maze: indeed, it translates into a life/death tension, which each model develops differently. While the compost features aspects of finitude in the decomposition and decay of organic matter, its recycling stage indicates that such demise is intimately linked to the renewal of life. Navigating multicursal labyrinths is much more uncertain, for maze-walkers are never sure of their spatial position, of the presence or not of a centre or an exit. Thus, this wandering experience strikingly oscillates between life-threatening and regenerative outcomes.

In this interplay between life and death, the chaotic maze is decoded through symbolic lenses in the Western imaginary and its literatures to a greater extent than the compost. Characteristically, the literary tradition favours a metaphorical use of spatial representation: "awareness of the labyrinth always represents man's relation to space, which valorises abstract topological principles" (Schmeling 44; my

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[1] In literature, the maze is most often presented as multicursal: it consists of several choices of paths and includes dead-ends. By contrast, the "unicursal" labyrinth (presumably the Cretan model) usually appears as circular and has been pervasive in visual arts. In this simple structure, the maze-walker must follow the unique path which inevitably leads to its centre and then walk backwards to find the way out (see Doob 46-51).

translation). The cultural, spiritual, and metaphorical interpretations connoting the maze operate at two main levels, i.e. society (culture, belonging) and the self (mindscape, language). Therefore, the labyrinth as a metaphor represents modern alienation occurring at an individual or collective social level.[2] These interpretations suggest that the maze also tends to be viewed exclusively through the lenses of human affairs. By contrast, although the compost could also be viewed in a symbolic way, it primarily comes across as an ecological/biological process and earthly artefact.

The lethal aspect of the labyrinth also results from some walkers' inability to embrace randomness as a process that complements more ordered designs that characterise the natural world and human society. When associated with the individual's psychic or spiritual initiation, wandering through the labyrinth signifies an inner journey of self-discovery (see Jaskolski 46, 73-78). In its positive configuration, this quest for personal, philosophical, or religious fulfilment results in a fruitful regeneration: experiencing the confusing labyrinth as an initiation and rite of passage, "the novice emerges from his ordeal a totally different being: he has become *another*" (Eliade 112, emphasis in original).[3] This productive othering of the self seems to suggest that, paradoxically, the disorientating labyrinth has some meaningful design. Although mainly an imaginative exercise leading to a "psychic birth" (Jaskolski 46), the transformative function of the labyrinth here echoes that of the compost in its natural occurrence, with its recycling process which completely modifies the biological makeup of organic matter.

In summation, the differences between the labyrinth and compost chiefly lie in their intrinsic nature: the compost is associated with the biological processes governing organic matter, whereas the maze has to do with spatial dynamics, with the individual's relation to and navigation of his/her outside environment. In this model, space also tends to be interpreted in abstract terms, denoting the contextual spheres of culture and human society (e.g. political and social structures). On the other hand, Grace's *Tu* unveils the complementarity of these two images, crystallised in the labyrinthine compost. When allied to the labyrinth, the compost reframes the concept of space, or spatial navigation, through ecocentric and materialist lenses: the tangible nature of the compost foregrounds the biological/biophysical processes of enmeshment, alteration through decay, and regeneration that affect earthly entities. To put it differently, the compost stresses the materiality of space. Conversely, the labyrinth adds the dimension of movement in space—and erratic movement, in particular—to the compost. The resulting labyrinthine compost reminds us that, in their convoluted peregrinations in the environment, human and non-human wanderers also constantly undergo physical alteration. The

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[2] See for instance, Kafka's "The Burrow" and the nonsensical tortuousness of bureaucracy in Kafka's *The Trial*.

[3] In European medieval times, following the meandering of the two-dimensional maze reproduced on many cathedrals' paving was "similar to a pilgrimage to the Holy Land": by entering this maze, pilgrims eventually reach Jesus, since God is believed to be the centre of the universe (Jaskolski 73).

corporeality of all life forms is changed, decomposed, and renewed (either visibly or invisibly, as at microscopic level) during their journey through the intricate pathways of the Earth and through their interactions with one another.

From Maze and Compost to Spiral

While the labyrinth archetype particularly resonates with Western culture, the more inclusive and flexible, because biocentric, aspects of the compost offer possible links with the Māori worldview. In order to discuss the ecopoetic structuring of *Tu*, it is crucial to mention that the strong influence of Māori non-dualist cosmology on Grace pre-empts any simplistic reducing of her fictional work to mere displays of the anthropocentric mindset. Indeed, in Māori epistemology, human beings and the non-human environment are not "hyper-separated" as in most Western, "reason-centred" philosophies (Plumwood 115). Although Grace openly acknowledges that she is more interested in developing her characters and their "voice" than in working on a specific "plot or theme" (Hereniko 161), she intimately associates human beings with their ancestors, who, in line with the Māori worldview, permeate present everyday life and the non-human realm (such as animals and natural elements; Della Valle 137). This sense of trans-species and trans-temporal community based on kinship is essential in Māori spirituality.[4] This is encapsulated in the processual and structural image of the spiral. Inspired by the fern plant, the folding and unfolding movements of the spiral motif (*koru*) incidentally express the fruitful alliance between chaotic and ordered patterns: "The koru, which is often used in Māori art as a symbol of creation, is based on the shape of an unfurling fern frond. Its circular shape conveys the idea of perpetual movement, and its inward coil suggests a return to the point of origin. The koru therefore symbolizes the way in which *life both changes and stays the same*" (Royal n. p.; my emphasis).

Although Grace's body of work has not yet been investigated explicitly through the lenses of "ecopoetics," the motif of the spiral—examined predominantly in her novel *Potiki* (DeLoughrey, Knudsen)—at least hints at the intrinsic *poietic*, productive, energy of the non-human world. Yet the spiral is often examined for its metaphorical, psychological, and metaphysical significance for the protagonists and for Māori culture at large (DeLoughrey "Spiral Temporality," Suzuki). While these interpretations are useful to understand the postcolonial cultural dialogue and practice of storytelling in *Tu*, they hardly account for Grace's poetics of randomness and design in this narrative, occurring as it does at the material, concrete level of the individual's lived experience of the terrain.

The meaning of the spiral as implying a "repetition with a change" (DeLoughrey "Spiral Temporality" 68) echoes the recycling process of a compost,

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[4] Grace extensively illustrated these concepts of kinship and non-linear time in her previous novel *Potiki* (also see Grace's explanations in Sarti 49).

through which regeneration similarly implies a continuation of living organic matter, albeit in an altered form. In a compost heap, "rebirth" does not equal "identical" repetition: through their contact with each other, the decayed elements are all transformed into a fertiliser that combines their nutritive properties. This is a tangible example of the spiralling notion according to which "life both changes and stays the same" (Royal n. p.). The compost and the spiral both emphasise the dynamic complementarity between alledgedly opposed forces and concepts, such as creation (life) and destruction (death), randomness and design, repetition and alteration, beginning and end. Interestingly, the circular, one-path layout of the Cretan-style labyrinth (Doob 19) also espouses the same spiral-like form that evokes such regenerative processes in nature. Yet this is a very specific kind of labyrinth, which rarely features in Western fictional structures (see footnote 1).

Tu recuperates the models of the labyrinth and the compost through a postcolonial strategy of articulating a mutually-transforming negotiation between the various cultures, identities, and terrains that characterise the former colonies (Aotearoa New Zealand) and former "motherland" (Europe). This negotiation is made concretely possible through the Māori soldiers' encounter with European environments and cultures during the war. Therefore, the complementarity between alleged opposites (chaos and order), the ceaseless movement, and "'the organizational role of randomness'" (Atlan, qtd. in Rasula 4) at work in the labyrinth and the compost are not at odds with the Māori cosmology based on "spiral temporality" (DeLoughrey) and on fluid interconnections between all life forms and spaces. The maze and the compost thus encounter the Māori spiral in a productive fashion, as a close reading of Grace's novel shows.

Patricia Grace's *Tu*: Warfare in Liminal Topographies

Tu focuses on the real-life 28th Battalion—the so-called "Māori Battalion"—which was part of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force during the Second World War. Indeed, in 1939, numerous Māori men voluntarily enlisted in this frontline infantry unit and were sent to fight on European fronts. This marked a historical moment in Pākehā (White people)-Māori relations: some leaders, such as Te Puea Herangi, viewed Māori men's willingness to fight for the British Crown as a submissive act of cultural assimilation, as an "incongru[ous] […] participating in the colonisers' battle" (Wilson 89). Others, led by MP Sir Apirana Ngata, considered it as an opportunity to demonstrate Māori communities' spirit of endurance and to improve transcultural, racial relations. For their wartime service, many Māori people hoped to gain respect from White New Zealand people and wider political and cultural visibility on the national scene.[5] Such hopes are addressed in *Tu*, when

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[5] Ngata famously argued that the participation of Māoris in the war effort was the "price of citizenship." See Coates for an instructive overview of the historical background of the Māori Battalion and the New Zealand political scene at the time (29-34). Patricia Grace herself used an extensive historical and critical scholarship to document *Tu* ("Author's Notes" 286-87). The website

Grace recounts the pre-war personal lives of three brothers and the wartime hardships they face together. The title of the novel is an abbreviated form of the youngest brother's first name, Te Hokowhito-a-Tu, which translates as "the many fighting men of Tumatauenga" (*Tu* 7). In Māori creation stories, Tumatauenga is the god of war. This allusion, which presupposes a contiguity between the "supernatural" and the "real," creation stories and everyday life, draws attention to the subtle magic realist atmosphere. Such liminality between the real and the unreal reflects the "spiral temporality" of Māori cosmology (DeLoughrey) which counters linear conceptions of time and clear ontological (species) delimitations. This sense of in-betweenness is also concretely reinforced by the disquieting combination of order and chaos that characterises the war-torn landscape. The novel primarily consists of Tu's personal notebooks written on the frontline. Semantics and syntax remain generally fluid, involving experimentation with structure rather than actual radical experiment with language itself. *Tu* depicts a human and natural carnage foregrounding the interpenetration between all the decaying life forms trapped in its midst. This composting and meandering dynamics takes almost gothic and apocalyptic proportions: the narrative features sporadic examples of a trans-species mesh with strong magic realist and uncanny connotations, as the following analysis demonstrates. In those blends of human and non-human fragmented bodies, the co-presence of organised and random patterns informing the whole world in the novel becomes terrifying, as it threatens the protagonists' physical and mental integrity.

The Environment as Compost

Grace's male protagonists, brothers Pita, Rangi, and Tu, participate in the Italian campaign, and more particularly in the long and costly Battle of Monte Cassino (1944), in the Lazio region. The hill, where German soldiers occupied an abbey transformed into a fortress, was the stage of repeated Allied bombings and infantry raids. As a result, this rural location became an immense wasteland (*Tu* 163-64). The Māori soldiers must painfully make their way to the summit where the German fortress still proves impregnable. In Grace's narrative, the doomed and gruesome nature of this mission climaxes in the horrific image of the battlefield as a giant compost heap in which accumulated layers of lifeless bodies and inorganic debris have entered their putrefying and recycling stages:

> And what we came across, entangled in all the jumble and waste as we made our way, were reeking, water-swollen corpses of Germans which had been there since the bombing and the first forays into Cassino. We didn't realise at first, after slipping and scratching along, and sliding over mud-caked rubble and stone in the dark, that on striking a soft surface it was rotting flesh that our hobnails, our hands, our knees were sinking into. (165)

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https://28maoribattalion.org.nz/ also provides a wealth of personal testimonies, archives, and information regarding the Māori Battalion's military actions.

In this passage, the accumulating principle of the compost suggests that design and randomness are tightly interrelated. The layering of this macabre "jumble" and agglomerated "rubble" paradoxically involves some kind of order, as the following sentence indicates: "Scattered on top of that under-layer of bodies were the newly dead, Jerries and Kiwis alike" (166). This tension between order and unpredictability is reflected in the uncanny contiguity of decaying matter and living soldiers. Indeed, this sense of liminality does not characterise this ravaged location only: in this decomposed and recycling battlefield, Tu grows unsure whether he and his fighting friends are alive or dead:

> I'm surprised to find myself alive. Or am I alive? Dropping down, I had to believe I was dead so that others would know it too. [...] Is there really an edge that separates what is real from what is not, or is there no such separation? [...] If, like a lizard or a fish, you are so indistinguishable against rock that you are undetected by the globular eye of a fly, or any eye, have you become rock? (173)

His metaphysical considerations even ponder the nature of "reality" and "unreality" in ecological terms, as the last sentence devoted to the uncanny camouflaging skills of animals suggests.

The author expands this parallel with the mimicking abilities of non-human individuals by alluding to the gothic archetype of the walking dead. Separated from his battalion during the battle, Tu must smear himself with a killed soldier's blood and play dead in order to lure advancing German soldiers (178). Tu accepts his uncanny status, since "Another man's blood was painting me. Both the other man and I were dead, and both alive" (179). Although this blurring between life and death is quite "natural" in a composting environment, it nevertheless adds to the magic realist, in-between atmosphere of the place. Most importantly, the gothic aspect of such "magic" is based on ecological facts and metabolic principles:

> [...] flies were in love with us in the same way that they love dead men. They were in love with our eyes, our lips, our skins, our backsides. If we were not dead we'd have waved at them, slapped them down. Instead we left them to circle, creep, spit, lick. [...] On the other hand there were feeders and egg-layers in love with us too, who as a rule love only the living. They crept and hopped all over us, attaching their drinking mouths to flesh and tunnelling under our skins. How could we know whether we lived or not?
>   Perhaps there's an in-between state where ghosts walk in and out of you, or where you could be your own ghost coming and going? (179-80)

Tu's allusions to the figure of the walking dead are not only metaphorical renditions of his shell-shocked feelings of horror and (post-)traumatic stress disorder in this war-torn place. Beside these psychological interpretations, the walking dead figure also derives from his factual observations about the soldiers' corporeality rendered uncanny—because deeply altered, yet somehow still recognisable in part—by their difficult living conditions: "we could be an assembly of the dead who, if touched by the light of the sun which we had not seen for days, would melt back into the earth's formations" (178). The ghost figure in these passages is echoed in the Māori soldiers'

allusion to the presence and stories of "*kehua*" (haunting spirits) during the battle (80, 83).

Thus, in Grace's novel, the surviving soldiers are caught in a paradoxical in-between position, simultaneously belonging and not belonging to the recycling collective made of fallen soldiers and debris. Because of their existence as material, flesh-and-blood beings, Tu and his friends seem destined to blend in with this earthly compost sooner or later (i.e. to "melt back into the earth's formations"). At the same time, as living, unhurt, and autonomous individuals, they reject the possibility of such an integration which would imply their death. The highly disquieting interplay between order and chaos on the battlefield acquires an eco-apocalyptic dimension: this composting process involves the entire (human and non-human) environment in which the Māori battalion finds itself. In brief, the whole world appears as a compost of waste materials.

The Environment as Labyrinth

In Tu's recounting of the battle, the motif of the labyrinth helps emphasise the ambiguous role of the world-as-compost as well as the erratic journeying through space it implies for the soldiers. The Cassino battlefield also proves a huge maze that Tu and his brothers must navigate as best they can:

> [...] there was no waking from this nightmare of Cassino as we attempted to clear a way in a town that bore no resemblance to any maps we had been shown as part of our preparation. "Via this, via that," we'd been told. "Turn this way, turn that way." But there was no this way, that way, no via anything. (165)

Because of the ongoing bombings, the natural and urban topographies are being altered in unexpected ways, creating a labyrinth of shifting obstacles and meanders. This structure is ambiguous in that it retains some of the old, ordered patterns, alongside new, unknown ones. This strange combination may literally lead the Māori soldiers to their death by confusing and exposing them to the concealed enemy fire. As a result, "our attack disintegrated into a kind of foraging as we moved forward and back. [...] It was cat-and-mouse out of the town" (167). The soldiers' confusion yields to erratic movements, as Tu bitterly explains that the cat-and-mouse chase with its "zigzagging" pattern "is too clean," whereas their intra-human chase is "brainless" (167). The perilousness of this composting maze means that death awaits the maze-walker at every turn: "We groped our way forward through the ruins and over the disintegrated pieces of men – through the rotten stink of it all – soon finding that this place where we thought there wouldn't be a flea still jumping, was infested with Jerry [German soldiers]. Live ones, that is" (166). By contrast to the original Greek myth, however, Grace's labyrinth blurs clear boundaries between the monster, Theseus, and the tortuous non-human space, so that they all together resemble the agglomerated elements of a composting mesh.

The Germans camouflage themselves so well in this environment that Tu cannot perceive any fundamental distinction between the land and the people (98).

As a result, the Māori soldiers feel that the environment around them has "eyes" watching them. This impression is accurate insomuch as the hilly topography of the place gives a strategic advantage to the Germans camped in the summit fortress: "Everywhere we go we feel Jerry's eyes upon us from on high. […] an enemy who sees all" (111). The elevated position enables the enemy forces to organise their attacks: the Germans benefit from a comprehensive vision of the whole labyrinth (the low-lying ruined village of Cassino) and can thus find some order in it. Tu and his brothers, however, still perceive the layout of their surroundings, the sequence of the attacks, and by extension their own survival as highly unpredictable. On the frontline, such a hampered worldview can prove fatal. When Tu becomes aware of the uncanny enmeshment between maze-like nature and the enemy troops, he comments: "a feeling of unreality would come over me. I felt as though I had become part of a picture or a Christmas card, or a story of woodcutters and princes in a book once read. Here I was in the once-upon-a-time, in some make-believe place" (98). This "feeling of unreality" is triggered not only by the magic realist contiguity of different realms—i.e. between human and non-human beings ("trees could be men" concealed to shoot at Tu, 98)—but also by the liminal nature of the maze. The confused maze-walkers (the soldiers) find it difficult to reconcile the dynamics of order and chaos which characterises their encounter with the more-than-human world and their arduous navigation of this shifting environment. The defamiliarising effect of such a liminal topography has important cultural implications, as I will show later.

Finally, Italy itself, as a heavily bombed and ruined country, assumes the tortuous structure of a maze. Given this particular geographical location, the soldiers' peregrinations on mountain roads that are "'long and filled with many a turning'" is somewhat reminiscent of Dante's many-tunnelled Inferno (109).[6] This last subtle analogy suggests that the environment as labyrinthine compost is not only unsettling in its conflation of random and design patterns: it also seems to take on the role of an oppressor engineering Tu's death. At the same time, Tu's descriptions show that the Italian rural environment is also crushed by the man-made war. Constituted by the ruins of blown-up buildings, the battlefield-as-maze bears witness to the more-than-human world as an additional victim of the depicted military apocalypse. Here, both human and non-human beings share the life-threatening and traumatic consequences of a putrefying world-labyrinth. Both must go through the process of survival: within the paradigm of the compost, this means to effectively regenerate after one's physical decomposition, while surviving the labyrinth implies finding an exit point.

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[6] As Doob reports, many authors viewed Dante's Hell in his *Divine Comedy* as a potential labyrinth. In this instance, although it is made of concentric circles, the *Inferno* is intrinsically a closed maze from which the damned souls can never escape (282).

Writing the Labyrinthine Compost as a Means to Recycle the Mind

More than a physical exercise, exiting the labyrinth implies psychic travail: the individual's mental energy must attune itself to the convoluted structure of reality so as to accept its ambivalent (ordered/random) organisational pattern. In this way, "making sense" of the maze means to successfully perceive how productive and creative the tense co-presence of randomness and design can actually be. Here, arguably, the compost contributes to the maze archetype, as such psychic acceptance of the labyrinth implies a reconfiguration, or recycling, of the mind and rigid cognitive categories. Grace's fictional rendition of mindscape considerably depends, thus, on the complementarity between maze and compost. Indeed, her novel constitutes a psychic maze inspired by Tu's difficulty to comprehend the random, yet somehow ordered, geography of the Earth and to reconnect his pre- with his post-war life. Influenced by the protagonist's struggle, the structure of the text proves as sinuous and fragmented as the labyrinthine compost. Consequently, the reading experience becomes an exercise of mental meandering and spiralling through time and space. In this process, the reader, just like Tu, must reassemble disjointed plot elements so as to acquire a more comprehensive overview of the story.

Tu survives the terrifying composting labyrinth, at least in part, through his storytelling activity: writing down his memories and impressions eventually helps him organise to some degree the chaotic compost or labyrinth of his mind. The tension between randomness and design found in these two archetypes also characterises the overall layout of Grace's book. While Tu's personal notebooks are first intended as a wartime log of factual entries (16-21), the text gradually espouses a more fluid and novel-like form. In the second chapter, the book's protagonist reverts to a less rigid and orderly presentation of events so as to convey his impressions better: "Just because the days are quite monotonous shouldn't mean that writing has to drag as well" (22). This almost metafictional reflection extends to the spatial and temporal configurations of the whole narrative: blurring fact and fiction, Tu's accounts are interspersed with the pre-war life of his elder brother, Pita, in Wellington. Except for the Prologue and Epilogue, Grace's book thus systematically alternates chapters devoted to the European frontline (recounted by Tu through a first-person narrative) and the home front respectively (a third-person narration focalised on Pita). The New Zealand-based stories are actually fictionalised transcripts of Pita's confessions to Tu while both fight in Europe. However, it is unclear how much Tu embellishes or modifies these family stories (150). This ambiguity lends a subtle metafictional flavour to the whole narrative.[7]

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[7] For the writing of *Tu*, Grace was similarly inspired by her father's war diaries. The latter, however, remain very short and incomplete regarding the military action themselves. Thus, Grace relied on external research and imagination to depict such scenes ("Author's Notes" 284).

In Grace's polyphonic and multidimensional text, such labyrinthine poetics is particularly detectable in the intertwined plotlines and deceptively plural narrative point of view, thus disrupting the time-space continuum of the narrative. At the same time, a clear design structures this randomness, as the syntax of Tu's prose remains fluid and seamless, without giving way to even more radical modes of experimental writing and textual fragmentation. On the other hand, Tu's interweaving of past and present events and of various points of view also mirrors the folding and unfolding movements of the spiral. The composite blend of fact and fiction in his stories is further reinforced by the Māori's conception of genealogy, or *whakapapa*, as highly flexible. In Māori epistemology, *whakapapa*, understood as both "process and product" (Suzuki 117), accommodates change to ensure its survival (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 164). Thus, Grace's entire novel could be decoded as the written genealogy of Tu's family, one which weaves together various geographical places (Italy and Wellington), cultural traditions (labyrinth and spiral), and temporalities.[8]

Grace's technique of *assemblage* complicates the textual labyrinth by doubling "the hermeneutic burden and the Theseus-role" usually assigned to "the recipient of the text" in Western fiction (Gillespie 388). Written some twenty years after WWII, Tu's introductory and closing letters to his nephews Rimini and Benedict mean not only that the latter must navigate Tu's meandering accounts set in the past: the reader must also simultaneously negotiate the past and present labyrinths of Tu's universe, represented respectively in his wartime diaries and his current reconnection with Rimini and Benedict. As regards such processual reading experience, Rasula's prolific model of the poetic recycling compost as suffused with signs (128-29, 199) contrasts with the much more uncertain possibility of making sense of the labyrinth. What the reader makes of the maze-like narrative upon closing the book is highly unpredictable. The chaotic labyrinth epitomises the reader's dynamic cognitive journey through the tortuous plotlines of a narrative, a journey which may remain nonsensical and fruitless. By contrast, the compost emphasises the individual's assemblage of fragmented information gleaned *en route throughout* this journey. In *Tu*, the productive compost complements Grace's labyrinthine text at the end: piece by piece, the protagonist's convoluted stories reveal—and thus in a way (re)construct—the true identities of Benedict and Rimini as the respective love children of Tu's brothers.

Ironically, just like the reader, Tu himself must travel through the designed chaos of his own labyrinthine diaries. Indeed, the second and most important purpose of this maze-walking experience inside Tu's notebooks and Grace's novel is to make sense of the protagonist's own life. Two-thirds into the novel, a new section begins with Tu recovering in an Italian hospital. He resumes his diary writing in order to remember the circumstances of his discharge: "it'll help me sort out what took place and how it all happened. Now that I've begun to remember, there's

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[8] See Suzuki for an extensive exploration of the notion of *whakapapa* in *Tu*.

nothing I can do to keep half-formed recollections from making their way into my head" (*Tu* 232). Thus, Tu's mind has become a circuitous maze or a "mind-compost" (Snyder 10) of randomly agglomerated memories, of "scraps" which are progressively "gathering themselves together" (*Tu* 232). To transcribe this difficult assembling process, that particular chapter (232-37) espouses a slightly more fractured layout than the others, as the prose is structured around short paragraphs and indented sentences or words. Reflecting the progressively resurfacing and accumulating memories, this layout conveys a sense of both contingency and organisation, with a back-and-forth movement between timeframes significantly recalling the dynamic principle of the spiral motif.

Because of his notebooks and his war experience, Tu could be seen as embodying all his fellow soldiers' stories, or *whakapapa* (Suzuki 120-21). As he has pondered and re-assembled his and his brothers' memories of war, "the detritus of day-to-day consciousness" is recycled, i.e. "re-created through reflection" and given back to the community (Snyder 10). In this sense, his Māori name, which means "the many fighting men of Tumatauenga, the god of war" aptly describes not only his narrative, but most importantly his own identity. This correspondence between the book as textual object and Tu as a physical character suggests that the latter is like a composting entity as well: caught in the recycling process of the war-torn environment, Tu physically and psychologically goes through the stages of decomposition and regeneration.

Moreover, because Tu's full name—Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu—also designates "the Pioneer Battalion of Maori volunteers during World War One" (*Tu* 7), his survival also casts him as the custodian of a broader collective of human memories, or as a living testimony to the Māori people's historical war effort. All in all, the ambivalent maze-like compost re-enacts what the reader and Tu must accomplish when reading Grace's fractured plotline: both must connect pieces of information pertaining to Tu's New Zealand-based family (the local) and European war-experience (the global) in the hope of finding some purpose out of Tu's present multicultural and "glocal" life.

The Labyrinthine Compost as Postcolonial Ecopoetics

Indeed, in *Tu*, the author shows how the physical trans-species entanglement at work in the labyrinthine wasteland in Italy also translates into a strong cultural bond between Europe and the former colony of Aotearoa New Zealand. Grace's ecopoetics here acquires a postcolonial dimension because her vision of the European landscape as composting labyrinth complicates the colonial ideological associations of the "Old World" (the "civilised") with order and of the "New World" (the "savage" and "wild") with chaos. In this process, the fact that the main narrator unveils the differences *and* similarities between European and New Zealand terrains

from a Māori perspective reinforces Grace's postcolonial deconstruction of fixed human roles (coloniser/colonised) and ecological features.

Echoing the accumulation of composting strata and circuitous tunnels in a maze, the intricate juxtaposition of different perspectives, timeframes, and places enables us to establish a parallel between the stories set on the Italian battlefields and those pertaining to New Zealand life. Tu's "feeling of unreality" while he is on the Italian front (98), as outlined in the first section of this article, also derives from his perception of Europe as the "upside-down side of the world" (174). Moreover, with its old buildings, the Italian countryside is actually "quite spooky" (47). Such mixed feelings of fascination and unease are shared by many his fellow soldiers, who have never left their home country before. Grace brings about an interesting reversal of roles between the so-called "Antipodes" ("New Worlds") and Europe (the "Old World"). In colonial times, the Antipodes were often considered as strange and "unreal" lands by Anglo-Celtic settlers; the Europeans regarded this unknown environment and its internal organisation as the epitome of life-threatening and unintelligible randomness (Cronon 70-71; see Garrard 66-85). In the eyes of many settlers, the wilderness of these colonies accordingly constituted a literal and symbolic waste-land that had to be transformed and tamed, i.e. re-designed in an orderly fashion so as to make it a profitable and safe land (Crosby 147; Huggan and Tiffin 5-8). Ironically, in *Tu*, Europe is seen in this way by the Māori soldiers, as the gothic and ambivalent depictions of the Italian environment suggest. Thereby, Grace strikingly re-appropriates the concepts of "unreality" and (apparent) "chaos" as synonyms for "uncivilised," "wild," and "irrational." The book evokes and reconfigures these notions, which have long informed imperialist arguments legitimising the colonisation of territories and Indigenous people (Cronon 79; see Huggan and Tiffin 5-11; see Garrard 77, 129-36).

Despite his feeling of uncanniness, Tu does not actually express real hostility towards this Italian putrefying wasteland and the Minotaur-like enemy troops (*Tu* 181). Rather than being driven by a colonial impulse to tame this desolate and dangerous landscape of his own, Tu seems to accept the ambivalence of this place, i.e. the fact that it appears both unfamiliar and familiar (47). The most reassuring and recognisable features lie in the mountainous topography, which both characterises Aotearoa New Zealand and some parts of Italy (110, 112, 275). Tu reflects that the Māori are forever part of Italian history not only because of the war (which implies that dead soldiers are buried overseas), but also because of the similarities in landscapes (77). These echoes provide Māori soldiers with some semblance of order—in the form of peace of mind—as they feel less bewildered by the horrifying and disorderly human and non-human compost on the battlefront. In brief, Grace blurs the rigid polarities between (post)colonial figures—White and Indigenous people—and their supposedly different perceptions of a maze-like world. Geographical and cultural oppositions between the "centre of the civilised world" (Europe; England for the British Empire) and the remote colonies "on the

edge of civilisation" (e.g. Aotearoa New Zealand) are called into question. The author's rejection of cultural and ecological binaries is informed by the cyclical dynamics of the composting pile and the interconnecting movement of the spiral. It further echoes the high human mobility, transnational, and transcultural dialogues that characterised the rise of a globalised world in the second half of the twentieth century.

Finally, the environmental ambivalence of these uncanny, controlled and unstable, dangerous and life-renewing places in Grace's novel can also be linked to the tense Māori-Pākehā relations in Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid-twentieth century. Interestingly, the image of the enemy-filled European countryside as an environment that observes Tu recalls the chapters devoted to his brother, Pita, set in Wellington before he enlisted. Pita is struggling to adjust to the strange, anonymous, and largely White urban centre of Wellington, where, historically, many Māori families moved for economic reasons at the outbreak of WWII (Coates 37-38). As he faces racial discrimination in this city, Pita too feels the burden of White people's gaze: "And it was the thousand eyes that made the colour of his skin a shame" (*Tu* 140). Whereas the watching eyes concealed in the Italian wasteland may prove physically lethal to the Māori Battalion, in Wellington the "thousand eyes" harass Pita with feelings of double-consciousness and cultural in-betweenness. This may lead to a symbolic death caused by cultural alienation (140). Grace's "layered" fiction and its juxtaposition of plotlines invites the reader to make connections between the death of the body in a composting wasteland and a symbolic demise in a city that may drastically reshape the individual's cultural identity. If the Second World War represents the decomposing and putrefying stages of the same Western civilisation that engaged in colonisation, a decomposition experienced physically by Tu (who is severely wounded) and his brothers (who both die in battle), can the post-war moment and its corresponding "crisis of reinventi[on]" for postcolonial nations (Howells, Sharrad, and Turcotte 1) initiate the recycling, regenerating process of compost through an improved transcultural dialogue and social justice for the Māori community? Tu's closing letter to his nephews Benedict and Rimini suggests that the Māori Battalion's praiseworthy service did not, unfortunately, bring in much political change (*Tu* 279). In this sense, the Māori soldiers in Grace's *Tu* could also be envisioned as waste material partaking in the composting war from a political perspective: their lives seem to have been literally wasted in vain, if one considers the racial status-quo in the aftermath of WWII.

However, projects of house renovation, further storytelling to the family, and a visit to Italy with Rimini and Benedict conclude the novel on an optimistic note (281-82). Tu's resolution to "renovate the house" (282) is highly suggestive: it points out his desire to rethink and revitalise his *oikos*, i.e. his "home or place of dwelling" (Bate 75). In view of his life-changing transcontinental and transcultural travels, Tu's home acquires more global dimensions. In a nutshell, the ending highlights the transformation of hermit-like, war veteran Tu, who previously

defined himself solely as a soldier, into a person committed to his community's livelihood and cultural re-empowerment. Echoing Māori creation stories, Tu finally shifts his interests to the other attributes of the god Tumatauenga, who is not only the god of war, but also "the god of man" (Barlow 12). Grace's choice of this highly symbolic name is in line with the "spiral temporality" (DeLoughrey) of Māori cosmology. This narrative could be decoded as recounting the adventurous life of the God Tumatuenga in twentieth-century Europe and Aotearoa New Zealand. In Grace's story, Tumatuenga makes the uncanny experience of the labyrinthine compost: he is psychologically marked by his corporeal enmeshment with the maze-like, hellish Italian landscape during WWII (to refer to Dante's famous "Hell"). In the end, he is not annihilated but manages to re-emerge "as another" (Rasula 8; also Eliade 112): though still physically maimed, Tu feels spiritually enriched and re-energised by his transnational voyages. Recalling a fecund recycling, the spiral has gone full circle, so to speak: Tu's rebirth emulates the folding movement of the spiralling fern frond back to its starting point. Tu, his family, and his home place are eventually re-united, all transformed and yet still the same. Although the soldiers and the environment are linked primarily through bodily disintegration on the frontline, the recycling process of the compost implies that these decaying entities still possess a (re)creative potential, or *poietic* energy.

Conclusion: The Novelistic Ecopoetics of *Tu*

This article set out to demonstrate how Grace emphasises the complex enmeshment between the human and non-human realms at physical and psychic levels. In this narrative, the compost and the labyrinth are not only portrayed as concrete structures: extending into the metaphorical realm, they operate, for the central protagonist and the reader, as a processual ecopoetics reflecting (on) how to dwell in the world both physically and imaginatively. Tu perceives the battlefield as a liminal terrain where randomness and design, contingency and predictability, and life and death are actually collaborative forces. Tu's accounts are not completely the result of an individual, human imagination: the composting and convoluted wasteland lies at the source of his meandering thought process and multi-layered storytelling. Moreover, the spiralling dynamics characterising the narrative's non-linear temporality and the life/death co-presence on the disintegrating battlefield intrinsically harks back to the ongoing state of biological emergence through patterns of renewal and alteration. In brief, Grace's ecopoetics of randomness and design, as illustrated in the labyrinthine compost, highlights the reciprocal dialogue between the perceiver and the perceived, the dweller and the dwelling place.

Also, Grace's prolonged and intense immersion of her readers in a labyrinthine compost, destabilising their boundaries between ordered and chaotic organisations of reality, opens up the way for future reflection on the possible cross-pollinating exchange between prose and the field of ecopoetics. It is granted that, in poetry, the

tense interplay between chaos and order seems to occur at the very core of language: the latter is "*dislocated*", to use Rasula's suggestive terminology (124), from the inside. Language may be said to implode thanks to the poets' experiments with rhetorical devices, Rasula considering this trope as "poetry's composting medium" (9). By contrast, prose texts perhaps more frequently expand the apparent disorder of the maze to their macro-structure rather than re-inventing "the word" itself. Granted too that for its defamiliarisation effects and re-enactment of a chaotic universe over three hundred pages, *Tu* relies more on a multiplicity of narrative points of view and on a disruption of the time-space continuum than on an actual re-invention of language and its plasticity from inside out. Nevertheless, while Grace's labyrinthine compost (deceptively) conveys a sense of order at the level of prose syntax, her accumulation of layers—of characters, places, voices, epistemologies, timeframes—and the ceaseless circulation of echoing, spiralling correspondences between them definitely show the author's aesthetic kinship with an ecopoetics of randomness and design, an ecopoetics that particularly evokes the difficulty of evolving in and understanding a world in constant movement. Grace's novel, therefore, shares important characteristics with the eco-poem seen as a "making of the dwelling-place" modelled not merely after nature's rhythms in a naturalistic fashion, but also through aesthetic procedures and textual structures inspired by dynamic ecological processes, to paraphrase Jonathan Bate (75-76). In *Tu*, as in other ecopoetic texts, the reader does indeed not merely discover descriptions of the landscape and a universe brimming with fluctuating and contingent energies: he/she experiences what it means to evolve and reside in such a place.

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ISSN 2171-9594 136

POÈME : la POïesis à l'Ère de la Métamorphose

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Résumé

En nous appuyant sur une reconstitution de l'histoire de la notion de *poïesis* et notamment sur ses mobilisations dans des domaines extra-littéraires, nous dégageons dans cet article son potentiel pour être réinvestie comme désignant un certain type de faire ouvert au hasard et aux trajectoires imprévisibles du vivant, se déployant aussi bien dans les processus naturels que dans les processus du langage humain. Nous proposons alors de re-sonder à l'aune de l'instrument de la *poïesis* une série de lieux de vie autonomes et durables étudiés pendant une enquête terrain de cinq mois, de mai à septembre 2015. Dans ces habitats au métabolisme réinscrit dans la nature vivante, la *poïesis* s'avère particulièrement utile pour observer des productions faisant figure de véritables « *nexus* » ou enchevêtrements entre matière et signification. Ceux-ci donnent corps à une « habitation poétique du monde » observable non plus dans les textes mais au cœur de la vie quotidienne, démontrant de manière inédite, à l'échelle des habitats autonomes et durables, et même au-delà, la nature très incarnée et donc très politisée du langage et de l'imagination.

Mots-clefs: Poïesis, poétique, écopoétique, architecture et design, habitats autonomes et durables, contreculture, hasard, vivant organique.

Abstract

This article starts with a survey reconstructing the history of the notion of *poiesis*, with a specific emphasis on the way it has been used in various fields outside literature. This survey brings out that the potential of *poiesis* to be both understood and dwelled in anew as a type of making open to randomness and that organically unfurls together *with* the unpredictability of the living, as well as a kind of fashioning that unfolds equally in natural processes and those of human language. In this very light, the article then goes on to probe into the *poiesis* characterizing a series of sustainable alternative and dwellings which were studied over a five-month period of fieldwork, from May to September 2015. Within those human habitats organically built up and encapsulated again within living nature, *poiesis* proves particularly useful when examining the production of designs and artefacts which entangle matter and meaning in a genuine "*nexus.*" Such designs and artefacts, it is argued here, give physical shape to a "poetic inhabiting of the world" no longer limited to literary texts only, but also unfolding at the very heart of everyday life. In connection with these sustainable forms of human habitat, and even beyond, this article sheds new light on the very embodied, and therefore political, nature of language and the imagination.

Keywords: Poïesis, poetics, ecopoetics, architecture and design, sustainable alternative dwelling and habitat, counterculture, randomness, organic life forms.

Resumen

Este artículo comienza con un estudio que reconstruye la historia de la noción de *poiesis*, con un énfasis específico en la forma en que se ha utilizado en diversos campos ajenos a la literatura. Este estudio revela que el potencial de la *poïesis* debe ser entendido y reinstaurado como un modo de «hacer» abierto al azar y que se despliega orgánicamente junto con la imprevisibilidad de la vida, así como un modo de diseño que se desarrolla igualmente en procesos naturales y del lenguaje humano.

En este mismo sentido, el artículo continúa investigando la *poiesis* que caracteriza una serie de viviendas ecológicas alternativas y sostenibles que se estudiaron durante un período de cinco meses de trabajo de campo de mayo a septiembre de 2015. Dentro de esos hábitats humanos construidos orgánicamente y encapsulados nuevamente dentro de la naturaleza viva, la *poiesis* es especialmente útil al examinar la producción de diseños y artefactos que entremezclan la materia y el significado en un «*nexo*» genuino. Tales diseños y artefactos, se argumenta aquí, dan forma física a un «vivencia poética del mundo» que ya no se limita a los textos literarios, sino que también se desarrolla en el corazón de la vida cotidiana. En relación con las formas sostenibles de hábitat humano y más allá, este artículo arroja nueva luz sobre la naturaleza, muy encarnada y por lo tanto política, del lenguaje y la imaginación.

Palabras clave: Poiesis, poética, ecopoética, arquitectura y diseño, vivienda y hábitat sostenibles y alternativos, contracultura, aleatoriedad, formas de vida orgánicas.

Introduction

Dans l'édito du premier numéro de la revue *Ecopoetics* paru en 2001, Jonathan Skinner invitait ses lecteurs à aborder l'écopoétique en repartant de son sens littéral, soit à la reconsidérer très simplement comme « house making » (7). Cependant, si la capacité des poètes à rendre le monde « habitable » est souvent présentée comme passant par les mots (Bonnefoy n.p.), leur potentiel à intervenir de façon plus directe dans la *matérialité* de l'habiter n'est que rarement abordé, si ce n'est pour être mis en doute (Heidegger 224).[1] Dans les années d'après-guerre, alors que le paradigme textualiste domine et que Blanchot s'apprête à publier *L'Espace littéraire* (1955), Boris Vian évoque pourtant dans *Je voudrais pas crever* (1962) des poètes « house makers » ayant le pouvoir d'incarner, en-dehors de l'espace littéraire, un monde « encor jamais [vu] » (49):

> Les poètes [...] écrivent pour commencer
> [mais s'ils] étaient moins bêtes [...]
> Ils construiraient des maisons jaunes
> Avec de grands jardins devant [...] Et l'on travaillerait sans hâte
> À construire des escaliers
> De formes encor jamais vues (48–49).

Rebondissant sur l'intuition de Vian quant à la possibilité d'un « travail » poétique extra-littéraire, nous proposons dans cette contribution d'envisager l'écopoétique sous l'angle de la relation particulière qu'elle entretient avec la *poïesis*, conçue comme un certain type de faire ouvert au hasard et au vivant à l'oeuvre dans l'univers matériel, à la jonction des mondes humain et non humain. Nous reconstituerons tout d'abord l'histoire de cette notion, et nous pencherons notamment sur ses mobilisations par Heidegger (16), Humberto Maturana et Francesco Varela (xviii), et par les penseurs contemporains de la biosémiotique

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[1] « Notre habitation est pressée et contrainte par la crise du logement, [...] bousculée par le travail, rendue instable par la course aux avantages [...]. Toute habitation n'est-elle pas à jamais incompatible avec la manière des poètes ? » (Heidegger 224).

(Wheeler 376). Nous entreprendrons ensuite de sonder à l'aune de son instrument une série de lieux de vie autonomes étudiés pendant une enquête micro-ethnographique menée sur cinq mois, de mai à septembre 2015. Nous verrons alors que la *poïesis* trouve à s'appliquer, en-dehors de tout corpus poétique « verbal », à des pratiques et productions habitantes dans lesquelles nécessité et contingence, sens et sensible, mais aussi l'humain et le non-humain s'enchevêtrent.

Nous observerons alors que le type de faire des enquêtés apparaît non seulement comme « hybride » mais aussi comme profondément « organique » (Ingold, *Making* 21), se caractérisant par une ouverture aux agentivités non humaines mais aussi par des rythmes, un rapport au verbe et une écoute du corps bouleversés. Nous observerons donc la façon dont se déploient sur les terrains autonomes, en dehors de tout recours à la poésie comme genre littéraire, les manifestations d'une *poïesis* doublement matérielle et sémiotique par laquelle se voient réalisés à la fois habitat et langage, « poïétique » de survie quotidienne et poétique de l'habiter.

« A word without history »: la *poïesis* et ses parcours

Le tout des actions productrices

Dans *Résistance de la poési*e (1997), Jean-Luc Nancy rappelle que selon Platon, « *poïesis* est un mot auquel on a fait prendre le tout pour la partie : *le tout des actions productrices* pour la seule production métrique de paroles scandées » (Nancy 13; Platon 146─47, nos italiques). En effet, selon plusieurs dictionnaires de référence comme le dictionnaire anglais-grec ancien Liddel-Scott-Jones, ce n'est « qu'après Homère » que la *poïesis* en viendra à désigner « la composition de chants, d'ouvrages en vers ou d'œuvres d'art » (1428). Auparavant étranger au monde du langage et du récit, non conceptualisé en tant que tel dans la culture grecque pré-classique, le verbe *poïein* est lié à la production concrète et à la transformation de la matière. Le Liddel-Scott-Jones le définit comme « acte de fabriquer (*making*) ou de produire (*producing*) appliqué à quelque chose de matériel tout d'abord, comme des produits manufacturés, des ouvrages d'art [...], de forge [...], [ou], fréquemment chez Homère, des bâtiments » (1427─29). De manière intéressante, la *poïesis* s'exerce alors à l'échelle privilégiée de l'*oikos*, le domaine local et familial distinct de la cité où se concentrent les activités liées à la production et à l'administration des biens matériels (Francotte 1329; Liddel, Scott et Jones 1202–05). S'il n'est pas une « constante » linguistique, ce lien étymologique entre la poésie et les actes très concrets de construction et de fabrication matérielle est loin d'être spécifique à l'univers gréco-latin.[2] Dans le système des racines Proto-Indo-Européennes (PIE) (*Indo-European Lexicon*), la *poïesis* se rattache ainsi aux racines **kωei*, **kωer* ou

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[2] Des dérivés du terme *poïesis* sont encore utilisés dans le sens de « poésie » dans de nombreuses langues européennes dont l'albanais, le catalan, le danois, le galicien, l'anglais ou encore l'arménien.

kra[u], kru convergeant autour des idées de faire, fabriquer, et d'un ensemble de gestes élémentaires — couper, entasser, arranger, composer — à la base de la construction en général et de l'habitat en particulier (*Indo-European Lexicon* n. p.; Delamarre 2001).

Envisagée sous ce jour, la *poïesis* présente une facette particulièrement intéressante. À l'époque de la Grèce pré-classique, en effet, on constate que le *poïein* recouvre notamment le domaine des productions et processus naturels. On le rencontre appliqué à des activités productives non humaines telles que la croissance des céréales, la reproduction, l'efficacité d'un médicament, la création des hommes ou des étoiles, ou le travail des abeilles qui « font (*poïein*) pour elles-mêmes » (Liddel, Scott et Jones 1427−29). Ceci confirme non seulement l'absence « [of] clear ontological distinction between handicraft and poetry » (Dicks 58), mais aussi le manque de ligne de partage nette entre ces deux notions et le type de faire naturel ou *phusis*. Ce phénomène perdurera d'ailleurs à l'époque classique, chez Platon par exemple, qui continue d'utiliser le mot de *poïesis* — en parallèle à d'autres acceptions — dans un sens proche de la *phusis* pour désigner la « fabrication des êtres vivants » (126, 197a). De manière générale, les sens « prosaïques » liés à l'artisanat et au labeur quotidien de la *poïesis* survivront et voyageront jusque dans le latin tardif de *poeta*, « fabricant », « artisan » (*Dictionnaire Gaffiot latin-français* 1194). Au seizième siècle, lors de la grande entreprise linguistique de la Pléiade et de l'élaboration de son « vulgaire illustre », ces sens premiers seront finalement abandonnés de l'autre côté de la barrière linguistique franco-latine (*Dictionnaire Gaffiot latin-français* 1194; *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* 2808).

Cependant, ce sont les résurgences de la *poïesis* à l'époque moderne et les sens très matériels et physiques qu'elle adopte alors qui lui confèrent une grande partie de son potentiel actuel de réinvestissement. Alors qu'à partir du dix-septième siècle, l'influence grandissante d'une culture scientifique et technique explique en partie, pour Edgar Morin, le phénomène d'autonomisation culturelle progressive de la poésie (*Amour, poésie, sagesse* 42), c'est au début du dix-neuvième siècle, dans le champ d'une science du vivant en pleine reconfiguration expérimentale, que la *poïesis* ressurgit. Alors que le nouvel *homo faber* reconceptualise ses objets sous la forme de processus de fabrication (Arendt 300−301), on la voit réintroduite à l'instar de nombreuses autres racines grecques sous forme de suffixe dans le kit de base d'élaboration d'un vocabulaire médical en pleine expansion, lequel migre de la description de pathologies et de remèdes quotidiens à celle de processus et de fonctionnements métaboliques.[3] La *poïesis* va occuper un rôle central dans cette ébullition lexicologique et participer à la désignation de nombreux processus de sécrétion ou de fabrication biologiques spontanés : galactopoïèse ou galactoposie (processus de sécrétion du lait), hématopoïèse (processus de renouvellement des

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[3] Cette évolution est patente lorsque l'on consulte les différents dictionnaires de médecine disponibles en ligne sur le site de la *Bibliothèque numérique Medic@*. Voir www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histoire/ medica/index.php, consulté le 8 juillet 2017.

cellules sanguines) ou uropoïèse (formation de l'urine).[4] Aujourd'hui encore, la médecine est le champ dans lequel la notion est la plus citée, toutes disciplines confondues. Sur une base de 40 000 documents où elle apparaît, plus de la moitié ressort des domaines médical, anatomique, physiologique, biologique et chimique (cf. Baron; Mazzurana et Mjösberg).[5]

La réintroduction de la *poïesis* dans le vocabulaire médical associée à la phase de rupture épistémologique décrite par Hannah Arendt comme celle de la *vita activa* et du nouvel *homo faber* (300–301) va être à l'origine d'une nouvelle vogue du terme et d'un courant de sens faisant de la *poïesis* un « processus de fabrication en cours » qui va traverser le vingtième siècle et innerver les sciences humaines (Valéry 13; Passeron 13–14; Lévi-Strauss 30; Bourdieu *et al.* 9). Dans *L'Invention du quotidien* (1980), Michel de Certeau l'utilise par exemple dès l'introduction pour décrire un type bien particulier de fabrication « poïétique », « cachée, [...] rusée », « bricoleuse », « [disséminée] dans les régions définies et occupées par les systèmes de la production » (xxxvii, xl).

Un type de faire autonome, organique et ouvert

Cependant, comme nous le laisse entrevoir l'association faite par de Certeau de la notion à un type de production de l'ordre de l'émergence singulière, spontanée et « [anti-disciplinée] » (xl), la *poïesis* en vient aussi à désigner un certain modèle de faire et de fabrication autonomes, modèle placé au cœur même de la définition du vivant. Cette évolution, qui précise la pertinence de la *poïesis* comme instrument pour toucher du doigt la poétique « incarnée » évoquée par Vian (48–49), marque une deuxième phase de mobilisation de la notion et accompagne une deuxième rupture épistémologique, celle de la révolution cybernétique.

À partir des années 1950, trois auteurs attachés à cette nouvelle période vont mettre en effet la *poïesis* au cœur de leurs réflexions. Heidegger, tout d'abord, qui fait d'elle un « dévoilement producteur » capable de désamorcer de l'intérieur les menaces contenues dans la cybernétique (Dicks 41), continue de dissocier la notion de la *mimesis* et de la création *ex nihilo.* Avec lui, le mouvement métonymique qui avait conduit le « tout des actions productrices » (Nancy 13) à désigner le type de *poïesis* spécifiquement littéraire continue à s'inverser, et la *poïesis* revient sur le devant de la scène sous un aspect générique et englobant. Dans le même temps, sa proximité avec le faire naturel de la *phusis* est affirmée. En faisant de cette dernière « la *poïesis* au sens le plus élevé », Heidegger précise la définition du type de faire associé à la *poïesis* comme ce mode organique de « production [...] par [lequel] la

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[4] Voir note 3.

[5] Ceci ressort de l'étude statistique conduite par l'auteure en février 2015 à partir de la base de données *Summon* de Proquest. Celle-ci regroupe plus d'un milliard d'entrées, dont 90 000 sources reconnues remontant au plus loin jusqu'à 600 ans, et inclut plus de trois siècles de journaux et magazines génériques et spécialisés, 450 000 livres électroniques, un vaste ensemble de journaux académiques ainsi que les collections numérisées de bibliothèques, musées et archives historiques à travers le monde.

chose s'ouvre d'elle-même [et] [...] a en soi [la] possibilité de s'ouvrir », comme « la fleur [...] dans sa floraison » (16). Loin d'être anodin, le recours à l'image de la fleur qui éclot par Heidegger révèle au contraire la pertinence cachée de l'image de la « fleur bleue » souvent utilisée en langage courant pour caricaturer le discours poétique.

En tant que biologistes penseurs de la seconde cybernétique, Francesco Maturana et Humberto Varela vont, quant à eux, achever de théoriser en 1973 ce lien étroit de la *poïesis* aux processus caractéristiques des métabolismes vivants. Loin de se référer à Heidegger, ils vont au contraire invoquer à la fois l'absence d'histoire et le « pouvoir » inhérent à la notion de *poïesis* entendue comme « création, fabrication » pour forger le néologisme *autopoïesis* et le mettre au cœur d'une nouvelle définition du vivant (Maturana et Varela xviii). Les biologistes associent alors le type de faire « poïétique » à « la production permanente de [son] propre être » (Morin, *La Nature de la Nature* 252), soit à cette « [capacité à être] à la fois son propre créateur et sa propre créature » (252—53). Comme le formule Edgar Morin qui en fait une notion-clef de *La Méthode*, son ouvrage-synthèse en six volumes, la cybernétique « [fait] surgir des profondeurs une nouvelle constellation conceptuelle avec les notions de *poïesis*, de générativité, de boucle rétroactive », et notamment avec les idées « de production-de-soi » (*La Nature de la Nature* 253). Elle donne ainsi une importance cruciale à la *poïesis* qu'elle inscrit non seulement sous le signe de la fabrication matérielle et des processus vivants, mais aussi d'un faire autonome métamorphique caractéristique de façon large des êtres organisés. Combinée avec l'influence de la conception heideggérienne comme « dévoilement producteur » (Dicks 41), cette mobilisation de la *poïesis* par Maturana et Varela va déterminer l'infléchissement encore plus marqué de la notion vers l'idée d'un type de faire organique, processuel et ouvert, idée qui va être abondamment reprise et innerver une variété de sciences sociales (Bash 97; Atkinson 170; Dicks 41—42; Guattari 130).

À partir des années 2000, on remarque en effet une diversification notable des disciplines où la notion de *poïesis* est utilisée, si l'on en juge tout du moins d'après sa présence dans le titre des publications de l'époque. Celles-ci montrent une augmentation significative de la mention de ce concept, à côté de la physique et de l'informatique liées à la cybernétique, dans les sciences sociales, l'histoire et des champs tels que les arts visuels, la religion, la psychologie, l'éducation, le théâtre, l'anthropologie.[6] En 1997, par exemple, montrant la double influence d'Heidegger et de la cybernétique, le philosophe et historien des sciences Robert Crease fait de la *poïesis* « not merely a *praxis* — an application of a skill, technique or practice that simply produces what it does — but [...] a bringing forth of a phenomenon, of something with presence in the world » (211). En anthropologie culturelle, et notamment dans les travaux autour de l'artisanat et des façons de faire incarnées et

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[6] Étude statistique conduite en février 2015 à partir de la base de données *Summon* de Proquest. Voir la note 5.

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ouvertes de Tim Ingold, la *poïesis* est invoquée pour décrire « a performative process which is not a metaphor » (Hughes-Freeland 216), c'est-à-dire un processus dont le sens ou l'image ne précède pas la réalisation, mais qui « *assists* in the encounter with the new, even if it does not completely determine the outcome » (Hughes-Freeland 216). Ingold navigue d'ailleurs implicitement sur le spectre liant les mondes matériels et littéraires de la *poïesis* à travers ses réflexions les plus récentes rapprochant les figures de l'artisan et du poète : « l'artisan raconte par ses travaux comme le poète avec ses mains » (Ingold, « De la pratique et des mots » n. p.).

Aménagé par son histoire à la fois suffisamment déterminée et suffisamment ouverte, le potentiel de la notion de *poïesis* va se voir ré-activé de façon marquée à l'intérieur de deux champs, celui des nouveaux matérialismes (Dölphin et Van der Tuin) et celui de la biosémiotique (Barbieri). Dans un article intitulé « A Connoisseur of Magical Coincidences: Chance, Creativity and *Poiesis* from a Biosemiotic Perspective », la chercheuse Wendy Wheeler reprend ainsi le sens heideggérien de la *poïesis* comme « faire » organique soumis à la fois aux contraintes de l'évolution et à celles de la *techne*, mais dépassant aussi largement cette dernière par son ouverture au hasard et son articulation à l'inventivité sémiotique du vivant. Comme chez Maturana et Varela, celle-ci donne une dimension culturelle aux processus naturels : « *Techne* and *poiesis* are craft and making [...]. All organisms make their worlds and each other's. [. ...] Where there is *semiosis*, there is always already both *techne* and *poiesis* » (376). La description de Wheeler fait bien entendu écho aux travaux de Maturana et Varela et à leur conception de la *poïesis* comme étant un ensemble de transformations à l'oeuvre dans l'univers matériel, sous-tendant l'auto-organisation de nombreux systèmes vivants.

Cette reconfiguration matérialiste se prête aisément à une vision transversale — à la fois biologique et littéraire — de la *poïesis*. Celle-ci peut se comprendre comme une puissance à la fois libre et déterminée car ancrée dans un métabolisme physique et une énergie matérielle, et dès lors comme une potentialité rassemblant les différentes facettes d'un « faire nature » profondément organique (Breteau 61-65, 210-35). Une telle reconfiguration tranche, certes, avec les approches dominantes au sein de la jeune écocritique francophone, davantage centrée sur l'étude de stratégies narratives et de « poétiques » littéraires (Pughe et Granger 3–7). Elle résonne néanmoins avec certains courants des humanités environnementales francophones au sens large, et notamment avec les travaux sur l'habitabilité de géographes tels que Nathalie Blanc, qui n'hésite pas à désigner l' « aller retour entre un lieu et son appropriation par la création d'une forme de vie » comme une activité « poétique » (Blanc et Lamarche 14). D'une part, ces emplois extra-littéraires du champ lexical poétique permettent de revisiter la *poïesis* selon la conception renouvelée de la matière et de son agentivité que développent les nouveaux matérialismes. D'autre part, de telles approches facilitent aussi l'arrimage de la *poïesis* à un faire humain ouvert au hasard et au vivant (Breteau 210-35).

Sur la base de l'étendue des racines extra-littéraires que l'historique de la notion de *poïesis* nous a laissés entrevoir, nous proposons donc de constituer en

objet d'étude la *poïesis* appréhendée comme type de faire organique et ouvert, observable non pas seulement dans les textes ou en théorie, mais aussi sur le terrain, de manière anthropologique. Notre démarche consiste alors à revisiter sous un jour précisément néo-matérialiste la conception du faire non hylémorphique et organique développée par Tim Ingold (*Making* 21).[7] Celui-ci déclare notamment vouloir « switch [the] perspective from the endless shuttling back and forth from image to object and from object to image [...] to the material flows and currents of sensory awareness in which images and objects reciprocally take shape » (Ingold, *Making* 21) Nous suggérons alors à travers le schéma ci-dessous (fig. 1) d'appréhender la *poïesis* comme cette dynamique d'«entanglement» entre matière et signification qui constitue le cœur du néo-matérialisme (Dolphijn et Van der Tuin 15; cf. Barad) et de voir l'espace poétique comme le champ d' « ontologies mêlées » (European Cooperation in Science and Technology n. p.) qui en résulte. On retrouve d'ailleurs cette image de l'entrelacs chez Jakobson qui parle du « *nexus* son/sens » comme caractéristique du poétique (241), ainsi que chez Kenneth White lorsqu'il évoque la *poïesis* comme « expérience *entrelacée* de la 'création' naturelle et poétique » (Collot 106, 117; nos italiques).
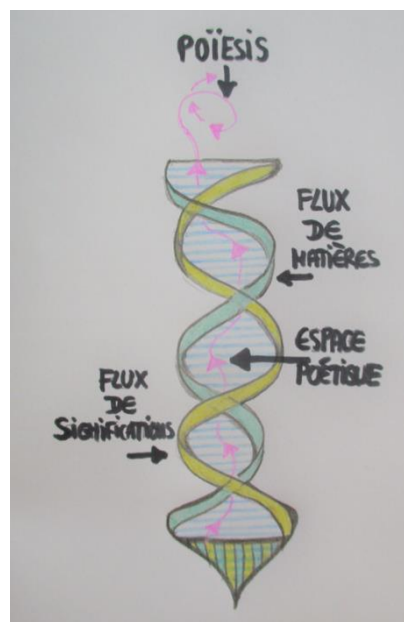
Figure 1 Représentation schématique du faire « poïesis ».[8]

Envisagée sur cette base, la *poïesis* ébauche une continuité organique entre les branches élevées de la « haute poésie » et le sol du concret. Cependant, ce n'est pas « au prix d'une certaine indifférenciation de la poésie [...] [d'avec] ce qui dans

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[7] Le type de faire « hylémorphique » désigne un modèle selon lequel « practitioners impose forms internal to the mind upon a material world 'out there' » qui s'offrirait vierge à elles (Ingold, *Making* 21).

[8] Toutes les photographies illustrant cet article ont été prises sur le terrain par l'auteure Clara Breteau et figurent dans la thèse POEME.

l'art ressortit à la seule puissance de création, au *poïein* » que nous avons l'ambition de « défendre la place sociale et politique de celle-ci » (Michel 256). Nous défendons en effet la caractérisation de la *poïesis* comme mode de faire spécifique en lien avec un type de terrains bien particulier, distinct des habitats et métabolismes conventionnels. La *poïesis* a donc ceci de spécifique qu'elle aiguille la pensée vers une réflexion géographique et notamment vers certaines formes et certains rythmes de vie, focalisant le champ de la description sur une quotidienneté singulière et resserrée.

Nous allons donc dans ce qui suit délinéer sur le terrain les contours de la *poïesis* comme type de faire organique, tels qu'esquissés plus haut. L'histoire de la notion de *poïesis* ainsi que nous l'avons reconstituée nous servira de balise pour analyser les types de faire observés dans une série de lieux de vie autonomes (fig. 2) pendant une enquête menée sur cinq mois, de mai à septembre 2015.
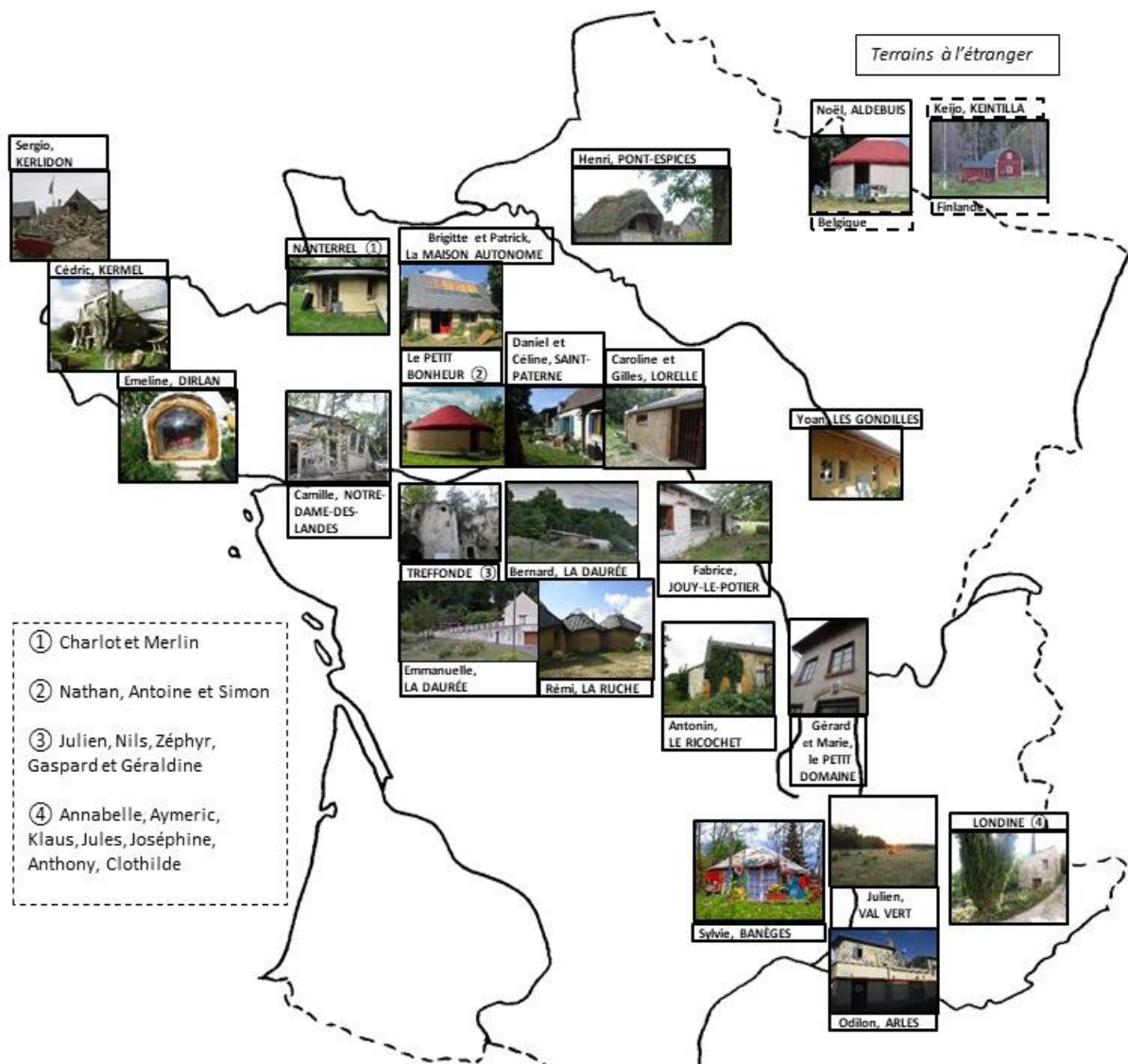
Figure 2 Aperçu des terrains étudiés et des habitants interviewés.

Orientés vers une autonomie abordée avant tout comme capacité d'auto-détermination (Kant 33) matérielle et démarche de réappropriation d'un ensemble de besoins essentiels, les habitats considérés, bien loin de rechercher l'«autarcie»,

> se définissent] [...], plutôt que par [...] un modèle univoque [...] [ou] la seule appartenance à un même groupe politique, associatif ou résidentiel [...], [par] la mise en place de réseaux denses [...] [ainsi qu'un] spectre de pratiques [quotidiennes] [...] : une alimentation biologique, un habitat partiellement ou totalement éco-construit, une défense de l'ancrage local et des circuits courts de distribution [...], des pratiques d'éducation et de médecine alternatives. (Pruvost 37-38)

Parfois regroupées sous le vocable d' « utopies concrètes », ces expérimentations ancrées dans le faire se distinguent des « groupes déjà singularisés, souvent privilégiés et en partie folklorisés [...] de la 'contre-culture' » (Certeau xxxvi) ainsi que des mouvements de « retour au désert » (Mésini 149) des années 1970 par une « culture de nature » singulière. En effet, celle-ci ne consiste pas à dupliquer le métabolisme de l'habitat conventionnel dans une optique survivaliste, mais à le réinscrire dans un biotope ainsi que dans une multitude de cercles d'entraide (Pruvost 49).

La *poïesis* sur les terrains autonomes

> D'un côté des lisses, de ce côté d'en haut [...] où sont sculptés le cerf et les étoiles, il y a tous les fils de laine de la chaîne, séparés les uns des autres, chacun avec leur force, leur couleur [...], leur personnalité propre – et de l'autre côté des lisses, du côté d'en bas qui va des baguettes de lisses à l'ensouple, [...] [il y a] tous les fils serrés et unis [...], il y a la toile, et elle n'est plus le fil, elle est la *personnalité-toile*, la réunion de toutes les subtilités de couleurs de chacun tremble dans la toile comme les reflets de nacre dans les coquilles de la mer . (Giono 421—22)

À de maints égards, et notamment à l'instar du métier à tisser décrit dans cet extrait de *Que ma joie demeure* (1935), les maisons autonomes apparaissent sur le terrain comme des « personnalités-toiles » composées de la réunion de multiples fils, humains et non humains. Comme nos travaux de terrain le mettent en évidence, c'est à travers le rebouclage les unes sur les autres des composantes de leur milieu naturel que les habitats étudiés réalisent ou tendent vers l'autonomie. La prolifération biologique, végétale et animale, les enchevêtrements bioclimatiques, les multiples cas de recyclage et les entrelacements fonctionnels concourent ainsi à réactiver et redensifier une « toile » du vivant placée au cœur des représentations des enquêtés[9] et dans laquelle ceux-ci cherchent avant tout à « trouver [leur] place ».[10]

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[9] Dans cette seconde partie qui présente notre enquête de terrain, notre système de référence mentionnera en tout ou en partie les éléments suivants : 1) le prénom (fictif ou non) de l'enquêté ; 2) le nom (fictif ou non) de son lieu de vie et la région dans laquelle il est localisé ; 3) le type d'habitat éco-construit; 4) le rôle ou l'identité sociale de l'enquêté. Les enquêtés qui ont souhaité l'anonymat seront désignés par un prénom fictif.

[10] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan), paillourte autoconstruite dans une jeune forêt mixte, militant de l'économie domestique et formateur, ex-ingénieur.

Cependant, ces entrelacements qui réinscrivent l'économie domestique dans l'écosystème local et la reconnectent aux foisonnements non dirigés de la naturalité vivante vue comme « tissu »[11] se transposent par des jeux d'ombres portées[12] à une multitude de niveaux. De la même manière que « la réunion de toutes les subtilités de couleurs de chacun [des fils] tremble » (422), dans la toile évoquée par Giono, « comme les reflets de nacre dans les coquilles de la mer » (422), ces enchevêtrements métaboliques se réverbèrent dans les habitats autonomes sur toute la « trame » esthétique et symbolique des lieux. Marquant un certain nombre de leurs facettes de ces tremblements de nacre esquissés par Giono, ils leur confèrent une nouvelle ambiguïté. On assiste ainsi à une série de feuilletages, tissages et enchâssements entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur, l'humain et le non-humain, la matière et la signification, autant de « *nexus* » entre le corps et le sens (Jakobson 241) qui apparaissent dans le sillage de la reconnexion au milieu naturel.

Ces enchevêtrements métaboliques et symboliques apparaissent également comme les formes cristallisées de gestes tisserands et d'un certain type d'agentivité elle aussi hybride, la *poïesis*. De même que le « métier à tisser » de Jean Giono, cette dernière possède la caractéristique de combiner travail besogneux et figures vivantes et cosmogoniques, qui viennent l'animer et y ouvrir des fenêtres. Se frottant aux objets comme Aladin à sa lampe, le faire poïétique autonome inscrit dans la toile du vivant se trouve capable d'imprimer ce qu'il touche d' « [éclats] » singuliers, échos des « puissances latentes de la vie » qui le nourrit (Bachelard 74).

a)   b)

Figure 3 Un faire « traversé »: bureau d'Henri surplombant le ruisseau traversant le domaine à Pont-Espices (a) et cabane de Camille à Notre-Dame-des-Landes (b).

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[11] Voir par exemple Julien, écolieu Le Val Vert (Gard), yourte dans parcelle de maquis méditerrannéen de 7 hectares, ancien ingénieur nucléaire, maraîcher et militant de l'économie domestique .

[12] « Chacun de leurs gestes pour poser la pierre dans le mortier est accompagné d'une ombre de geste qui pose une ombre de pierre dans une ombre de mortier. Et c'est la bâtisse d'ombre qui compte » (Giono 27).

Figure 4 Vitraux à Treffonde. Un faire germant « de l'intérieur du monde naturel
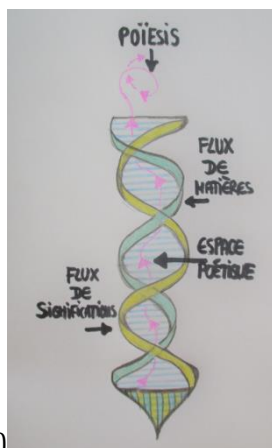et au contact des formes sensibles ».

Figure 5 La poïesis comme dynamique d'enchevêtrement et « écheveau » entre matière
et signification (a) et cheminée « spire » chez Emeline à Dirlan (b).

Figure 6 Spire dessinée sur un mur dans la cabane des Merveilles à Nanterrel.

Un faire hybride

Dans son article « L'alternative écologique. Vivre et travailler autrement », Geneviève Pruvost note combien les trois facettes du travail théorisées par Hannah Arendt dans *La Condition de l'homme moderne* 65), aujourd'hui séparées dans des sphères distinctes de la société, en viennent dans les habitats autonomes à se retisser ensemble (Pruvost 42) (fig. 7).

Figure 7 Quand travail, œuvre et action se mélangent. Figure de l'hybridation chez Emeline à Dirlan.

Dans son étude de la dimension poétique de l'espace, Bachelard, citant Henri Bosco,[13] s'intéressait déjà à cette fertilité imaginaire et « figurale » du faire machinal : « c'est pendant qu'elle travaillait au plus banal ouvrage que les *figures* de ce pays lui apparaissaient familièrement » (75). Observant les habitants autonomes, Pruvost souligne quant à elle comment ceux-ci conjuguent le « labeur répétitif et circulaire destiné à satisfaire les besoins vitaux » à l' « 'oeuvre', fabrication non circulaire de produits d'usage durable » et à l' « 'action' [mettant] les hommes en relation » (42). Faisant état d'un mélange « quasi alchimique » s'opérant sur les lieux alternatifs, Pruvost constate ainsi sans toutefois rentrer dans une description détaillée la façon dont s'y entremêlent le « travail » (qu'il soit « manuel », « intellectuel » ou « artistique » selon les catégories d'Arendt), l'« œuvre », l'« action », mais aussi les expériences « utiles » et « inspirantes », les « savoir-faire artisanaux anciens» et l' « innovation artisanale contemporaine », les « arrangements ingénieux » et le « bricolage », ainsi que les « [démarches créatives] » et « l'invention de soi » (41—43).

Nos propres observations confirment largement les analyses de Pruvost. À la fois perfectionniste,[14] soucieux de « design »,[15] mais aussi volontairement diversifié, intuitif[16] et ouvert à l'imprévisible, le type de faire des habitants autonomes, déployé

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[13] Bachelard ne précise malheureusement pas à quelle oeuvre précise de Bosco il emprunte ces mots.
[14] Gilles, Lorelle (Touraine), pavillon bioclimatique de type Phoenix autorénové en bordure de forêt, formateur en permaculture et militant de l'économie domestique, ex-ingénieur.
[15] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan); Julien, écolieu Le Val Vert (Gard); Gilles, Lorelle (Touraine).
[16] Gilles, Lorelle (Touraine); Yoan, GAEC et écolieu des Gondilles (Bourgogne), bâtiment de ferme ancien sur plateau cultivé, berger, ex-salarié dans une *start-up* en pharmaco-chimie; Rémi, La Ruche

à petite échelle au niveau de l'habitat local (fig. 9), aboutit à des formes excentriques et singulières (fig. 8).

Figure 8 Des formes libérées. Etrangeté et excentricité du faire autonome à Treffonde (a et c) et Londine (b).

Figure 9 «Danger! Technology at work» à Londine.

Dans une transversalité allant jusqu'à remettre en cause les catégories existantes et toute idée de partition nette, les « visages du faire » rencontrés sur le terrain des habitats autonomes s'hybrident, affichant la même diversité et le même côté énigmatique que les figures de gargouilles proliférant sur les façades du village de Treffonde (fig. 10).

Figure 10 Au village troglodytique de Treffonde, en Touraine.

Trop multifacettes pour tomber uniquement sous l'acception large de « pratiques »,[17] ils relèvent à la fois de l'art, de l'artisanat, du bricolage, de la technique, sans être réductibles à aucun de ces termes. Notre propos ne sera pas ici de rentrer dans la discussion des spécificités respectives de ces différents types de

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(Touraine), paligloo autoconstruit sur plateau en bordure de forêt, apiculteur, ex-militant associatif dans l'humanitaire et à la Confédération Paysanne.

[17] Mathis Stock par exemple envisage l'habiter comme constitué de « *pratiques* de relation au monde » (8, nos italiques).

faire les uns par rapport aux autres, mais plutôt de constater, à l'instar de Pruvost (41-43), la façon dont ils se multiplient et co-existent sur le terrain des habitats autonomes. Comme Gilles à Lorelle ou Antoine au Petit Bonheur le soulignent d'ailleurs eux-mêmes, leur volonté est plutôt de « travailler [des] liaisons »[18] et des combinaisons, Antoine racontant quant à lui comment la pratique de l'autonomie l'a fait « [passer] de l'art à l'artisanat, [...] du beau à l'utile, [puis] [aux] deux en même temps ».[19] Nous dériverons de ceci l'hypothèse d'être en présence d'un faire « hybride » se présentant, là encore, à l'image des interactions qu'il suscite et de la toile du vivant qu'il recrée, sous la forme d'un « écheveau » (Nantes Révoltée n. p.; fig. 5—6 et 11) qu'on ne pourrait vouloir défaire qu'au mépris de sa singularité.
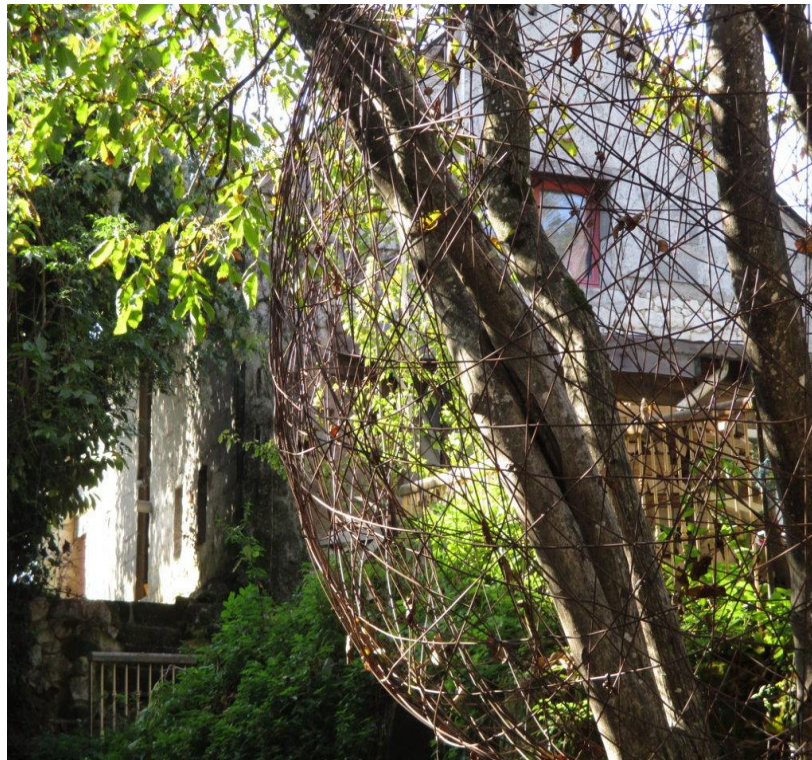
Figure 11 Un faire entremêlé au vivant, à Treffonde.

À la faveur du « trouble » et des entremêlements qui marquent les pratiques autonomes, de premiers rapprochements se dessinent ainsi avec la *poïesis* dont nous avons retracé l'histoire. Nous défendons ici l'idée que le type de faire *organique* observable chez les enquêtés représente la manifestation concrète et incarnée de cette notion. Le terme « organique » est ici entendu dans le sens de ce qui croît depuis l'intérieur d'un corps physique donné, selon son métabolisme propre, mais en référence à et en correspondance avec un corps plus grand qui participe à sa transformation. Soumis aux contraintes de l'évolution et à celles de la *techne* mais

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[18] Gilles, Lorelle (Touraine) : « Tout [l'] enjeu, [...] c'est [qu'] il n'y a pas de différence entre l'architecte, le maçon et l'art, je trouve que ça serait bien [...] de travailler ces liaisons ».

[19] Antoine, éco-village Le Petit Bonheur (Anjou), yourte auto-construite dans le bocage angevin, militant de l'économie domestique, ancien artiste et professeur de *story-board* dans une école de cinéma.

dépassant aussi largement cette dernière par son ouverture au hasard et au vivant (Wheeler 376), ce type de faire organique combinant « logique de la restriction, [...] physique de la rareté » et inventivité sémiotique contribue alors, à l'instar des travaux de Leroi-Gourhan notamment, « [à énoncer] la poésie de la *poïesis* » (Guérin n. p.; nos italiques).

Le faire autonome comme *poïesis*

Dans la partie qui suit, nous allons plus précisément montrer comment les enquêtés offrent un référentiel pertinent et homogène pour la reconsidération prônée par l'anthropologue Tim Ingold du « making [...] as a process of *growth* » (*Making* 21, nos italiques), et par là même, du faire autonome comme *poïesis*. En effet, avec le choix des habitants de se replacer dans un « face à face physique avec les besoins vitaux » (Pruvost 42), le lieu de vie et son métabolisme deviennent, sinon aussi nécessaire et « irremplaçable »,[20] du moins doté dans l'immédiat de la même dimension vitale pour la survie de l'habitant que le bon fonctionnement d'un organe de son propre corps.[21] Nous verrons d'abord que ceci se traduit notamment par un entremêlement étroit des marques du faire humain et non humain dans les discours comme dans les pratiques des enquêtés. Nous verrons ensuite que la *poïesis* des habitants, de par son lien intime avec le monde vivant biologique, voit le rapport du faire au temps et au langage significativement modifié. Enfin, nous observerons comment la *poïesis* autonome se déploie en articulation à un « corps » envisagé à différentes échelles.

À Dirlan, Emeline a pris l'habitude de suspendre des citrons aux branches des petits arbres fruitiers disséminés dans son potager. Jaunes vifs, ceux-ci luisent après la pluie comme de grosses larmes d'or et font écho aux pierres translucides et colorées qu'Emeline incruste dans les murs de ses maisons de terre ou « kerterres ». Interrogée sur le sens exact de cette pratique, Emeline répond :

> On me demande toujours ça ... je ne sais pas. Comme ça, il sèche, et après il va faire du compost ... et puis c'est joli [rires]. Je fais toujours ça avec les citrons. [. ...] Depuis le début j'ai toujours fait les choses sans savoir pourquoi. Et après tu comprends pourquoi. C'est un peu ça, *l'action organique.*[22]

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[20] Les habitants autonomes s'inscrivent dans un même rapport au lieu que les défenseurs du Plateau d'Albion dont en février 1966 René Char avait résumé le combat par ces mots : « à nos yeux ce site vaut mieux que notre pain, car il ne peut être, lui, remplacé » (*Char et Picasso* n. p.).

[21] Selon le *Dictionnaire Le Petit Robert* de 1985, le premier sens de l'adjectif organique est ainsi ce « qui a rapport ou qui est propre aux organes » (1321).

[22] Emeline, Dirlan (Bretagne), kerterres dans un jardin-jungle, formatrice en construction de kerterres, ex-professeure de piano. Notre accentuation.

Figure 12 « Multiplication » des figures de l'organique: à Notre-Dame-des-Landes, l'inscription « we don't die we multiply » fait pendant à une fleur en bouteilles encastrées dans le mur.

Emeline à Dirlan n'hésite d'ailleurs pas à se comparer à une « fourmi » : « j'ai toujours fait les choses sans savoir pourquoi [...]. Tu vois la fourmi elle se demande pas pourquoi elle déplace les graines et les plantes, pourquoi elle découpe les feuilles, pourquoi... ».[23] De la même façon, Gérard et Marie associent de nombreux traits de leur « intérieur » pris au sens propre comme figuré à l'oeuvre du hasard, hasard qu'ils en viennent même à envisager comme une agentivité particulière et une véritable « vie intérieure »: « c'est le hasard qui a fait ça. [...] Mais oui, on a une vie intérieure ».[24]

De manière générale, en écho à l'image de la fourmi évoquée par Emeline, les habitants autonomes recourent souvent, de manière directe ou en filigrane, à des métaphores animales pour caractériser leur rapport au faire. Si Antonin évoque les nombreux tas de matériel et de matériaux qu'il a disséminés à travers son terrain comme des « *nids* de coucougne »,[25] Merlin quant à lui a choisi de bâtir sa paillourte, une maison en paille ronde inspirée de la yourte, d'une manière concentrique directement inspirée du mode de croissance des arbres.[26] Comme il le souligne lui-même, le choix de la charpente autoportée dans laquelle chaque poutre repose l'une sur l'autre sans besoin de poteau central[27] (fig. 13) permet non seulement « d'utiliser des matériaux bruts, du bois rond, qu'on peut cueillir en forêt »,[28] mais rappelle aussi l'idée d'interdépendance et d'appartenance à un plus grand corps contenue dans le terme « d' organique ».[29] Pour lui, la construction consiste

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Marie, association Le Petit Domaine à Canterel (Auvergne), pâté de maisons auto-rénové dans le centre-bourg, gérante d'association (formations, épicerie, boutique), ex-femme au foyer.

[25] Antonin, Le Ricochet (Auvergne), maison en pierre auto-rénovée en bordure de forêt, ouvrier en bâtiment et militant de l'économie domestique, ancien étudiant des Beaux-Arts et gérant d'une galerie d'art contemporain. Notre accentuation.

[26] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan).

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Cette signification est perceptible dans le sens politique de l'adjectif « organique » ou dans la définition de l'adverbe « organiquement » comme ce qui est « du point de vue de l'organisation profonde et cohérente d'un *ensemble* » (*Dictionnaire Le Petit Robert* 1321).

d'ailleurs ni plus ni moins à « trouver » et à « [créer] sa place dans la *toile* du vivant ».[30]
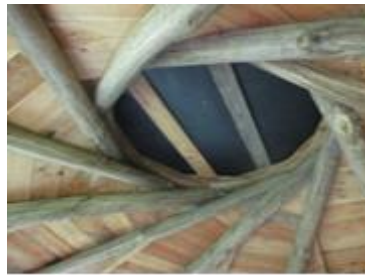

Figure 13 Charpente autoportée de Merlin à Nanterrel.

Emeline à Dirlan ou Gilles et Caroline à Lorelle associent eux aussi arbres et maisons. Chez eux, l'action de bâtir se rapproche étrangement des cycles de croissance du vivant. Yoan aux Gondilles considère quant à lui que « les choses émergent à un moment donné, quand c'est mûr. Quand c'est mûr ».[31] À Treffonde, Zéphyr dit rassembler les sculptures et figures qui prolifèrent spontanément sur les façades du lieu en « massifs »,[32] une métaphore végétale qui renforce la dimension organique et « adventice » avec laquelle ils apparaissent et qui tisse étroitement en filigrane faire humain et non humain. Dans ce contexte, le rapport au « travail » et au labeur se trouve alors transformé. Si les habitants autonomes sont peu à véritablement « se laisser porter par la nature », sans « travailler [ni] faire d'effort », comme le déplore Bernard à La Daurée à propos de certains candidats à l'autonomie séduits par le mythe de la vie facile et du paradis terrestre,[33] les rythmes et les formes de ce qui passe pour labeur en sont néanmoins bouleversés.

Figure 14 « À bas les cadences infernales », affiche sur la porte de la scierie, à Londine.

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[30] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan). Notre accentuation.

[31] Yoan, GAEC et écolieu des Gondilles (Bourgogne).

[32] Zéphyr, Treffonde (Anjou), maison troglodytique auto-construite, écovillage dans une ancienne carrière d'extraction de tuffeau, tailleur de pierres et co-propriétaire du terrain.

[33] Bernard, Ferme de La Daurée (Touraine), *mobil home* agrandi d'une partie cabane en auto-construction, fermier en biodynamie, ex-mécanicien.

L'action lente, patiente et opportune proche du travail de « fourmi » revendiqué par Emeline, faite « de petits actes en permanence »[34] et entrecoupée de coups de feu et de grosses décharges d'énergie, se substitue au travail mécanique continu et acharné (fig. 14). Elle se rapproche alors à bien des égards de cette activité de gardien du feu évoquée par Cédric à Kermel ou Nathan au Petit Bonheur, composée à la fois de coups d'éclats — abattage, sciage, flambée — et de consomptions longues et sourdes.[35] Ainsi la *poïesis* porte-t-elle aussi en son sein une autre appréhension du temps. Souvent, comme le raconte Zéphyr, fondateur du village troglodyte de Troglobal et tailleur de pierre professionnel, les figures sculptées dans la pierre à travers tout le village ont surgi là par hasard, sans plan d'ensemble ni préméditation, fruits d'une lubie ou d'un moment de désoeuvrement, comme manière de s'exercer « sur le tas » , saisir une idée, une forme, un état d'esprit passager.

Le faire poïétique autonome se trouve aussi lié avec le refus, récurrent chez nos enquêtés, de trop verbaliser leur vie et notamment de dire les choses à l'avance.[36] Comme si cela allait rompre le charme de l'immersion et rendre celle-ci inopérante, ils préfèrent au contraire garder imprévisible, indicible et en partie « sauvage » — parce que « vivant » — leur rapport à un habitat dont ils voient trop bien que les mots, comme a pu le souligner Bourdieu, contribuent souvent à la domestication (9–10).[37] « Face à face physique avec les besoins vitaux » (Pruvost 42), la *poïesis* autonome affirme alors un langage corporel et implique à bien des égards de « faire corps » avec la nature transformée (fig. 15–18).

Figure 15 Mémoire du geste aux Gondilles.

Figure 16 Cicatrice dans le mur de la paillourte à Nanterrel.

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[34] Emeline, Dirlan (Bretagne).

[35] Cédric, Kermel (Bretagne, Finistère), maison-cabane auto-construite sur la côte, militant de l'économie domestique, ancien veilleur de nuit dans un foyer pour SDF; Nathan, éco-village Le Petit Bonheur (Anjou), yourte auto-construite dans bocage angevin, patron d'une entreprise de construction de yourte, ancien étudiant en lettres et sciences humaines.

[36] Aymeric, Coopérative de Londine (Alpes de Haute-Provence), chambre dans une ancienne bastide en pierre auto-rénovée, musicien et militant de l'économie domestique, ex-professeur de piano; Camille, ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes (Loire-Atlantique), cabane auto-construite en matériaux de récupération, militant de l'économie domestique, ex-étudiant en mathématiques; Yoan, GAEC et écolieu des Gondilles (Bourgogne).

[37] Emeline, Dirlan (Bretagne).

Figure 17 Poignée de porte prise dans l'enduit, figure du « faire corps » autonome, à Nanterrel.

Figure 18 Figures du « faire corps » sur le chantier de la maison en pisé à Nanterrel.

À Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Yves qui construit une cabane sur pilotis en pratiquant ce qu'il appelle « l'anarchitecture » entremêle tout son corps à celui de la cabane pour accéder au palier principal. Au fil de la construction, le toucher endosse une véritable importance, Yves éprouvant par exemple de la main chaque perche faisant office de poteau pour identifier si elle est ou non porteuse: « celle-ci elle porte, celle-ci elle porte, celle-ci elle ne porte pas ».[38] Par ailleurs, à Nanterrel, Merlin pratique le « taï-chi chantier », une technique consistant à faire se rapprocher les gestes de la construction de mouvements du taï-chi: « [Nous], par exemple, on faisait une heure de taï-chi dans la matinée, puis deux heures de chantier, en essayant de rester dans cette disposition d'écoute du corps ».[39] Cette « écoute» dont parle Merlin devient alors à la fois celle de son corps propre et celle de la maison en construction, des matériaux et des outils que l'on manie.

Cette attention à un corps « double » qui fait se confondre objet et sujet, corps humains et non humains, apparaît de façon manifeste dans la double pratique de Zéphyr à Treffonde qui, sculpteur de profession, exerce aussi le « sculpting massage », une technique asiatique de massage à l'aide d'un petit marteau qui, par le jeu de reflets qu'elle instaure, donne un aspect très corporel et sensuel à la taille de pierre[40]. Elle apparaît aussi avec netteté dans la manière dont Aymeric à Londine décrit sa façon de conduire les chèvres rien qu'en jouant sur la position de son propre corps par rapport au grand corps mobile du troupeau. Comme cet exemple le montre, l'insertion dans un tissu de rapports vivants donne aux enquêtés la sensation de pouvoir agir sur tout un ensemble indirectement, rien qu'en modifiant leurs propres attitudes corporelles : « elles te considèrent comment une partie du troupeau, donc rien que par ta position, ton propre mouvement, ta propre vitesse, tu peux les diriger ».[41]

Les produits de ce type de « faire nature » organique et immergé créent alors les différentes composantes d'un habitat « corps intermédiaire », ayant « poussé » (Ingold *Making* 21; Thoreau 40) à partir de la vie intérieure de l'habitant tout en

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[38] Camille, ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes (Loire-Atlantique).
[39] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan).
[40] Zéphyr, Treffonde (Anjou).
[41] Aymeric, Coopérative de Londine (Alpes de Haute-Provence).

étant à la fois traversé et alimenté par la nature vivante. Pour reprendre le motif textile qui traverse les sites étudiés, les lieux de vie en général et les ornements en particulier ne sont plus alors seulement une « toile-peau », « something outward and in the skin merely » (Thoreau 40), mais bien une « toile organe » entremêlant son tissu avec les « racines » du métabolisme des lieux et de la vie des habitants (fig. 19) :

> J'y vois [dans la nature] des liens, des racines en fait, de ce que je sens vivant en moi en fait, et j'ai envie plutôt que de partager ça, peut-être de l'éveiller ou de le réveiller aussi chez les autres. [...] Il n'y a pas de raison que tout ce qui est vivant tout autour, ne le soit pas aussi à l'intérieur de nous ![42]

Figure 19 Un « faire tisserand » entremêlé aux « racines » de ce que l'on sent vivant en soi (Merlin à Nanterrel). Stabile composé à partir d'un pied de vignes et de fils tissés à Treffonde.

Dans *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau recourt, quant à lui, à l'image de la coquille pour désigner ce rapport organique des êtres humains à des maisons dont la beauté « has gradually *grown* from within outward » :

> A man has no more to do with the style of architecture of his house than the tortoise with that of its *shell*. [...] What of architectural beauty I now see [...] [is] preceded by a like unconscious beauty of *life* [...] [the life] of the inhabitants whose *shell* they [the houses] are (40, nos italiques)

De manière frappante, les maisons de terre, chaux et argile aux formes très organiques sculptées et modelées par Emeline à Dirlan s'assimilent volontiers de fait à des coquilles (fig. 19), coquilles qu'elles intègrent d'ailleurs jusque dans leurs murs (fig. 19.d). Que ce soit chez Emeline ou à Londine, La Maison Autonome, Treffonde ou Notre-Dame-des-Landes, les formes organiques dodues, gonflées et sensuelles prolifèrent,[43] de même que le motif de l'habitat-carapace, que l'on retrouve aussi dans les propos de Bernard à La Daurée, Fabrice à Jouy-le-Potier, Brigitte à la Maison Autonome ou Antonin au Ricochet.[44] On observe ainsi dans les lieux de vie autonomes des figurations donnant une forme concrète aux ontologies mêlées néo-matérialistes, lesquelles incitent, comme le souligne par exemple Stacy Alaimo, à envisager les habitations comme des « dissolving *shells* », « where the domestic does not domesticate and the walls do not divide » (1, nos italiques).

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[42] Merlin, écolieu de Nanterrel à Condorcet (Morbihan).

[43] *Ibid*. En plus que de le traduire dans ses constructions, Merlin manifeste ce goût de façon explicite : « j'adore la forme de mur dodue, c'est rond et lisse ».

[44] Bernard, Ferme de La Daurée (Touraine); Fabrice, AMAP de Jouy-le-Potier (Touraine); Brigitte, La Maison Autonome (Loire-Atlantique); et Antonin, Le Ricochet (Auvergne).
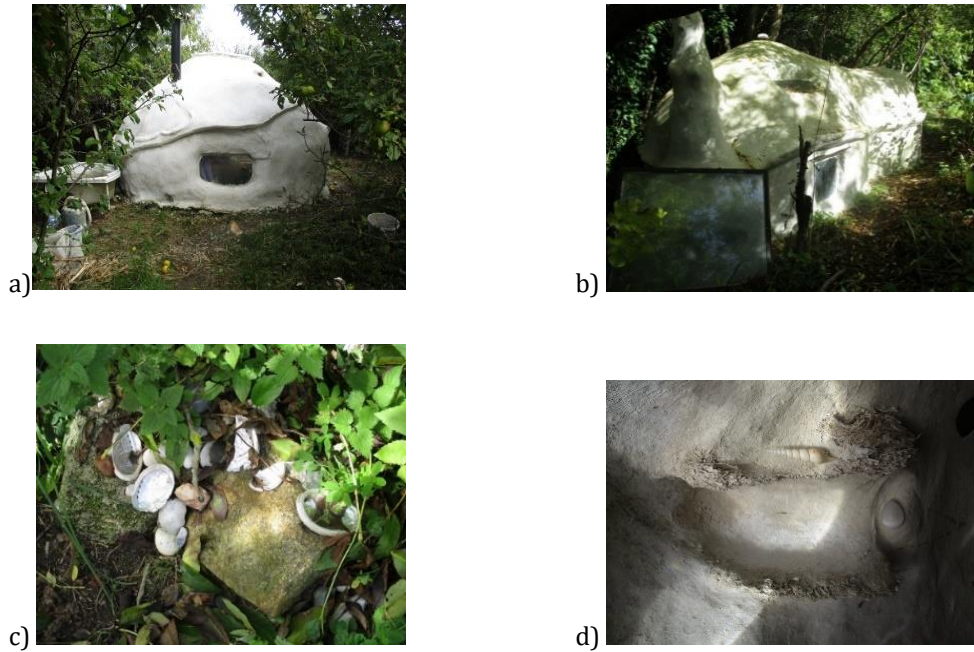
a)

b)

c)

d)

Figure 20 Maisons-coquilles chez Emeline à Dirlan.

Figure 21 Chez Emeline à Dirlan.

Figure 22 Maison coquille d'« œuf » brisée chez Fabrice à Jouy-le-Potier.

Figure 23 Lit de coquilles d'huîtres à Londine.

Le processus de concrétion organique dont la coquille est le produit montre bien le faire des habitants comme ce faire organique « tisserand » parcouru de reflets de nacre évoqué par Giono (421–22). En tant que « faire miroir » qui se met lui-même en abyme dans le sens où il porte la mémoire de son déroulement même, il rejoint là encore la *poïesis* envisagée selon Katherine Bash comme « form of *threading* forward existing conditions into the process of making such that what is made *links* the process *as a thread of Ariane* » (97, nos italiques). Ce« faire miroir » se retrouve non seulement animé par la vie individuelle des habitants, mais aussi par les différents « mouvements » de la toile du vivant qu'il nourrit tout en en étant nourri.

Du non verbal au littéraire : les dimensions politiques de la *poïesis*

Chrysalide d'une invisible métamorphose, la toile du vivant recréée par les habitants autonomes s'épaissit et s'enroule sur elle-même, provoquant une multitude de feuilletages liant sens et sensible. Alors que l'écocritique continentale aussi bien qu'anglo-saxonne est longtemps restée associée par le passé à des corpus livresques, n'accordant que peu d'attention aux cultures matérielles et aux langages ordinaires, tout en réduisant souvent ses conceptualisations des rapports textes-mondes à un analogisme insatisfaisant (Blanc, Breteau et Guest 124; Gifford 15; Cohen 9–36; Buell 45), la *poïesis* telle que nous la concevons et l'appliquons ici, peut représenter une contribution utile à la discipline.

Par son intermédiaire en effet, la portée politique de l'écopoétique cesse d'être cantonnée aux mondes lettrés et universitaires habitués à se frotter aux textes et prompts à mettre en évidence leurs supposées dimensions « sensibilisatrices » vis-à-vis de masses considérées comme passives. À l'inverse, une véritable liaison vitale entre mondes et textes qui les voit traversés d'un même mouvement organique. Il devient alors possible d'ouvrir l'écopoétique, en dehors de toute étude de texte, à un vaste ensemble de pratiques habitantes, de langages ordinaires et à une créativité en actes non seulement « réceptrice » de savoirs académiques et informés, mais réévaluée comme étant elle-même porteuse d'un langage et de précieux enseignements.

Quittant le domaine verbal *stricto sensu*, nous observons la vérification au cœur des vies quotidiennes traversées par la *poïesis* du principe identifié par Jakobson comme étant aux fondements de la « fonction poétique », à savoir le principe de transposition des équivalences sensibles en équivalences sémantiques (233-41). Comme nous l'avons observé, les *nexus* physiques de la toile du vivant retissée par les habitants essaiment en autant de *nexus* sémiotiques, appelant à réévaluer les « cultures de nature » des autonomes comme de véritables « métiers à tisser » poïétiques et poétiques.

Cependant, de manière intéressante, la *poïesis* autonome se réverbère également sur la sphère littéraire, dans la mesure où elle s'avère aussi réanimer la langue. La réinscription des enquêtés dans la naturalité et dans toutes ses connexions vivantes fait, comme en poésie, « [retrouver] sa pertinence » à « la forme intérieure des mots eux-mêmes, autrement dit [à] la charge sémantique de leurs constituants » (Jakobson 247) . Le mode de vie autonome fait ainsi « resurgir la poésie » de la langue, dans le sens où il en révèle la dimension profondément « catachrétique » et les nombreuses métaphores « premières » , « standardisées » au fil du temps (Dufrenne 34–35).

Si nous n'avons pas la possibilité de nous étendre ici sur ce point, nous nous contenterons de citer un cas particulièrement parlant de « recréaturalisation »

(Prete 91) ou « relittéralisation » du langage, celui de Jouy-le-Potier, en Touraine.[45] Ancienne poterie dotée de nombreux fours, le lieu porte encore, en effet, à la fois dans son nom et dans son sol même de nombreux tessons de poterie, tirés et transformés dès l'origine à partir de la terre du lieu. Ceux-ci sont littéralement cette « substance », soit « ce qui se trouve en-dessous », dont Fabrice déplore l'absence dans de nombreux noms choisis comme de simples habillages, avec « rien derrière ». C'est pour cette raison qu'il a choisi le nom de « ferme de Jouy-le-Potier » pour sa propre AMAP [46] : « c'est la substance qu'il y a dedans, c'est pas le nom qui est important ». Curieusement, le mot « substance » prend ici un sens très littéral, en ce que les traces très matérielles et donc la substance du nom de « poterie » existent encore bel et bien. Figurations concrètes du travail transformateur du langage et de la mémoire, elles se trouvent encore littéralement « en-dessous » du lieu et de son nom, faites de cette « substance » par excellence qu'est la terre elle-même. Ainsi, quand les enquêtés tels que Daniel à Saint-Paterne disent aimer dans leur mode de vie « le rapport à la nature, [...] le contact, ce qui [les] nourrit »,[47] nous pouvons comprendre qu'il y va aussi fondamentalement d'une réappropriation de ce qui nourrit ou a nourri leur langue, soit de ce qui alimente non pas seulement « gustativement » mais aussi « oralement » parlant cette bouche qui travaille à la fois nourriture et discours.

Ces jeux d'échanges donnent corps et substance à un espace métaphysique néo-matérialiste « d'ontologies mêlées » (European Cooperation in Science and Technology n. p.) inscrit sur le terrain même des habitats. Déployant ce qui peut être décrit avec l'anthropologue Alfred Gell comme une véritable « technologie de l'enchantement » (92), la *poïesis* et son travail tisserand contribuent à « [nouer] des relations durables entre les personnes et les objets » (Guell 92). À travers elles, les toiles du vivant des habitats se font tambours et tremplins. De par leurs jeux de résonances, transports et métaphores, elles érigent les lieux en véritables « territoires existentiels » (Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies* 50) et « lieux propres » (Certeau xxvi) en lesquels se lèvent simultanément une culture et un « monde » singulier. En tant que tel, celui-ci devient foyer de subjectivation individuelle et collective et se fait le porteur d'un « récit » non plus exclusivement littéraire, mais aussi existentiel et collectif, doté d'une valeur profondément « politique ». Cette réouverture du poétique au politique par le biais de la *poïesis* contribue donc à cette tâche qui nous appartient aujourd'hui à tous, et à la communauté universitaire écocritique en particulier : « identifier les pratiques sociales qui auraient la capacité de construire des milieux [...] durables » ainsi que « les milieux qui génèreraient une responsabilité individuelle et collective de l'usage durable de tout lieu » (Morel-Brochet et Ortar 52).

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[45] Fabrice, AMAP de Jouy-le-Potier (Touraine), maison en terre-paille sous hangar auto-construite en bordure de forêt domaniale, fermier-paysan, ex-mécanicien.
[46] Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne.
[47] Daniel, Saint-Paterne (Touraine), maison de bâtelier auto-rénovée en bord de Loire, électricien.

La reconfiguration de la *poïesis* comme type de faire organique et ouvert, alliant le hasard à l'agencement structuré, a donc des conséquences politiques et sociales notables. Elle révèle la *poïesis* comme le cœur battant non seulement de la poésie, de l'art ou de l'artisanat, mais aussi de cette culture populaire et vivante qui nous tient ensemble autour de ce que nous avons de plus précieux, nous préservant ainsi du pire. L'être humain est comme le trichoptère, ce petit animal utilisé par les joailliers pour les dentelles de pépites d'or minuscules qu'il est capable de tisser. Comme lui, il s'engonce au fil de son existence dans un fourreau mobile de brindilles ou de graviers qu'il a lui-même construit à partir de ce qui l'environne. Comme lui, la disparition de ce fourreau engage son pronostic vital. La *poïesis*, cœur vivant de la culture, tourne autour du maintien et de l'assemblage souterrains et quotidiens de cette cuirasse d'or. Celle-ci n'est pas une simple arme, ni un simple abri. Elle n'accumule pas en son sein de trésors qui la dépassent. Elle ne protège, ironie suprême, rien de plus précieux qu'elle-même. C'est à ce titre que cet article tente, très modestement, de lui rendre hommage.

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Kareema's Ecological Self in Salwa Bakr's "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees"

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Abstract

This paper deals with "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees", a short story written in Arabic by Salwa Bakr, the Egyptian critic, novelist and author. The reading I propose is extracted from deep ecology, namely the ecological self. It highlights the self's identification with nature; opening one's self up to the multifarious surrounding life forms, even when one lives in an urban setting. I hope to demonstrate that Kareema Fahmi, the protagonist, embodies the ecological self and tries to promote environmental ethics in the various settings in which the events unfold—her neighborhood, her work place, and the asylum she is admitted to. The events of the story also bring to the fore her experience of a marginalized woman in a conservative patriarchal Egyptian society. I hope to illustrate how her concern for the quality of life, her love of nature, her love of her city Cairo and her feelings of oneness with the ecosystem, paradoxically, lead to tragic consequences of greater marginalization, and isolation, thus underscoring the cultural specificity of the story at hand. "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" is unique in its representation of an Egyptian ecological self, that of a sensitive and environmentally conscious but ostracized young woman who desperately struggles to promote environmental ethics, free herself from bondage and assert her individuality in a society where women are silenced.

Keywords: Ecological self, love of nature, topophilia, environmental ethics, Egyptian patriarchy.

Resumen

Este ensayo explora "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees", un relato corto escrito en árabe por Salwa Bakr, la autora, novelista y crítica egipcia. La lectura que propongo procede de la ecología profunda, específicamente del ser ecológico. Destaca la identificación del ser con la naturaleza; la apertura de uno mismo a las múltiples formas de vida alrededor, incluso si se vive en un entorno urbano. Espero demostrar que Kareema Fahmi, la protagonista, personifica el ser ecológico e intenta promover una ética medioambiental en los diversos escenarios en los que se desarrollan los hechos—su barrio, su lugar de trabajo, y el centro en el que es admitida. Los sucesos de la historia también ponen en primer plano la experiencia de una mujer marginalizada en la sociedad patriarcal y conservadora egipcia. Espero ilustrar cómo su preocupación por la calidad de vida, su amor por la naturaleza, su amor por la ciudad de El Cairo y sus sentimientos de unidad con el ecosistema, paradójicamente, llevan a trágicas consecuencias de una mayor marginalización y aislamiento, enfatizando así la especificidad cultural de la historia en cuestión. "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" es único en su representación del ser ecológico egipcio, el de una joven mujer sensible y medioambientalmente consciente pero aislada, alguien que lucha desesperadamente por promover una ética medioambiental, por liberarse de las ataduras y reivindicar su individualidad en una sociedad en la que las mujeres son silenciadas.

Palabras clave: Ser ecológico, amor por la naturaleza, topofilia, ética medioambiental, patriarcado egipcio.

"Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" is the title of the translation of a short story written in Arabic by Salwa Bakr (b.1949), the Egyptian critic, novelist and author. The Arabic text "Ihdā wa thālathūn shajarah jamīlah khadrā" first appeared in *Maqām ʿAtiyyah* (Atiyyah's Shrine) in 1986, and was translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies in *The Wiles of Men and other stories,* in 1992. Most of Bakr's novels and stories "focus upon the detail of everyday life as it is experienced by Egyptian women, and they express her discontent with the cultural attitudes, social institutions and economic policies that shape women's lives" (Seymour-Jorn 151). "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" belongs to this category of Bakr's writing inasmuch as its protagonist is a young woman, Kareema Fahmi, who is marginalized, cast out and incarcerated in a mental asylum for kissing a colleague forwardly and in public when on a date, failing to wear a brassiere to work, painting her work desk red, and making a scene on election day—actions deemed socially transgressive in a conservative Egyptian society.

The critical corpus on Bakr's work and the story at hand is essentially feminist. In their analysis, critics have focused on topics such as madness, the silencing of women, and patriarchal ideologies, to name of few. Dinah Manisty, in "Madness as Textual Strategy in the Narratives of Three Egyptian Women Writers," explains that "[t]he fictional character of the deranged woman who haunts the margins of [the] nineteenth-century texts [of Mary Shelly, Emily and Charlotte Brontë (among others)] re-emerges in women's texts in Egypt" (154), namely in the works of Radwa Ashour, Salwa Bakr and Sakina Fuʾād, "a generation of writers concerned with challenging the limitations placed on women" (154). Hoda El Sadda, in "Women's writing in Egypt: Reflections on Salwa Bakr" sheds some light on the various phases of women's writing in Egypt and reveals how

> Bakr's fiction defies any reductive attempt at classification or categorization. She succeeds in doing so by refusing to depict 'the struggle of the sexes' through situating her women characters in a larger context of subjugation and enslavement which is the fate of individuals forced to submit to a life of drudgery and social inequality. (134)

In "The Madness of Non-Conformity: Women versus Society in the Fiction of Salwa Bakr" Rasheed El-Enany reveals how "[i]n the world of Salwa Bakr, both men and women are fellow victims of a repressive political regime and an unjust social order, but within their fellowship, women become additionally the victims of men. The norms of patriarchal society oppress them as women, just as the norms of authoritarian government oppress them (and men) as citizens of diminished rights" (377). In his analysis of "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" El-Enany states that

> [t]he narrative demonstrates the synchronized degeneration of a society into moral and physical ugliness, and disintegration of the mental faculties of the idealistic, free thinking female protagonist, as she gradually loses the ability to sacrifice her own true convictions for the falsities of society. (384)

This is just a sample of the critical corpus on Bakr's works in general and specifically "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees". One can argue, however, that other readings of Bakr's story are possible and equally pertinent.

The reading of "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" that I propose in this paper

differs in its focus. I have chosen an ecocritical framework of investigation. Scott Slovic defines ecocriticism as "the study of explicit environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach, or conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world" (160). Within a multitude of ecocritical approaches, I have selected a theory extracted from deep ecology, from Arne Naess' conception of the ecological self. It is a potentially trenchant reading that highlights the self's identification with nature; opening one's self up to the multifarious surrounding life forms regardless of gender, even when one lives in an urban setting such as Cairo. In light of the events of the story, one might rightly argue that an ecofeminist approach is equally pertinent. However, in many instances, the arguments would overlap with the feminist critical corpus of the story at hand. By contrast, Naess' concept of the ecological self brings to the fore a facet that has not yet been critically examined and, from a broader perspective, instigates a rapprochement between a modern Egyptian short story and deep ecology.

Arne Naess introduces the "ecological self" in "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World". He believes that we tend to confuse our self with a narrow ego, though "with sufficient comprehensive (all-sided) maturity, we cannot help but 'identify' our self with all living beings: beautiful or ugly, big or small, scientific or not" (225). Naess calls for "a deepening identification with all life-forms and the greater units: the ecosystems and Gaia, the fabulous of planet of ours" (235). This "process of identification", which involves a deepening and expansion of the self, defines the ecological self and brings about self-realization (227). In order to clarify what he really means by the ecological self, Naess refers to what he calls a "paradigm situation" of identification (227). While performing a laboratory experiment, looking through an old-fashioned microscope at two different chemicals on a slide, a flea jumped into the acid chemical solution and struggled violently for several minutes to free itself, but to no avail. He felt a painful sense of compassion for the flea and empathy that, in his view, was more than basic. It was a process of identification, of seeing himself in the flea. He states: "If I had been *alienated* from the flea, not seeing intuitively anything even resembling myself, the death struggle would have left me feeling indifferent. So there must be identification in order for there to be compassion and, among humans, solidarity" (227).

In *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, Naess sheds more light on the process of identification, the opposite of alienation. He gives the example of children playfully spraying insects trapped against a wall. With indifference, the children watch the insects fall to the floor. An adult caringly picks up an insect and tells the children that perhaps those animals, like them, prefer to live rather than die. At this particular moment, the children overcome their indifference, here being synonymous with alienation. They spontaneously experience the insects as themselves (171-72). As such, identification acquires the meaning of similarity, which Naess clarifies when he states: "a process of identification is created by the very fact of your feeling something of yourself in something else. Not that it need resemble yourself, but there is something about it that you recognize in yourself" (Naess, *Life's Philosophy* 113-114).

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My analysis of the ecological self in Bakr's "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" will be based on the Arabic text. However, I will be using Denys Johnson-Davies' faithful English text for quotes to make the story accessible to non-Arabic speaking readers. I hope to demonstrate that Kareema Fahmi persistently embodies the ecological self and an environmental ethics irrespective of the various settings in which the events unfold— her neighborhood, her work place, and the asylum she is admitted to. Clearly, the events of the story bring to the fore her experience of a marginalized woman living in a conservative patriarchal Egyptian society. One can also argue that her concern for the quality of life, her love of nature, her love of her city Cairo, and her feelings of oneness with the ecosystem do not lead to self-realization. Paradoxically, they lead to tragic consequences of greater marginalization, and isolation, thus underscoring the cultural specificity of the story at hand. "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" is unique in its representation of an Egyptian ecological self, that of a sensitive and environmentally conscious young woman who desperately struggles to instill environmental values in others, free herself from bondage, and assert her individuality in a society where women are silenced.

The opening of "Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees" is devoid of any reference to nature. The story opens with a first-person narrator who decides to tell her story, "to write it and set it down precisely" as it happened to her. She wants to tell how she lived before being brought to what she refers to as "this terrible place," without immediately and directly divulging that she is in a mental asylum (Bakr 12). What leads the narrator to adopt an objective stance in the narration of such a subjective experience? Is it because she is a woman? Manisty analyzes the function of the narrator in the works of Radwa Ashour, Salwa Bakr and Sakina Fu'ād. She states:

> Unlike their Anglo-American counterparts who often place the figure of the madwoman on the margins, Ashour, Bakr, and Fu'ād have placed the madwoman in a central, narrating role. The role of narrator enables the protagonist to resist marginalization of voice and space and to question the validity of binary logic in which women in patriarchal society are defined in terms of lack, irrationality and silence. Through appropriating the label of madness habitually used *against* women, they invert its function to expose the "real madness" inherent in the prevalent social conditions and show the irrationality of patriarchal binary thought which erects false truths and "false madness". The alternative knowledge which the women articulate puts the male monopoly over public discourse at risk; they dismantle the patriarchal premise which links woman's voice to madness by positing an alternative premise which equates woman's voice with truth. (154-55)

Kareema's autobiographical writing can be seen as a vital negentropic measure with the function of representing a multifaceted yet coherent self-identity, not only that of an unfairly ostracized woman but also that of an eco-conscious person. However, her desire to write is an activity fraught with difficulties since we see her encouraging herself to write her story in detail and hide it in a safe place, perhaps in the mattress, in a hole she has scooped. As such she posits a contrast between a safe place (an enclave of order) and a terrible place—the asylum. One cannot ignore her constant and repetitive reference to the asylum as a hellish and terrible place, which would highlight one facet of ecocriticism, its attention to place. In "Literature and the Environment," Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise and Karen Thornber state:

> [E]cocriticism's attention to place reflects its recognition of the interconnectedness between human life/history and physical environments to which works of imagination (in all media, including literature) bear witness—hence the claim by one of ecocriticism's earliest spokespersons that its distinctive addition to the commonly studied triad of race, class, and gender was place as a critical category. (420)

Kareema's life at present cannot be dissociated from the place she lives in and how she perceives it. She describes the asylum as a place with grey filthy walls that induce insomnia and keep her staring at the ceiling the whole night fearing that these walls will close in so tightly on her and asphyxiate her. She stares at them and sees them drawing nearer and nearer, getting close to her to the point where she screams with all her strength, leading the walls to return to their original positions. The asylum is a place of confinement, a place of utter isolation from the world, with no hope of being released except in death. Clearly, it is a place where she experiences "existential outsideness" in its extreme forms, "[t]he weakest of all levels of identification with place, which [Edward] Relph equates to a sense of not belonging, feelings of un-involvement with and alienation from the place" (Liu and Freestone 6). In Kareema's view, it is a place she was brought to wrongly and by force because "[she] preferred silence, everlasting silence, that day when [she] decided to cut off [her] little tongue, that simple lump of flesh with which [she] was always giving vent to words and thoughts" (Bakr 12). Kareema's desire to cut her tongue evokes the myth of Philomela in Greek mythology whose tongue was cut by her husband's sister to silence her after he raped her.

In the description of her life in the asylum, Kareema brings to light one facet of her ecological self. Despite the state of mental anguish she lives in, and despite the utter alienation she experiences, she is deeply concerned about the fate of a sparrow who slips through the window of her room and eats a few crumbs of what she believes is poisoned food she has to ingest daily. In a frantic attempt to save its life she runs towards it to scare it away but it has already picked up some bread crumbs in its beak before flying away. This causes her to weep for a whole day as she thinks about the miserable end that unfortunate sparrow would meet. One cannot but notice Kareema's great sensitivity, who, regardless of her mental state or how she is perceived by others, demonstrates a strong bond with the natural world and its non-human inhabitants.

In her autobiographical account, Kareema chooses to limit herself to writing about her life before her incarceration. She chooses to highlight the interconnectedness of things around her and the changes within herself. The changes around her are environmental and cataclysmic. No sooner does she graduate from the university and is employed at the Water Company than "a few drops from the flood had already made their appearance on the horizon" of the city she inhabits, "affecting both people and things, and even animals and plants" (Bakr 14).

Kareema portrays herself as a witness to the destructive power of this flood, which may simply be a delusion, a symbol of the deterioration of the quality of life in Cairo. She sees the flood "sweeping over everything, everything of beauty in [her] beautiful city" (Bakr 14). One cannot be oblivious to her perception of the city as beautiful. She could have simply said the flood destroyed the city she was living in, and

not "the beautiful in [her] beautiful city." Is it because she is a woman and women are more sensitive to beauty than men? More interesting is the way she appropriates the city, referring to it as *her* beautiful city. This appropriation is symptomatic of Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of *topophilia* (literally: "love of place") as "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (*Topophilia* 4). Oftentimes she also expresses her love for the street she takes to go to work, describing it as the street she loved so much, was so proud of and had strong feelings for (Bakr 14).

Kareema brings her love for her city to the fore even on the day she is brought to the asylum—when riding a van that passes through the streets at a crazy speed. She cannot but smile tenderly and look at the tall buildings scattered here and there. She says: "Farewell, farewell, my beautiful city, the flood has once again swept you away" (Bakr 14). The destructive effect of the flood is not incidental. She had previously seen the signs of the flood in the street which she used to walk along daily on her way to work at the Water Company. The flood had caused the street to lose its landmarks little by little:

> The glass of the clean bright shop windows in which, so brilliantly did they shine, one could of a morning see one's face, had begun to lose their lustre and grow dull, and the well-laid pavement damp with water during the hot hours of summer had come to be pitted with holes in which dirty water had collected, and I would notice that these holes were becoming larger day by day till they formed what looked like stagnant pools spread round the pavement. (Bakr 14-15)

Kareema's love for her city is so intense that even in the asylum, when she is about to write her autobiographical account, she reminisces about her beloved city. She is possessed by what Svetlana Boym calls "a mania for longing." She experiences flashes of joy and her heart is filled with yearning and nostalgia for her city, one that operates by "associationist magic," whereby aspects of everyday life, including minutia and trivia, sensations, tastes, and sounds are conducive to triggering a nostalgic reaction (4). Kareema writes:

> I imagine the pictures made by the bright, laughing colors of the shop awnings, bright orange and sparkling blue, and that marvelous awning I used to gaze at so long while the vendor handed me the paper cone of monkey nuts, the awning of the 'Freedom Star' shop that sold chick-peas and all types of salted melon seeds and other things to munch and chew. (Bakr 14)

Kareema then moves on to describe the beautiful little trees she would gaze at on her way back and forth to work, providing the long-awaited reference to the title of the short story. She would amuse herself by gazing at the beautiful trees. Kareema would even count them—thirty-one green-leafed trees—adorning the street. The reference to the exact number of trees is puzzling. Is it perhaps to show that the number might diminish? Or is thirty-one a symbolic number? It represents practical, yet creative, energy, all of which are traits of the protagonist (Walmsley n.p.). Nonetheless these traits are going to be ignored, mislabeled by her conservative entourage, and one of the reasons why she is admitted to the asylum. More significant than numbers is the impact of the trees on her emotions. They bring joy into her heart, thus revealing how intimately connected with nature she is:

> Making my way along the street daily, coming and going to work on foot, I would generally amuse myself by gazing at the street's beautiful little trees, and I would count them. I would know that after the blue gum tree there would be the casuarina, then the Indian fig, and some ten meters before arriving at the door of the Water Company there would be a beautiful tree whose name I never got to know, a tree with spreading branches almost all of whose leaves would fall at the coming of spring when it would be resplendent with a vast quantity of large purple flowers; it would look magnificent, a unique spectacle among the other trees. I knew by heart the number of trees along the way; thirty-one green-leafed trees adorning the street and bringing joy to my heart whenever I looked at them. (Bakr 15)

The emotions the trees trigger in the protagonist are not simply those of joy but also sadness. One day, on her return from the water company at noon, Kareema counts the trees and finds that they are thirty and not thirty-one. She thinks that, having a lot on her mind, it was simply a miscalculation. To her dismay, she sees that one tree had been uprooted and thrown on the pavement with the rubble of an old building that was being torn down. The reader cannot but establish a parallel between Kareema's uprooting from home, incarceration in the asylum and the uprooting of the tree.

Kareema laments the loss of one of the Indian fig trees. She weeps bitterly and feels a lump in her throat that is about to choke her. She cannot but compare the uprooted dumped tree to the dead body of some harmless innocent bird that has been killed. This is the second reference to birds being harmed. She feels diminished because of the possible death of the bird, and more so now because of the uprooting of the Indian fig tree—she is part and parcel of the ecosystem.

Kareema chooses to highlight the correlation between nature, in the form of birds or trees, and her physical health. She explains that as soon as she saw the tree thrown on the pavement, she sensed that changes were taking place inside her. From that moment she begins to feel pain in her insides—a pain that would last for days and weeks and subsequently deteriorates into ghastly and crazy pains in her head with every breath she takes. The diagnosis, she explains, is a chronic intestinal inflammation brought about by nervous tension (Bakr 16).

Kareema also chooses to portray the deterioration of her mental health as a result of environmental degradation. More trees are felled, and when there are only three trees left along the entire road, she falls into a state of confusion. She sinks into depression and puts on so much weight that she is perceived to be obese. She loses her capacity to be cheerful and becomes quite uncommunicative. She loses her interest in going to the cinema or in conversing with her women friends on any of the topics she used to talk about. She does not know exactly what has come over her, or what calamity has befallen her city or the people in it, thus proving once more oneness with the ecosystem.

Being a witness and a victim of environmental destruction, Kareema changes her mind about marriage and her future. She decides not to think about marriage at all despite her getting on in years. One may conjecture that this change is caused by her obesity in a shallow society where women are judged based on their appearance. However, she hastens to say that despite her gaining weight, her complexion is still good, her eyes large and her hair soft. She is still regarded by some people as possessing

a certain beauty. The real reason for her change of mind is environmental. She expresses her worry about her children and grandchildren living in a concrete city:

> How could I one day get married and bear children who would live in this city? What misery they would experience when they looked around them and found nothing but a vast jungle planted with concrete and colors of grey and brown! Also, I won't conceal the fact that I was even more afraid for my grandchildren, when I thought about what it would be like for them when they came out into the world and lived in this city, without seeing a flower or knowing the meaning of the word. (Bakr 16)

One may be tempted to interpret Kareema's worries as an anthropocentric form of environmentalism, one which clashes with her ecological self, since her concern about environmental damage is linked to the loss of benefits for future generations. Nevertheless, one should not be oblivious to the fact that Kareema thinks of humans as part of the ecosystem. Positions in deep ecology are concerned with

> future generations rather than the next few decades, with the Third World rather than just the developed world, with non-human species as well as human interests, and with cultural diversity and resistance to economic and cultural domination rather than endorsement of the status quo. (Attfield 38)

The environment, be it the natural or the physical one, influences Kareema's conception of the ideal husband. She dreams of a husband who differs from all the young men who have presented themselves to her. He would be someone who would love his city as much as she did, and who would not get bored counting its trees on warm summer evenings when the sky is clear and the moon is shining down on the world from on high. This dream husband would accompany her as they walked hand in hand in the city's streets chatting and eating monkey nuts. Nowhere does she refer to the ideal husband as one possessing wealth and having a high status in society.

Even when it comes to dating, Kareema cannot but be close to nature. Whereas many girls would dream of going out with a date to a fancy restaurant, Kareema prefers to sit with a colleague at work, right at the river's edge, and watch the water as it makes its way aimlessly to the sea rather than accept his proposal to sit at a riverside café. In addition, nature becomes the instigator of romance. Sitting with him at the edge of the river, with the golden rays of sunset making Kareema's colleague look very handsome and gentle, leads her to kiss him on the lips, even though there is simply affection between them. This angers the conservative young man who scolds her for being so forward in a public place. This incident leads both of them to depart angrily, and she stops talking to him.

Kareema's dreams are environmental. Nature infiltrates her unconscious in the form of a beautiful dream. The felling of her beloved trees has such a traumatic impact on her that she sees the trees of her beloved street not only return to their original place, they do so in leaf and in full bloom. They also produce wonderful, fantastically shaped fruits of exquisite colors she has never seen before (Bakr 18). The colorfulness of the fruits stands in stark contrast to the dirty street that is crammed with cars.

The consequences of this beautiful dream happen to be detrimental for Kareema on the emotional and physical level at the Water Company. She wakes up from her dream feeling the heat of the sun on her forehead only to realize that she will be late to

work. She skips breakfast, dresses hurriedly, rushes to work, only to realize that she has forgotten to wear a brassière. Going back home to wear one would delay her arrival at work. She thinks it is stupid to insist on wearing a bra as there is nothing shameful about a woman's breasts, just as it is ridiculous for men to wear a necktie. At work, her boss, Mr. Aziz, is scandalized by her unconventional attire and deems her behavior disruptive and indecent. He asks her to return to her office and asks a woman colleague to talk to her, who in turn reproaches her for her audacity. Manisty explains that "the bra and necktie are metaphors for the prevailing restrictions imposed on human beings which bind them emotionally and physically. More specifically, the bra is a symbol of male control over female sexuality and its absence threatens the *status quo* and accounts for the exaggerated reaction of Kareema's boss (159). The bra incident, Kareema states, brings a large number of male and female colleagues to regard her as mad. The Water Company with its patriarchal and close-minded views destroys Kareema in the same manner men destroyed the trees and the flood destroyed her beautiful city.

Strangely enough Kareema is concerned about the quality of life of her coworkers. Her concern is revealed in her decision to beautify the work place of six of them with whom she shares the same account room. We have already seen her sensitivity towards beauty in her description of the thirty-one beautiful green trees and in the reference to beauty in her city. She can tolerate neither filth nor gloomy colors. She asks: "Why is there all this filth at the Water Company? Why is the color of the desks always a gloomy grey? Also, why is it that so many files and heaps of papers are stacked up in corners to form a nightly playground for insects and rats?" (Bakr 20) Her desire is to turn the space of the office into a place. In "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective" Yi-Fu Tuan explains that "[p]lace incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (387). Consequently, she goes early to work, sweeps the office, polishes it and cleans the windows, then places on the desk of each employee a pretty bunch of flowers in a glass of water.

Kareema decides to beautify her working station as well. In a moment of epiphany she comes up with a surprising idea. She buys a beautiful desk with her saved money, has it painted in bright red and asks for its delivery to the Water Company. To her dismay, the security officer refuses to let the delivery man in even when informed that she had paid the bill. In a more oppressive move the security officer contacts the office manager who summons Kareema and inquires about the situation. In an emotional outburst Kareema objects about the absence of colors and highlights the impact of colorful desks on the mental state of people at work: "Why do we have to have grey desks? What would be wrong if one employee were to be seated at a red desk, another at a green desk, and a third at a yellow desk, and so on? Wouldn't this make everyone feel jolly?" (Bakr 21). For Kareema, the beautiful is an essential condition for a happy life. El-Enany posits that beauty is at the core of Bakr's worldview, though it is a fluid concept. In his view, Bakr strives for an aesthetic sense of life and her characters are distressed about the disappearance of the value of beauty from society (392-93).

He adds:

> If the absence of beauty can lead to crime in Salwa Bakr's world, it can also lead to insanity, as many stories across collections demonstrate. The souls of Bakr's women are thirsty for beauty and, when it is denied them by a harsh, arid and inhospitable reality that sets no value on beauty morally and physically, but is ever preoccupied with expediency and basic material needs, they exit from society into one form or another of madness—the madness of non-conformity, a madness which in Bakr's worldview is superior to sanity. (393)

The work place is ideally a comfortable place, a place where one works harmoniously with one's colleagues and superiors and where one is happy, but it is not so in reality. When Kareema informs the manager that she will buy some simple pieces of furniture for the accounts room when she has saved enough money, he gives her a scornful look and asks her to go back to her office. Losing her composure Kareema shouts: "This isn't fair! Why do you think in this way? What's wrong with a red-colored desk?" (Bakr 21). Had the manager been a woman, would his reaction be similar? One cannot but wonder whether the manager's reaction is personal, gender-related or instigated by a rigid bureaucratic system. As a consequence of his response, Kareema has a slight fainting fit and is taken back home. This incident not only reveals her inability to be heard as a woman but also her inability to give an identity to this space, to turn it into a place that dramatizes her aspirations. Tuan explains that "identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life" (*Space and Place* 178). This incident also highlights the tyrannical power of the administrative officers of the Water Company who silence Kareema and crush her creativity: a creativity that stems from her concern about the quality of life of other fellow beings.

In her autobiographical narration Kareema then moves on to draw attention to another facet of her personality, her environmental ethics and her political activism, past and present. She explains that she has always been interested in public affairs, the realm of men. She used to attend several discussion groups and while still at school she participated in demonstrations. Kareema asserts that what happened on Election Day is the real reason for having been brought to the asylum wrongly and by force. On this day, while she was walking towards the elementary school where the elections were to be held, she noticed a weasel sticking its head out from the doorway of one of the closed shops, then dashing across the street in the direction of the school. She could not interpret the meaning of seeing a weasel in full daylight. The sight of the weasel triggered in her intense emotional and physical reactions. Her violent headaches recurred and her stomach became bloated. She lost control of her feelings at the sight of this small animal with the dejected face and soft, lithe body roaming through the streets of the city. She had seen it many times before freely crossing the streets. She sat at the edge of the pavement in a state of semi-collapse, sobbed bitterly and ignored the inquiries of an old woman. One may postulate that Kareema's reaction is due to her realization that the weasel's appearance during the day in the city is most likely symptomatic of the animal's loss of habitat. It is also well known that weasels are nocturnal carnivorous mammals. Weasels live in a variety of habitats, such as open

fields, woodlands, thickets, roadsides and farmlands, abandoned burrows, or nests under trees or rock piles. They are not usually seen during the day in the midst of a city like Cairo. Kareema's tempestuous reaction reveals, once again, her sensitivity towards the earth's non-human inhabitants and her concern about environmental degradation.

Kareema's sensitivity to the natural world can be contrasted with that of other people at the elementary school where the election is to be held. Someone there distributes papers to the voters with texts, patterns, pictures of animals (dogs and camels) and trees (palm trees), and small gifts. Not that the candidates and their supporters care about nature; they are simply keen on capturing the votes of the illiterates. By contrast, we see Kareema's passion towards environmental issues. When someone notices that she is reading the pieces of paper with interest, he comes up to her and begins a conversation, indicating that she should vote for the candidate to whose party he belongs. In an outburst, Kareema questions him about environmental issues that are closely connected to her mental and physical health: "Does your party do anything about planting trees in the city instead of concrete? Has it formed a well-equipped army to deal seriously with the weasels? Does it possess some medicine that can restore my good spirits?" (Bakr 23). Altman and Churchman explain that "[e]nvironmental implications of women's lives relate to all scales of the environment: from the dwelling to the neighborhood, to the settlement and the region, and to the nature of the personal and societal decision-making processes that affect them" (3-4.) Kareema wants politicians to address problems that arise from humans interacting with the natural world, in contrast to another view where "it is the scientists who bear the major intellectual responsibility for coping with [environmental] degradation" (Conway et al. 2).

Indisputably, the political cannot be dissociated from the social and the environmental. Kareema then moves on to attack the current ministers. She shouts: "[M]ost of our ministers are ugly and they have such fat necks one doubts their ability to do anything useful" (Bakr 23). In a loud voice, she moves on to inquire about women's participation: "Where are the women? I see no women around me. Why have you not sought out the reasons for the sparrows having fled from our city and why is it so full of flies and mosquitoes?" (Bakr 23). This might be an insinuation that women are concerned about environmental issues whereas men are not. Kareema's ethics is also that of animal-welfarism. Sadly, the reaction Kareema gets from the people is nothing but mockery and laughter. Only one man asks her for her identity and voting cards which she submits in good faith, not knowing that it is an attempt on his part to silence her and prevent her participation in the elections. To her dismay, the man does not offer any explanation and does not give her the cards back. This leads her to curse him and hit him, and to people attacking her. She calls the police and the people in charge and does not know what happens subsequently, except that she finds herself at home. Clearly her society is indifferent to environmental issues and has entrenched codes and norms that restrict female individuality and free expression of speech.

The marginalization of Kareema is even more violent at home. One would hope that upon her return home Kareema would be able to express herself freely and would

find a sympathetic ear. Instead, she has to confront a mother who scolds her, reproaches her for ruining her brother's future, accuses her of silliness and tells her that she deserves to have her tongue cut out (her mother had already threatened to do so in the past). Dejected, Kareema thinks of cutting her own tongue, an ironic act of self-silencing, in conformity with a patriarchal society that silences women. She opens the scissors and places her tongue between the blades. At this crucial moment her mother comes in, snatches the scissors and starts screaming. The neighbors and people gather in the street. Kareema is admitted to the asylum. There she tells her story to all the nurses and doctors around her, but they smile and pat her on the back. To no avail, she tries to make them understand that the thought of cutting off her tongue was simply a way to stop herself from talking and avoid getting in trouble. Kareema's marginalization continues in the asylum.

The story ends with the image of Kareema as a diminished woman, mentally and physically. She does not know how many years she has spent in the asylum. She simply remembers the numerous visits of her mother who would talk to her without getting any response. But her mother is no longer coming. She remembers her brother's infrequent yet silent visits. Kareema realizes that she is on the verge of dying. She sees that her body has withered, her hair has gone white and her legs are weak. Despite this grim picture, she reiterates her love for her beautiful city, her street and her hope to see the thirty-one beautiful trees, which as we know, are no longer there. She says: "Yet I hope to get out of this place, be it even for a single hour, that I may see my city and the road so dear to my heart, which I have so often walked along and in which at such time I would so hope to see thirty-one beautiful green trees" (Bakr 26). Clearly, her experience of marginalization, accusation of madness, and unjust confinement has not annihilated her love for nature. Let the so-called madness and fantasy prevail if they entail dreaming of a city with beautiful green trees!

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ECOZON@

Vol 10, No 1

Shrieks from the Margins of the Human: Framing the Environmental Crisis in Two Contemporary Latin American Movies

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Abstract

The contemporary fictional films *Nosilatiaj. La belleza* [*Beauty*] (dir. Daniela Seggiaro, 2012) and *Los decentes* [*A Decent Woman*] (dir. Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2016) explore the complex intra-action between the human and the non-human worlds, in this case the animal world and the natural landscape, in the context of environmental crisis. In both movies, images of natural landscapes are accompanied by depictions of class inequalities and the environmental crisis. As fiction, the films present an environmental perspective through a symbolic framing of nature. This highlights the marginal place assigned to the non-human world by progress and development. In *Beauty*, nature is threatened by deforestation of the dry forest landscape called the Bush or the Gran Chaco. Throughout the film, the landscape is always present in the background, either fragmented or just suggested in the memories and subjectivity of the protagonist, Yolanda, a girl of the Wichí people. *A Decent Woman* adopts the trope of idyllic nature through a nudist community set in a natural jungle-like area adjacent to a gated community for wealthy residents. Belén, the protagonist, a maid working in the gated area, begins participating in the nudists' rituals. Employing posthuman and new materialist theories, the article analyzes scenes from both movies that foreground the interactions between the human and the more-than-human world in the light of the threats to the natural ecosystem. We discuss the framing of the environmental crisis through the intervention of animals and the animalization of characters, which exemplify the haunting presence of a receding but resistant nature. While nature vanishes from the screen—it is either cut out for agriculture or for ornamental parks in private neighborhoods—the viewers are placed in an active position that prompts ethical thinking concerning the environment.

Keywords: Beauty, A Decent Woman, the more-than-human world, nature/culture, environmental crisis, Latin American cinema.

Resumen

Las películas de ficción contemporáneas *Nosilatiaj. La belleza* [*Beauty*] (2012) de Daniela Seggiaro y *Los decentes* [*A Decent Woman*] (2016) de Lukas Valenta Rinner exploran las complejas intra-acciones entre el mundo humano y el mundo más que humano, en este caso el mundo animal y el paisaje natural, en el contexto de la crisis ambiental. Como películas de ficción, la perspectiva ambiental se presenta a través de tomas fílmicas donde la naturaleza adquiere significados simbólicos, destacando así el lugar marginal asignado al mundo no-humano por el progreso y el desarrollo. En *Nosilatiaj. La belleza* la naturaleza está amenazada por la deforestación y es evocada en la narrativa por el paisaje del Monte chaqueño argentino. A lo largo de la película, el paisaje siempre está latente, enrevesado con los recuerdos y la subjetividad de la protagonista, Yolanda, una niña del pueblo Wichí. *Los decentes* adopta el tropo de la naturaleza idílica a través de la presencia de una comunidad nudista en un área verde similar a la jungla adyacente a una comunidad cerrada para residentes de clase alta. Belén, la protagonista, una empleada doméstica que trabaja en el barrio

cerrado, comienza a participar en los rituales de la comunidad nudista en ese entorno natural. Empleando teorías sobre el materialismo posthumano y el neomaterialismo, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar escenas en ambas películas que ponen de relieve las interacciones entre las formas de vida humana y más que humana, explorando cómo este tema se retrata a la luz de la amenaza a respectivos ecosistemas. Discutimos los encuadres de la crisis ambiental a través de la intervención de animales y de la animalización de los personajes en las películas, que prefigura la inquietante presencia de una naturaleza que retrocede, pero resiste. Al desvanecerse la naturaleza de la pantalla–es podada para la agricultura o para parques ornamentales en barrios privados– analizamos cómo el espectador va ganando una posición más activa que exige un gesto ético hacia la crisis medioambiental.

Palabras claves: Nosilatiaj. La belleza, Los decentes, el mundo más que humano, naturaleza/cultura, crisis medioambiental, cine latinoamericano.

The threat to the natural world from "extractive"[1] socioeconomic regimes that rely on plundering natural resources is a contemporary issue affecting the Earth's biodiversity in the so-called Capitalocene, that is, the age that began in Early Modernity and has led to today's global environmental crisis (Moore; Demos; Gómez-Barris). This extractivist practice is a phenomenon that the aesthetic repertoire deployed in the movies *Beauty* and *A Decent Woman* brings to our attention. Further, the narrative strategies of both films stress the interaction of humans with the more-than-human world as a key component in the process of becoming "post-human" (Wolfe qtd. in Kirksey 4), i.e. developing a mode of being dependent on complex entanglements with animals, ecosystems and technology. The relation between neoextractivism and urbanization leading to environmental degradation in Latin America has been pointed out consistently, as have the counterefforts to build green cities (Gudynas 147-151). The arrival of the Anthropocene has made us aware of the imminence of a system collapse that will affect all organic and nonorganic life forms (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene" 161). The tension between the historical conception of the human as a superior, special species and the understanding of complex "more-than-human worlds" (Abram 7)[2] is most striking at the very frontiers where the natural world is being pushed back by urbanization and agricultural expansion. However, these borderlands also reveal the composition of "hybrid collectives" (Descola 2) on the margins of the human, that is, the mutual constitution of entities deemed ontologically different. This has led to acknowledgment of the agency of other life forms and recognition that human identity is constructed through mutual entanglement with other life forms with which humans interact, or in Karen Barad's terms, "intra-act":

> The notion of intra-action is a key element of my agential realist framework. The neologism "intra-action" signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction", which assumes that there are separate

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[1] We draw on Gómez-Barris (2017)'s definition of "extractive zones" as those marked by "the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of 'high biodiversity' in order to reduce life to capitalist resource convention" (xvi). Such system was installed by colonial capitalism in the 1500s and turned natural resources into commodities to integrate them within the global market. The extractive system "converts life into commodities" (xix): nature, bodies, geographies.

[2] We borrow Abram's term "more-than-human worlds" to refer to non-human nature. An alternative term is Braidotti's "non-human others" (1), which refers to beings other than human: animals, robots, inorganic matter.

individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action (Barad *Meeting the Universe* 33).

Thus, the idea of intra-action questions the nature of agency and "its presumed localization within individuals (whether human or nonhuman)" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe* x). This study focuses on how the agency of the more-than-human world intra-acts with the human world. We take as our point of departure the premise that other life forms apart from the human—things, natural elements, animals, energies—also have agency. This position also highlights the impossibility of understanding the human being as the only *locus* of meaning production in a multispecies world, and calls for "a new way of thinking humanity-in-nature, and nature-in-humanity" (Moore 5) in a bioethical vision of the world.

In this article we look into the (sometimes problematic) intra-actions between the human and the more-than-human world within the frame of the haunting presence of a receding but resistant nature in two contemporary fiction films, namely, *Beauty* (2012) directed by Daniela Seggiaro (b. 1979 in Argentina) and *A Decent Woman* (2016) by director Lukas Valenta Rinner (b. 1985, an Austrian resident in Argentina).[3] The movies cultivate specific poetics and narrative strategies to draw attention to the interaction of humans and their environments, accentuating how this interaction is a cornerstone in the process of becoming "multispecies communities" (Kirksey 14). The film sequences that we have chosen to comment on are those that in particular bring to the fore the blurry boundaries between the human and the more-than-human world. Thus, the aim is to analyze how the mutual intra-actions between the human world and the more-than-human world are realized in these contemporary movies.

The movies touch upon questions of territoriality in the light of the current environmental crisis originated by extractive dynamics as well as by aggressive urbanization policies. *A Decent Woman* portrays the constant expansion of gated communities on the outskirts of urban areas and its impact on social as well as on environmental relations. *Beauty* focuses on territorial conflicts and the control of natural resources. In the movies nature is threatened by the advance of the agricultural and urban frontiers, which in both cases leads to deforestation and the loss of vital resources.

Although these films do not engage in documentary portrayal of their subject matter, they are examples of what Forns-Broggi and MacDonald—with some differences between them—call "ecocinema". For Forns-Broggi ecocinema is a cinematic genre that articulates the relation between human beings and the physical environment from a biocentric rather than an anthropocentric perspective, aiming at evolving an ecological consciousness and imagination in the spectator. Similarly, MacDonald defines a corpus of selected avant-garde films as ecocinema because

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[3] The titles in Spanish are *Nosilatiaj. La belleza* and *Los decentes*, but in this article we use the official translations in English due to the article's language.

they "offer [...] audiences a depiction of the natural world within a cinematic experience that models patience and mindfulness—qualities of consciousness crucial for a deep appreciation of and ongoing commitment to the natural environment" (19), and consequently provide an alternative to commercial cinema and advertising. Thus, for MacDonald, ecocinema serves not only as a sub-genre of avant-garde cinema but also as purposeful art meant to "provide new kinds of film experience that demonstrate an alternative to conventional media-spectatorship and help nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset" (20).

In spite of their different aesthetic approaches, which are outlined in the following paragraphs, the central narratives of both films revolve around the relation of humans with the environment and the grey zones that emerge at this "biocultural borderland" (Kirksey 13), i.e. zones of multispecies encounters. It cannot be sustained that the perspective of any of the films is fully biocentric –rather than anthropocentric– as Forns-Broggi suggests to fulfill the requirement to fit the category of ecocinema. Nevertheless, they do stress the double relation of "humanity-in-nature, and nature-in-humanity" (Moore 2016) and elicit an active spectatorship, an attentive gaze aware of the environmental issues surrounding each socioeconomic context. Through exploration of the margins of the human and the more-than-human world, both films interrogate power relations. While *A Decent Woman* portrays class differences, *Beauty* addresses postcolonial conditions, both revealing a similar logic of domination expressed through territorial tensions. Consequently, both films are in dialogue with current political issues in the region that have spatial matters at the center. *A Decent Woman* confronts the viewer with the conflict caused by the constant expansion of the private neighborhood business, and the impact of this phenomenon upon socioecological relationships (Svampa; Cuenya; Sonia). *Beauty*, on the other hand, highlights territorial conflicts and struggles for control of natural resources between indigenous peoples, the State and private capital. (Zúñiga García-Falces; Martí i Puig et. al. 2013).

In *Beauty* the more-than-human world is in crisis: the dry Chaco forest in the north of Argentina, known as "the Impenetrable" or simply as "*El monte*" (the Bush), is threatened by deforestation. *El monte* functions as a narrative "actant" (Bennett xvii), in the sense that it is not just the place where the main character's people— the Wichí—have historically lived, but also a place that is in itself a significant and constitutive part of her subjectivity. This presence and intervention of the forest are felt throughout the film, not in a direct way, but rather in a fragmented manner. The images of the rural space are channeled fundamentally through the character of Yolanda, a young Wichí girl whose memories, subjectivity and experiences are intimately linked to the Bush landscape. Working as a home maid for a white family in a small village in Salta province, far from the Bush, her people and her language, Yolanda's social and cultural world risks extinction. The plot of *Beauty* juxtaposes the violence against Yolanda, whose long hair is forcibly cut by her employer to make a fake braid for her daughter's birthday party, and the violence towards the

forest that is being razed to gain space for the expanding agroindustry. Salta province belongs to the Gran Chaco area (a large geographic and cultural region that includes parts of Bolivia, Brazil, northern Argentina and Paraguay), where the soil of the dry forest is coveted mostly for lucrative soy plantations and, to a lesser extent, cattle raising. Yolanda's dreamlike-memories, which pop up spread throughout the film without following a linear narrative, show the bush, herself, her relatives or her people, intra-acting. With few dialogues, sometimes accompanied by Yolanda's off-voice speaking the Wichí-lhämtes language, these scenes of people net-fishing in the river, of swaying trees at night, of women carrying branches walking through the woods or children playing in the mud, are presented to the viewer by still camera shots accompanied by a rich complexity of ambient sounds. These sounds including birdsong, rain, the rustling of foliage and the buzzing of insects are juxtaposed with the noise of chainsaws accompanying images of dry barren land in the forest, which evoke deforestation.

The movie *A Decent Woman*, on the other hand, shows a longing for a utopia of "ideal" nature in a pristine environment, manifested through a nudist collective in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. The natural environment occupied by the nudist community borders an enclosed private area where the wealthy live in comfort and security, secluded from the ordinary world and surrounded by acres of artificial park and electric fences. Belén, the protagonist, also a maid, has recently been employed to work in one of the residences of this gated neighborhood. Soon after her arrival, she discovers the nudist club on the other side of the electrified wire mesh and begins to participate in its activities, which leads to her mental and sexual awakening. Long, slow panoramic shots are used to show the multiple activities of the two communities: courses in cupcake making, running, tennis at sunset, and going shopping in the gated community, and shooting practice, tantric sex, and poetry-reading in the nudist community. Belén acts as a bridge between these two worlds for the spectator, and her coming and going crystallizes the contrast between the normative, materialistic and controlling lifestyle of the closed community, and the pursuit of liberty and a sense of self-exploration in the nudist community. At the same time, as she goes back and forth and the different lifestyles are shown, indicators of actual likeness between the two groups gradually appear, as well as the question of class difference. The very first scene of the movie takes place outside the gated community in a big city, presumably Buenos Aires, at an employment agency, when Belén and other women are being interviewed for cleaning jobs. The precarious position of these cleaning workers is emphasized: they come into the office one after the other, sit in a chair and are scrutinized and interrogated by a female voice we hear, but never see, asking "do you have children or a partner?", "Can you sleep over at work?", "All these references are from the same

family?" (our translation)[4]. The narrative delves further into the situation of exploitation, focusing on Belen but always reminding us of the privatized land, stressing ownership and control of territory and the work force. Belén does all the household work and lives in a small peripheral bedroom attached to the laundry room. She is also required to absorb a substantial part of the emotional cravings of her employer, who demands care, company and a listening ear at any time of the day and night while totally ignoring everything to do with Belen's own existence. When the movie shows class inequalities of this kind, it is often done through subtle humorous touches, a narrative strategy that avoids victimization and puts the focus on Belen's individual experience. The first chain of events in *A Decent Woman* sets in motion the narrative progression announcing Belén as the protagonist: Belén and other girls being interviewed for a job, Belén's arrival to her new place of employment and the encounter with her new living conditions, the house where she will be working, the family and the guard who will fall in love with her. The narrative rhythm sometimes abandons the conventions of cinematic storytelling in order to include scenes of a more playful, almost dreamlike nature, which are relatively independent from the rest of the story and employ humor and even absurdity. This change in style is inaugurated by the moment when, while trimming the hedge of the house, Belén looks through the shrubs for the first time and discovers the nudist community on the other side. From now on the scenes are about Belén's adventurous discovery of and involvement with the nudists.

The shots featuring birds make visible the intra-active dynamics, where the human and more-than-human world meet, giving rise to intricate intertwined agencies that affect the narrative core. The movies in question exploit specific poetic and narrative strategies—*Beauty* employs a quasi-documentary language and features documentary/ethnographic elements, while *A Decent Woman* relies on a kind of absurd humor employing theatrical or metacinematic elements. Such aesthetics draws attention to the intra-actions of humans and their environments, portraying how this mutual constitution is part of the process of "becoming post-human" (Kirksey 4), and thus posing a bioethical question. It is this particular aesthetics—a poetics engaged with the role of the environment as a key participant in the representation and formation of subjectivity and challenging "human exceptionalism" (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 46)—that we are principally concerned with in this article. In the case of *Beauty* we focus on a sequence featuring the intervention of birds flying into a church during the celebration of a mass. In *A Decent Woman* we focus on the scenes where the nudist colony is preparing to celebrate a collective sexual ritual, for which their bodies are made up mimicking the fur features of different animals. These moments chosen for comment are those that particularly bring to the fore the blurry boundaries between the human and the

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[4] In Spanish the voice of the lady interviewing at the employment office says: "Hijos, pareja, ¿tenés?; "Disponibilidad cama adentro ¿tenés?"; "Decime una cosa Emi, ¿Todas estas referencias son de la misma familia?."

non-human by staging the animal. Further, we deal with certain cinematic frames that show the crisis of nature through its vanishing from the screen as a resilient presence, placing viewers in what MacDonald suggests is an active position or activated presence in the face of the fading image of the natural world, which prompts viewers to question anthropocentric ontologies.

In *Beauty*, the border between the human and the non-human is questioned by portraying the categories of the human and the animal as two comparable bioethical entities capable of producing meaning, while insisting on the idea that the forest is a constitutive part of the protagonist's subjectivity. Although both entities are equated as producers of meaning, they are simultaneously in tension or friction around the discursive-material frontiers[5] that they occupy and produce in this encounter—is also the case with the linguistic borders between Spanish and Wichí-lhämtes. The house where Yolanda works and the church are both marked by the omnipresence of colonialist language, Spanish, while the forest and her subjectivity are identified with the precarious status of the Wichí-lhämtes language. This discursive-material frontier is mediated through its spatialization within the Catholic church, where the more-than-human world intervenes during the Sunday mass. The village people gather in the church located close to the Bush. The agency of the animal world is expressed through the materiality of the birds' shrieking as they get into the church, and by their fluttering and trilling, which interrupt and disturb the parish priest's sermon, causing the congregation to laugh, and thereby disrupting the order at church and desacralizing the ritual. Here, the limits of the human as the privileged locus of enunciation are shown through the intervention of a type of discourse that signals the agency of the more-than-human world, since it is enunciated from outside language. The animal actions—turned into material discursive event—open to a series of marginalized voices that resonate together, voices regarded as "less-than-human" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 15) in Western tradition—the Wichí-lhämtes language, the sounds of the trees, the voices of female experience—struggling to be heard throughout the film. Particularly in this scene, the birds' unexpected entrance disrupts the hierarchic figure of the priest—whose authority is reinforced by the white, masculine power position he is invested with— while delivering his sermon to the congregation. Citing St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he states that "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a ringing gong or a clanging cymbal."[6] The priest's attempt to impose order by invoking this passage of the Sacred Scriptures ends up being ironized by his dislike of (or "lack of love" for) the birds, which turns the pragmatic force of the Biblical passage against him and the religious institution, making his words sound empty like the noise of a ringing gong. The modernizing and colonizing

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[5] In her agential realist theory, Barad (*Meeting the Universe*) is concerned with how discursive practices and material bodies intra-act in dynamic entanglements of relations producing boundaries and "the differential materialization of nonhuman as well as human bodies" (34).
[6] In the movie, the priest says in Spanish: "Aunque yo hablara todas las lenguas de los hombres y de los ángeles, si me falta amor soy como una campana que resuena o un platillo que retiñe."

discourse (evoked also by the categorical call of the priest to the congregation to "listen only to the word of God", and therefore to avoid the boisterous voice of the flying creatures) is interrupted by that of the birds, which distract, cause laughter, and achieve what, according to a female neighbor, no one seems to have achieved before: "someone had to silence the priest". That is, the two discourses "intra-act", and that of the birds is not excluded. Indeed, it ridicules the idea of "human exceptionalism" (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 46) by challenging the efficacy of the human discourse of the priest.

On the other hand, in *A Decent Woman* there is no concrete animal presence, but rather a kind of nostalgic call for the animal—or the interior animal within us— and the search for a different language, codified in this case through the animalization and deconstruction of the anthropomorphic being. In a kind of meta- performance the members of the nudist group are made up as animals that pose in front of the camera eye, putting on animal gestures and sounds:
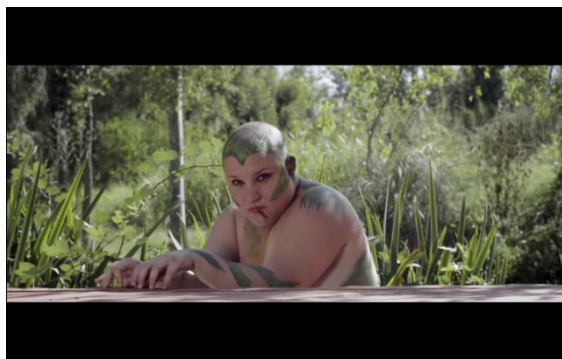
Fig. 1 *A Decent Woman*

Fig. 2 *A Decent Woman*

The animals are alluded to through mimesis, and knowledge of the human body is re-elaborated through totemism (Descola 10); that is, a mode of identification through a common ontology. This new form of agency in the case of the film is also put into practice through non-language, or the search for languages beyond human semiosis, where meaning is produced from other than human instances such as animal gestures, purrs and corporeal contortions. Here, at the beginning of a ritualized and orgiastic sexual encounter, the characters do not speak, but produce sounds imitating animal noises. Moreover, at the beginning of the scene one of participants plays a recording of percussion music, creating the atmosphere of a staged and aestheticized jungle-like-setting. The music is heard through speakers hanging in the trees playing drum sounds. Each animalized body appears directly in front of the eye of the camera, posing while being portrayed, each one assuming an animal identity, but in a playful way. The eye of the camera is constitutive of the scene, as well as the human factor, protagonist and observer, the animal and the technical apparatus. This collective celebration engaging in a kind of animalization and search for transcendence serves as resistance to the individualistic spirit that governs on the other side of the fence. But even though

there is a celebration of animality as something that unites the group, there is, at the same time, a total renunciation of any pretence to originality or authenticity. On the contrary, the scene is a celebration of representation, artistry and playfulness, as these qualities are stressed by various explicit gestures of the actors directly looking towards the camera, reminding the spectator of the artistic mediation of the cinematic event. Thus, with this scene, it becomes clear that, rather than seeking an approach to nature or the animal as a source of authenticity, the nudist colony seeks to resist the advance of the space occupied by the gated neighborhood on the other side of the fence, which represents the overwhelming power of capitalist modernity that extracts value from land and from bodies. Since there is no intention of "originality", of showing natural authenticity (which would imply a dynamic reflection of identity) we can understand these movements in the sense of "diffraction" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe* 72; Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second* 26)[7], that is, as processes or phenomena that arise from the intra-action in the representation of the outside-inside dynamics related to the boundaries between entities considered ontologically different:

> Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries— displaying shadows in "light" regions and bright spots in "dark" regions—the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of "exteriority within." This is not a static relationality but a doing—the enactment of boundaries—that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 803).

The skin painting and animal performance of the characters (Fig. 1 & 2) in *A Decent Woman* erode the boundaries between human and animal by enacting the two entities in a playful and comic way, which erases all intent of originality in the portrayal of human-animal identities.

In both movies nature is an evanescent presence, which is connected to the conflict caused by the advance of the agricultural border (deforestation in *Beauty*) and that of the urbanizing border (privatization of green areas in *A Decent Woman*). In this context nature is connected to the idea of a lost paradise or a receding one. Particularly, in *Beauty* the nature shots and the slow tempo of the action in these shots are reminiscent of pastoral aesthetics, i.e. idealized, harmonious, paradise-like images. Idyllic shots of the countryside are embedded in dream-like scenes where Yolanda's mother lies in bed and looks outside through the square window to the green forest. The spatial framing of the window[8] exhibiting the green trees is repeated in a zoom-in shot to the window frame in the following scene (Fig. 4), suggesting metaphorically the enclosing and exclusion of nature.

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[7] Haraway (*Modest_Witness@Second*) defines "diffraction" as "meant to disrupt linear and fixed causalities, and to work toward more promising interference patterns" (26); and Barad (2007) points out that "we can understand diffraction patterns—as patterns of difference that make a difference— to be the fundamental constituents that make up the world" (72).
[8] For a detailed study of the spatial framings in this movie and in contemporary Latin American cinema see Leticia Gómez' (2017) doctoral dissertation *Encuadres espaciales en la representación de las identidades étnico-culturales en La teta asustada, Zona Sur y Nosilatiaj. La belleza*.

Fig. 3 *Beauty*   Fig. 4 *Beauty*

The shots employed for these images of the forest are panoramic and static, activating what Lefebvre in his studies of cinematic landscapes calls "the spectacular mode" (28–29), that is, one where the images impel spectators to get involved in a contemplative activity, observing the landscape independently, as actants standing for themselves. The viewer abandons for a while the narrative mode of reception, which corresponds with the typical way movies are seen, following the events and development of the story, and is confronted and involved with (or maybe "enveloped by") the life and vibrancy of the natural world. Within the multiple ways the movie invokes the Bush/ the Impenetrable in the story, the visual images present the forest as landscape, that is, as an image that mediates between nature and culture, assembling the human with the non-human, but also as the physical archive that mediates between sociopolitical relations and the non-human environment (Andermann 5). This landscape of the Bush in *Beauty* is, however, not an obvious or a given one. Many images of the dry forest are quasi-abstract, underexposed and unfocused, shown through a kind of filter which produces a feeling of texture on the image. The natural landscape thereby becomes a denied one. While the natural landscape is present in full color in some images, as if it were a naturalist painting (Fig. 3), in others the picture is altered in such a way that it cannot be accessed and seen clearly, as we can see in the following screenshot from one of these scenes (Fig. 5), thus playing with the role of the spectator and exposing a human urge to "consume" nature and to "enjoy" the landscape, and at the same time suggesting the impossibility of the fulfillment of such an impulse: the dry forest, the Bush—not coincidentally called the *Impenetrable*—is complex, difficult to see through and to understand, as it is not static and unalterable.

Fig. 5 *Beauty*

In the image above, the camera moves backwards and the image of the landscape becomes thick and unfathomable, preventing the viewer from seeing through the landscape and thus decoding nature. As we can see in Fig. 6, one of the movie's film posters shows nature from a variety of perspectives:

Fig. 6 *Beauty*

The poster shows us three images of the landscape: the center-image featuring the two children looking at the tree draws on evocations of the religious theme of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, though in this case, instead of being thrown out of the natural paradise, nature is disappearing around them. The centrality of the tree in the middle of the photograph and the children turning their backs on the camera to look at the tree compel viewers to see the tree as a material presence testifying to the jungle's disappearance while, at the same time, resisting such violence with the force of its body. The blackish background of the poster corresponds to the image of the Bush in Fig. 5, portraying nature's impenetrable character which cannot be appropriated by human signification. Finally, the image

in the lower left-hand corner showing the tree's trunk interrupted by white wavy lines exposes the aesthetic-cinematic eye on nature portrayed in the movie, drawing attention to its fictional character and thus providing a critical opening between the filmic image and the viewer. The assemblage of these three framings of the Bush landscape in the movie materializes the entanglements between nature and culture, in which the landscape as an aesthetic construct mediates between sociopolitical conditions and the natural environment.

An instance of the conflictual relationship between nature and culture in *Beauty* can be seen in the bird-hunting scene which follows just after the scene in the church analyzed previously, when a flock of birds interrupt the priest's sermon. After the mass two women comment on the interruption of the birds and this is followed by a scene of children shooting at birds with slingshots (Fig. 8):

Fig. 7 *Beauty*

Fig. 8 *Beauty*

It becomes clear that this last scene is linked to the scene in the mass where the boundaries between the human and the animal are enacted: its imperative is passed on to the children through the authority of the adult world that legitimizes their violent action—their attempt to kill the rebellious birds. Immediately after the bird hunting by the children, the off-camera voice of the protagonist, Yolanda, is heard giving a historical-testimonial discourse, with didactic undertones, directed to the viewer. She tells about holistic spiritual visions among the Wichí people, while the viewer sees images of trees, hears sounds of birds, and sees two children crossing the screen. The contrast between these two scenes—violence against nature and cohabitation with the more-than-human world—makes room for voices and discourses that struggle to be heard. The sequence of scenes that leads to the bird hunting by the children (that is, the priest sanctioning the trilling of the birds in the mass, the mothers commenting on the laughter occasioned by the birds' interruption, and then the children hunting the birds) shows the reinforcement of the boundary between the human and nonhuman, exemplifying what Derrida in his essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am" identifies as anthropo-theomorphic discourse, which "feeds the limit" (398) between the human and non-human. The priest's speech is held within the power conferred by the space of the church and reinforced through the declaration "These are the Words of the Lord". However, its performative power is not only that of the words of the *Bible*, but of the entire

religious discourse, which is interpellated and questioned by a manifestation of the more-than-human world. The animals break into the middle of the service, a space where in normal circumstances the animal does not "take place", destabilizing the authority of the religious discourse since this action provokes laughter that takes away the mantle of sacredness around the ceremony. The nonhuman world is expressed here, following Alaimo, not as a mere background to be exploited, and submissive to the human being, but close, "close as one's own skin" (238), because it sneaks in and disturbs an extremely rigid ritual. "It seems that the birds cannot endure this priest either," Sara says to her neighbor at the church door. "Someone had to silence him,"[9] the neighbor replies, revealing the reputation of the priest as someone who talks too much. At least momentarily, a continuum is established between voices located in less powerful positions, allying those of women with those of animals.

In *A Decent Woman* there is no animal presence, but a longing and calling for the animal within, as well as a search for a new language through animalization shots that challenge human language by utilizing gestures, noises and the body as semiotic means of communication. This act can be understood as parodic in the sense that Butler uses the term to describe drag and cross-dressing as examples of a performance that effectively exposes gender as performative. In the same way, the cross-dressing in the movie exposes human identity and human nature as performed rather than as natural. As we have seen in Fig. 1 and 2, the assumption of an animal identity in these scenes enacts a transformation, a transvestism, where there is no intention of originality. Karen Barad goes a step further in thinking about borders with the concept of "diffraction", which, as we have already noted, abandons the assumption that there is an original somewhere, and the idea of reflection of either social or natural reality. Diffraction is marked by "patterns of difference" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* 71) that seek material connections between different entities:

> my aim is to disrupt the widespread reliance on an existing optical metaphor—namely, reflection—that is set up to look for homologies and analogies between separate entities. By contrast, diffraction, as I argue, does not concern homologies but attends to specific material entanglements […] [it is] […] understood as a material-discursive phenomenon that makes the effects of different differences evident, a way of understanding the world from within and as part of it (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* 88).

In the movie in question, the limit is challenged by the presence of the nude body, which marks a separation in space from the neighbors of the private estate (and its lavish lifestyle of accumulation of material things). Derrida speaks of nudity as the exposure of the logic of the material limit. His reflection on the nakedness of the human being in the animal's gaze (that of his cat, observing him step out of the shower) forces him to re-constitute or rethink himself as a species. In the film this

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[9] In Spanish Sara says: "Ni los bichos se lo aguantan al cura este" and the neighbour replies "Y bueno, alguien tenía que hacerlo callar".

dynamic would be further extrapolated to the viewer's position in front of the nakedness of that animalized human group, creating a kind of anxiety or discomfort in the viewer, who might feel the material limit separating different entities is dissolved once skin becomes the parameter of identity. This contact with a border is also channeled through Belén, the protagonist, who, in turn, represents agency in Barad's sense of the word (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*), that is, as something questioning and constantly reconfiguring the identity of the subject. Belén finds a new connection with the environment, herself, and the others through participating in the activities of the nudist group.

The conflictual spatial limit in *A Decent Woman* is also rendered in two interrelated scenes: the hunting of parrots by one of the female members of the nudist group, who justifies the action in so far as "they became a plague and eat the food that is for other animals. Pests are to be controlled" (Fig. 9); and the film's final scene when the nudist group begins to hunt the gated neighborhood's residents with shotguns as if they were the plague that must be controlled, after the nudist group is evicted by the police and the natural open space is closed off (Fig. 10). These two scenes exemplify the conflict over the right to space and the right to diversity of life in space. The invasive behavior of the parrots and the mechanisms of control of the species pose the questions of human overpopulation, human consumerist desire and the impact of its colonizing force on other life forms.
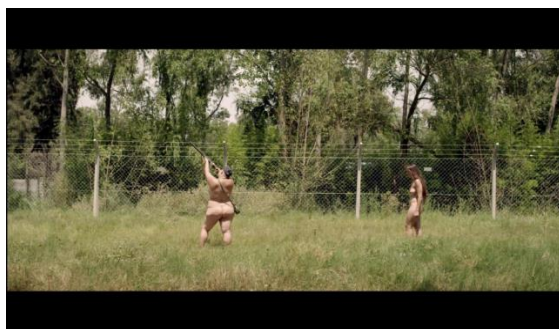

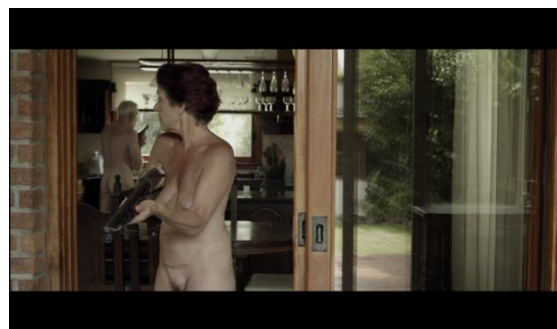Fig. 9 *A Decent Woman*   Fig. 10 *A Decent Woman*

The bird scenes in both movies—the hunting of birds with slingshot by a group of children after the mass in *Beauty* and the bird-hunting scenes in *A Decent Woman*—prompt the spectator to reflect on the equality of species, and the need for multispecies encounters which in the movies are prevented by the spatial segregation and sociocultural organization. The birds in both movies are material presences—rather than a symbol or an allegory—that haunt the human world in a "post-anthropocentric world" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 86).

In *A Decent Woman*, nature becomes a 'lost extinct paradise' for the nudist community after their eviction, because of the efforts of the gated neighborhood's inhabitants to eradicate it. That natural environment becomes indeed lost when the police shut down the place, cover the nude bodies of the members, expel them from the piece of land and close off the zone. In response to the eviction, in the final scenes

the nudist group becomes a kind of naturalist urban guerrilla force which begins to hunt the gated community's residents (Fig. 11 & 12). The bodies appear as if in a performance, because they crouch, hide and adopt attacking positions in their hunting, imitating animals. There is no dialogue in these scenes.
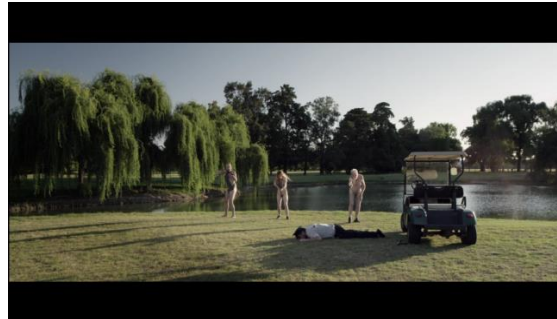

Fig. 11 *A Decent Woman*

Fig. 12 *A Decent Woman*

These last scenes featuring human hunting are once again semi-absurd, since the nudist group decides to intrude on the gated community and carry on the killing even though they know that they will die. Indeed, they are finally killed by the guards in the vast golf course (Fig. 13 & 14). Nudity becomes here their uniform or flag and the mown lawn of the golf course where they fall becomes a symbol of the capitalist exploitation of animals, human beings and nature. The screenshot in Fig. 14 shows the mown lawn extending to meet the sky and the excised bodies, both human and non-human, lying lifeless as left-overs in the advance of extractive capitalism. Previously, during a celebration at the nudist camp before the eviction, the oldest members and founders of the community had remembered the many years of struggle to continue with their practice and naturalist life-philosophy, and their resistance to the constant attack of conservative forces.

Fig 13 *A Decent Woman*

Fig. 14 *A Decent Woman*

We interpret the two hunting scenes, namely, the hunting to control the parrots and the hunting of the residents of the gated community, as expositions of the conflicts connected with the spatial limit, the confrontation between two forms of organization of space. On an ethical level, the film projects for the viewer a dissolution of the boundaries between human and non-human. On the other hand,

it also reinforces the differences between two systems or opposed lifestyles, which leads to the final catastrophe and to consideration of the question of the constitution of decent/indecent in current urban society. This idea of "decency" in the film is also entangled with a dominant Catholic idea of purity and cleanliness, and in this regard, it is revealing to take a look at one of the film posters (Fig. 15):

Fig. 15 *A Decent Woman*

In the poster we see a representation of a naked Belén covering her breast and genitals and stepping on the head of her employer's son dressed in tennis clothes and covered in blood. Among the vegetation surrounding her like a halo there are other naked people, some of whom carry firearms, as well as animals and fruits. Such an image reinterpreting the religious theme of Adam and Eve in paradise becomes here a re-vindication of animal language, nature and the woman, where the First Woman listened to the snake's voice as representative of the more-than-human world, ignoring God's prohibition and his biopolitical administration of bodies and nature in Paradise.

In conclusion, the animal interventions and the framings of the natural environment illuminate the spatial boundaries between human/non-human in these two films. In spite of their different poetic and narrative approaches—*Beauty*'s quasi-documentary audiovisual language that increases the credibility of the connection between Yolanda's experience and the ongoing conflict for the lands of Chaco forest, and *A Decent Woman*'s use of humor and absurdity to comment on the environmental politics in a megacity—these two movies blur the limits between the human and the non-human where nature and other life forms outside the anthropocentric are exposed and claimed. Our analysis and discussion show that in both films the environmental crisis is framed through the intervention of animals and the animalization of characters in the movies that give account of the world being lost in the Anthropocene. In *Beauty,* the animal intervention highlights power

issues related to the dominant language and other languages such as Wichí-lhämtes, as well as the non-human language of nature—the forest, animals—as displaced discourses that struggle to be heard. In *A Decent Woman*, the animals emerge in the nude skin of humans, deconstructing the anthropomorphic being in a ritual that proposes identity as diffraction, devoid of origin and originality. In both movies the natural landscape is shown as a receding presence whose remains are exposed on the screen. In *Beauty* the natural world and the indigenous group overshadow the narrative and emerge in dreams and the stream of consciousness of the protagonist, Yolanda, as a constitutive part of her being human. In *A Decent Woman,* nudity, the bare skin of the nudist group and the jungle, presumably on one of the river banks in Buenos Aires, expose the limit that modernizing progress, represented by the materialistic lifestyle of the gated community, strives to conquer. The meticulously mown lawn in the huge park of the private neighborhood, watered by the blood of those who struggled to save the natural environment, will be the decent face given to nature once it is appropriated by urbanization. By exploring the margins of the human, both films highlight the entanglements between power and nature by connecting the environmental crisis with issues of class inequality and postcolonial conditions. Finally, in both films, normative anthropocentric relations are crossed by aspects of gender, class and ethnicity that are called into question by the intervention of the more-than-human world displaced towards the margins of progress, but resistant in Yolanda's subjectivity as well as in the body inscriptions of the nudist group, to be further projected onto the viewer, where bioethical thinking is hopefully activated.

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Editorial

Creative Writing and Art
Toward an Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design

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In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), Walter Benjamin famously claims that the position of the audience at movie theaters requires an attention devoid of contemplation, without the *aura* traditionally attributed to a work of art. The film spectator can be thus both distracted and receptive: the new mode of perception Benjamin attaches to movies is in fact a "reception in a state of distraction," wherein "the public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one" (18). In other words, when we watch a movie we are not a (human) subject before an (artistic) object, we rather enter into a state of semi-trance in which a new perceptive (and for Benjamin, political) event is made possible by the lack of fixed, preconceived boundaries between the self and the other (see Duttingler 276-277).

Odd as it may sound, Benjamin's thesis always comes to mind any time I go mushrooming. From a young age I used to accompany my grandmother into the forest to look for edible mushrooms. As I learnt with time, to see the mushrooms one must indeed be receptive in a state of distraction, examining the surrounding environment, but in an almost absent-minded way, focusing on the task on hand, but also enjoying the frivolous and aimless act of strolling—or the *flânerie*, to use another of Benjamin's key terms. The perception established by such a practice breaks down the division between present enjoinment and future (gastronomic) interest; irrational wandering and strategic planning; randomness and ecological knowledge. On the epistemological level, mushrooming thus becomes a hybrid aesthetic experience through which boundaries are dynamic rather than fixed: as mycologist Alan Rayner has pointed out in a more biological context, I can also say that mushrooms have taught me to appreciate "the enormous significance of indeterminacy or 'open-endedness' amongst all kinds of life forms" (vii).

A similar stance on mushrooms has been recently taken by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Tsing writes about the "art of noticing" mushrooms as a practice in which we give up the alleged linearity of human progress to instead pay attention to those instances where indeterminacy gives birth to "multiple time-making projects, as organisms enlist each other and coordinate in making landscape" (21). In these open-ended and polyphonic gatherings she calls "assemblages," we stop focusing exclusively on teleological categories created by

anthropocentrism and instead begin noticing those "histories that develop through contamination," in which "interwoven rhythms perform a still lively temporal alternative to the unified progress-time we still long to obey" (29; 34). As with Benjamin's movies, with mushrooms we leave behind the centrality of our human perspective and the teleological continuum of human time, to enter into a nomadic world of assemblages in which randomness and enchanting lines-of-flight are in control as much as regular configurations.

The works included in the Creative Writing and Art section of this issue of *Ecozon@* devoted to "Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design" share with Benjamin's movies and Tsing's mushrooms the ability to evoke both contemplation and distraction; progress and indeterminacy; bio-technological randomness but also artistic design. Going back to the etymological common origin of the Greek word "poiein" (to make) with Sanskrit "cinoti" (to gather, to heap up), these works of art are in fact human-made, but also gather and collect more-than-human worlds. Like mushrooming, each of them is indeed a gathering that, through ecopoetic contamination, becomes "a 'happening', that is, greater than a sum of its parts" (Tsing 27).

It is no coincidence that this section of *Ecozon@* opens with a series of digital pictures of mushrooms and mold elaborated by the Montreal-based French visual artist, Ophélie Queffurus. As shown by the image on the cover, Queffurus's works deal with the dynamic boundaries between art and biology, and with the possibility of their reciprocal ecopoetic contamination. By designing and initiating what would appear to be a biological experiment in a scientific setting, Queffurus allows microbiological, nonhuman agents to create efficient networks that are also aesthetically stunning. From the electric blue of the cover image to the yellow growths of the *Physarum Polycephalum* in her most recent work, Queffurus' art wanders between traditional and new artistic media to promote what she calls "a more spatializing conception of living practices," no longer seen as "a line between two disciplines (art and biotechnology) but more as a common space." The outcome is a series of astonishing world-making ecologies, polyphonic assemblages capable of revealing the conceptual, epistemological, and material space "in-between" (human) design and (nonhuman) randomness.

This "in-betweenness" also characterizes the two subsequent art projects. The first is the result of a collaboration between Judith Tucker and Harriet Tarlo. Tarlo is a poet and Reader in Creative Writing at Sheffield Hallam University with an interest in landscape, place and environment. Tucker is for her part an artist and senior lecturer in the School of Design at the University of Leeds. Her work explores the juncture of social history, personal memory and geography; it investigates their relationship through drawing, painting and writing. Since 2013, Tarlo and Tucker have worked on and with a contested coastal community on one of the UK's last existing 'plotlands', the Humberston Fitties in North East Lincolnshire. The painting and poems that they submitted to *Ecozon@* are from the series "Night Fitties," which explores the play of light and dark and the uncanny transformations of the chalets that take place after hours, as well as notions of vulnerability, occupation and emptiness. As the two artists point out in their introduction, their cross-disciplinary collaborative practice between poetry and visual

art explores open, environmentally-aware engagements and methodologies with landscape and place. In investigating the relationship between social, environmental and energy politics on micro and macro scales, their work delves into the effects of radical open form text and paintings, and how their reciprocal contamination and indeterminacy challenge audiences' assumptions about boundaries and linearity.

A similar ecopoetic gathering is at the very core of Daniel Eltringham and David Walker Barker's contribution. Eltringham, a poet, teaches contemporary literature at the University of Sheffield, while Walker Baker is an artist and collector interested in geology, landscape evolution and collecting. As they write in their abstract for *Ecozon@*, their collaborative project entitled *Searching for Jossie* explores the Pennine reservoir landscapes and partially drowned communities of Langsett and Midhope, ten miles north-west of Sheffield (UK). The project comprises Eltringham's poetic sequence *R/S Res.*, and a collaborative cabinet artwork, a playful take on the elusive "Jossie cabin," a vanished shepherd's hut that gives the work its title and pretext and that had stood on the moorland above Langsett Reservoir. *Searching for Jossie* juxtaposes objects found on walks in those landscapes with text-and-image slates that work archival photographs and *R/S Res.* into a textured surface. Their contribution to *Ecozon@* presents a selection of these slates, some with text and some without, alongside Eltringham's sequence in full. Both Eltringham's poem and Walker Barker's palimpsestic technique delve into these landscapes' geology, ecology and human histories, enacting imaginative reconstructions of a scarcely legible landscape marked by loss as well as interrogating a poetics of reserve and resource. Eltringham's poem's imperfect grid form is an exploration of randomness and design as an experiment in place-writing: as he writes, it peters out in the face of chance findings and failures, and finds its ecopoetic significance in narrating both what is left of a field-system that has itself been partially erased, neglected and naturalized, and the absences that seep through the little that is known.

Our forth contribution is three poems by Frances Presley—a poet and freelance translator who has published several books of poetry since the late 1980s. They are taken from a forthcoming book based on the life of nineteenth-century English mathematician and writer Ada Lovelace. The sequence I have chosen for this issue of *Ezocon@* is rooted in landscapes which are significant for both Presley and Lovelace, and focuses on two themes—wave function and the will o' the wisp (an atmospheric ghost light seen by travelers at night)—as examples of unpredictable natural phenomena interwoven with complex scientific theory. As exemplified by the first text in the series, "wave function," these poems combine mathematical theory and a scientific approach to the physical world ("the difficulty of measuring a wave function") with an aesthetic sensibility capable of recognizing the beauty embedded in the landscaping function of chance. The result is an original artistic practice that acknowledges the potential friction between design and randomness both in the physical world and in poetry, as well as the agency of an environment that shares with the poet the ability to write and thus narrate its own stories.

While within Presley's work and the two previous collaborative projects water plays a key role, the last two contributions bring us back to more mushroom-prone but

equally polyphonic habitats. *Flower Poems? or Cobridme de flores* is a series of poems written by Robin Murray, a poet and a Professor of English and Film Studies at Eastern Illinois University. As the overall title suggests, almost all the poems in the series are about both real flowers, often described as a collective presence, and flowers as metaphor for love and almost mystical entities, transfiguring death. The Portuguese part of the title can be in fact roughly translated as "Cover me with flowers" and it is probably a reference to a poem by Sister Maria do Ceo (1658–1753), a Portuguese nun, poet, writer, and playwright who combined a Baroque attention to detail and allegory with religious sensibility. Murray's poems mirror the dark beauty of Maria's lyric and mix the different allegorical levels of the flowers mentioned with anecdotal references to the actual life of the poet. As in a garden occasionally attended where the original design has given away to structural randomness, the result is a set of poems that avoid fixed boundaries between the physical and the metaphorical work of the senses as well as between human and nonhuman existences.

Moving from gardens to forests, our last contribution is an excerpt from a long poem entitled *Tree,* written by writer and research fellow at the University of New England (Australia), John Charles Ryan. The five poems (from a longer sequence of 24 sonnets all devoted to trees) that Ryan chose for *Ecozon@* reflect his scholarly interest in investigating the potential of poetic practices capable of inspiring understanding of the natural world and redefining human-plant relationships. In particular, the ecopoetic strategy Ryan employs fits nicely within the general theme of this issue. On the one hand, the five poems are designed to be not only sonnets (likely the poetic form that requires the most planning) but also about a specific topic, trees. On the other hand, they are also the linguistic embodiment of polymorphous, polyphonic vegetal assemblages: to quote a few lines from the first poem anthologized here, each of them does "Prosper […] through plurality" as they all collectively envision a random botanic force capable of rightly claiming that "allthingsthingsings repeated in everything else." In other words, Ryan's poems simultaneously imply and corrode the alleged boundaries between nature and culture, gesturing toward an indeterminate kaleidoscope of life-forms and harmonic world-making projects.

Although fungi are only flickering elements in Ryan's poems, their smell is undoubtedly present among his trees. As Tsing has noted, the combination of ineffability and presence is evident in mushrooms' smell, which is another reason why we find them (43). The artworks I gathered for this issue of *Ecozon@* share with mushrooms and mushrooming this other aspect: they, too, not only represent but are part of a world that is beyond and within our reach, a world that is governed by both design and randomness, and in which humans are part of larger life-projects where we neither have total control (thankfully) nor are simply neutral observers or contemplators. As for finding mushrooms, the rich but at times disturbing aroma of the works in the Creative Writing and Art section of this issue of *Ecozon@* can only gesture toward an ecopoetics without fixed boundaries that likely will be never "here" but always "in-between," never fully completed by constantly becoming. Yet, as once again it is for mushrooms, the ecological stories they narrate are not isolated but gather diverse things and meaning

and value and, let's hope, "never end, but rather lead to further stories," to further world-making projects and assemblages (Tsing 287).

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Phy[art]um

Queffurus, Ophélie

1 Réseau

2 Untitled (Study of plasmodium)
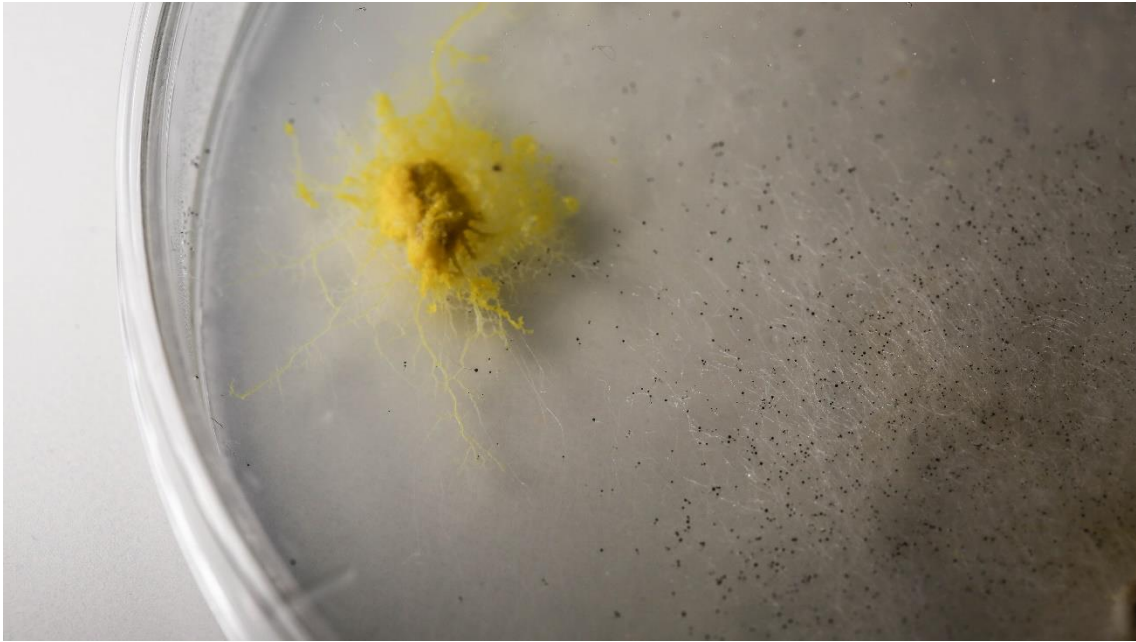
3 Contamination

Excerpt from Night Fitties

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t.v. flashes window in
window's wide sight:
big guy in vest jumps
up behind blown rose
flicker white in colour

woman in red top
feeds fox at lit door
frame intimate until us:
lifts bowl, turns
light off, door shuts

prow push to shove
fence out, leylandii up
& round long held *for
sale or sold* garden boat
grounded at dusk

hearts hang inside
cold closed summer
houses: few vent
smoke, few gleams
car corners statuary

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R/S Res.
Searching for Jossie

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Text by Daniel Eltringham
Images by David Walker Barker

Langsett & Midhope 2017

Resistance
      the grit

    in field   greens
between layers of leek

Surface
eyes down

          for an archaeology
of dinner

Response
    of the collective, to risk
      (religious sense)
grip (get one)

Scan
the surface
    of the surface   for strata's strata;
perverse way in

    to mineral's time

Recline
    at the Bankside Café, Langsett

in direct light   (what's left of it)

Shard
       fragments

   found in mud   one,

   a horse peering over a gate

Reserve
    –voir   lines

   deciduous/evergreen

   [4 res publica]

Shaft
    eyes ground

(animal excavators, foxes etc.).   down

way down in the mine of the mineral
   present:
    bring the pot to light

Return

      safety & danger
  –ed,   flesh & death
   –ing, doubt & faith
     urn(al)

Suffice   enough

     to say "he lived"

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Resistance   Stanny [stony] Common w/
          rain driving full/

Surface

                          la sobrehaz, the outer surface,

                  illegibility
of a shepherd's life, a shepherd's

                          of the water's body   beneath

grave   hut

Response

Scan

                          the grain of the picture, ground

                  cleared, North America (farm),
                          Langsett (res.)

Recline
                    the site
              a resting   receptacle
          ready for water

Shard

Reserve

Shaft   delve

                          a root

Return   Field (felled)

Suffice

              Treed (for) et

well what will

Wood (lune)

                          nuestro Valverde de Lucerna

                                    our Langsett
              Syke (lic) al   the patient illegibility
                                    of the shepherd's life now

Resistance   *Surface*

                                                                [eyes down again]:

        the chives need no encouragement   Swinden House & Farm (site)

Response   *Scan*   stones in profile, then
                                                           Sun on Stanny,

                                                                 Horizon &

                                                     Hills matched up   &

                                                                Nothing,

Recline   *Shard*
        sandwiches, moorland repose:

             5 mountain hares in
                     winter moult

Reserve   *Shaft*

reservoir a big blue fact
        this afternoon, a turning

point, for 4 Oystercatchers   over Langsett water
                 low   they light on surface

Return   *Suffice*

                                                     not a stone   >   Jossie abolished

Resistance　　　　　　due S down path　　　　*Surface*

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Brook House
　　　thru neglected timber enclosures　　　　　　　Brock House
　　　　　　　what extract　　　　　　　　　　　　the "Badger" House?
　　　　　　　well what

　　　　　　　-ion? –ed?

Response　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*Scan*

　　　　　(conjectural inaccuracies
in Kenworthy)

Recline　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*Shard*

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　another,

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　a boy's face, what

Reserve　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*Shaft*

Return　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*Suffice*

Ada Unseen

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wave function

the difficulty of measuring a wave function

.   at two specific points   separated by time   .

which changes

                             continuously and causally

discontinuously and erratically

               as a result of observation

is the collapse of the wave function

wave writing

when
waves
reclaim

shufter   shingle
                    ridge

   grey smooth stones
          white lichen

          white paint
               swastika
          on grey smooth stone
                    kick down

               how long & when
                              waves   turn   roll
                              suck

                    surf swallow
                         sink holes
                                   grey   splu   sur

…………………………   ……………

                              your hand pulling me
                                        across the breach

                    tidal fast flow
                         slipping submerged stones

          new salt marsh residents
                    white egrets
                         surprised

the breach did not defeat us

Porlock Bay Nov 17

Will o' the Wisp: eight equations

I

These Functional Equations are   Will-o'-the-Wisps
the moment I fancy   I have   really   at last   got hold of
something   tangible & substantial   it all recedes
further   and further   & vanishes again   into thin air

A.A.L.

II

Prompted by your beauty & intangibility   you always elude
my grasp   you seem to delight in leading me   into a bog
you are will o' the wisp   flickering with wayward course
and pleased when those who follow   are bogged to the neck

Dr JK to A.A.L.

III

Lead then, said Eve   The wily adder   rolled in tangles
Makes intricate seem straight   Elevates his crest
A wandering fire   compact of unctuous vapour
Misleads   the amazed   night-wanderer   to bogs and mires

J.M.

IV

God   amputates
                   his small right hand
ignis fatuus   no illume at all

E.D.

V

A functional equation   specifies a function   in implicit form
Solve through substitution   with some constants (eg. 0 or 1)
after that some expressions
which will make some part of the equation become constant

VI

the moment I fancy I have really   got hold of
          two or more known constants:
  marsh gas (0)   fireball (1)
it advances as you advance   recedes as you recede

VII

I have often seen it there   rising up

   and falling
          twistering about

      rising up again
          a candle in a lantern

             Mrs Lubbock

VIII

       Joan (0)   the Wad (1)

Note: Will o' the Wisp, or ignis fatuus, was a common sight before the draining of the fens and marshes in England. By the time Ada Lovelace used it to describe her difficulties with functional equations they were much rarer. JK is Dr James Kay, who wrote flirtatious letters to Ada, then hastily got married; JM is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*; ED—a reworking of Emily Dickinson's 'Those—dying then'. Mrs Lubbock was remembering incidents from before 1810 in Norfolk. 'Joan the Wad' is a Somerset name for Will o' the Wisp. Scientists have attempted to recreate the right conditions for the spontaneous ignition of marsh gas.

Flower Poems, or Cobridme de flores

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Irises

My mother grew a circle of irises
dividing koi pond from rose garden,

bearded blond heads bobbing like fishhooks,
their reflections prismed into Greek goddess robes,

(messengers, I know, using flowing rainbows
as bridges between earth and the heavens,

I thought they'd turn to gold by seven,
melanin changing one iris from blue to tan

Dina's *heterochromia iridium* charming bartenders, disc jockeys
and the entire Columbus Clipper baseball team

her bi-colored eyes blending way too smoothly
into exotic berry wine coolers in the

back of a maroon Escort, looking rosy
from the rear-view mirror before a smell

like Jim's skunked Australian shepherd washed in
tomato juice, baking soda, and hydrogen peroxide

opened my doors)—the bronzed lower petals
grow fuzzy from rhizomes, purging the liver;

behind the cornea their tinted apertures open

symbols of passion planted on graves.

Doodle Poll (Calendar View)

She regrets

she's unable to meet today.

Yesterday

she looked out over a low creek

turning into

a heron

snaking between sumacs,

one of the bird people

gliding with

starched cotton wings

thinking only

"I'm hungry"

as she dived.

Sunflower Summer

That summer had a face like a sunflower
mane of yellow hair framing circle of tan

Clytie watching Apollo kiss her sister beside the coal bin
in the back of a three-car garage

In Takeshi Kitano's *Hana-Bi*
 "flower fires" create and consume
Horibe painting smiling flower heads on lions
bending upward toward hana-bi hung in the sky

just like Romero's *Land of the Dead*

flowers in the graveyard
not the kind you lay on the ground

sky flowers way up in heaven
reflecting off a paddle boat
in the center of Duck Lake

and those chipped teeth
moving to face the sun

distracting decoys planted in a line
their thick stalks confront the wind

seeds weakening growth
like Clytie's sister locked in a cave

or

planted in loose soil behind the Buick

Clytie turning slowly
Her flower face following
Apollo's dazzling chariot and radiant crown

James Garner Under Sumacs
(Or Just Light the Damn Thing on Fire!)

Your boyfriend's dead he says
I laugh
ask which one

but think of James Garner

my own *Murphy's Romance* (1985)
staying for supper only if breakfast is included.
How do you like your eggs?

A sign maybe.

The amaryllis stops swallowing.

The cilantro dries up.

I hear people went to the wrong Roanake this weekend.

I remember stooping under a sumac

      blushing under leaves

       and listening:

Fragrant bobs attract bees.

Stems transform into pipes
    fluorescing under ultraviolet light.

I fear

my toes will grow numb
    harden and fall off,
      useless and without scent.

I fear

I'll say, "I'm 60,"
    (Just like Murphy)

and the door will slam

leaving me outside
in the coming dark.

Titan Arum

In July

my elbow
swells

like a corpse
flower

loose scar folding
over a loaf of arm

a human pistil
sweating

flesh flies'
perfume

I smell
stink

bugs
in a composter

and that
dead cow

we nearly
stepped in

on

Regina's farm.

tree:
five sonnets

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All prefatory quotes are from Joyce Kilmer's poem 'Trees' (1913)

I think that I shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree

Prosper I through plurality,
Nothofagus, Antarctic beech,
my figures primeval of speech,
polymorphous lyrebird tonality,
idiom am of *Dendrobium* vitality,
in mosslivrworte lichnferne pleach.
Auburn caesurae of fungus breach
terse Gondwanan surges of prosody—
njahnjah I whet waddawee I djadjadja
toeing your slickest stairs to weeping welts
wyy wyawya I dzeedzee I we bdabdabda
below satinwood seedlings so sweetly svelte
wwhedeetd seesee whedeetd I are ulaulaula
all thingsthingsings repeated in everything else.

Drawn longbow, bodily aches,
stave careworn, splitting from strain.
Re-receding leaves desire to maintain
the finest bearing from which to slake
heaven-lust-sund-thirst-ruby-star-take.
Wart-prone plinth mandrake brayn.
Not infectd I ed but yew by blain
nont I et but yew is ay I fersake.
These eons baring wetness
en lonely stark plateau.
Yr atrocities n gorges.
Bnksia m beauful,
ey m breathless
anksia m beau.

a tree whose hungry mouth is prest
against the earth's sweet flowing breast

Where is your faith? Mine is bare before you.
Mine is grass felted and cloaked around me.
Mine is the charred hollow bole that lifts me.
Where is your faith? Mine is stark before you.
Where is your god? Mine is sickened by you.
Mine is earth under heaven beyond me.
Mine is flame that destroys and absolves me.
Where is your god? Mine is nothing to you.
Where is your prayer? Mine is an inching year.
Mine is blossom borne on a barren scape.
Mine is abrupt thrust of a floret spear.
Where is your hope? Mine is a seed agape.
Mine is a resinous thought rendered clear.
Mine is a wholly shrouded earthly shape.

granite above meme above granite.
whatbird left me herehere me left birdwhat.
justheard gust beneathbeneath gust heardjust.
planted bones underunder bones planted.
canit be long herehere long be itcan.
touch of rime overover rime of touch.
clutchrim of pure brinkbrink pure of rimclutch.
planet below meme below planet.
fineniche of soil slantslant soil of nichefine.
shadow behind meme behind shadow.
whineof gorge torrenttorrent gorge ofwhine.
below is bellowbellow is below.
chineof me still herehere still me ofchine.
bellow is belowbelow is bellow.

a tree that looks at god all day
and lifts her leafy arms to pray

Sentinel, I dwell in this quadrangle,
gone at dusk as they come, pied currawong
song cleaves the crisp mucous air, I belong
to decibels impelled at odd angle,
accessible to larks who embrangle
along my fuguebrisk updraughted headlong
brawn is borne of golden pollen threadsong,
falsetto at depth of dark tangle.
When, by dusk, courtyard flush with canticle
and woodswallows croon lunar euphony,
even I blush with moonlight in my cell
and all good hollows of me gush dolce—
again in every sleeping particle,
this harmony awakes and swallows me.

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Frederike Middelhoff, Sebastian Schönbeck, Roland Borgards and Catrin Gersdorf (eds.), *Texts, Animals, Environments: Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics* (Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, 2018), 360pp.

Poetry makes nothing happen, W.H. Auden once famously wrote; I'm not convinced that philology makes much happen either. This isn't to judge, rather to point out that text-based studies of language and literature have limited usefulness outside of the academy, which is the place where nearly all of them are written and the vast majority of them are read. *Texts, Animals, Environments,* which belongs to the Cultural Animal Studies series edited by Roland Borgards, also one of the co-editors here, takes its academic readership on trust, and it has much to offer specialist readers in the by now well-established fields of ecocriticism and animal studies. Its main aim is to use its two lead terms, "zoopoetics" and "ecopoetics", to argue for the productive confluence of these two fields, which have sometimes been taken to be separate, and to explore what Donna Haraway—a major influence throughout the volume—calls the "various forms of entanglement and co-production at work when species, environments, and aesthetic practices meet" (Haraway, qtd. in Middelhoff and Schönbeck 25).

Despite the wide range of essays assembled here, this argument is admirably well sustained, with the zoopoetics/ecopoetics nexus serving to show (1) the inherent limits of all forms of representation, and (2) alternatives to realist/mimetic theories of representation that focus instead on the multiple modes of embodiment and agency present within the phenomenal world. Both strands of argument will be familiar to the increasing number of practitioners in ecocriticism and/or animal studies whose work has fallen under the spell of the "new materialism"—less a unified body of theory than an accretion of related ideas and insights brought together by their insistence on the agential capacities of matter, from the unmistakably lively to the apparently inert. Surprisingly, however, new materialism is rarely mentioned here, at least by name, which is perhaps one of the advantages of the volume—that it is not just content to replicate the orthodoxies of "new" cross-disciplinary thinking inspired by the likes of Haraway and other celebrity theorists operating in the wake of the so-called "ecological turn". The volume's emphasis, rather, is on *philology*, a field all too hastily dismissed as being outdated in contemporary Anglo-American literary/cultural criticism. The philological impulse of the volume is clear from early on, with Middelhoff and Schönbeck's introductory chapter patiently working through the layered historical and contemporary meanings of its key terms. Poetics, they assert, is as much about *making* as *meaning*, and in the context of the volume, this includes the world-making capacities of nonhuman animals, who both participate in the process of their own textual

representation and, as Margo Demello—one of the volume's few non-literary scholars— suggests, are the "creative agents of their own lives" (234).

The essays that follow offer a set of variations on this theme, with (mostly) literary readings to match. As with most collections of essays drawn from academic conferences, this creates a "cabinet of curiosities" effect, fascinating but disorienting at the same time, and inevitably less than the sum of its disparate parts. Some of the highlights, at least for me, were among the least expected, as in Dan Gorenstein's finely observed commentary on Ernst Jünger's "entomological hermeneutics" (209), or Verena Meis's extraordinary essay on that extraordinary creature, the jellyfish, which she ingeniously sees as acting as a kind of magnifying glass whose milky translucency allows us, in looking right through the animal, to contemplate our (human) selves (190–91).

Some of the bigger names disappoint: Susan McHugh, for instance, whose essay on bees as "endangered communities" is problematically situated within the context of "the biopolitical legacies of settler colonialism" (304), or Kári Driscoll, the contortions of whose poststructuralist piece on Rilke's zoopoetics culminate in the flat statement that humans and nonhumans participate alike in the "shared co-creation of the world" (173). By and large, it is the younger scholars who shine: Dominic O'Key, for one, whose excellent essay on W.G. Sebald offers the most cogent definition of zoopoetics in the volume (namely, "a mimetic act of translation whereby humans read and interpret what they take to be nonhuman signs": 219); and Alexander Kling, for another, who is honest enough to admit what other, more experienced contributors to the volume seem to be shying away from, i.e. that "ecology" as it is understood here is a primarily "textual concept" (87) rather than an empirical set of scientific methods: a tried-and-tested disciplinary approach. Science, in fact, is largely conspicuous by its absence in the volume, which makes me uneasy, while several of the essays seem almost oblivious to the fact that we are currently going through a devastating phase of extinction in which the proliferation of animals in literature (and, for that matter, animal studies) can hardly compensate for the number of species in decline.

Thus, while it may seem theoretically naïve to speak of the plight of animals in the "real world", it seems almost irresponsible not to; and it is only really Frederike Middelhoff's essay at the end that concedes, albeit tentatively, that "it may be worthwhile to commit [ourselves] to *action* which might transcend the *act* of speaking-for" (352). This is well said, but what kind of action, and on what grounds? Doubtless the volume's editors don't see it as being their task to spell this out, but if zoopoetics and ecopoetics are to have much traction beyond the academy—if they are to make things happen—the question remains as to how to create further, much-needed connections between *aesthetics*, *advocacy* and *activism*: the task, one might have thought, of both ecocriticism and animal studies, however these two mutually informing areas of study are defined.

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Aurélie Choné, Isabelle Hajek and Philippe Hamman (eds.), *Rethinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 268 pp.

Rethinking Nature is a cross-disciplinary volume introducing fields of study that have followed "the green turn" within the humanities in the last three or four decades. Calling on approaches belonging to anthropology, ecology, economics, history, literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and urban planning, this collection of essays provides a sweeping panorama of the environmental humanities. In addition, each chapter ends with a comprehensive bibliography that will be helpful for students or scholars new to any of these individual branches. Bringing together contributions from European scholars, this book casts light on significant work being carried out across the borders of Europe, with the greater portion of essays written by French scholars.

Tackling many of the epistemological crises of the twenty-first century, this book invites us to rethink the concept of "nature" together with many of its related notions, such as the "environment" or "the animal." Encompassing twenty-one chapters, the collection seeks to challenge conventional boundaries separating various academic fields of study in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, most of which intertwine when it comes to re-envisioning the concept of nature. The book opens with an introductory essay by the three editors presenting the aims and objectives of the volume. It closes with another joint piece by the editors highlighting the results of the collective work, providing insights into reflexive and pragmatic dynamics for humans to reconsider and reinvent healthier relationships with the living world. The book is then divided into five parts, each with its own, short introduction that contextualizes the theme and synthesizes very briefly the individual chapters that follow.

Part I, entitled "Values and Actions," moves from environmental ethics to ecosophy, ecospirituality, and ecopsychology. Questioning the values nature has been assigned by modernity, this first part deals with their relevance and pitfalls. Because most of our concepts have been greatly influenced by myths, much focus has recently been paid to the symbolical dimension of ecological awareness. French philosopher Catherine Larrère takes up various strands of ethics of respect and of responsibility in the light of seminal writings by Aldo Leopold, Lynn White Jr., John Baird Callicott, and Hans Jonas, to name but a few. Hicham-Stéphane Afeiss then introduces ecosophy, or deep ecology as founded by Arne Naess, in a chapter that closely connects with the previous one on environmental ethics. In Naess's wake, Afeissa distinguishes between 'shallow' and 'deep' ecological approaches. He then broaches the question whether the nonhuman possesses inherent or instrumental value, to conclude on the essentially

relational properties of the living world. The following two chapters might have come as one, with Aurélie Choné focusing on ecospirituality and Dennis L. Merritt on ecopsychology. Both chapters deal with beliefs in the sacred, with myths, and practices that define the ties between our *oikos* and aspects of our psyche. Choné grapples with the greening of religion and the spiritualization of ecology. While it briefly touches upon the neopagan influence of Earth goddess religions and Native peoples' beliefs and practices, this chapter mostly foregrounds the contributions of white, male thinkers to the field. Merritt synthesizes Theodore Roszak's elaboration of ecopsychology, retracing its roots in and emancipation from Freudian and Jungian theory. He further draws connections with social psychology, behavioral psychology, cognitive, Gestalt, transpersonal, and humanistic psychologies. Stressing the importance of notions such as the numinous and the sacred, Merritt looks into what they may bring to modern society and science; he recalls the endurance of "a totemic self," or "the indigenous within" (Kahn and Hashbach), or again of an "ecological unconscious" (Roszak) within our modern selves. If there is one complaint to be lodged about the chapters in this section, it would have to be that they give short shrift to ecofeminism's significant contributions to ecopsychology.

Part II deals with "Writing and Representations". It starts with a contribution by Nathalie Blanc discussing the notions of nature, forms, and environments, to distinguish between aesthetics of nature and environmental aesthetics. The next chapter by Emmanuelle Peraldo focuses on ecocriticism, seeking to synthesize the birth of the field, its goals and ambitions, which today tie in with geocriticism, an approach advanced by the French scholar Bertrand Westphal. Laurence Dahan then presents "Epistemocritical Perspectives on Nature". She first situates the notion of nature in relationship to culture, then, relying much on Goethe, retraces the naturalization of social and moral relations in the eighteenth century. She further deals with inclinations to humanize nature, tackled through the notions of gardens and grafting, and eventually moves away from the image of nature as harmonious and stable to introduce the posthuman paradigm.

Part III covers "Movements, Activism and Societies". Focusing on the social sciences, it highlights the way many schools of thought and disciplines have evolved to be driven by an "eco" orientation. Catherine Repussard concentrates on the birth and growth of political ecology and the different eras of ecologism, the organizations and intuitions borne from them, and the ideas prevailing within various strands of political ecology. She defines "green capitalism", conviviality, or economics of happiness, as ways to negotiate some of the tensions between market ecology and growth objectors. Margot Lauwers's chapter on "Ecofeminism" first summarizes the history and some of the issues at the heart of the movement, from internal divisions to common misconceptions of ecofeminism, mostly when it comes to essentialism and Eurocentrism. Lauwers then gives an overview of some recent developments in ecofeminist theory. She finally underlines the avant-garde, theoretical and conceptual shifts ecofeminism sometimes fails to be credited for, despite its having laid the grounds for many of the perspectives that are currently being presented as new. The following chapter by Graham Woodgate follows the shift from environmental sociology—focusing on the impacts of

environments onto societies—to ecosociologies, studying the impacts, conversely, of society onto the environment. Woodgate synthesizes how some of the foundational works of sociology (Durkheim, Marx, Weber) have been revisited through a green lens in recent work by Rosa, Richter, Foster, and Holleman. He then elaborates a framework for ecosociologies, defining key concepts such as "conjoint constitution", the "coevolution" of society and nature, "socioecological agency", and taking up Carolan's distinction between "Nature, nature, and 'nature'". Extending Marx's concept of the "metabolic rift" to those of a "planetary rift" (Foster) and a "knowledge rift" (Schneider and McMichael), Woodgate concludes with environmental justice issues such as the ecological debt of the global North to the global South. The chapter written by Eric Navet takes us from anthropogeography to ethnoecology. Starting from the influence of early explorers and geographers on Western thinking, Navet links ethnocide with ecocide while retracing the emergence of a so-called "naturalistic" form of knowledge leading to the modern split between the "natural" sciences and the humanities. He then tackles problematic notions such as "primitive", "traditional" and "pre-industrial societies" which have divided geographers and ethnologists, with each discipline taking a different view of the increasingly complex interactions between human groups and other geographical agents. Navet gives a few examples of the non-Western conceptualizations of the world (Ojibwa, Inuit, Teko, Tupi-Guarani) which ethnologists and anthropologists have studied and which question our own notion of the "environment" (Tim Ingold, Philippe Descola or Jared Diamond), paving the way for ethnoecology and human ecology.

Under the heading "Renewed Ecologies", part IV deals with recent ecological concerns with urban and rural areas. Owain Jones looks at the dichotomy between rural and urban spaces, which has become meaningless in the face of the ongoing ecocide. Eradicating the lines previously separating urban from rural—or "wild"—nature, new ecologies focus our attention and efforts onto urban green spaces, urban wilderness and food production. Isabelle Hajek and Jean-Pierre Lévy's piece on "Urban Ecology" examines the history of the concept from the eighteenth century to the present, where the city is perceived as an urban metabolism (Coutard and Lévy, Barles). Following a paradigm shift from a catastrophic conception of the city to one with more positive takes on urbanization, Hajek and Lévy show that urban ecology has provided a conceptual framework for public action, leading to a variety of "top-down" and grass-roots initiatives. Lionel Charles then summarizes the history of environmental health, shedding light on its ties with the evolution of the very concepts of "health" and "environment". Philippe Hamman's chapter on "Sustainable Urbanism" surveys the interactions between sustainable development and urban development, tackling notions such as "smart cities", "nature in the city", "natural capital", "urban green spaces", and "ecological gentrification". Linked to a form of utopia, the concept of the "sustainable city" provides a new meta-narrative which is wielded at a local level in the era of postmodernity and globalization. Hamman explains that it is based on four major models, i.e. the "recyclable city", the "compact city", the "mixed city", and the "participatory city". Finally, Hamman broaches the problematic notion of urban "resilience" as compared with the emerging movement of "transition towns". Taking up

the metaphor of the metabolism, Nicolas Buchet delves into various models and visions of nature in industrial ecology and their implications. While industrial ecology aims to achieve a closed loop of material and energy flows, it is often built upon the development of environmental technologies, with a questionable belief in the development of geoengineering to save the Earth. Roldan Muradian's chapter then grapples with the "Ecosystem Services Paradigm", another metaphor that has been adopted as a framework in policy and academic circles, based on the notion that nature provides services for the benefit of people. Categorized as "supporting", "provisioning", "regulating", and "cultural", ecosystems services are connected with human well-being and have provided a successful paradigm to renew environmental discourse, despite the analytical problems it poses.

Part V explores human-animal relationships and issues. Eric Navet here again draws from various civilizations and religions in the light of their tendencies toward ecocide and ethnocide. In contrast with the various attempts to do away with nature and to deny humans' kinship with the animal world and the rest of nonhuman nature which have characterized hegemonic civilizations, Navet examines some of the ecological, social and spiritual values at the heart of various indigenous civilizations. Roland Borgards scrutinizes the recent "animal turn" in the humanities and some of the terms, theories, and approaches that have emerged in an effort to rethink animals, namely "animal studies", "human-animal studies", "critical animal studies", and "cultural animal studies", "literary animal studies", and "cultural literary animal studies". Borgards goes over some of the main thinkers of animal studies and key concepts—Foucault's "biopower" and "biopolitics", Agamben's "anthropological machine", Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-animal", Derrida's insistence on plurality, Haraway's notions of "becoming-with" and "companion species", and the new materialist approaches of both Haraway and Latour, with his "actor-network theory" and "political ecology". Eric Baratay then calls for the elaboration of a non-anthropocentric "animal history", or a history of animal cultures, which would combine historical methods with ecological and ethological knowledge, show empathy, and consider animals as fully-fledged subjects. Consequently, a second type of history focused on individuals could lead to the composition of animal biographies. Finally, Sabine White provides an "Outlook" on the Environmental Humanities, presenting some of the institutional frameworks, journals and programs dedicated to the field, its emerging paradigms, and the questions it has opened for future research–a section that might have been better suited at the beginning of the book.

It might be asked whether this collection of essays effectively challenges disciplinary boundaries as suggested by the book's title, considering the subdivision into 21 chapters which actually tends to perpetuate disciplinary boundaries. While the greater themes and parts of the book lend themselves to cross-disciplinary approaches, it might have been more convincing for each part to include one, longer essay braiding together in one piece the various movements and approaches while underscoring their articulations and cross-overs. One area in which this book might be found wanting is the lack of attention paid to ecopoetics, specifically but not solely in the light of material

ecocriticism, to zoopoetics, as well as to biosemiotics—fields which play a crucial role in reconnecting language with "nature", interweaving and urging us to rethink many discourses not only within the environmental humanities but also within popular and scientific discourse. Nevertheless, this book offers a great introduction to the environmental humanities, providing a kaleidoscopic vision of the idea of "nature" which can help us rethink how we have arrived at the present moment of crisis and, potentially, where to look for better ways forward.

Vol.10, no. 1

Mission Statement

This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

Ecozon@ is currently indexed in MLA, OAI, DOAJ, ERIH PLUS, Latindex, Dialnet, ISOC and EBUAH, the institutional repository of the University of Alcalá.

Editorial Board

Vol 10, No 1

Issue published April 27 2019

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Cover image: *Marine bleu* by Ophélie Queffurus

Published by

Universidad de Alcalá

Sponsored by

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Greco
Grupo de Investigación en Ecocrítica
Instituto Franklin - UAH

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