

## Editorial 14.1

Heather I. Sullivan

Trinity University, USA

[ecozone.associate.editor@gmail.com](mailto:ecozone.associate.editor@gmail.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozone.2023.14.1.5096>



Gardening enacts and engages multiple forms of power, both vegetal and human-cultural power. Certainly, creating a garden means tapping into the power of plants that includes both large-scale vegetal beings as well as single-celled photosynthesizing oceanic algae; on all scales, plant power fuels the majority of multicellular living things, including human beings, with food energy and the oxygen that we need to survive. While both gardening and agriculture are human activities working with the green in a manner as if we human beings were the primary shapers of the land, these activities actually reveal our obvious yet all-too-often overlooked dependency on these energy-producing lives; that is, the power relations are often presented backwards in the self-aggrandizing human expressions of working with life-supporting vegetal power. In any case, the power of gardening is not limited to its production of edible life, nor to the fact that plant power takes so many other forms upon which we depend such as the vegetal remnants that we burn for energy: wood, peat, and fossil fuels. In fact, human power often constructs itself with an illusory belief that our minds (easily) dominate matter—especially vegetal matter—even while human power is not only fed by plants but is, in fact, often represented by gardens themselves. These gardens as power can be the religious images of spaces like Eden and the ancient Yggdrasil tree, or the large-scale palace gardens of aesthetic flowers and decorative plants surrounding or within elaborate buildings. Such gardens function as an age-old signal that we have land, time, water, and enough energy to surround our architectural constructions with pleasing and humanly-shaped vegetal beauty that extends as far outwards as our social status allows. But cultural exploitation of gardens extends well beyond palace beauties to include agricultural systems that have exploited in the past, and continue to exploit, other human beings in some of the most brutal forms of human power abuse such as slavery, feudalistic land systems, or the contemporary impoverished crop workers denied decent wages and often citizenship. One should also mention colonial imports of “exotic species” for special gardens and greenhouses as well as the import of colonial plants from one area to another, overwriting ecosystems around the world in the name of profit or even science. Finally, one should not forget the massive power of plants to respond to human activities, as we see with invasive species that cannot be corralled and with herbicide-resistant plants retaking agricultural fields with a destructive fury.

Gardening differs from agriculture, however, since the latter typically evokes much bigger systems of impact. Agricultural efforts to control entire ecosystems require massive amounts of energy and labor and they often feed large human populations to the

detriment of most all life in the area except for the desired human crop. Gardening, in contrast, can also be small, individual, community-driven, and/or a social-justice effort looking to enhance local conditions and peoples. It can be a challenge to the large-scale industrial processes of fossil-fuel based agriculture; gardens can be a system based on collaborative efforts utilizing the powers of local life and local activities. Gardens mean power, but that power can be vegetal and social, and it can feed social resistance and even the recalibration of dominant power structures, especially in the Anthropocene. While some scholars of the Anthropocene consider the beginning of the epoch to be during the late eighteenth-century industrial revolution that amped up the burning of fossil fuels formed primarily from ancient vegetal matter (that eventually leads to industrial agriculture), other scholars locate the Anthropocene's origins already at the very beginnings of human agriculture in the Neolithic. Both arguments relate, however, to transformations of plant-human relationships. Gardening, similarly, is rich in meaning, and may function as a smaller-scale form of agriculture's brutality, colonialism, and human exploitation, or it may offer significant experiences of human-vegetal collaborations that resist the destructive forms of the Anthropocene and produce instead vibrant and powerfully purposeful multi-species alternatives.

In our special section for this volume on "Gardening (against) the Anthropocene," our guest editors Catrin Gersdorf, from the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Germany, and Catriona Sandilands, from York University, Canada, offer wonderful insights into the wide array of possibilities for gardens as forms of resistance found across the world in the Anthropocene. They begin with Jamaica Kincaid's experiences with gardening that document both a personal reflection on flourishing (and withering) plants but also on the colonial control over who can garden, where they have access to land, and what plants they grow. Contextualizing gardening in terms of its "global, colonial origins," Gersdorf and Sandilands note how Kincaid states "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." They note that in order to garden "against the Anthropocene," social justice needs to be at the center of the work for sustainability and the "complex biopolitical entanglements" of our lives.

The section features eight impressive articles on gardening from a wide array of places and perspectives. Axel Goodbody links Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761) and Michael Pollan's *Second Nature* (1991) as two instances of "Anthropocene thinking" through gardening. Jordan A. Norviel discusses the Harlem Renaissance poet and activist Anne Spencer, who read and annotated garden and seed catalogues in terms of race. JC Niala documents the creation of a project on the "history of gardens as sites of memorial practice" during the COVID-19 pandemic lock-down in relationship to the use of biocidal technologies alongside allotment gardens in the first World War. Considering Caribbean ecologies, Chiara Lanza writes about the ongoing colonial and racist violence of plantation agriculture, while Maria Sulimma presents a feminist study of urban gardening in the United States as a means of protest that also

disrupts the nature-culture division. Looking at Australia's settler colonialism, Prudence Gibson's critical plant studies essay links Murray Bail's parodic literature to Val Plumwood's ecofeminist work. The collaborators Aubrey Streit Krug, Ellie Irons, and Anna Andersson return us to the United States with a focus on one plant, the yellow-flowering *Silphium integrifolium*, in order to study the small scale of local gardening, conservation and restoration questions and how that local connection interconnects multiple larger "food-energy-water scales," including industrial agriculture. Finally, Serena Ferrando shifts the focus of the essay collection onto the movement between symbolic systems inspired by Emanuele Coccia, that is, how vegetal narratives resist simple translation into human language in Italian plant poetry. This series of essays delivers profound insights into international expressions of gardening as an embodiment of various forms of power, both positive and detrimental, and they reveal gardening's potential to disrupt existing systems of (colonial, capitalist, fossil-fueled) power. The authors and guest editors provide exquisite insights into the shifting human-non-human relations of gardening in the Anthropocene.

The general section presents two essays that also relate to the possibilities of narrating human and non-human relationships in times of massive ecological change and disasters; the first on multispecies communities, and the second on means of portraying ocean acidification as a hyperobject. Aurélie Choné's essay, "L'apport de la littérature à la composition d'un 'monde commun': *Die Wand* de Marlen Haushofer et *Minotaurus* de Friedrich Dürrenmatt," considers these two cold-war stories about catastrophe. Choné describes the changing ecological relationships and the formation of new kinds of communities in terms of "ce que Marielle Macé a appelé la 'grammaire des attachements.'" Despite the fact that both Haushofer and Dürrenmatt write apocalyptic-type narratives, Choné argues that they nevertheless avoid a simple horror of the future. Instead, she sees the "possibility of another world" evoked in the "possibility of another end of the world."

Oriol Batalla turns to art and hyperobject theory as possibilities for representing the strangeness of ocean acidification from within the water in his interdisciplinary contribution, "Ocean Acidification as Hyperobject: Mediating Acidic Milieus in the Anthropocene." Viewing and reading a set of images by Christine Ren from 2018, *Underwater Woman*, Batalla immerses the reader textually into the acidifying ocean waters of the Anthropocene with a new materialist lens. Ren's fascinating images inspire a hermeneutic process of engaging in a new epistemology of altered fluidity. Batalla's mapping of the woman holding a dissolving shell while floating under water insightfully suggests that comprehending the global, non-localized alterations of our ecological systems cannot occur solely through "rationalist" arguments but rather better through the weave of art and intentional articulation of representation. He writes that "the challenges of the Anthropocene are put at the forefront, situating specific events and problematics in a planetary scale. That is, this article aims to contribute to the dismantling of the problematic 'rationalism' by immersing analysis in an underwater and acidic milieu that will expand and reshape ontology, phenomenology and epistemology."

Battala thereby creates a bridge to the Arts section of the volume, edited by Elizabeth Tavella, our arts editor from the University of Chicago. Tavella's comments on the creative contributions offer a marvelous array of connections to the special guest-edited section on "Gardening (against) the Anthropocene" more broadly. Following Anna Tsing's understanding of the Anthropocene as a means towards change, Tavella writes that: "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." She emphasizes the capacity of gardens to reveal mutual interdependence and to enact forms of "trans-species justice," even while acknowledging that gardens can also be part of ideological power structures. Tavella highlights the fact that "All seven artistic contributions in the current issue challenge, from various angles, the dominant ideologies tied to gardens," particularly with their productive blurring of boundaries such as urban-rural, ethics of design, and as "reciprocal and relational sites."

The first three contributions to the arts section are fascinating photographic essays; the first being Benjamin Vogt's lush images and comments, *Rewilding Suburbia*, which is a proposal to create wild prairie on Nebraska's lawns. Vogt thereby overwrites, literally, on the land, the colonial impulse of English gardens with a rewilding practice that also counters agricultural monocultures. The second photographic essay moves to Europe with the contribution from Agnese Bankovska, who explores three very 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." These three gardens offer a "multispecies ethics of care" that reject categories such as the derogatory idea of weeds (that feed pollinators), and to rethink ideas of "invasive" lives. The third photographic essay is from Canada, written by dp patrick in collaboration with "allied calendulas against bulldozers," and chronicling "the vicissitudes of tending to 'The Big Gay Garden' planted as an act of protest during the 2018 union strike at York University, Canada." This garden thrives while transforming earthy labor into a kind of activist strike of slow joy and tactile care.

The arts section then shifts to poetry, opening with Mary Newell's powerful and disturbing poem, *Tongues All Out*, that presents, in Tavella's words, a "world of weather imbalance to meditate on the impacts of climate change on gardens," and features heat, species loss, and the "disruption of interspecies relations." Then, Antonello Borra's evocative bilingual contribution, *Erbario* is, as Tavella writes, "a 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." Borra's poems traverse various pungent fragrances, myth, and the dignity of "invasive" weeds. William Bond writes the next poem, "Walnut," about an American black walnut tree, expanding poetic horizons to include knowledge-making of the non-human on multiple scales and of various kinds, including the vegetal and the microscopic. The poem's very shape and sequence maps out the shape and form of a tree's active morphology. The final creative contribution is Elizabeth Bolton's six-part poem on 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." Bolton thereby

questions and reshapes the Linnean heritage of naming, and the colonial appropriation of indigenous plants, recipes, and cultural practices. Indeed, in Tavella's final introductory comments on this marvelous collection of works, she reiterates the need to decolonize gardens and the rich promise of textualizing gardening tropes in the Anthropocene.

Finally, in the book review section edited by Isabel Pérez, this volume of *Ecozon@* also includes an impressive array of seven book reviews/review essays of recent work in the environmental humanities. Katie Ritson contributes a review essay of four edited volumes on oil extraction and petro-narratives, including: *Oil Fictions: World Literature and Our Contemporary Petrosphere* (2021), edited by Stacey Balkan and Swaralipi Nandi; *Life in Plastic: Artistic Responses to Petromodernity* (2021), edited by Caren Irr; *Cold Water Oil: Offshore Petroleum Cultures* (2021), edited by Fiona Polack and Danine Farquharson; and *Oil Spaces: Exploring the Global Petroleumscape* (2022), edited by Carola Hein. Pamela Phillips then reviews together Marco Armiero's *Wasteocene* & Samuel Amago's *Basura: Cultures of Waste in Contemporary Spain*, both also appearing in 2021. Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell reviews John Parham's 2021 edited volume, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene*. On plants, Stefan Hecht reviews (in German) *Die Pflanzenwelt im Fokus der Environmental Humanities / Le végétal au défi des Humanités environnementales*, edited by Aurélie Choné and Philippe Hamman, conference proceedings from 2021. The final three reviews address different genres and media in the environmental humanities: first is Mònica Tomàs's review of the 2022 volume, *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media*, edited by Marek Oziewicz, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dedinová. Then, Caroline Granger reviews Cary Wolf's 2022 monograph *Art and Posthumanism: Essays, Encounters, Conversations*; and, finally, Marco Caraciolo provides the concluding review of Tom Tyler's 2022 monograph, *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity*.

In closing these editorial comments, the editors of *Ecozon@* would like to acknowledge our concern for the well-being of all the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria. *Ecozon@* has benefitted immensely from many important and long-term contributions from our friends and colleagues in Turkey. We want to use this platform to recognize all of their work for our journal and their collective ecocritical work more broadly, as well as to express our hopes for Turkey's and Syria's recovery from the earthquake's aftermath.