

Editorial 15.2

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The encounters with the more-than human world are taking on new forms in our fossil-fuel-fed, industrialized societies driven ever onwards and deeper into extractivism while riding the resulting high waves of our climate-changed waters. From a hopeful perspective, many people attempt to create positive encounters by immersing themselves in seemingly still wild and aesthetic zones of peace in order to seek a holistic and healing experience of our nonhuman surroundings, at least those sites not (yet) impacted radically by mountain-top removal mining, radioactive waste, heaps of plastic, or endlessly extended concrete. As hurricanes, droughts, fires, and accelerated extinction rage and spread all around us, such soothing green or blue encounters may offer an antidote and even a means of reminding us of our interconnectedness with the plant-based ecosystems that provide us all with oxygen and food; and yet, from the less hopeful perspective, such antidotes may bolster individuals while leaving in place the impression that contamination and other environmental catastrophes are localized and small-scale. Other kinds of ever-more inevitable and disturbingly disruptive encounters force, rather uncomfortably, an expanded awareness of the many ecosystems screaming with the hurricane-force winds or gasping in the face of polluted water and the penetration of microplastics and forever chemicals deep into all living bodies. Considering the fact that we are always already a part of the world and that our trans-corporeal selves exist as multi-species chimera in life-sustaining co-existence with our gut biota and the huge array of other species all over and in our bodies, we must ask, when thinking about disruptive encounters, how our co-habitant species now function in their microscopic-scale worlds as they face modern processed diets and chemical immersions. We are learning that altering your gut bacteria—biome, if you will—can alter your mind and mood, too. In other words, industrialized fossil-fueled practices create disruptive encounters on all scales from single-celled to global. Despite the scalar enormity, awareness of the shifting kinds of encounters remains oddly muted for many.

In that our daily existence now consists of ongoing disruptions often hidden from view by being too small or too large, or because some people are affluent enough to avoid first-hand contact with the storms or the dramatic spread of waste, there is a need to awaken our distracted senses to the forms of disruption we all experience on

a daily basis. (I use “we” here to refer to all living things on all scales, but especially to human beings with our possibility of consciously acknowledging both our deeds and their implications.) The danger exists that ecological disruptions and convoluted encounters are so frequent that they (just) become a steady background noise. Not even massive hurricanes seem to get enough attention; does it take a direct hit for these weather events amped up by climate change to become an “encounter” for those not washed away? Ecocriticism offers ready tools to contextualize and interpret the various kinds of weirdness emerging from the bizarrely consistent belief that nothing has really changed and a little more waterfront property is fine, but also from the Promethean belief that humans can now shape, control, and “care” for the world as beneficent managers guiding the way. Acknowledging disruption may be a crucial factor for social change.

Indeed, the guest editors for Volume 15.2 of *Ecozon@* take up this challenge with their focus on “Disruptive Encounters. Concepts of Care and Contamination out of Control.” In their introduction to the eight essays in the section, Solvejg Nitzke (Ruhr-University Bochum), Svenja Engelmann-Kewitz (Technische Universität Dresden), and Kirsten Jüdt (Technische Universität Dresden) explain how the longed-for reunification with “healing nature” can elude the dark, disruptive, dangerous, and infectious aspects of the nonhuman on its own terms as well as the world as it is impacted by human industrial actions. The guest editors note that it is the privilege of the few “to ignore, deny or even just gloss over disruptive encounters.” Furthermore, such inattention to the powerful and disruptive encounters with the more-than-human world tends to diminish non-human agency and make human beings seem the only active forces of relevance. Nitzke, Engelmann-Dewitz, and Jüdt write: “In this special themed section, we assemble explorations and conceptualizations of disruptive encounters—whether gentle or violent, fictional or factual—which challenge the cause-and-effect logic of quick-fix remedies as well as relativism and denial of difference and opposition.” Building on Anna Tsing’s concept of the transformative effect of “unpredictable encounters,” and Donna Haraway’s “staying with the trouble,” the guest editors hope to “challenge and transform dominant (alienated) human-nonhuman relationships.” The special section imagines three main categories of reconceptualized disruption. First are the “Science-Art-Worldings” that model a “multispecies thinking” of human and non-human inter-intra-actions. Second, they present the concept of “Forced Nurture” based on Tsing’s “empowering concept of contamination” and “Haraway’s concept of sympoiesis.” The third and final section attends to “Gentle Collisions” that avoid notions of dominance and “re-imagine and practice human-nonhuman contact” in terms of “care.”

The first three essays of the special section all look to the Arctic for startling encounters in the frozen lands and waters. “Alina Stefan, University of Cologne, Germany and Sieglinde Grimm, University of Cologne, Germany study disruptive encounters” between ecological, economic, scientific and Indigenous interests” in their analysis of Wolf Harlander’s German cli-fi eco-thriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022). In his essay, Karl Emil Rosenbæk Reetz, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark,

presents the concept of “Coastal World Literature: Encounters at the Shores of Europe” as a frame for disruptive encounters in the littoral zones across the planet. And by looking at “feral Islandic horses” in Benedikt Erlingsson’s film *Hross í oss* (2013), Judith Meurer-Bongardt, Universität Bonn, Germany, proposes in a German-language essay the relevance of considering human-animal encounters in terms of the various philosophies of “care.” The next three essays also focus on human-animal encounters, but with an expanded geographical focus. Taylin Nelson, Rice University, USA, responds to “The Sounds of Cetacean Revolution through History” in terms of the now famous behavior of “rogue whales” crashing ships; Nelson thereby provides a “cultural history of whale resistance.” Moving to Rwanda, at least as it has been presented in German publications, Anne Peiter, Université de la Réunion, France, writes a German-language essay mapping out ongoing racist representations of animal-human encounters that have had genocidal consequences. From the oceanic and coastal areas, the section then moves into the forest: Helga Braunbeck, North Carolina State University, USA, explores questionably idealized visions of hunting in the German forest. Her essay reveals both the problems and potential of the assumptions and myths appearing in three very famous **texts** portraying deer: Felix Salten’s *Bambi*, Horst Stern’s *The Last Hunt*, and Peter Wohlleben’s *The Hidden Life of Trees*. The final two essays turn away from the human-non-human divide and challenge us instead with two very different kinds of disruptive encounters: Giulia Baquè, Università Ca’ Foscari, Italy / Universität Heidelberg, Germany, studies the issue of AI and robots in her essay on “nonhuman care” in science fiction; and Elisa Mazzocato, LMU Munich, Austria, attends to the dead, writing about the “Weird Ghosts of the Anthropocene: The Spectral Encounter in the New Weird Fiction as a Conceptual Metaphor for Ecocritical Theory,” depicting how China Miéville’s works productively shock the readers with something so weird that it unmutes our entangled encounters in the Anthropocene.

The general section of *Ecozon@* 15.2 includes six full essays that provide provocative supplements to the inspired inquiries of the special focus on “disruptive encounters”; two of the essays are in Spanish, one is in French, and three are in English. The topics of these essays range from the value of anthropomorphism, questions of nonhuman agency and queer ecology, and challenges of anthropogenic bodies. The first essay is by Alissa Kautz, University of Bonn, Germany; in her “Humanising the Nonhuman: An Ecocritical Toolbox for Anthropomorphic Agency,” Kautz rethinks with excellent results the question whether the use of (often heavily criticized) anthropomorphism might actually be a productive strategy for ecocriticism in that it appears in many effective environmental texts and it questions standard notions of agency. She proposes a precise toolkit for assessing the function of anthropomorphism and notes that “that while shifting to ecocentric thinking on a global scale, anthropocentrism is not inherently negative, but rather can allow humans to understand and empathise with the nonhuman.” In their Spanish-language essay, Diego Zorita Arroya, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, España and Joaquín Macarro Sánchez, Universidad de Salamanca, España, “La derivación ecologista del

mito de Orfeo en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* de Irene Solà” describe how the author uses the myth of Orpheus as the basis for an “Orphic chant” running through the novel in a manner that provides voice to animals. With a focus on enchantment, rhythm, and myth, Solà’s novel “reveals the uniqueness of each of the beings that make up the earth, as well as the interdependencies that exist between them and that make up the higher organism called Gaia.” With her French-language essay on queer ecology, Gina Stamm, University of Alabama, USA, “L’écologie *queer* et l’écologie du *queer* chez Jean Giono” offers a new understanding of Jean Giono, whose ecologically-focused novels have often been deemed “conservative, pastoralist, or backward-looking.” In contrast, she demonstrates how the famed eroticism of his texts refuses to follow standard expectations when presenting the natural world’s sexuality, instead allowing for the celebration of fluid genders and the desires of those often considered to be excluded from sex due to non-conforming and differently aesthetic bodies. She concludes that Giono “separates eroticism in general from the sexual act, liberating pleasure in contact with the environment and allowing for the full range of meaning of the word ‘biophilia.’”

The final three essays of the general section attend to an impressive variety of genres and tropes that include anti-pastoral climate songs, rural poetry, and dystopian fiction presenting illness as a means of rethinking human subjectivity. Håvard Haugland Bamle, University of Agder, Norway, expands the volume’s offerings to include contemporary Norwegian music from the folk artist Moddi in his essay, “Anti-Pastoral and the Prophetic Mode in Moddi’s Climate Songs.” The activist singer presents lyrics on the disasters of climate change and thereby features the possibilities of art to confront such global problems, especially in Norway, where the country is openly environmental yet very well-funded by a flourishing oil industry. Bamle notes that Moddi’s music sustains “contradictions between pastoral and apocalypse,” thereby reflecting a conflict between Norwegian identity and a global cultural imaginary in the face of global warming. From this study of the folk artist, we turn to Spanish depictions of rural agricultural folk farmers in Miguel Hernández’s poetry. In his Spanish-language essay, “Aquí la vida es pormenor”: Mundo rural, naturaleza y campesinado en la poesía de Miguel Hernández,” Gonzalo Luque González, Universidad de Almería, España, focuses on “the historical and material reality of the rural world” as it appears in poems. Hernández writes into his poems a lived reality of farmers’ productive experiences with the nonhuman; the agricultural experience of the “peasantry” evokes not the “abstract labor of capital,” but rather the mundane and actual daily work with plants and animals in his poetry. Our final essay evaluates *Mugre rosa* (2020) by the Uruguayan author Fernanda Trías. Manuela Crivelli, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, discusses both climate disaster and disease in: “Anthropocenic Futures and Precarious Bodies: A Reading of *Mugre rosa* (2020) by Fernanda Trías.” Crivelli’s analysis has good resonance with the special section on disruptive encounters, looking at how the encounters of precarious bodies with disease and a toxic environment can lead to the imagining of new, bodily subjectivities. Above all, the precarious bodies most at risk are, again, those of people

without enough power to avoid dedicating attention to “already irreversibly damaged entire ecosystems,” in contrast to those who can flee from, and mostly ignore, the hurricanes and other storms while being able to occupy geographical sites with less overt damage.

In the Creative Arts section of volume 15.2, Arts Editor Elizabeth Tavella, University of Chicago, USA, introduces an expanded understanding of “encounters” formulated ecocritically as conflicts and meetings of subjective bodies shaped by and emerging from the fleshly experiences with others. Tavella therefore notes optimistically that: “The emergence, then, of novel ecosystems within muddy moral landscapes blasted by capitalism should not be understood exclusively in terms of loss and destruction, but also through the lens of resilience and adaptability.” From symbiotic relations with other species to the domestication of dogs, human bodies/beings, which are already chimerically entangled with bacteria, fungi, viruses, etc., compete and cooperate but never neutrally and never from an outsider position. As Tavella describes it, the cover image by illustrator and designer Jan Martin sets the tone for the entire volume with its combined digital art and collage featuring repeating forms in our mundane experiences with the human and more-than-human world, whose beauty evokes multivalent possibilities of encounters. Inside the Arts section are five poetic contributions, one interview, and a short story with an accompanying woodcut; the first piece is Serena Zanzu’s haunting poem “Forcing the Bond.” Zanzu’s short and powerful poem describes the laboratory enhancements of biological systems for agriculture, succinctly presenting such encounters as if praising human advances, while closing the poem with the telling lines about how we mistake the power to reshape our symbiotic communities for the power to solve problems of our own creation: “Today we unblock nature / we turn bios around / render life a tool / we unleash new crises.” The next series of works by Anna Nygren, titled “Other Horses,” wends through poetic and prose writings enhanced with sketches that flow together, drawing on the potential of neurodiversity and queer studies to approach the more-than-human with new senses. Next are two poems from Dean Anthony Brink, a poet, painter, and professor of literature and thought: “The New Speciesism” and “Feel Free to Splash About Disturbing Patience.” With the vibrantly dark fluency of the Anthropocene’s poetic rhythms, Brink weaves poems of concern for bodily encounters that we may assume are standard (gassing up on I-5) but that take on eerie and even Kafkaesque tones when we “stop pretending to care.” Then, Jose Elizondo-Gonzalez provides a collection of poems from the perspective of a migrant in the American Midwest, “El peso del aire” (“The Weight of Air”). Tavella writes that the poems present “the topic of ‘disruptive encounters’ from the perspective of migration, intricately weaving together themes of cultural displacement, environmental imagery, and the struggle for acceptance in unfamiliar surroundings.”

The next contribution is an interview undertaken by Qian Liu, who spoke with Paolo Peng Shuai, a multidisciplinary artist based in Milan, Italy, though born in Xiangtan, China. Their conversation addresses Peng’s artworks and how they reflect diasporic identities with ecological reverberations that change and are changed by

the movement to new places each themselves experiencing various forms of ecological crises. The human-non-human boundaries become less relevant as the individuals and groups travel across borders and experience new forms of encounters, both disruptive and collaborative. Finally, the Arts section closes with Wendy Wuyts' short story "An Ash Tree in Os," illustrated with a marvelous wood cut by Laura Brusselaers, an Independent Artist from Belgium. The story does not explicitly state its focus, but the artist statement notes that it "features Sámi characters and practices" experienced by Wuyt after she moved to Norway. In the swamps of rot, death, and decomposition emerge life forms: this tale of grief, illness, and femicide brings us into terrible encounters tainted still by the hope for the possibility of ongoing entanglements with the plants and beings rising out of the murky waters. Ending with fungi, our clever connectors who link trees and plants throughout entire forests and grasslands who thus may well be our most important ecological enablers, Wuyt leaves us with a poetic image of the life of death and the underground and the underappreciated beings whom we daily overlook and yet whom we will encounter again, and again.

Ecozon@ 15.2 also includes seven book reviews discussing recent books in the environmental humanities that cover environmental history, animal studies, the blue humanities, the ecopoetics of re-enchantment and of place making, diseases, and the humanist forms and methods of the climate crisis. The reviews open with the discussion of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *One Planet, Many Worlds* (U of Chicago P, 2023), 131pp, by Damini Bhattacharya. The next book is by one of our own former Presidents of EASLCE, Serpil Oppermann, who has written *Ecologies of a Storied Planet in the Anthropocene* (West Virginia UP, 2023), 221pp, by Johanna Skibsrud; and, thirdly, there a review of a book by our newest EASLCE President, "Bénédicte Meillon's *The Ecopoetics of Reenchantment* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), 386pp. by Terry Harpold. Looking at various genres are the studies by Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Indep. Acad. Pub., 2023), 277pp, by Isabel M Fernandez Alves; and the interdisciplinary book by Basak Agin & Safak Horzum's edited volume: *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* (Routledge, 2022), 257pp, by Madeline Becker. The final two reviews are on new work in animal studies and forms in the climate crisis: David P. Rando's *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens, and Ghosts: Defamiliarizing Human-Nonhuman Animal Relationships in Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 200pp, by Sofie Schrey; and Caroline Levine's *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis* (Princeton UP, 2023), 202pp, by Leonardo Nolé.