Editorial
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Gardening (against) the Anthropocene

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As present times force us to reassess our interconnection to the more-than-human world, it becomes essential to cultivate ways of life rooted in bonds of reciprocity that disrupt human-centered practices fueling extractive relations with the environment. Such a worldview recalibration implies addressing anthropogenic damage and its asymmetrically distributed effects, including the global processes that entangle to form the Anthropocene, from capitalist interests to imperialist and colonial practices. While the term "Anthropocene" has been widely contested, especially to counter the silencing of social inequalities implied in understandings of humanity as a homogenous species, the current journal issue aligns with Anna Tsing's framing of the term, which recognizes its potential to generate "concept-changing conversations" (13).

This radical paradigm shift includes rethinking the role given to gardens and their potential to encourage the adoption of a multispecies lens when we enter into a dialogue with landscape. Functioning as a mediation between humans and nature, gardens have historically been associated in western cultures to control and values of human superiority over nature. As a result, their cultural significance reflects the symbolic meanings that nature hold for us. At the same time, gardens are also deeply tied to economical exploitation of the land and have been—and still often are—places of privilege and hegemony. In other words, quoting Shelley Saguaro, "gardens are subject to, and subjects of, the discourses of history, aesthetics and ideology" (ix). Yet, precisely because of the legacies of oppression tied to the history of gardens, they can turn into sites of transgression and transformation, especially through food security activism, community gardening, and the reclaiming of unused or misused property or public spaces. Most importantly, by recognizing them as ecosystems of mutual interdependence where one can restore trans-species justice, they become powerful "places of mutually imagined construction" (Bayes 37).

All seven artistic contributions in the current issue challenge, from various angles, the dominant ideologies tied to gardens. By engaging with the blurring of urban, suburban, and rural boundaries, landscape design, ethics of care, garden politics, multispecies entanglements, and decolonial practices, gardens are creatively reimagined

as reciprocal and relational sites. In fact, in each of the narratives, plants and other more-than-human inhabitants of the garden are not only active participants in the construction of multispecies communities, but also protagonists of their own histories. Hence, by engaging in the generative encounter between multispecies collaboration and storytelling, both vital tools for challenging the Anthropocene, the authors build meaningful and promising connections to place. As a result, the series of interwoven contributions takes readers on a journey of radical hope and resistance grounded in multispecies alliances: the three photographic essays by documenting multispecies encounters in specific, circumscribed local contexts; the four poems by attuning our sensory perception to the vitality of nonhuman microcosms. While the first three contributions can be read independently, their revitalizing potential emerges more vigorously when read as a tryptic.

In *Rewinding Suburbia*, the garden designer Benjamin Vogt, proposes to create "islands of refuge" as a means to re-engage with nature in urban areas. By reinstituting wild prairie on Nebraska's lawns, the aim is not only to reverse a canon of beauty tied to colonialism, namely that of English gardens, but also to highlight the erasure of ongoing structures of power tied to homeownership and accumulation of intergenerational wealth for predominantly white settler descendants in suburban areas. Additionally, in reaction to agricultural monocultures, a predominant landscaping mode driving environmental degradation on a global scale, the author advocates for an inclusive garden design attentive also to the interests of more-than-human actors, whose cultures are valued as much as their "language of hunger, desire, and hope." Besides celebrating echinacea flowers standing out like "exclamation marks" on the restored lawns, Vogt also admires the diverse communities of insects enlivening these spaces, indirectly raising awareness on the daunting silence of insects in the Anthropocene, whose rapid decline threatens the collapse of our ecosystems. By shifting, then, to a value system that respects multispecies existence, landscape gardening turns into a "liberating and empowering, and perhaps, subversive act."

Moving to a different geographical area, the second photographic essay by Agnese Bankovska is rooted in ethnographic fieldwork carried out in three different garden settings in Helsinki, Finland: the plantation plots in the Greater Helsinki area, a communal initiative in the industrial district, and the author's own terrace garden in a suburban area. Grounded in methodologies that foster a multispecies ethics of care, the author focuses on pollinators, so-called "unwanted" species, and soil. In particular, she exposes hierarchies of care based on profitability, which are responsible for the discriminatory labeling of plants as "weeds" according to mobile notions of belonging and exclusion. At the core of the project lies a desire to abandon the harmful rhetoric of "invasiveness" in favour of multisensorial practices grounded in attentiveness to multispecies presence. Once again, acknowledging the "loud conversations" taking place in these shared spaces, illustrates the intricate dynamics of interspecies (re)negotiation that gardens can stimulate.

The third and last photographic essay represents a reinvigorating example of land-based resistance and guerrilla gardening. Written by dp patrick in collaboration with

"allied calendulas against bulldozers," it chronicles the vicissitudes of tending to "The Big Gay Garden" planted as an act of protest during the 2018 union strike at York University, Canada. Blending queer praxis and radical ecology, the author celebrates the embodied exchange of experiential knowledge across the species line, which in turn transforms the act of gardening into a "tactile and tactical intervention into the symbolic and material geographies of the campus and the political praxes of the strike itself." As the thriving land offered teachings on nonhierarchical relationality, mutual care, and resilience, the "Gay Gardeners" learned from her how to embrace patience as an antidote to activist burnout, a process that includes learning how to move at a "snail's pace," and to privilege joy over hopelessness. The photographs accompanying the text, one of which enriches the cover of the journal, function as a visual reminder of the power of the land "to absorb and transmute collective grief, rage, anger, and despair into nourishment, beauty, sweetness, and delight."

The transition to poetry encourages an even deeper attunement to nonhuman temporalities, enabled by the ability of fiction to celebrate the garden as "a poetic, literary, mythological, and magical space" (Solnit 75). In fact, the poems act as a magnifying glass amplifying the livelihoods of single flowers or trees, while embedding them into broader (non)human cultures and histories. Starting with Mary Newell's poem, *Tongue All Out*, readers enter a world of weather imbalance to meditate on the impacts of climate change on gardens. Co-editor of the mindblowing volume *Poetics for the More-than-Human World: An Anthology of Poetry and Commentary*, Newell has also authored a chapbook as well as several poems in journals, all exhibiting a strong ecological inclination. Already from the title of the poem, Newell evokes a sense of loss mixed with suspension, intensified by the sequence of eight tercets, which imbues the poem with a rhythmic cadence that simulates repetitive time cycles. The overwhelming heat permeating the poem is reiterated through lexical choices connected to an excess of light: "sun-glare," "solar brutishness," "sun blast." An increase in aridity is also evoked through the repetition of the word "dry" in the first tercet, further reinforced by a sense of desolation elicited by the image of cup-shaped flowers, usually highly attractive to pollinators, turned into inhospitable dwelling places due to the water shortage. The isolation of the word "empty" at the end of the tercet, set between two punctuation marks, upsets syntactical expectations of words ordinarily dependent on each other, which echoes the disruption of interspecies relations taking place in the garden due to changes in weather patterns. To build empathy toward nonhuman struggles, the poet employs anthropomorphic images to strategically relate nonhuman coping mechanisms in times of drought to a human bodily experience. And so, plant stems stand tall like necks stretching in the air, petals "limp" like fatigued limbs, and drooping cups become hand palms waiting "for a settling petrichor."

Moving on to Antonello Borra's contribution, *Erbario* is an example of literary floriculture composed of four short poems in Italian with parallel English text, each one named after a plant: dragon lily, mint, great celandine, and snowdrop. In the abstract, the author writes, "disappointed by mankind I started writing about animals, now it is plants. I have been descending along the hierarchies of the great chain of being in search for a place with peace." With these poems, the descent into the world of plants uncovers the

role they play in the construction of human cultural traditions, including histories of magical herbalism and botanical lore. Enriched by a mythological tone, the imaginative journey of the first two poems originates from the fragrance of the protagonist flower species: the scent of dragon lily, disliked by humans but appreciated by insect pollinators, a sign of different perceptual worlds coexisting to maintain ecological balance, and the aroma of mint, or "refreshing green," desired even by underground gods. The third poem takes inspiration from the etymological history of the plant's name, celandine, which derives from the Ancient Greek word *chelidon*, meaning *swallow*, hence its association with the bird who is considered a herald of Spring. By honoring its cultural history, the poet restores dignity to a plant that is commonly listed as an "invasive" weed in gardens. The last poem takes on a more overt political tone to address the residue of white supremacy lingering in the symbolic value attributed to flowers. Merging the etymological roots of the flowers' name to their peculiar trait as winter bloomers, the poet defines snowdrops "winter milk," alluding to the dominance of whiteness in the western/imperialist/religious imaginary, made even more explicit by the syntactic correlation between "white supremacy" and "poison."

Continuing with the cultural histories of plants, William Bond contributes a poem about an eastern American black walnut tree, which offers a metapoetic consideration on our epistemic limits in grasping nonhuman life-worlds beyond visible horizons: "your hope of a whole in the tree's shape – branches marginal, roots only more so." The branches of the tree extend too high up, the roots too far below. The insistence on a semantics of negation stresses even further this epistemic hurdle, while depicting the nature-culture dichotomy as a flaw in human mental constraints (i.e. "unfastening," "unwinds," "lacks the heft," "not even in its permanence"). The poem thus problematizes an approach to knowledge-making that excludes the countless microscopic interactions occurring outside our perceptual reach. Yet, communities of birds find a home on the tree's branches, such as "the grackles" chatting away, while the walnut tree leaves "ink-stained" traces in the ground, just like humans recording their cultures and (hi)stories through writing. Ultimately, the majestic shape of the tree escapes full comprehension. This epistemological failure resembles the gap existing between signifier and signified, thus pointing to the inherent inadequacy of reductionist approaches to grasp the complexity of more-than-human lifeforms.

In response to these limitations, the last creative contribution proposes to embrace a process of linguistic decolonization in order to achieve liberation from histories of nomenclature oppression, an integral facet of epistemic injustice. In her poem in six parts, Elizabeth Bolton traces the natural history of fiddleheads, a plant native to northeastern Turtle Island (North America) and a traditional food, to remind readers that words and names carry a legacy of meaning that holds potentially harmful consequences. While reflecting on the relationship between gardening and conquest, Jamaica Kincaid writes in her memoir, *My Garden (Book)*, that "to name is to possess" (114-124). Bolton's poems closely echo this statement, stressing the need to confront power dynamics hidden in language. As an example, the second poem, *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, once *Onoclea struthiopteris,* engages directly with the issue of oppressive naming practices by

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questioning Linnaean taxonomy, whose founder is defined as "a second Adam naming and claiming dominion over species around the globe." The poet also narrates the appropriation of fiddleheads by "refugee-colonists" to make their own recipes, thus exposing the impact of colonial practices also on ancestral foodways. Yet, the fern resists; the "spiral of resilience" survives through centuries of social, cultural, and ecological violence, ready to rewrite history.

To conclude, the body of creative contributions included in this issue brings attention to the regenerative abundance and ecological awareness provided by gardens, while highlighting the opportunities to cultivate multispecies collaboration within these sites. To people asking for a recommendation on how to restore human relationships with the land, Robin Wall Kimmerer's most frequent answer is: "Plant a garden" (134). Admittedly, the garden is a site where kin-centric multispecies communities can flourish and, most importantly, where the *plotting* of collective liberation can be enacted, both literally and figuratively. However, as the seven authors hereby show, to truly be revolutionary, the act of gardening must be rooted in decolonizing efforts that intentionally remove systemic barriers to land access, while tackling the problematic legacy of naming practices that nonhuman species unwillingly carry with them.

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