

Editorial Ecozon@ 6.2

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This new number of *Ecozon@* appears in the run-up to COP 21. The objective of the talks in Paris at the end of November, with which the “Conference of the Parties” to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change comes of age, is to achieve a universal, legally binding agreement on climate. However, it is already clear that the pledges received from 140 nations to cut carbon emissions fall well short of the measures needed to prevent global temperatures rising by more than the 2°C above pre-industrial levels which economists and climate scientists have argued should be the maximum warming which policy makers allow. The world’s carbon emissions are currently around 50bn tonnes a year. To have a 50/50 chance of keeping the increase in the global temperature below 2°, the world would have to cut emissions to 36bn tonnes of carbon. However, despite significant recent pledges from major emitters, they are set to rise to 55bn by 2030.

Given this yawning gap between what reason appears to be telling us we should be doing and the public’s appetite for change, it is apposite that this issue is devoted to the question whether and how contemporary artists and writers can play a part in meeting the challenge of what the Spanish poet, translator, political sociologist and environmental philosopher Jorge Riechmann has called the “century of the great test” (in his book *El siglo de la gran prueba*). Under the heading “Artistic Ways of Understanding and Interacting with Nature”, José María Parreño presents seven essays (five of them in Spanish, and a further two in French and English), on forms of ecological art ranging from conventional canvases to Land Art and postmodern dance. Engaging with ideas of the American social theorist Jeremy Rifkin, arguments of the Scottish anthropologist Tim Ingold about human perception of the environment, the environmental aesthetics of Allen Carlson and Boaz Simmus, and Thomas Hanna’s theories of somatics (the internal perception of body movement), these essays examine the work of artists including Reiko Goto and Tim Collins, Lorena Lozano, Yolanda Gonzalez, and Lucía Loren, and of the Chilean poet-artists Raúl Zurita and Cecilia Vicuna, and review two major exhibitions “Beyond Green: Toward Sustainable Art” (Chicago 2005) and “Earth, the Art of a Changing World” (London 2009). Themes running through the essays include the ability of art to forge affective links with nature, whether it be by making abstract relations visible, by using natural materials, or by other means; the sustainability of artistic practices; the relationship between knowledge of nature and aesthetic experience; the uses of nostalgia; the ethics of care; and an ecopoetics of gestures, exemplified in choreographies reconnecting spectators with their sensory memory. In his recent book, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, Timothy Clark has challenged the perhaps all too comfortable assumptions of some ecocritics about the importance of

literature and art as media facilitating change in social attitudes and behaviour. The essays collected here amount to a partial rebuttal, and contribute impulses for the new modes of interpretation which Clark has called for.

The General Section comprises three essays, one in French and the other two in English. Kathryn St Ours introduces the non-fiction writing, fiction and photographic work of Jean-Loup Trassard. She explores the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of the portraits of disappearing landscapes and ways of life in the rural Mayenne area in North-West France which he has drawn since the 1960s, and reflects on the potential of such literature of place to re-engage readers with the natural world around them. Trassard's historical novel *Dormance* is characterised as a work of 'eco-psychological ethnography', probing human ties with nature. In the second essay, John Charles Ryan contributes to the study of literary representations of plant life which is coming increasingly to complement cultural animal studies. Examining J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and other works on Middle-earth, Ryan notes that Tolkien conformed to cultural tradition in privileging trees, attributing to them consciousness, memory and the ability to speak, while associating herbs and other plants with the more primitive sense of smell, and constructing them in terms of their healing qualities. He argues that plant representation in literature is an intuitive grasping of facts which have only recently been confirmed in the science of plant acoustics and behaviour, but at the same time critically assesses traditional cultural representations of trees and plants in the light of plant science. In the final essay Jacob Barber discusses Werner Herzog's filmic images of the Antarctic as a site of desire, incomprehensibility and fear. He shows how Herzog's 2007 documentary *Encounters at the End of the World* critiques perceptions of the Antarctic as a static, empty wasteland waiting to be discovered and conquered scientifically, and invites us in a spirit of ironic hopefulness to find new ways of living in the world.

The Creative Art Section is closely aligned with the theme of the issue, artistic ways of understanding and interacting with nature, and complements the earlier essays on the subject. It presents 4 works that capture and reflect on the art/ nature (or art/ environment) interplay in different ways. The first consists of Lucía Loren's 'Resource Islands': these photographs record a project completed as artist in residence earlier this year. Inspired by biological experiments with the ability of esparto grass to combat erosion in semi-arid zones of southern Spain by fixing the soil and retaining moisture, "Islas de recursos" leads us to consider ways of sheltering, securing, recovering and nurturing the land. An image from her work, "Seed Balls", used in her "biorolls" has been used for the cover image of this issue of *Ecozon@*. These are followed by paintings of the Californian artist George Woodward comprising the series 'The Four Elements' and 'Rolling Drunk on Petroleum'. The Turkish photographer Tunç Özceber contributes two photographs of serene landscapes in which the human presence is in harmony with nature. The section closes with a cycle of poems by the Pennsylvanian writer Sharon White, in which humans, animals and landscape elements enter into conversation with one another.

As always, we are grateful to our book reviewers, who round off the issue by presenting eight recent publications, on subjects ranging from ecocritical studies of major women writers, James Joyce, climate fiction, and urban ecology, to collections of essays on ecocriticism in Canada, ecosemiotics, art and ecology, and the “anti-landscape” (environmentally degraded, often dystopic landscapes prompting reflection on sustainability).