

Editorial 13.1

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozone.2022.13.1.4739>



Urban environments provide both the best hope for reducing overall human ecological impacts and for seeing how fully linked the human is to the non-human even when it seems they are separated, as discussed by Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* from 2008, Timothy Beatley in *Green Urbanism* from 2000, and Christopher Schliephake in *Urban Ecologies* from 2015. Schliephake claims that cities are porous sites exchanging materials and energy constantly across their systems so that “material processes constitute a connecting link between the two spheres [the “human-built” and “natural” environments],” and that “Materials like waste, toxics, or petroleum, easily traverse the boundaries between these different forms of environment and illustrate that their boundary is one of porosity and instability” (xiii). While potentially positive for efforts at sustainability and at reducing developmental spread, densely populated cities can certainly contain toxic accumulations and experience rapid spread of disease through their crowded populations; furthermore, coastal cities face ever more frequent flooding with the rising sea levels of the Anthropocene. When discussing portrayals of urban ecologies today, we must face the enormous challenges of representing their rapidly evolving existence in the face of climate change, the increasing threat of global pandemics, and the blatant inequalities revealed by environmental justice studies. Such challenges become increasingly urgent as the polar regions explode with heat so that their cold spreads down into unprepared southern cities like my own San Antonio, Texas, where many people froze to death in 2021; and as the war in Ukraine smashes land, buildings, and people so that human bodies are left scattered about the urban landscape as if melting from missiles and fire. Witnessing urban violence and destruction occurring with brutal speed in real time, we also face the latest IPCC report on the rapidly closing window of opportunity to slow climate disruption across the planet. Yet, I want to feature not just the war-torn, pandemic-damaged, and overheating or flooding cities in these editorial comments but rather the hope that urban communities offer for large numbers of people seeking the possibility of lower-impact lives rich with culture and green spaces alike. While our last volume, *Ecozon@ 12.2, 2021*, addresses primarily the dramatic and inspiring implications of both ancient and anthropocenic rural areas depicted in the Eco-Georgic, our current issue considers Hip Hop Ecologies and thus primarily urban environments. In the cities across the world, we see environmental injustice brutally mapped across neighborhoods and yet also the potential for attending to the myriad voices who speak there, and what they say and sing about power, energy, ecologies, and representation.

Our special themed section guest edited by Timo Müller and Alain-Philippe Durand presents an exciting array of essays on the very urban genre of Hip Hop music. Their introduction corrects the overly simplistic assumption that Hip Hop focuses exclusively

on social issues. They demonstrate in their discussion both the urban origins of Hip Hop as well as its recent reflections on environmentally relevant issues such as race, class, gender, public safety, and urban space. Müller and Durand note “it becomes clear that hip hop has from its origins been much concerned with environments, places and spaces, ecologies, and their effect on humans.” In fact, they explain that “eco hip hop” since 2007 addresses such issues as sustainability, veganism, and environmental justice. The articles included in this volume explore Hip Hop’s depiction of nature, urban spaces, the metaphors rap takes from the environment, concepts borrowing from or engaging in conversations with nature writing, the ecology of built environments, activism with water issues, and “The Cultural Ecology of Alaskan Indigenous Hip Hop.” Through attention to such varied topics, Müller and Durand explain that “hip hop expands the purview of academic study in that it challenges culturally and conceptually limited notions of the environment.” This urban music form provides opportunities for global voices of the marginalized and oppressed to be heard, and for us to rethink delineations of interdisciplinary environmental discourse.

With the increasingly apparent importance of studying urban environments in ecocriticism, it is not surprising that the four essays in our general section also include two focusing on urban genres and topics. The first essay by Alejandro Rivero-Vadillo connects nicely to the themed section’s music focus with its groundbreaking study, “Greening Black Metal: The EcoGothic Aesthetics of Botanist’s Lyrics.” While acknowledging some of the darker and more politically problematic aspects of older Black Metal explained his brief history, Rivero-Vadillo provides one of the few discussions of the genre’s attention to environmental issues with a focus on the US band Botanist. Using an apt frame of the EcoGothic, this important contribution notes that while “[e]arly Black Metal embraced the questionable dichotomy of “Civilization vs. Nature,” and problematic forms of nihilism (environmentally speaking), Botanist, in contrast, poeticizes “a mythical space that seems to sanctify Nature,” especially plants. Rivero-Vadillo demonstrates how the dark power of nature in Botanist’s lyrics rises up against human industrial destruction and, with EcoGothic overtones, fights back with its monstrous green forest and self-regulating vegetal universe. This verdant realm puts into question, Rivero-Vadillo concludes, the very categories and hierarchies of human and nature in the Chthulucene.

Leonardo Chinchilla Mora’s essay, “Capitalism Clothes it: Toxic Resilience and Undemocratization in the Face of Climate Change,” also focuses on urban themes, specifically the discourse of flooded cities in the Anthropocene. Studying the two climate-change novels, Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140* (2017), Chinchilla Mora demonstrates how the rhetoric of resilience is used by capitalistic discourse to continue destructive and toxic practices even in the face of the massive flooding that destroys New York City in the two novels. Furthermore, the essay makes important contributions to urban studies with its focus on how public spaces prove to be far more democratic in terms of helping the most people in times of crisis. Private spaces, on the other hand, are reserved for the “elite” and offer poor long-term and large scale options for surviving urban life in climate change. Chinchilla Mora concludes that these two novels “imply that private-focused economy undermines democracy and (the defense of) public places. It is only by reconfiguring the blueprints for the human envisioning of places *together with* the surrounding environment—*not dominant* to it” that there is potential hope for human and non-human alike.

The two additional essays in the general section offer insights into rural environments and how they connect to urban spaces in terms of interactions with the nonhuman and agricultural practices: Vanesa Roldán Romero's discussion of sheep and post/colonial discourse in Ireland: "Colonising the Nonhuman Other in Anne Haverty's *One Day as a Tiger*," and Jing Hu's study of environmental racism in the Chinese Tibetan-Jiarong author, Alai's 2005-2009 trilogy, *Hollow Mountain: A Story from a Mountainside Tibetan Village*: "La "línea divisoria" en el hukou: La injusticia medioambiental y la población rural en *Montaña hueca* de Alai." Roldán Romero studies Haverty's 1997 novel in terms of how the human Martin adopts colonial language and practices in his treatment of his genetically-engineered sheep, Missy, who has human DNA. Exploiting and leaving Missy to die, Martin fails to overcome the colonial past of the Republic of Ireland. Instead, Martin stands in for the "Celtic Tiger Ireland" with its turn to internal colonization deflected onto the sheep: "Physically dominated by the Irishman, the sheep is treated as property to be exploited by the coloniser, Martin, until her usefulness is exhausted. Here, she will be sacrificed, as if mirroring how the British used to sacrifice Irish culture and traditions." Hu's study similarly combines social justice issues with eco-social realities, attending to how Alai "identifies the rural population as one of the potential collectives exposed to great levels of environmental pressure," even as there is little discourse in contemporary China about environmental justice. She looks specifically at "how social inequality established by the *hukou* (system of household registration) led to environment-related consequences for rural communities during the 20th century." The registration allowed a specific division between agricultural and rural populations that led to exploitation and further pressure on those living on the land. These essays thus explore various narratives from across the world about the porous and messy boundaries between the rural and the urban spaces.

The Creative Writing and Arts section expands the discussion of green hip hop, presenting three original pieces of lyrical autobiographical narratives that all link in creative ways different social issues to environmental justice. The first piece by Anthony Kwame Harrison expresses how Black communities are often excluded from environmental discussions. Accompanying his piece are three images by the digital artist Ahad Pace, including the marvelous image on the cover of the issue. Steve Gadet's fictional tale, *Même les Tueurs Dorment (Even the Killers Sleep)*, describes the life of a young drug dealer in ghetto of Texaco in Martinique's capital city, Fort-de-France. Finally, Leonardo Chinchilla Mora, the author of one of the essays in the general section, also contributes a poem, "Suppose a World," considering the utopian hope for the future alongside fear of ecological devastation with a lyrical call to rethink our current practices.

This volume includes a review essay of *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* and *Mountains and the German Mind: Translations from Gessner to Messner*; and reviews of the following seven books: *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene*; *Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanted the Earth*; *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought*; *Deutschsprachiges Nature Writing von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart. Kontroversen, Positionen, Perspektiven*; *Black to Nature: Pastoral Return and African American Culture*; *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung*; and *Visualizando el cambio. Humanidades ambientales / Envisioning Change: Environmental Humanities*.

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