Gardening (against) the Anthropocene
An Introduction

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At the beginning of her brilliant, iconoclastic gardening memoir *My Garden (Book):* Jamaica Kincaid tells two stories that, together, serve as an excellent introduction to the idea of gardening in the Anthropocene. In the first story, she describes the gift that inaugurated her attachment to the garden: "a hoe, a rake, a spade, a fork, some flower seeds to mark the occasion of that thing known as Mother's Day" (3). With her gifts, Kincaid "went outside and dug up a large part of the small yard, a patch that had never been cultivated, and put all seeds in the packets in the ground" (3). The results were disappointing, "for nothing grew, the ground was improperly prepared, it was in the shade of a big oak tree and a big maple tree" (4). Kincaid's first venture into gardening became even more disappointing when she learned that the tomato plants her neighbor grew not only thrived but also bore fruit that "tasted most delicious" (4) despite fact that they were exposed to the toxins from the building materials of the neighbor's house.

In the second story, Kincaid describes another garden she began some years later, in which she hired a neighbor to dig up strange, irregular patches of soil for new beds "so that the house would eventually seem to be protected by a moat made not of water but the result of an enthusiastic beginning familiarity with horticulture" (6). She was reading a book on the conquest of Mexico at the time, finding in the process references to marigolds and dahlias and zinnias, and it eventually dawned on her that the shapes she wanted to make in the garden "resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it" (8). For Kincaid, the epiphany served as a moment of embodied remembrance that connected her Vermont garden to her Antiguan past and to the conquest of Mexico, including the colonial plunder of its plants.

On one hand, Kincaid's self-critical reflection of her first steps into the practice of gardening expose some of the major problems of life in the Anthropocene, an epoch that bears the mark of the human, or rather, of capitalist modernity's reliance on the logics of science, technology, consumerism, colonialism, and the market. For that which seems to be in a state of nature (the patch in the back yard that had never been cultivated) does not bring seeds to germinate and grow into plants while that which grows in the vicinity of

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poisonous toxins (the very signature of modernity's failure to understand the principles of healthy ecologies) grows into deceptively tasteful food. The story also shows the ignorance of modern humans when it comes to basic knowledge about plants and the environmental conditions they need to flourish, while at the same time it highlights the joy and emotional enthusiasm that is generated by the very prospect of working the soil and cultivating beauty and nourishment.

On the other hand, Kincaid's observation that her garden is a site of embodied memory with global, colonial origins and resonances highlights the fact that gardening has been, and continues to be, implicated in the political and economic relationships that lie at the core of the Anthropocene, including the often-forced movement of plants and people from place to place and the replacement of complex ecosystems with culturally and ecologically impoverished monocultures. Although we would qualify that a garden is not necessarily a plantation in Anna Tsing's sense of the Plantationocene (Haraway and Tsing), it would be naïve not to remember—as Kincaid clearly does—that gardens have been instruments of colonization and recipients of plunder, that local horticultural practices are enmeshed in relations of international trade and migration, and that the idea of the garden as an Edenic space that exists outside global political ecologies is clearly now, and has been for at least hundreds of years, a considerable, and often willful, misrepresentation.

Following Kincaid, we consider that gardening *in* the Anthropocene means we need to acknowledge and work within the histories that have generated the political, ecological, economic, and social crises we are confronted with in the twenty-first century, histories in which gardens can be themselves implicated as sites of colonial, capitalist activity. We understand, then, that gardening *against* the Anthropocene means we need to place relations of justice at the center of our work alongside those of environmental sustainability. Gardening *in and against* the Anthropocene asks us to remember that gardens embody and enact complex biopolitical entanglements; to attend to the ways gardens have, both historically and in the present, been sites of contestation and resistance; and to imagine how gardens can be generative of more just and equitable futures, including more attentive and respectful relations with the natural world. And, of course, gardening can involve the cultivation of flourishing, joy and abundance in the active company of others, both human and more-than-human: in this sense, perhaps gardening can be understood as a potentially prefigurative practice to help take us *out of* the Anthropocene.

This issue of *Ecozon@* includes eight articles that begin from specific places, texts, and practices to ask how gardens are implicated in different Anthropocenic histories; how gardens thread through literary texts, performing complex symbolic work in relation to their larger social and ecological contexts; how gardens are rich sites of multispecies practice that bridge art, philosophy, science, and craft; and how gardening, done well, can contribute to reparative, restorative, and/or decolonial forms of more-than-human world-making.

In the article "Gardening the Planet: Literature and the Reimagining of Human/Nature Relations for the Anthropocene," ecocritical scholar Axel Goodbody reads

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761) and Michael Pollan's *Second Nature* (1991), a collection of autobiographical essays about gardening, as texts which, although separated by genre conventions, language, history, and geography, are connected through their representation of horticultural practices as modes that may help "humanity … to survive in the Anthropocene." For Goodbody, garden literature—a term by which he means both prose fiction and nonfiction garden writing produced in Europe and North America—can be understood as an archive of "Anthropocene thinking." Independent of genre or historical location, garden literature is presented as a tool for tracing the complicated history of "the quest for a sustainable form of [human] interaction with the natural environment." From the pages of Goodbody's contribution, the garden emerges as a place and a space created and inhabited by *Homo hortensis*, a paradoxical figure that represents Western culture's proclivity of control and mastery as well as the desire to find better, more sustainable ways of living from and with nature. This horticultural paradox—the desire for control and mastery on the one hand, and for coproduction and coexistence on the other—is one constituent of the political dimension of the garden, and of gardening in (and against) the Anthropocene.

An equally political component of gardening is investigated in literary scholar Jordan A. Norviel's essay on Harlem Renaissance poet and activist Anne Spencer (1882 – 1975). The daughter of former slaves, Spencer has not received much scholarly attention but nevertheless, was a vital actor in the intellectual, literary, and artistic community of the Harlem Renaissance. In her garden and home in Lynchburg, Virginia, she hosted such prominent figures as W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston, thus providing a "location of [Black] social and intellectual life" amidst the discriminatory reality of the Jim Crow South. By taking Spencer's reading (and annotation) of garden and seed catalogues as seriously as her perusal of Browning, Housman, and Whitman, Norviel is able to demonstrate that this Harlem Renaissance poet ultimately invites her readers "to think of ecology [as] existing in the permeability of the social, lyrical, and botanical spaces." From Norviel's readings, Spencer emerges as an Anthropocene poet *avant la lettre* and an ecological thinker whose work as both a poet and a gardener requires her to continuously respond to the history of oppression and racism inscribed in the botanical nomenclature and cultural history of gardening. More than just a refuge in a world torn by the cultural and physical violence of anti-black racism, Spencer's garden "served as connective tissue between Virginia and Harlem, rupturing the stability of a singular, isolated landscape." By highlighting the proximity of Spencer's poetic and horticultural interests, Norviel contributes to the work of uncovering the ecological foundation of the Harlem Renaissance.

In "(Re)creating a Living Memorial: Urban Gardening as a More-than-Human Co-creating Practice," artist-scholar JC Niala reflects on a work she created during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic that employed a garden-plot near Oxford, U.K., to remember and perform unrecognized, embodied connections between the current pandemic and the so-called Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. Noting, poignantly, that "we ask a lot of gardens, both practically and in our imaginations," she considers in her reflection both larger histories of gardens as sites of memorial practice and the specific dynamics of embodied

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memory involved in her project, *1918 Allotment*. In the work, Niala created a small vegetable garden in the style of early twentieth-century allotment gardens such as the ones promoted in the *Dig for DORA* (Defence of the Realm Act) campaign during the First World War. Using T.W. Sanders' 1918 manual *Kitchen Garden and Allotment,* she planted the "King Edward potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, onion, peas, radish, runner bean, kale, and turnip" that he recommended, at the same time reflecting on his language—e.g., "vegetal foes"—and the practices he advocated, such as the production and use of blood meal, in the context of the war-wrought antagonisms, the killing fields, the land enclosures, and—perhaps especially—the biocidal technologies that emerged from the war such as DDT. As Niala describes, the *1918 Allotment* project enabled conversations with visitors to the garden that entwined the two pan/epidemics in important ways; that connected them to technologies of war, experiences of loss, and legacies of violence; and that reminded them of their personal relationships to place and history. In both the garden and her shared poetic reflections on it, Niala reminds us about the importance of the relationship between gardens and memory, and also of the particular importance of soil as a medium of memory, both human and interspecies.

In "*Le Jardin d'Allah:* Ecological Sensibilities in the Francophone Caribbean," multidisciplinary scholar Chiara Lanza mobilizes post-colonial theory and agroecological concepts of human-soil relations for a reading of Maryse Condé's novel *En Attendant la Montée des Eaux* (2010; Engl. Trans. *Waiting for the Waters to Rise,* 2021). Gardens and landscapes are not at the center of the stories told in the novel. Yet by focussing her analysis on Movar, one of the novel's protagonists who keeps a small garden patch in his backyard, Lanza shows that close critical attention to otherwise inconspicuous aspects of a novel may reveal the ecological undercurrents of its narrative, while at the same time positioning human stories within the extended "timescapes of nature." As Lanza argues, Caribbean ecologies are obvious examples of the "double fracture" characteristic of the Anthropocene—he intertwined environmental and social violences of colonization and structural racism—including the impoverishment of the soil that is the ongoing legacy of plantation agriculture. In this ongoing history, gardens, and especially the "provision grounds" in which enslaved people were forced to grow their own food, often served as spaces of cultural resistance and resurgence; these gardens, "at the same time physically within and imaginatively beyond the controlled plantation boundaries," are now places of relatively greater biodiversity and soil health. As Lanza demonstrates, in a similar manner "Movar's acts of gardening and kinship-making perform a healing function" in the context of contemporary turmoil and displacement in the region, including the threat of rising sea levels. These acts cultivate more-than-human intimacies and entanglements and, especially, they highlight the agencies of vegetal actors in gardens that, in Movar's case, might continue to do healing work even after his tragic and violent death. As Lanza concludes, "through the character of Movar, Condé shows that literature can be both aesthetically pleasing and ecologically aware": like a provision garden in the midst of mass plantation enslavement, the story of Movar's small patch of healing serves as a space of resistant possibility against the Anthropocene.

Gardening practices are at the center of the texts analysed in the contribution by

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Americanist Maria Sulimma. In recent years, urban gardening has been approached as a practice that disrupts the division between nature and culture, city and countryside. As guerrilla gardening, urban gardening is still perceived as a form of political protest and civil disobedience to spatial practices that privilege the individual interests of private investors over the common interests of communities in livable neighborhoods. In "'I am not by any stretch a gardener, just curious': Feminist Gentrifier Memoirs and an Ethics of Urban Gardening," Sulimma draws on Vikki Warner's *Tenemental* (2018) and Anne Elizabeth Moore's *Gentrifier* (2021), two examples of nonfiction garden writing that address the ethical contradictions as well as the emotional dilemma experienced by two feminists who, in spite of their dedication to the causes of equality and justice, cannot completely avoid to become instrumental in processes of green gentrification. Yet Sulimma also demonstrates that their critical self-awareness "is a necessary first step for combatting" the ill-effects of gentrification. Nevertheless, as Sulimma argues, "at its core, the feminist gentrifier memoir is a paradoxical text," one that represents the garden and gardening as frameworks for "improvised moments of connectedness" and for building "informal networks of neighborly care" but that ultimately fails to realize "the potential for anti-gentrification activism."

In "Gardening (against) the Anthropocene: Sustainable Counter-Narratives to Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus,*" feminist critical plant studies scholar Prudence Gibson turns to a novel that has long been read as a parodic response to the ecological devastation caused by settler colonialism on the Australian continent. Reading it a second time twenty-four years after it was first published in 1998, Gibson "detected an absence of decolonial context in the book … and an unintended reinforcement of misogyny that requires fresh interrogation." In her essay, Gibson brings Bail's novel into dialogue with the work of Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood and with an art project conducted by the Dirt Witches, a collective of artists and writers, in Sydney in 2021, which involved the planting of a permanent urban forest. Writing as a member of the Dirt Witches, Gibson reads Bail's use of parody as a form of ethical nonchalance, asking whether "he uses a parodic tone to relieve himself of authorial responsibility, and instead to recolonise and re-objectify the trees, as assets, as objects of curious interest." Becoming aware of the possible pitfalls of Bail's well-intentioned novelistic critique of the Anthropocene, Gibson then shares with her readers how this critical re-reading of a literary text informed the creation of the Dirt Witches' urban gardening project. In particular, she emphasizes the project's insistence on concrete strategies of decolonization, including extensive consultation with First Nations and acknowledgement of their prior cultural knowledge of sustainable scrublands and, especially, an emphatic understanding that the urban forest they created in the project was – in counterpoint to Bail—"an artwork (constructed, conceptual and synthetic) not a re-wilding."

In "Sensing Scale in Experimental Gardens: Un-Lawning with Silphium Civic Science," multidisciplinary authors and collaborators Aubrey Streit Krug, Ellie Irons and Anna Andersson begin with a single plant, indigenous to the middle part of what is now the United States, and reflect on how a local, interdisciplinary civic science/gardening project both embodied and intervened in multiple scales of Anthropocenic social and

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ecological relationship. The yellow-flowering *Silphium integrifolium*, also known by many other names, inspired a collective gardening experiment in which participants were "invited to plant, care for, and study garden-scale plots of different silphium ecotypes" in order to conserve locally-adapted populations of the species and consider the plant's role in future projects of conservation, restoration, and domestication in the region. As part of the project, Irons developed a video "silphium story" that catalyzed, in conversation with Timothy Clark's observations about the importance of "scale framing" to Anthropocenic interventions, the authors' consideration of how a small project about silphium gardening might also underscore much larger "questions of how humans collectively relate to the larger living Earth systems or ecosphere in which we are embedded." In their analysis, the video, "Un-Lawning with Silphium," reveals and develops the importance of thinking about gardening as not only a *multispecies*, but also a *multi-scalar* practice, including personal relationships between human and plant bodies; garden-scale relationships involving multiple communities and neighborhoods in their different commitments to the land; lawn-scale relationships that speak of the pervasive influence of settler-colonial and industrial relations on the landscapes in which the silphium experiments took place; and food-energy-water scales that bring questions of biogeochemical relationships into play, including industrial agriculture and its dependence on fossil fuels but also including the petrochemical relations that support even the most environmentally-aware, local biodiversity projects. The authors conclude that scale-framing highlights the potential contradictions involved in gardening in and against the Anthropocene, and "offer a framework to visualize and support experimental engagement with nested and cross-scalar relationships in gardening projects."

In "Gardening the Symbiocene: Andrea Zanzotto's and Daria Menicanti's Poetic Hospitability," environmental humanities scholar Serena Ferrando takes up recent ecocritical calls to explore how writing can stage new relations between human and nonhuman, both in the garden and more broadly. Specifically, she considers how the works of the two Italian poets "employ vegetal and elemental narratives that … resist translation into the language of humans and stage encounters among living beings that offer a new way forward." Drawing inspiration from the burgeoning scholarship in critical plant studies on vegetal liveliness, and especially from Italian philosopher Emanuele Coccia's 2018 book *La Vita Delle Piante* that envisions a new cosmology based on the interpenetrating life-worlds of plants, she explores how vegetal ontologies of permeability, fluidity, and immersion find articulate expression in the two poets' works. Although Zanzotto's expansive, experimental texts are far better known than Menicanti's more classical and contained poetry, Ferrando places them in conversation to consider how their language and imagery intertwine to produce poems that "take us back to our life by making the vegetal world prominent and showing the deep and complex entanglements of bodies, language, and earth." As she demonstrates through close reading, Zanzotto's strategy is to "plunge[…] us into the landscape with a disorienting, overwhelming poetic experience that is meant to capture the entirety of the life of the territory and its vegetal presence, which overflows the limits of human language." In contrast, Menicanti's works are "meticulously arranged forms [that] contain within them

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a sense of the marvelous, so much so that her books may be labeled herbaria and bestiaries." In their shared vegetal attentiveness, however, both poets draw into palpable presence a "poetic hospitality" that invites conversation between human and vegetal worlds, toward an experience of the present moment as *Symbiocene*—connected, proximate, collaborative—rather than human-dominant Anthropocene.

Finally, in the arts section of the issue, we are pleased to present both a wealth of poetic ruminations on plants and gardening and a triptych of photographic essays. In these essays, Benjamin Vogt, Agnese Bankovska and dp patrick offer important, place-based images and reflections about the work gardens perform in diverse, Anthropocenic moments. Vogt's focus is on landscapes of the suburban, United States midwest and how *rewilding*—planting and tending native species instead of lawns and carefully attending to what happens as a result—can contribute to an enriched sense of place. Bankovska's work considers different kinds of gardening in and around Helsinki, Finland, and the ways gardeners make sense of multispecies relationships amid their desires for food production. Patrick's reflection on a garden planted in the middle of a bitter labor dispute in Toronto, Canada, demonstrates how gardening can serve as a reminder of relationships and temporalities that lie askance to political conflict. Especially when read together, these photo-essays demonstrate the polyvalence of gardens and, in particular, their significant contributions to embodied, place-specific conversations and conflicts about past, present, and future socio-ecological imaginaries.

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