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Front Cover Image: Elizabeth Demaray, *Upholstered Stones***.** Installation detail**,** Steadman Center for the Arts Rutgers University-Camden. Photo by David Gehosky, 2006.

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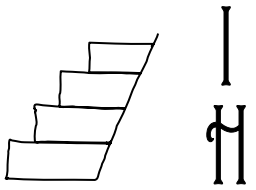
Environmental Aesthetics



Contents

Editor's Introduction

Tony Lack
Alamo College

It is correct to say that environmental aesthetics has developed out of a set of questions and problems in aesthetic theory, beginning with debates and discussions prompted by Ronald Hepburn's 1966 article, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty."[1] However, this captures just part of the story, which I would like to summarize before showcasing the ways that our contributors have addressed specific issues in this evolving field.

Hepburn claimed that philosophical aesthetics was inappropriately narrow, concerned, as it was, with formal analysis, problems of representation, intentionality, and an art appreciation model that couldn't get much beyond the idea of nature as a landscape framed as if it were a picture. This default approach reproduced a number of age-old dichotomies between subject and object, artist and audience, the beautiful and the sublime, avant-garde art and kitsch, and so forth. Hepburn's article broadened the scope of inquiry and did much to undermine the notion that appreciation of nature and natural beauty is or should be similar to looking at, reflecting upon, and writing about, Art with a capital A.

During this same period, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, conceptual art and environmental art emerged, constituting a new topos and terrain within the arts. The environmental movement, and the study of environmental ethics also infused the culture with questions about nature and our place in it. For example, Robert Smithson's giant artwork, *Spiral Jetty* (1970) is both conceptual and environmental, and the first Earth Day, proposed in 1969, "happened" in 1970.

Hepburn's questions and the artistic and social changes just mentioned constituted the field of environmental aesthetics. However, the initial synthesis exhibited a Romantic bias toward beautiful scenery, picturesque landscapes, and breathtaking vistas. It seemed as if the only forms of nature worth seeing were those that resembled a scenic overlook on the Pacific Coast Highway. Just as Romanticism had functioned as an escape from the harsh reality of the Industrial Revolution, so too the love of unspoiled scenery began to function

as an escape from a wide assortment of social problems in late 20th-century urban life.

Perhaps, it was then argued, we just need to learn more about how nature really works so that we can approach and appreciate it with realistic expectations. This was the idea put forward by advocates for the "natural environmental model" approach, later known as "Scientific Cognitivism."[2] An approach grounded in the natural sciences, such as biology and geology, would produce a broader context for environmental appreciation and preservation. Glancing backward, it looks as though the development of the field unfolded in a repetition of the historical dialectic of enlightenment, romanticism, and realism.

The next contradiction to overcome was the gap between the subject and object of nature, which involved putting humans back into the world. This phenomenological approach emphasized the embodied, multisensory, aspects of dwelling with-in nature. It was understood, by theorists such as Arnold Berleant and Yi Fu Tuan, that methods emphasizing objective distance, disinterested cognition, and formal analysis can contribute much to our understanding of human artifacts, but these same tools tend to undermine any plausible environmental aesthetics, because nature is nature's project and product, we are nature's project and product, and nature is our project and product. There is simply no way to delineate artifacts from artificer, designs from designers.

This embedded, engaged, approach also led to questions about exactly what "nature" or "environment" refers to. The environment is that which is revealed through our encounters, and therefore environments must include urban places, suburban landscapes, shopping mall interiors, deep space, and the ecological niches of microorganisms. I have argued that the historical trajectory of environmental aesthetics has moved from, the analysis of the nature as object of art, the expansion of the idea and approach to natural beauty, and the phenomenological implosion of the categories of subject, object, nature, and culture.

What then, portends? The field continues to expand as we address "transhuman" questions about bio-engineered life forms, designer babies, eternal youthfulness, and the unequal distributions of beauty and power that may emerge in the wake of this possible future. We can also see a post-phenomenological philosophy emerging in the work of thinkers like Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, and Peter Sloterdijk[3] who explore a kind of ontology that departs radically from the substance-based worldview that frames the thoughts and actions of most humans living in global society today. As these new ways of thinking about humanity and existence develop, environmental aesthetics will continue to develop as well.

Yet, as this brave new world emerges, we are still captive to the most basic questions. We continue to hold that there is some relationship between beauty, truth, and goodness, whether our reflections take the form of a poetic meditation like Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*,[4] or of the hard-nosed

empirical approach to criminology known as the Broken Window's Theory.[5] The future is open, what have our contributors done to keep it that way?

It is fitting that this issue begins with an interview with Yi Fu Tuan, pioneering founder of the field of humanistic geography and author of the classic, *Topophilia*: *A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. We are pleased and honored to offer Professor Tuan's reflections in the opening pages of this issue. In "Expressions of the City," Ivy Lai Chun Chun reads the urban environment as a cultural text, analyzing the relations of proximity and distance constituted by the great mobility of the crowd of strangers.

In "An Encounter with Janet Lawrence: Towards and Affective Architecture," Maryam Foutouhi uses the Deleuzian understanding of the body to rethink contemporary architecture beyond building(s) and to reimagine architectural practice as a creative, dynamic and performative process through a close analysis of a 2006 project by Laurence entitled *Water Veil*.

Tony Lack's article, "The Music of Nature: Nietzsche's Aesthetic Ontology and John Cage's Sounds of Silence," discusses Nietzsche's "musical" approach to nature in the context of contemporary discourses about the end of nature. Lack highlights and discusses some connections between Nietzsche's aesthetic ontology and the music and ideas of the modernist composer John Cage.

In "Evacuated Ecologies: H.G. Wells and the Evolutionary Aesthetics of Extinction," Robert Pasquini plumbs the depths of H.G. Wells' *Time Machine* in a discussion of the aesthetics of extinction. In doing so he builds on Henry M. Cowles's postulation that "Extinction was a Victorian idea" which surfaced in its modern form after the popularization of Darwin's Origin of the Species.

In "Sense of Place and Sense of Taste: Thoreau's Botanical Aesthetics," John Ryan unearths an embodied aesthetic at the heart of Thoreau's protoecological writing. Ryan's discussion of Thoreau literally eating his way through nature foregrounds an ecological aesthetics that resists paradigms of beauty that privilege art over, humanity over nonhuman life, and vision over the non-ocular senses of sound, taste, touch, smell, and spatial orientation.

Pao Chen Tang addresses the relationship between aesthetics and ecology in "Copy as Creation: Ecological Aesthetics in Xu Bing's Forest Project." As he explores the Forest Project, whose goal is to create a recursive system that could initiate and sustain processes of afforestation and reforestation, he highlights some of the ways that art inspires conservation, as well as ways that conservation inspires art.

In "Metaphors we die by: The Aesthetics of Nature in Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*," Oliver Volker addresses the apparent indifference of nature in the face of our existential concerns. His interpretation seeks answers to two questions. First, how can we conceive of a kinship between humans and non-human animals? Second, how can art or, more specifically, literature help us to understand this relationship?

In "'Weaving' a New Dialectics of Ecology: Reading Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in the Anthropocene," Alden Wood employees an ontological perspective derived in part from Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* in his explanation of ways that medieval poetry can present a more nuanced understanding of the interrelationship between nature and culture.

Notes

[1] Ronald Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," in *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 285-310.
[2] See, Allen Carlson, "Formal Qualities in the Natural Environment," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 13, no. 3 (1979), 99- 114.
[3] See, for example, Tim Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics,* Harvard University Press, 2008; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; and Peter Sloterdijk's three volume work, *Spheres*, of which two recent English translations have appeared; *Bubbles*, (2011) *Globes*, (2104) by Semiotext(e).
[4] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.
[5] http://www.britannica.com/topic/broken-windows-theory

An Interview with Yu Fi Tuan, Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Tony Lack
Alamo College

TL: How do you, as a humanistic geographer, conceive of the relationship between space and place?

YFT: I once had to give a talk on "space and place" to middle school students in Wisconsin. It was a challenge and I wondered how I could stimulate and keep the interest of eleven and twelve-year-olds. I said something like this. "Look out of the window and you will see open space. Open space suggests adventure but it also entails risk: for example, the boat on Lake Mendota where some of your classmates are may sink." Students nodded in agreement. I continued, "By contrast, a place like this classroom is safe and familiar. However, for that reason it can be limiting and boring." This time they not only nodded but shouted, "Yes, this class is boring!"

I don't remember how I recouped from this blow. Still, I must have been pleased that I got the children's attention and that they had learned something about "space and place" from me. Place is indeed nurturing and familiar; space, by contrast, is open and undefined- and yet, because it is open and undefined, it allows an individual to define himself. Unlike space, place, especially home place, defines the individual, thus removing from him the challenge of self-definition, but

of course to be thus defined by place (tradition, family, genealogy, and such like) limits the self; it can be a form of subjugation.

We humans, to flourish, need both place and space, security and adventure. In *The Wind in the Willows,* Mole has just returned to his cozy home underground. Soon he lays his head contentedly on his pillow. Before he closes his eyes he lets them wander around his room, "mellow in the glow of the firelight... on familiar friendly things." How good it is to be back! Yet he would not want to abandon the splendid spaces above the ground; he has no intention of turning his back on sun and air and creeping home and staying there. "The upper world was too strong, it called to him still, even down there, and he knew he must return to the larger stage."

TL: It seems that all of our encounters with a place, or a building, or a feature of the natural world, are structured by a wide range of associations, memories, dispositions, cultural assumptions, psychological predispositions, moods, and feelings of physical comfort or discomfort. The list could be expanded significantly without any loss of salience. There is a similar complexity and variability at work in that which we encounter. I think of Monet, painting haystacks at different times of day and in different seasons. How can we begin to study the human encounter with place, given this complexity?

YFT: There is all the difference in the world between what we experience of place, building, meadow, or human face, and our ability to articulate that experience. We need poets, artists, and musicians to make public our innermost feelings if only to assuage our sense of isolation. I remember coming out of a class feeling depressed because I failed to make myself dear to students even though I taught the material many times. Then, suddenly the thought occurred to me that exactly the same low feeling must have afflicted other teachers and, moreover, I won't be surprised if that feeling, seemingly so private to me, has been precisely evoked in a published short story now lodged in our university library and hence available to everyone. Playing with this idea, I felt less alone, broke into a smile, and thanked the lord for my liberal education. But it isn't just that we feel strongly about certain things, our only trouble being that we can't find the right words for them. It is also that we can't even *have* certain feelings until we have or have encountered the right words. Take patriotism. What do I know of patriotism-this deep love of homeland-without Shakespeare's evocation of it?

> This happy breed of men, this little world,

This precious stone
set in the silver sea,
which serves it in the
office of a wall
Or a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happy lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

True, this poem evokes patriotic feeling for England. But for all the poem's specific reference to one nation, it applies to other nations almost equally. For example, may not a Taiwanese woman see her nation as a "precious stone set in the silver sea," threatened by "the envy of less happy lands?" For that matter, the poem works even if the nation is not an island. True patriotic sentiment is not the vaunt of power but an awareness of its vulnerability, a strong attachment to a beloved place-and beloved at least in part because it is not a continental sprawl but a region with clear borders and so is, in some ways, like an "island," but without the sea to serve it as a protective moat.

TL: The Taoist tradition seems ripe with suggestions about how our intentional and unintentional states render us more or less prone to experience our environment aesthetically. In my own work on Heidegger, I see a similar attempt to understand the proper approach to encountering the world in a fashion that permits something like “wonder” to emerge. Yet in both cases there is also an emphasis on active withdrawal from the hurly-burly of daily activity, which seems to be a precondition for this type of experience. Do you think it is a necessary condition for fresh encounters with the spaces we inhabit?

YFT: Heidegger, in despair with prose, sought poetry to express his deep understanding of and feeling for the beauty of the world. Holderlin seems to be his favorite poet. But would he have despaired of prose so easily if he were a better writer himself? Nabokov was a good writer. In a letter to his wife Vera, he noted that "The weather this morning was soso; dullish but warm, a boiled milk sky, with skin-but if you pushed it aside with a spoon, the sun was really nice," or more extravagantly, his description of the Eiffel Tower as "standing in lacy bloomers, with lit-up goose bumps running up her spine."

We can hardly think or feel deeply without withdrawing from the hurly-burly of daily activity. And this means withdrawing into the sheltered place, which I earlier denigrated as familiar and which students declared boring. Yet it is in the quiet, familiar place—be it one's study, a patch of grass under an oak tree, or one's sleepy hometown—that

sustained thinking can occur. Kant never left Konigsberg and Einstein was not known to be a world traveler. As for emotion, doesn't it have to be of the moment, as it occurs?

Yet, there too, it has to be recollected in tranquility to be real. Think of the conversation you are having with your dearest and cleverest friend, after the first couple of hours, isn't there a moment when you just wish he would leave so that you can recollect his sweet image and bon mots in tranquility?

TL: In your work you have placed a significant emphasis on the structure and function of binaries in the perception of the natural world. A survey of work in cultural anthropology, aesthetics, and, most recently, neuroscience and neuro-aesthetics suggests that binaries are an unavoidable feature of human perception. Yet we also see an attempt to escape or overcome this way of perceiving in postmodern commentary and criticism. Do you think that such an escape or overcoming is possible, and, if so, what could be gained from it?

YFT: I don't think it is possible for human beings to escape from the binaries, as Claude Levi-Strauss showed in his monumental study of mythologies. Levi-Straussian structuralism is built on language, and is there a language without binaries? One can, of course, favor the middle term, gray rather than either black or white, as G. K. Chesterton claims; yellow (pause) rather than red (stop) or green (go), as with our traffic light signals. True, both the ancient Greeks and the ancient Chinese argued in favor of the middle way. The Greeks specifically denounced the extremes as hubris. But what can "middle" or "mean" mean other than that it is a value between polarized extremes?

As I see it, the binaries are more a consequence of thinking and judgment than of perception. That's why I believe they are uniquely developed among humans, just as thinking and judgment are uniquely developed-certainly at the level of language-among humans. Animals perceive, as we do, and they also judge as we do: for instance, whether a fruit is edible or not. But our most widely used binaries are nothing so specific, nor do they address the immediate needs of practical life; rather they consist of such evaluative abstractions as "high/low," "vertical/horizontal," "light/darkness," "good/bad," "right/wrong," "beautiful/ugly." Each of these terms is loaded with other shades of meaning: thus "high" implies "vertical," "light," and "good." Besides the abstractions, there are the more specific binaries derived from them, for example, "mountain" (high, vertical) and "plain" (low, horizontal).

Post-modernists, who are mostly social scientists and students in the humanities, espouse an ideology of radical equality—not equality in sense that we are all made in the image of God and hence deserve respect, but

equality in talent and achievement. Since in talent and achievement we all fall within the middling range, polar extremes (high/low, good/bad) are irrelevant, or are elitist pretensions supported only by power. The binary "high/low" is particularly obnoxious. Nowadays, no one would dare to speak of high culture, for "high" implies its counterpart "low." In mathematics and the physical sciences, equality in talent and achievement is manifestly untenable: their practitioners unhesitatingly rank themselves and their peers. Perhaps they are used to binaries, having been brought up on + and -, 0 and 1.

TL: The technological mediation of our experience of space and place is nothing new, but it does seem to have accelerated and intensified to the point where the sensory overload and concomitant blasé attitude that early modernist thinkers like Baudelaire and Georg Simmel pointed out have blossomed into the vicarious world of simulacra and the hyper-real discussed by Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio. In this brave new world, we seem to know everything, all at once, before we have time to think about anything. We know all about things that we have never experienced. Do you see any qualitative shifts in our ability to be captivated by our experience of nature; that is, to be stunned, overcome with awe, and placed temporarily out of sorts in the way that the 18th and 19th century theorists of the sublime conceptualized this type of experience?

YFT: Ludwig Wittgenstein, an accomplished aeronautical engineer, thought in 1946 that we humans could never reach the moon. Well, we did reach it in 1969, and even more remarkable achievements lay ahead. In 2104 European scientists managed to land a washing-machine size box with legs on a comet, only 2.5 miles in length, 311 million miles from earth and moving at 41,000 miles an hour! Knowledge has vastly expanded and yet Wittgenstein then, and space scientists today still live in a Ptolemaic cosmos in which the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

Theoretical knowledge of the kind known to astronomy and physics has no impact on daily life. Technical innovations based on physical science, however, are another matter. When I was a child, it took my family and me twenty-one days to travel by boat from China to Australia. On our way back to China, I thought it unlikely that I would ever revisit Australia and this meant that Australia had slipped into my past. Time had direction for me then, and it went from past to present to future. As an adult, I can fly to Australia in a matter of hours and so I begin to think of my frequent trips there and back to *USA,* my *home,* as a commute. Commute collapses time, making it into an extended present. The same effect is more obviously produced when communication becomes instantaneous. In the old days, news from a distant place is always about

events that occurred weeks, even months ago. One lived in the present, surrounded by the past. Now, with instantaneous communication a commonplace, one lives in contemporary space, no matter how large. With the sense of directional time thus curtailed, are we now more inclined to feel ourselves immortal?

Pundits of modernity say that we in the twenty-first century are threatened by the onslaught of stimuli and information. But hasn't this always been the case? Given the sensitivity of our senses, we must always be on guard against an excess of circumambient stimuli to avoid disorientation and, in the extreme case, madness. What means are available to us? Historically, the most common means are story-telling and action. Stories—and almost all conversational gambits are stories—direct our attention to certain features and excludes all else; likewise, action. What about music? What about architecture? Well, once we embark on this path, we must conclude that culture itself is a device to control and direct stimuli. Consider one of culture's modern products-the camera. Your tour bus stops at a scenic site and everyone files out. Don't you have a moment of disorientation, if not panic, until the tour guide starts to tell a story or until you take out your camera and confine your stimuli to the small picture in the black box? Video games, aren't they reduced and simplified realities comforting to the young? Are we still capable of being stunned, overcome with awe, and so have an experience called the sublime? I believe we still are capable of it and we probably always will be capable of it so long as we have not conquered death. A rural English landscape is not sublime because it is not a reminder of our vulnerability and death. Quite the contrary. An Alpine scene of ice-capped peaks and deep chasms, on the other hand, *is* a reminder of our fragile existence. In its midst, we feel fear, awe, but also appreciation-even gratitude-for something huge and utterly beyond our control that, paradoxically, both threatens and enhances life. But we don't need to go to the Alps, the Himalayas, or outer space for that. We can experience the sublime from our bedroom window as we see sturdy trees swaying in the wind, flashes of lightning in the background, and hear rain slashing and rattling the window panes.

Expressions of the City

Ivy Lai Chun Chun
Hong Kong University

The city is full of strangers. Everywhere you look, every sheer sense of unfamiliarity culminates in the crowds. The insecurity of the crowd lays births to strangers and flaneurs. Both "strangers" of Simmel's analytical concept, and "flaneurs" of Bauldelaire's idea converge on the crowd, yet "strangers" and flaneurs aim at different orientations in city life. Urbanization propels strangers to stay in the city to earn a better living whereas flaneurs express city life in the form of art. Both strangers and flaneurs take different perspectives: perspectives of sociology and of aesthetics respectively, to express their attitude, their consciousness of the city. In this essay, we shall discuss similarities shared by them, in which differences are found through their expressions of the city.

Both "strangers" and "flaneurs" are absorbed into the crowd. The crowd is the metonym of the city, a place in which city dwellers intersect with each other without being known. The great mobility of the crowd is what constructs the "synthesis of nearness and remoteness which constitutes the formal position of strangers"[1] and what fascinates, intoxicates flaneurs in delineating the city as a text. Every time there are wanderers who do not come and go tomorrow. Instead, they come today and "stay"[2] tomorrow. These are strangers constituted by closeness and remoteness. When strangers are absorbed into the crowd, which is like those set in detective stories, danger is signaled in the crowd.[3] That is why strangers have to alienate themselves from others to protect themselves from being harmed in the crowd. This defense mechanism caused by alienation results in others claiming them as "strangers." That is how the paradoxical synthesis of nearness and remoteness constituted by the great mobility of the crowd creates the social formation of strangers.[4] Likewise, flaneurs are fascinated, intoxicated by the fluid crowd. In the prose "Crowds," the flaneur is an ordinary person immersed in the crowd. "Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable"[5] indicates that

immersed in the crowd, the flaneur "enjoys feverish delights"[6] by plunging himself interchangeably from multitude to solitude. The flaneur has a "privilege" to choose any state he likes to identify with in the fluid crowd. The intoxication to the crowd is thus stirred up by the high mobility of the crowd. Jenks metaphorically names the flaneur the prince: "An observer is a prince who is everywhere in possession of his incognito."[7] The flaneur as a prince connotes that only materialism enables the poet to loiter everywhere to attain the feverish state of disguising himself in different roles in the crowd. Loitering everywhere in the crowd, the flaneur resists the spectacle, the domination of power mediated by images, by searching for the aesthetic vision of his own. The flaneur has become both the "interactor and constitutor of the people's crowd-likeness."[8] Both strangers and flaneurs share some similarities in being absorbed into the huge mobile crowd. Constrained by the money economy, strangers, who appear to be traders[9] trespass land in order to stay in the city whereas flaneurs are allowed to loiter, stroll everywhere in the crowd to seek feverish enjoyment. The money economy functions differently according to different categories of people, being pushed by huge mobility. Huge mobility is the backbone of the money economy, underlying the rapid turning over of people and goods and services in the city. The money economy enables strangers and flaneurs to be absorbed into the mobile crowd.

Constituted as part of the crowd, both strangers and flaneurs need to adapt to the "strange" situation set in the crowd. The "strange" situation is the rapid and speedy changes in the city, in which seeing is above hearing, and transportation is everywhere that accelerates the pace of the city. Strangers need to cope with the sensory overload constituted by the speedy and changing city[10] whereas flaneurs need to familiarize themselves with the way they connect with others through "seeing."[11] To strangers, the sensory overload and alienation in the city propel them to seek ways to adapt to the city life. What concerns strangers most is connecting with others based on contingent similarities.[12] No wonder strangers normally are contingently connected to those people who share similar traits with them by the exercise of freedom.[13] In a speedy city, strangers would find themselves being intimate with others within a short distance. That is intimacy without proximity. It is a characteristic of city people. This means that city people are easily being intimate with those who share similar traits in such a compact crowd. For example, colleagues are usually more intimate with who share similar backgrounds and ideologies. However, strangers cannot easily develop an in-depth intimacy with others in a speedy, changing city while connecting with someone who contingently shares similar traits. Not every stranger is able to acquire intimacy with others in short distances in the crowd. That is proximity without intimacy. Gilloch writes, "In the crowd, one may see many people, but one notices no one, one recognizes no one."[14] The incapability of developing an in-depth intimacy with others in the city adds to eccentric mannerism of strangers, critiquing the tyranny of speed in society. Simmel even expresses his nuanced thought in the erotic encounter of love. Even though one is not able

to establish a relation with other, someone else would establish the same meaning for the one.[15] The same meaning could be derived from the "open" possibilities of similarities in the crowd, to which strangers connect, to establish intimate relationship with others and assert unique individuality at the same time. While the intimacy of strangers with others is based upon the distance with others, the flaneur is integrated into the crowd, walking leisurely with a tortoise or retracing the steps on the boulevard, to draw others" attention of his unique aesthetic adoration in the crowd. The "seeing" is the leisurely gaze at the city in admiration. What the flaneur "sees" in the city is that people are nice and friendly, but are also competitive and secretive in anonymous identities.[16] As a result, crimes are always embedded in the intertwining layers of the crowd,[17] which is the origin of the detective stories; for example, in Poe's "Man of the Crowd," the crowd is the scene where crime takes place.[18] The physiologies thus fashion the phantasmagoria of Parisian life that could be found in any literature of detective stories. The phantasmagoria of Parisian life made up of the intertwining layers makes the fluid crowd so fascinating and thrilling that the flaneur could hardly resist it. Like strangers who are so eccentric to be drawn to the secretive crowd, the flaneur exhibits his eccentric mannerism by strolling leisurely on the boulevard amid the mobile crowd to sentimentally express the melancholy of city in the form of art—poems. While loitering in the crowd, the flaneur with imagination disguises anyone in the crowd to depict the city life through poems and prose. The city that the flaneur "sees" has eventually been switched to a literary text. In some of Baudelaire's poems, the speedy change of the city is melancholically depicted. In the poem "The Swan," "The old Paris is gone (the face of a town is more changeable than the heart of mortal man)"[19] ironically, cynically shows that the city changes faster than the heart of mortal man. The city dehumanizes human beings by Haussmann's project on developing Paris. The tone of pathos is echoed. In the prose "Loss of A Halo", "terror of horses and vehicles"[20] results in the loss of a halo dramatically. The rapid, speedy transportation of city has created chaos in the city. In the prose "The Eyes of the Poor," the "eyes" that represent the split of modern self are seen. Every part is fragmented in modernity, like the "eyes." The tyranny of speed smashes things up, and breaks things down into parts. It signifies the rejection of the autonomous self advocated by Enlightenment; "I think, therefore I am" by Descartes asserts the unity of self, which is rejected by fragmentation in modernity. The "eyes" are examples of tangible fragments that feature modernity.

In the poem "To a Passer-by," "We might have loved"[21] reveals that even lovers themselves do not realize they may have loved in rapid changes of the city. The instant moment of having loved each other could hardly be captured. What is retained in the city is the momentum of love at last sight. Both strangers and flaneurs exhibit eccentric mannerism when adapting to the "strange" city dominated by tyranny of speed. Strangers are more concerned with the intimacy based upon distance with others, whereas flaneurs are more

concerned with the devastating city they see to be reflected in the prose and poems. In the eyes of strangers, keeping intimacy with others with respect to proximity is out of their control. Keeping close to each other in short distances does not logically lead to close intimacy. On the contrary, being remote to others does not logically imply lack of intimacy. Fate/chance/contingence is the key of establishing a social relationship in the city that bothers strangers the most. Whereas strangers seem unable to have any control over a social relationship, flaneurs could transform the city life into art under their control. Having disguised one in the crowd by sheer observation, flaneurs could depict the devastating city life the one belongs to melancholically through poems and prose. Both strangers and flaneurs demonstrate various kinds of eccentric mannerism, which reflects how they come to terms with "strange" situations they are in. Comparatively speaking, flaneurs are more capable of adapting to "strange" situations by themselves than strangers.

Besides, both strangers and flaneurs are part of the "commodity" culture. Immersed in the crowd, both strangers and flaneurs are related ambivalently to the commodity culture. Both strangers and flaneurs belong to the money economy, as discussed above. Any wanderers who come and stay tomorrow are strangers, in the synthesis of remoteness and closeness.[22] An obvious example in relation to the money economy that Simmel gives is traders. "The trader must be a stranger"[23] because trader does not get hold of an identity in the eyes of others. The trader has no land nor pure finance and intermediary trade.[24] The trader is perceived as a "commodity" in the money economy by the nature of trade. Other strangers, like the trader, are perceived as "commodities," for strangers alienate from others in blasé attitude. Indifference is a nature of commodity. Likewise, the flaneur is abandoned in the crowd like a commodity.[25] The spectacular way the flaneur fashions himself is a commodity. The flaneur's intoxication to the crowd is parallel to the intoxication to the commodity penetrating and perpetuating the massive crowd. The "spectacle of modernity" is thus seen in the flaneur. The flaneur enjoys the multiplication of numbers in the mass, as "enjoying a crowd is an art"[26] The crowd as an art enables the flaneur to play tricks with numbers, which demonstrates a feature of modernity, calculability. Moreover, secularities and domination of man are found in modern city, according to Jenks.[27] In the poem, "Loss of a Halo," the loss of a halo symbolizes the secularization of modern man. Capitalism replaces God, and dominates the modern society. Therefore, modern man is secularized as a "commodity." In the poem "To a Passer-by," a woman "with a statue's form"[28] is a widow passing by. The flaneur beautifies the widow, who is being mocked at, being discriminated against, in city life. In the modern city, women are stereotyped as the "other," the ones who are abandoned, forlorn.

Furthermore, the distinction of classes is brought into "sight" in modernity. In the poem "The Eyes of the Poor", the poor "sees" the rich couple in "equal () degree."[29] The poor in tremendous fascination with consumption gaze at the rich. The repetitive boast of consumer goods: "How

beautiful it is!"[30] conjures up the picture of commodity in the eyes of the poor. Not only the flaneur is a commodity but also the people whom the flaneur sees in the city are commodities as well. Both strangers and flaneurs are constitutive of the commodity culture without consciously being known.

Even though both strangers and flaneurs are under the hegemony of money economy, however, both strangers and flaneurs protest against and antagonize the division of labor, specialization and industrialization in different ways. In the city, strangers usually hold the blasé or the indifferent attitude for self-preservation. If the external stimulus overrides the internal reactions, strangers would be hypersensitive to the external world. Reservation is the common response to the unfamiliar. If the reserve is not only limited to indifference, aversion that can break into hatred and conflict could be resulted.[31] There is a wide spectrum of feeling of strangers in responding to others as a defense mechanism. Despite the fact that people congregate in a compact mass that breeds intimacy, strangers adopt a reserved proposition to safeguard themselves. Feeling alienated to others is the aftermath of engaging in the money economy. People are alienated not just from the products they produce but are also alienated from each other. This is especially true for strangers who have no roots at all.[32] The act of self-preservation is a signal turning against the money economy. Whereas strangers uphold the blasé attitude to protect themselves in the money economy, the flaneur "shakes off blasé attitude to a critical appreciation of the falsehood, fabrication, and replication at the heart of postmodernist city."[33] The flaneur has transformed the social life into aesthetics. The everyday aesthetic social life denotes that the distinction between high and low art breaks down, leading to the stage of what scholars call post-modernity. In fact, the critical aesthetic appreciation of the city with the leisurely walking on the boulevard is a sign of acting against division of labor, specialization, and industrialization.[34] The flaneur is overwhelmed by fabricated images mediated in everyday social life, like the flaneur being tied to Baudrillard's TV sets, interestingly.[35] Overwhelmed by fabricated aesthetic images, the flaneur is critically aware of protesting against the money economy through aesthetic appreciation of city. Ironically, the flaneur has transformed the horrible society reality into the beauty of aesthetic poems and poems, like "the old suburbs drift off into allegory"[36] in the poem "The Swan." Both strangers and flaneurs resort to different attitudes and means to fight against the money economy in the modern city.

Moreover, both strangers and flaneurs "drift" to accomplish their goals in city life. It is also because of the city that they have to "drift" to construct the city life. Drifting is a swift movement from one place to another that accelerates mobility. Both strangers and flaneurs drift, but the way they drift reflects their different orientations in city. Strangers drift from outside the city to inside the city to maintain autonomy and freedom while acclaiming individual differences in the city.[37] The description "the purely mobile person comes incidentally into contact with every single element"[38] illustrates the fast, the speedy drifting of strangers in contacting with "every" single relation in the

city. Drifting by strangers is an individual act of opposing to the collective society. Yet, strangers alienate from others for self-protection in the versatile, mobile drifting. The dissociation resulted from which is in reality a kind of socialization.[39] In contrast to strangers who drift rapidly through trespassing borders, the flaneur drifts leisurely with idleness, watchfulness, and inquisitiveness on the boulevard.[40] The flaneur embodies subjectivity in art. Drifting on the boulevards with a tortoise or retracing steps, the flaneur leisurely walks in slow movements and gazes at the city with adoration. The slow, idle leisurely movement is a critique of tyranny of speed dominated in the city. The boulevard opens up a space for the flaneur to subjectivize every object he sees in the city. It is the artistic subjectivization of the objectification of environment. Lehan calls the subjectivization of objects "an inward turn,"[41] an "intuitive intelligence" turning against rationalism, and science by the Enlightenment project.[42] Berman argues that the construction of boulevard is at the expense of the poor.[43] The leisurely walk on the boulevard enables the flaneur to re-constitute steps in detournement—the psychological-geographical path to re-establish the psychic life, to catch things in flight, and dream like an artist.[44] Baudelaire describes modernity "ephemeral, fugitive, contingent" that he must capture in the form of art.[45] For example, in the poem "The Swan," the flaneur yearns for an end to the "cage."[46] The "cage" symbolizes the modern city that suffocates the swan, the flaneur. "Sifting city-dust,"[47] "remembered lake,"[48] the outrageous accusation of God—"As if God we the object of his hate"[49]—correspond to the demolishment of the suburb that has been replaced by the modern city. Longing for the good old past, the nostalgia in the suburb, the swan is desperate to rise above the predicament of modernity. The flaneur has transformed all the gloom of the city into a poem of the swan. The leisurely drifting on the boulevard in slow movements enables the flaneur to express his melancholic sentiments in his poems of the modern city. Both strangers and flaneurs drift, but they drift in different manners and speed that reflects their different orientations.

Furthermore, the notion of "strangers" and "flaneurs" share some similarities that both identities have been typified by certain elements. Weber coins the methodology as the "ideal" type. "Strangers" fall into the social categories whereas "flaneurs" fall into the aesthetic categories. Simmel has categorized strangers by the synthesis of remoteness and closeness.[50] In a sociological perspective, strangers are wonderers who stay in the city constituted by the synthesis of closeness and remoteness. I do not agree with Simmel's view because Simmel seems to overlook strangers who are not constituted by the synthesis closeness and remoteness, and tends to focused too much on strangers in the city in a sociological view. In my view, strangers should go beyond the synthesis of closeness and remoteness and are perceived as the "others" who are opposed to the majority in society. "Others" are the marginalized figures, the minority. An example is woman, who is perceived as "other" of man under patriarchy. Women can be strangers in the eyes of men.

Similarly, the flaneur can be a stranger, insofar as the flaneur is the "other" in the eyes of the crowd. Unlike the fluid crowd in high mobility, the flaneur leisurely walks on the boulevard, with unique fashion and a tiny tortoise. The flaneur stands out as the "other" of the crowd, who does not conform to the high mobility of the crowd. The flaneur can thus be a "stranger." Similar to the notion of strangers that is open to interpretations, the notion of "flaneurs" has been decoded by Benjamin and Jenks differently. While Benjamin argues that the "flaneur" is restricted/limited to historical subjectivity as the spectacle of modernity, Jenks analyzes the process of retracing steps of flaneur on boulevard as a reconstitution of own psychic life. Sight precedes site. Vision conjures up a space of one's psychic life. Practically, it is quite true that the flaneur is limited to historical subjectivity, with reference to Benjamin. For example, the flaneur living out of the class of bourgeois cannot leisurely walk on boulevard with eye-catching fashion to catch others' attention. Yet, I agree with Jenks that the vision in the fluid crowd opens up a space for the flaneur to reconstitute his psychic life of city. How I interpret the notion of flaneur is that the flaneur could be anyone strolling leisurely in the crowd without any unusual or distinctive costumes and behavior. As far as the aesthetic strolling in retracing steps amid the crowd invokes the flaneur to plunge into the psychic artistic world, the flaneur could put the city life into pictorial poems. I would argue that the flaneur needs not to be physically present to stroll in the crowd to open up a creative space of his. Imagining himself leisurely loitering in the crowd, the flaneur could also trace back the steps he desires to conjure up the city life in pictorial poems. Hence, I would argue that imagination and aesthetic appreciation are two key elements categorizing the flaneur, rather than interpreting the flaneur in particular angles, like Benjamin and Jenks. Even though "strangers" from Simmel's concept could dress up like the flaneur in Bauldelaire's text by monetary gain in the trade, and leisurely stroll everywhere in the crowd, strangers who have no imagination and aesthetic appreciation of the city can never reconstitute the city sentimentally and transform which into creative art. Money cannot replace imagination in arts, though money could financially support arts. City people cannot exchange money for imagination and creativity in arts in the money economy, but instead to "experience" the city life to be imaginatively depicted in the form of arts. This indicates that flaneurs are indeed particularly talented in creatively transforming what they have experienced in the city into arts.

To conclude, there are some similarities shared by both the strangers and the flaneurs, in which divergences occur by their different orientations in city life. Both strangers and flaneurs are absorbed into the crowd, in which strangers attempt to establish social relationships whereas flaneurs "see" to contact others. Constitutive of the "commodity" culture in the crowd, both strangers and flaneurs resort to their ways to protest against the money economy. "Drifting" has become significantly important in understanding their orientations in the city. Strangers fall into the social category whereas flaneurs fall into the aesthetic category. This creates the notions of "strangers" and

"flaneurs" which could be decoded differently. Nevertheless, the distinction of both social and aesthetic categories has implicated the following. The contradiction between modernization and modernism exists in modernity, as modernism, in the perspective of aesthetics departs from modernization, in the perspective of sociological changes.[51] Cultural modernity is seemingly going against societal modernization in modernity. However, both strangers and flaneurs wear the spectacle of modernity to express the consciousness, the attitude of modernity through the city. This implies that both cultural modernity and societal modernization contribute to modernity in different perspectives.

Notes

[1] Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited and with an introduction by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 145.
[2] Simmel, "The Stranger," 143.
[3] Simmel, "The Stranger," 146.
[4] Simmel, "The Stranger," 145.
[5] Charles Baudelaire, "The Crowds," Line 6 in *The Flowers of Evil,* Ed. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews, New York: New Directions, 1989.
[6] Baudelaire, "The Crowds," Line 17 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[7] Chris Jenks, "Watching Your Step" in *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995)*,* 146.
[8] Jenks, "Watching Your Step," 155.
[9] Simmel, "The Stranger," 144.
[10] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 325.
[11] Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyricla Poet in the Era of High Capitalism***,** translated from the German by Harry Zohn (London : NLB, 1973), 48.
[12] Simmel, "The Stranger," 146.
[13] Simmel, "The Stranger," 146.
[14] Graeme Gilloch**,** *Myth and Metropolis : Walter Benjamin and the city* **(**Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 145.
[15] Simmel, "The Stranger," 147.
[16] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 48.
[17] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 48.
[18] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 48.
[19]Baudelaire, "The Swan", Line 7-8 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[20] Baudelaire, "Loss of a Halo", Line 4 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[21] Baudelaire, "To a Passer-by", Line 14 *The Flowers of Evil.*
[22] Simmel, "The Stranger," 145.
[23] Simmel, "The Stranger," 144.
[24] Simmel, "The Stranger," 145.
[25] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 55.
[26] Baudelaire, "Crowds", Line 2 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[27] Jenks, "Watching Your Steps," 150.
[28] Baudelaire, "To-a Passer-by," Line 5 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[29] Baudelaire, "The Eyes of the Poor," Line 29 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[30] Baudelaire, "The Eyes of the Poor," Line 31-4 in *The Flowers of Evil.*

[31] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 330.
[32] Simmel, "The Stranger," 145.
[33] Jenks, "Watching Your Step," 153
[34] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 53.
[35] Jenks, "Watching Your Step," 148.
[36] Baudelaire, "The Swan," Line 3 in *The Flowers of Evil*
[37] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental life," 320.
[38] Simmel, "The Stranger," 145.
[39] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 332.
[40] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 41.
[41] Richard Lehan, "The Inward Turn" in *The City in Literature* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1998), 78.
[42] Lehan, "Inward Turn," 79-80.
[43] Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air: the experience of modernity,* **(**London: Verso, 1983) 139.
[44] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 41.
[45] Baudelaire*, The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 13.
[46] Baudelaire, "The Swan," Line 17 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[47] Baudelaire, "The Swan", Line 21 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[48] Baudelaire, "The Swan", Line 22 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[49] Baudelaire, "The Swan", Line 28 in *The Flowers of Evil.*
[50] Simmel, "The Stranger," 143.
[51] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* edited by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 8.

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An Encounter with Janet Laurence: Towards an Affective Architecture

Maryam Foutouhi
Columbia University

Introduction

Born in 1947 in Sydney, Janet Laurence is one of Australia's most established contemporary artists. She has exhibited widely in Australia and overseas since the 1980s. Her work addresses the concepts of time, body, memory, environment, and alchemy. It is influenced by her awareness "that a woman artist does not occupy a neat position within the linear progression of art history."[1] Thus, Laurence unfolds a kind of sensibility that is impacted by her experience as a woman artist. Although her work does not directly address issues related to gendered bodies and spaces, it is certainly a result of the artist's recognition and experience as a woman in the discipline of art and architecture. She believes that as a woman she experienced an outside position. One result of being an outsider is that she has been able to explore on her own creative terms. Therefore, her works is always at the margins of the discipline and constantly open to new directions and vistas, both at the level of the conceptual and the material. Her interest in alchemy and the transformation of materials, and thus the natural world, is a clear instance of such. She explains:

> This outside position provided me with a source of inspiration through which I could begin an ecological way of thinking and making art. In fact, the whole western historical position has seen nature as separate and subordinate to "Man." Historically both women and nature have been positioned as others.[2]

Actively involved within the world of contemporary art and architecture for more than thirty years, Laurence has created work that extends from the gallery space into the urban environment and engages with the natural world. Working in mixed media, installation, and ephemeral architecture, she is most well known for her site-specific projects and her collaborations with globally renowned architectural firms, such as Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects.

Laurence has completed many site-specific projects that have been included in major national and international exhibitions. Following her solo exhibition in 1991 at the Seibu Gallery in Tokyo, Laurence was awarded an Australia Council studio residency in Tokyo in 1998, and she has since shown regularly in solo and group exhibitions in Tokyo and Nagoya. She has been invited to create permanent installations, including *Elixir* (2005) in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in Japan, which is a glass botanical environment within a traditional storage house of dark wood that evokes an old apothecary or a tiny botanical museum. Laurence's *Vanishing* (2009)—a video installation that played at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and at the Berlin art forum—was filmed during the artist's three-month residency at Taronga Zoo in Sydney. *Waiting,* exhibited in the 2010 Sydney Biennale, is a transparent mesh structure filled with plants that echoes both a botanical greenhouse and a scientific vitrine. It functions as a medicinal garden that activates processes of "rejuvenation."[3] These pieces each explicitly engage with the fragility of the natural world and explore complex environmental issues, such as the interdependence of species in different life systems.

Collaborating with architects, landscape architects, and environmental scientists, Laurence is likewise renowned for her public commissions and architectural collaborations. Among the earliest of these projects is *49 Veils* (1998), an award-winning window for the Central Synagogue, Sydney, which was completed in collaboration with architect Jisuk Han. Another of Laurence's projects, *Veiling Space* (2001), is located in the Uniting Church of Sydney. Constructed from a translucent material that is suspended within the interior space of the church, it marks one of her earliest explorations of the possibilities for ephemeral architecture. She has continued to complete significant national and international projects, including the internationally acclaimed *The Australian War Memorial* (2003) in Hyde Park, London, which was completed in collaboration with Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects. This project is a multilayered wall that rises from the landscape and weaves together the names of the birth places and places of death[4] of Australian soldiers who were killed during the two world wars. A more recent project, *Water Veil* (2006), is situated in the CH2 Building of the Melbourne City Council. It is a wall that has been transformed into a transparent atmospheric membrane that expresses and reveals the hydrology processes involved in the black water recycling treatment used in CH2.[5]

In each of these projects, Laurence creates architecture that moves beyond simply the containment of space. In her view, architecture exists as a process. She works within an architectural time-space that understands architecture as performative, dynamic, and deeply engaged with the processes and events of other life systems. In her work, she introduces new modes of architectural experience through an affective architecture that interacts with the environment. These affective architectural processes, in turn, are grounded in her holistic view of nature.

In Laurence's view, we are entities that are interrelated and interconnected with a world that consists of many different kinds of life.[6] Through her work, she sets out to awaken the viewer's sense of their own interconnectivity within the life-world. By incorporating ideas of nature, science, memory, alchemy, and corporeality, Laurence illustrates the co-existence of natural and built environments through architectural time-space. In her interview with Adrian Parr, Laurence describes these "elemental"[7] and "fugitive"[8] spaces in the following manner:

> Through a language of veiling, transparency, and translucency I set out to create enmeshed environments that express ephemerality. I am interested in how spaces can be slowed down, the pace and the rhythm of porosity and fluidity and how these processes inform environments. I prefer not to think in terms of boundaries; rather membranes.[9]

Laurence is interested in a progressive architectural process wherein the work of architecture becomes a time-space environment. In this view, architecture is not separate from the life-world. This means that a work of architecture is no longer a mere object of thought; rather, it functions as a zone of potentiality. By drawing on connections with other life systems, architecture can evoke processes that are expressive, chaotic, and indeterminate. This approach allows for an endless unraveling of new, open-ended encounters, and generating those encounters becomes a function of the work. The work is never fully completed. It can continually be (re)inhabited and reinvested, and it is this potential for different inhabitations that opens architecture up to an outside.

Through the creation of a slow space, Laurence attempts to capture the rhythm of this transformative movement, inviting us to rethink architecture beyond building(s). Here, slow space is best understood, as Grosz describes it, as "a position, a relation, a place related to other places but with no place of its own: a position of the in-between?"[10] Thus, the slow space evokes the space of becoming, metamorphosis, and movement. This study expands on some of the strategies that Laurence employs to create slow space, or what she might call a

space of hesitation, focusing in particular on *Water Veil* (2006), wherein the body itself becomes an architectural time-space.

In this project, Laurence uses the body to create a time-space of investigation and enact an expressive and performative architectural process. Located in the recently constructed Melbourne Council building (CH2), this project rethinks contemporary architecture beyond the containment of space.

In the traditional Cartesian understanding of space, every point within the space can be equated and calculated mathematically. Such an understanding of space originated from Descartes' dualistic separation of body and mind and his understanding of mind, or cognition, as holding priority over the body. This is an understanding of the world that is purely analytical and rational, and for much of the history of Western thought, it resulted in a limited understanding of the material experience of space.

Towards an Affective Space

However, this view has been challenged in the past century, mostly through the works of continental philosophers, such as Husserl and Heidegger, who argue that space directly engages with notions of time, body, emotion, and memory and can be experienced only through the lens of a phenomenological subject who is embedded in the world and experiences it. French poststructuralist philosophers, among them Gilles Deleuze, have drawn on and elaborated these ideas. Deleuze is interested in the notion of time-space, understood as a zone of pure difference and creativity. As Adrian Parr describes in *The Deleuze Dictionary,*

> The question of "life," namely the force that persists over time and the changes that ensue, is addressed by Deleuze as an experimental, spontaneous, and open process of transformation…evolution is constructed as a process of repetition that is inherently creative: it is productive of difference.[11]

It is this notion of difference that allows for the creative transformation of life and which works as "a system of involution where transversal movements engage material forces and affects."[12] A Deleuzian time-space is one of transformation and becoming that is reducible neither to Cartesian space, which originates in a binary opposition between mind and matter, not to the space that is experienced by the phenomenological subject, which is characterized by the mutual transformation of subjects and objects. This understanding of space is not necessarily spatio-temporal; it is what Deleuze

calls "virtual." In *Architecture from Outside,* Elizabeth Grosz describes the virtual, as follows:

> The virtual is the space of emergence of the new, the unthought, the unrealized, which at every moment loads the presence of the present with supplementary, redoubling a world through parallel universes, universes that might have been.[13]

This time-space is, paradoxically, neither spatial nor temporal but, rather, is an affective status, a series of enabling and transforming potentialities within an encounter that might become actual. Grosz explains such a space as:

> A hesitation or pause within the expected; thought may actively function to passively interrupt habit and expectation by allowing something already there in the series, in the subject or object, to become. Thought, life, is that space outside the actual which is filled with virtualities, movements, trajectories that need release. It is what a body is capable of doing without necessity and without being captured by what it habitually does, a sea of (possible) desires and machines waiting their chance, their moment of actualization.[14]

Such a conceptualization of the space of the in-between can enhance contemporary architecture by allowing it to be considered as beyond the containment of a space (or spaces) and instead conceptualized as an affective entity. This is architecture as a transformative space and "as a mode of [re]production and enhancement of the real."[15]

By closely examining Laurence's *Water Veil*, we can see how this understanding provides a framework for approaching her work. This project is an expression of the fluidity and transparency of water and its purification. Black water treatment is usually a hidden process. However, in this work, this process has been expressed through the inscription of the chemical symbols on the body of the wall, revealed through the use of the transparent veil of the glass membranes, and interpreted as a lived medium. Thus*, Water Veil* engages the viewer playfully and poetically, while connecting and sensitizing the viewer to and informing them of the hidden water purification processes within the building. *Water Veil* changes our conception of a wall and re-conceptualizes the conventional definition of a wall as a solid divider. Laurence's wall connects, rather than divides, and it has corporeal presence. Dynamic, shifting, and sensually engaging, the wall invites the viewer to encounter it as another living body with the capacity to affect and be affected. In other words, Laurence re-

conceptualizes the static-function of a wall, presenting in its place an intensive and performative architectural space. The wall is made up of layers of vertical glass panels and fluid spills across the vertical glass membranes. This combination creates a dramatic, blurring effect and makes the wall seem to be in perpetual flux, challenging the clear distinction between outside and inside.

A wall, as traditionally understood, is a fixed entity that serves the purpose of dividing two spaces from each other. Laurence's wall, however, connects the outside and the inside and unites public and private spaces through the use of sheer glass. Through its transparency and reflectivity, the sheer glass problematizes the dichotomy of outside-inside, public-private, and external-internal. In other words, *Water Veil* is a wall that, rather than dividing space, articulates an intensive in-between space. The wall thus becomes a means to generate affects and sensations.

In her work, Laurence "prefers not to think of boundaries; rather membranes."[16] That is to say, her understanding of the world is not a dualistic one that thinks in terms of dichotomies, such as that which defines an internal world in opposition to the external world. The word "veil" is incorporated into the titles of many of Laurence's works, yet in her works, the veil is no longer a tool for hiding something, but rather it reveals the inseparability of inside and outside. It vacillates between interiority and exteriority and between the invisible and the visible. This use of the veil adds a mysterious and dramatic effect to the work. The quality of the veil, in this sense, is "to transform the window into a membranous fluid and smooth space; a space of seemingly non-fixity within the urban context from the public space outside creates a dramatic effect."[17] Laurence asserts that "This work bleeds the boundary between the inside and the outside of the building's skin. It can be viewed from both within the building, and the public space outside. One sees through it and reflects into it in varying light."[18]

In a very explicit and literal way, by turning the wall into a veil that reveals the processes of water purification, the wall unveils and intensifies bodily affects. The wall foregrounds the transformation and purification of the black water within the building, which resembles a corporeal system through the transformation of its material and elemental components, reinforcing the corporeal quality of the work.

Towards a Corporeal Intensity

Drawing on the Deleuzian understanding of the body, I understand corporeal schema as modes and series of linkages, assemblages, and associations that a body makes with its own elements and parts and with other bodies to create affects, intensities and sensations. This is a concept of the body and its affects that is not reduced to a psychoanalytic or

phenomenological account of the body as "it is experienced, rendered meaningful, enmeshed in system of significations."[19] In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* Elizabeth Grosz describes such an understanding of the body in the following manner:

> …body as a social object, as a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and nondiscursive) power, as a series of linkages (or possibly activities) which form superficial or provisional connections with other objects and processes, and as a receptive surface on which the body's boundaries and various parts or zones are constituted, always in conjunction and through linkages with other surfaces and planes.[20]

Such a corporeal schema is affirmative and affective. In contrast with a psychoanalytic definition of corporeal matter, this understanding of body evokes "the empowering force of affirmative passions,"[21] and engages with the creative force of life. Grosz briefly illustrates such a body in the following examples:

> Oral sexuality can be retranscribed in corporeal terms. Instead of describing the oral derive in terms of what it feels like, as an endogenously originating psychical representation striving for an external, absent, or lost object (fantasmatic and ultimately impossible object of desire), orality can be understood in terms of what it does: creating linkages with other surfaces, other planes, other objects or assemblages. The child's lips, for example, form connections (or in Deleuzian terms, machines, assemblages) with the breast or bottle, possibly accompanied by the hand in conjunction with an ear, each system in perpetual motion and in mutual interrelation.[22]

Thus, corporeal matter is complex and does not simply function through a single point, goal or term. It can traverse and connect different potentials. It travels from one assemblage to another,[23] changes, transforms, and recreates itself, and thus it is never fully complete. This is a corporeality that may resist fixed meanings, codes and symbols. According to Deleuze, bodies are "physical intensities."[24] They are intensive capacities whose force allows for change and which are capable of creating life "anew." This kind of physicality is specific to bodies, understood as a combination of muscles, fluids, energy, and the forces of memory and habit.[25]

The unpredictability of corporeal materiality intensifies a bodies' power of being affected and affective in the world and allows them to both undergo and engender change and transformation. Laurence carefully chose the materials of this project to allegorize the non-containment of the physical aspects of the body. Thus, her use of materials such as water and glass is based on an understanding of bodies as uncontainable physicality and transformative materiality, able to extend beyond the boundaries that are designed to contain them, such as science, medicine, or the justice system, which have always understood the body as a privileged object of investigation or a static site on which and through which institutional power can be exercised. Through their systems of knowledge production, these institutions have sought to reduce the body to a static and isolated entity. As Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish,*

> …the body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs…the body is invested with relations of power and domination.[26]

Each of these disciplines acknowledge the body as an "object of thought" within the boundaries of the discipline, ignoring that bodies are complex and multifaceted entities and that they are productive—affected and affective—sites of remembrance, life and transformation.

In contrast, *Water Veil* transforms the materials that compose it, acting upon, transforming, and purifying the black water. This whole process is visualized in "the actual space of the wall [that] expresses a slight ambiguity, a slight breathing sense through the layering and changing light and reflection."[27] By transforming the wall into a living medium that connects rather than divides and that reveals the interior processes of the building rather than obscures them, it enacts a threshold between the private and public, invisible and visible, and absence and presence.

Laurence prompts us to think of the world as a system of affects and intensities and to understand ourselves as part of that world. Through such an affective understanding of life as eventful, chaotic, and indeterminate, Laurence creates architectural environments that inform and sensitize the viewer to other life systems. She therefore shifts architecture beyond thinking only in terms of building(s) and evokes an understanding of architecture that invites and incorporates change-one that accepts that such change cannot be predetermined.

Grosz has theorized this creative dynamism as an affective process in *Architecture from Outside.* She explores a mode of architectural thinking in which

architecture is not simply a tool or an instrument. Rather, as Grosz argues, architecture can be (re)thought as

> [A process of] scatter[ing] thoughts and images into different linkages or new alignments …[in order to] produce unexpected intensities, peculiar site of difference, new connections with other objects, and thus generate[s] affective and conceptual transformations that problematize[s], challenge[s], and move[s] beyond existing intellectual and pragmatic frameworks.[28]

In this way, architecture becomes expressive, performative and volatile, and it has the capacity to transform both itself and those who engage with it. This is architecture that has the potential to become "a form of action"[29] and a "mode of becoming."[30] In other words, "more than what it is and how it presently functions."[31] This is exactly how Laurence approaches architecture and art.

To Conclude

I return to the Deleuzian body informed by corporeal feminism as way of thinking otherwise about contemporary architecture. In this view, a body becomes an architectural time-space. Bodies are a pure outside, meaning that there is always the possibility for a body to become otherwise. As Grosz asserts that "we don't know what a body can do, because the body is outside of thought; which does not mean that it is unthinkable, but that we approach it in thought without fully grasping it."[32] In Deleuze's understanding, the body is "any whole, composed of parts"[33] in which these parts are interrelated to each other, "with the capacity of being affected and affective."[34] The relationship of parts is not a hierarchical one; instead, the body comprises parts that function as a whole and collectively. A body is not merely defined by its materiality or by occupying space (i.e., extension), nor is it defined by its organic structure or form. Instead, a body in a Deleuzian sense is best understood as a physical intensity.[35]

According to Parr in *Deleuze and Memorial Culture,* "a Deleuzian intensity substitutes sensation for form. Rather than attending to the extensive, it invites us to consider affective magnitudes."[36] In this view, the body becomes a whole that is composed of the system of interaction and relation among its parts. Such a body is defined by its transformative materiality or, as Deleuze says in *A Thousand Plateaus,* it is "an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movements and rest."[37] The human body is just one example of such a body. An animal body, a body of work, a political party, or even an idea can be a body.[38]

This study has proposed architecture as an affective body that creates an environment inseparable from life as a whole and from the world around us. In this view, architecture becomes an art of movement and metamorphosis, as bodies generate what is new, surprising and unpredictable.[39] This means that the definition of architecture is not reducible to building(s). Instead, architecture becomes a process, a time-space, a silent murmur that sustains life as a dynamic, active force of change. The work of Janet Laurence provides a crucial example of how such an affective architecture might work. Throughout her art, she creates an interrelated and interconnected system of spaces and materials that can best be understood as dynamic modes of change and movement. Architecture, as her work exemplifies, is a transformative process—an architectural time-space.

Notes

1Adrian Parr and Michael Zaretsky, eds., *New Directions in Sustainable Design* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 18.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Adrian Parr in conversation with the author, in Parr's *DAAP Lecture Series*, Cincinnati, OH, Fall 2010.
4Adrian Parr and Michael Zaretsky, eds., *New Directions in Sustainable Design* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 16.
5Adrian Parr, "Interview with Janet Laurence on Public Art and Ecology," *New Directions in Sustainable Design*, 13-19.
[6] Adrian Parr, "Interview with Janet Laurence on Public Art and Ecology," *New Directions in Sustainable Design*, 13-19.
[7] Ibid., 13-19.
[8] Ibid., 13.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 91.
[11] Parr, "Creative Transformation," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 58.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Grosz, *Architecture from Outside.* 78
[14] Ibid., 70.
[15] Ibid., 90.
[16] Parr, "Interview with Janet Laurence on Public Art and Ecology," in *New Directions in Sustainable Design*, 13
[17] "Water Veil" from Janet Laurence's official website, accessed Feb 25, 2010, available at: http://www.janetlaurence.com/2009/10/water-veil/.
[18] "Janet Laurence, Water Veil," in *City Of Melbourne,* accessed Feb 25, 2010, available at: http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/Environment/CH2/aboutch2/Pages/Waterveil.aspx.

[19] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism.* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 1994), 116.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 66.
[22] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116.
[23] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Shizophernia.* Trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 343.
[24] Baugh, "Body," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 30-32.
[25] Adrian Parr in conversation with the author, Cincinnati, OH, Fall 2010.
[26] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House Inc., 1978), 46.
[27] "Water Veil" from Janet Laurence's official website, Accessed Feb 25, 2010, available at: http://www.janetlaurence.com/2009/10/water-veil/.
[28] Grosz, *Architecture from Outside,* 58.
[29] Ibid., 58.
[30] Ibid., 72.
[31] Ibid., 90.
[32] Ibid., 28
[33] Baugh, "Body," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 30-32.
[34] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 256-257.
[35] Baugh, "Body," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 30-32.
[36] Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture*, 154.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Baugh, "Body," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 30-32.
[39] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi.

Sounds of Silence

Tony Lack
Alamo College

Introduction

This essay addresses Nietzsche's general perspective on music and nature, with a foray into modern discourses of ecology, followed by a discussion of the ways that the music of John Cage pertains to these topics. The Nietzschean understanding of music as providing echoes and clues to the chaos and indeterminacy of nature is contrasted with the tendency in modern ecological discourse and practice to view nature as a balanced and harmonious system. Ecology is characterized and criticized as a manifestation of a will to power not unlike that of the slave morality described in *On the Genealogy of Morals*,[1] wherein the urge to control disguises itself as the path to liberation or salvation. The essay concludes with a discussion of the ways that the music and ideas of John Cage relate to Nietzsche's understanding of nature and to the problems associated with ecology as a discourse of control.

I. Friedrich Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy*

The Birth of Tragedy is about the way that the pre-Socratic Greeks solved Nietzsche's big question, the question of the value of existence. For Nietzsche, the key question for modern human beings was, "What do we do now that God is dead?" That is, how can we find meaning and value in life after secularism, atheism, scientism, and urbanization have created a situation in which modern humans find themselves without solid moorings, without any of the ontological security found in traditional societies? Now that traditional structures are unhinged, modern humans are faced with the prospect of nihilism; a form of indifference in which everything is meaningful, but only in a trivial way, so nothing is meaningful. How can we rescue modern life from this encroaching nihilism? As Nietzsche expressed this concern in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*,

> "All is empty, all is the same, all has been! . . .Verily, we have become too weary even to die. We are still waking and living on - in tombs"[2]

Does this imply that we have fallen away from truth and live in a false world? Not at all, for Nietzsche, all of our representations of reality, along with all of our creations, are illusory projections of the will to power. Nietzsche understood the world "in-itself" as a field of forces, a "monster of energy."[3] Our perceptions of reality emerge as necessary illusions from this blooming, buzzing confusion in the same way that stories about the past are constructed through the distortions and selective attention of the historians. All of our ways of knowing are riven with projections, repressions, illusions, fantasies, and fears, as they manifest in the will to survive, which takes form as a will to know, which appears in its Sunday best as a will to truth. "All of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error"[4]

From within this understanding that deceptions and fantasies are *necessary* illusions, Nietzsche distinguishes between those which are healthy and life affirming and those which lead to sickness and stultification. Illusions cannot, by definition, be arranged along a continuum of truth and falsity; instead they are evaluated according to their promise of sickness and health. The fictions we create must strike a balance between order and chaos in a way that is life affirming and useful for health. Artistic illusions are healthier than others. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche endorses, "art, in which precisely the lie is sanctified and the will to deception has a good conscience."[5]

Nietzsche identified two aspects of the will to power that constitute all of our illusions. They are the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Some corollaries in ancient Greek culture are:

Titans	Olympians
Asiatic-Barbarian	Hellenic
Music	Sculpture
Nature	Culture
Excess	Measure
Unity	Individuality
Pain	Pleasure[6]

Any humanly perceivable reality will be a combination of these two forces. They are always found together, with one predominating. For example, art is a discourse of truth; how does it create a balance between order and chaos and how does this balance function as a means of life affirmation? Science, too, is a discourse of truth; does it find this balance and, if so, how does this balance function as a means of life affirmation?

Nietzsche argued that the Apollonian force was the primary force in the plastic arts of sculpture and painting, with their emphasis on clarity of form, as well as the highly-structured, time-conquering, epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In these epics, Homer created gods who affirmed life to its fullest by conquering it with order and measure, bringing it under control. Nietzsche exclaimed, "Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it -- the only satisfactory theodicy."[7]

The Apollonian form also appears in nature and in civilization as the rational force that subdues and revels in subjugation. It is the force that individuates itself by structuring, shaping, and measuring the otherness of natural forces and life processes.

In the highly-structured epic we have a partial answer to Nietzsche's question, "How should we live?" We can accept and affirm the clearly delineated forms of natural life and social interaction that create measure, order, hierarchy, and predictability. We can witness the feats of the gods or the astronauts and feel that all is well because the unknown has been subdued and channeled into something productive, rational, and useful.

However, epic is a far cry from tragedy. In order to explain tragedy, Nietzsche directs our attention to the other force, the Dionysian. Dionysus is the god of excess, loss of control, orgiastic pleasures, and ecstasy. Where we find Dionysus, all order and measure is threatened. Under the influence of the Dionysian, the individual loses her individuality; she is swallowed up and carried away on the sea of feeling that swells up within the crowd. The Dionysian mode is self-transcendence driven by desire and facilitated by wine, sex, passion, or the elemental music of the Greek chorus. A tragedy exists when Apollo meets Dionysus in an uneasy truce.

Early Greek dramas had no roles for the highly individuated self. The focal point was the chorus. The chorus was composed of satyrs, which, according Nietzsche, represents a longing for the primitive and natural. The satyr is not a mere beast. The satyr was an "archetype of a man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions."[8] Presumably, the Greeks achieved an emotional identification with the satyr chorus during the performance of a tragedy. They became one with the primordial, natural, excessive, element in the satyr. Nietzsche explains:

> The Dionysian reveler sees himself as a satyr, and as a satyr, in turn, he sees the god, which means that in his metamorphosis he beholds another vision outside himself, as the Apollonian complement of his own state.[9]

Nietzsche claims that the spectators at tragedies experienced "metaphysical comfort."[10] The Greek revelers were getting behind the illusions of their everyday world and the trivial but necessary attachment to their social roles. In the ecstatic experience of the tragic performances,

> the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature. The metaphysical comfort-- with which, I am suggesting even now, every true tragedy leaves us-- that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable-- this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural creatures who live ineradicably, as it were, behind all civilization and remain eternally the same.[11]

The revelers who identify with the chorus are emotionally connected to nature. They also realize that they are part of an eternal cycle, and not in control. This is their strange comfort. These Greeks were becoming one, through emotion, with what they could not become one with through reason's representations of the world. This Dionysian revelry was a form of redemption and revitalization. It was a way for the Greeks to anticipate and respond to the incipiency of what Max Weber called the "disenchantment of the world:"

> The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental.[12]

Living in their monumental world, on the Acropolis, at Paestum, in Epidaurus, or the Valley of the Temples,[13] under the bright skies of Apollo's chariot, the Greeks recognized themselves as political-technical virtuosos, rational masters of the universe. At the same time, they must have sensed the coming danger of technocracy, dwelling as Olympians in the daylight of necessity and reveling in the intimate mysteries of night as form of release.

How then, does tragedy solve the problem of nihilism? The idea of transcending everyday suffering is part of it. The individual comes to see himself as part of a larger unity and that unity, although chaotic, dangerous, unpredictable, is seen in affirmative terms.

But alas! Nietzsche thought that the possibility to connect with the deeper impulses of nature was destroyed by Plato and his followers in their relentless search for the One Truth. Plato was intensely Apollonian. In his world, the

ecstatic desires, along with what they produce, poetry, music, art, and nature, were subsumed by a rational plan, a totalitarian bureaucracy of the soul and reason.

Is it time to inquire into the ways that ecology and the aesthetics of nature have assumed the role of Apollonian force par excellence? Is it time to peer underneath the labels "liberal" and "conservative" and ask whether or not a deeper process is at work, wherein ecology become a new-age version of "Platonism for the People?"[14]

II. The Unbearable Heaviness of Ecology

We might begin by considering the way in which ecology and sustainability are often expressed as a discourse of repression, serving the purpose of control rather than liberation. Three intertwined influences have generated the western ecological narrative: the metaphysics of presence, Christianity, and atomistic science. The basis of the western metaphysics of presence, from Plato to Kant, has been the denial of life itself, because life is, "appearance, change, pain, death, the corporeal, the senses, fate, bondage, the aimless."[15] Situated squarely within the western metaphysical tradition, the discourse of ecology expresses the desire for permanence, Being, and control. Christianity orders life in and nature in a way that leaves no room for the creative destruction of nature. It also represses the human instincts and teaches humans to feel guilty about the sex drive, which is the source of life. Like the Christian religion, secular ecological theory is rife with opportunities for guilt, asceticism, and shame, imperatives to conserve energy, ceremonial obligations to go green, and opportunities to confess one's wasteful sins. Moreover, Christian teaching tends to devalue earthly existence, which is understood as a preparation for the otherworld of the afterlife. For many, modern ecology is also like a religion in its idealization a notion of nature as a lost Eden that we can return to for wisdom, healing, and sustenance. Zizek writes,

> The underlying message of this predominant ecological ideology is a deeply conservative one: any change can only be a change for the worse. So what is wrong here? What is wrong I think is the . . . principal position . . . that there is something like "nature," which we humans, with our hubris, with our will to dominate, disturbed.[16]

This way of imagining nature empowers the priests and prophets of the god of nature who have instantiated themselves as caretakers of the world's balance. Some of them proclaim the problem, "your life is unsustainable," while others provide the solution in secularized forms of penance to compensate for our guilt, saving the earth at a distance, through green consumerism. We can have our cake and eat it too, purchasing an indulgence when we pay a little extra for cruelty-free meat or hybrid vehicles.

Our view of nature as a prelapsarian Eden reproduces a form of metaphysical dualism, yet another form of the eternal stalemate in which the Cartesian subject in its world of techno-science is opposed to the animism of Noble Savages who dwell in a harmonious relation to nature. Ecology promises humankind a solution to the alienation and pain caused by the "masters and possessors of nature."[17]

However, ecological narratives that claim to be materialist and atheistic—strictly scientific—exhibit some of the most otherworldly, pseudo-scientific, claims and assumptions. Our human need to create meaning causes us to project a teleology into scientific analyses, finding a natural balance and equilibrium where there is no such thing. For example, the Maryland Sea Grant Program's "Fact Sheet" claims,

> "[when species are moved] out of their natural ecological fabric—where eons of evolution have established a balance, for example, between predator and prey—to an area where they have no natural competitors or other controls, and may therefore reproduce unchecked."[18]

Fortunately, most scientists are skeptical, at best, of the Arcadian view of nature as a balanced, integrated, system. The view of nature as eternal turmoil has been widely held by scientists since the early 1990s and is by no means a radical perspective. By contrast, the nature-in-balance view, "makes nice poetry, but it's not such great science."[19] The developing conviction that nature is ruled more by flux and disturbance is "becoming the dominant idea."[20] Ecological communities of plants and animals are inherently unstable. Small but significant differences in behavior among communities and individuals in them create a permanent state of invasion, succession, and disequilibrium. What we see as a natural state of equilibrium is probably wishful thinking and exaggeration of temporary processes of recovery or stabilization.

Moreover, even if organisms and environments exhibit a drive toward equilibrium, external disturbances like climate change, variations in weather patterns, fires, windstorms, hurricanes and disease prevent them from attaining it.

There are also many problems with the nature-in-balance approach to evolutionary theory, which is not compatible with the idea that an environment could ever be in a prolonged state of equilibrium. Evolutionary theory is based on assertion that a well-adapted organism is one that temporarily succeeds in an unintended wager that salient features of the environment will remain stable and consistent enough for it to survive and reproduce. Creatures can never completely overcome this risk or become fully integrated into their niche because any environment is always more complex in scale, scope, function, and consequence than the organism's ability to comprehend it. Therefore, any organism is always-already out of sync with its

environment. The purely ideological conception of nature as a homeostatic totality is itself an adaptive way of seeing that has emerged from our modern human condition. We are out of sync, so there must be a comforting and stable presence that we could eventually synchronize with. All creatures, perpetually ill-fitted to their environments and unable to be perfectly adapted to them, have the need to create a representation of their world. However, as Nietzsche pointed out in *The Gay Science,* life is no argument:

> We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live by the postulating of bodies, lines, surfaces, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith no one could manage to live at present! But for all that they are still unproved. Life is no argument; error might be among the conditions of life.[21]

All creatures experience risk and must participate, albeit unwittingly, in the high stakes gamble that we call evolution. But only humans seem to generate expectations and ideals or "articles of faith" which we then impose upon nature. It is this sense in which our higher consciousness creates a necessary illusion which becomes a set of values. In our attempts to minimize risk and predict the best course of action we generate a Platonic Ideal of nature as symmetrical, balanced, and harmonious, as well as a source of goodness and wisdom. In this manner, the most radical, atheistic, materialist forms of ecology become forms of Platonism for the People. It has become empowering and profitable for some ecologists to preach a gospel of control, relying upon the false notions of balance and equilibrium. This technocratic discourse often conceals a darker side, which hindsight may reveal as yet another form of speciesism.

As Mark Sagoff has pointed out, the rhetoric employed by ecologists in warnings about the dangers of invasive species is similar to that which was used by nativists and "Know Nothings"[22] against immigrants in the early Twentieth Century. Under the aegis of "increasing ecological diversity" ecologists are actively involved in eradicating, relocating, and exterminating exotic species in an "all-out battle" which is getting "out of control."[23]

> Those who seek funds to exclude or eradicate non-native species often attribute to them the same disreputable qualities that xenophobes have attributed to immigrant groups. These undesirable characteristics include sexual robustness, uncontrolled fecundity, low parental involvement with the young, tolerance for "degraded" or squalid conditions, aggressiveness, predatory behavior, and so on.[24]

However, these same characteristics, seen in a more euphemistic light, are lauded in species that we wish to preserve and they are actively cultivated in

species that we wish to consume. Most of our crops, such as corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton, are exotic and sexually robust. Most of the world's oysters are commercially produced and reproduced. Cattle and Kentucky Bluegrass are exotic English imports. Indeed, of all crops we now grow in the United States, "only sunflowers, cranberries, and Jerusalem Artichokes evolved in North America."[25]

As a meta-discourse about how the world works and how it ought to be governed, science has assumed the church's historic role of institutionalized censorship and control. As a public metadiscourse cut loose from its foundations in empirical analysis, science conceals more than it reveals of the rich diversity of life and how to live it. As Slavoj Zizek observes,

> Science alone has the power to silence heretics. Today it is the only institution that can claim authority. Like the Church in the past, it has the power to destroy, or marginalize, independent thinkers [. . .] From the standpoint of anyone who values freedom of thought, this may be unfortunate, but it is undoubtedly the chief source of science's appeal. For us, science is a refuge from uncertainties, promising—and in some measure delivering—the miracle of freedom from thought, while churches have become sanctuaries for doubt.[26]

Do we really want to achieve stability and harmony and "freedom from thought"? Do we wish to enthrone the new Platonists and their religion of ecological harmony? Should we allow technocrats to reduce the rich ambiguity of the world and our place in it, our alternatives, to the false choices of living in harmony or destroying the earth? What if there is no such thing as nature, either as object of science or goal of mystical union? What if the best route to the appreciation of nature is the via negativa? Slavoj Zizek, invoking an idea from Tim Morton, makes precisely this point.

> . . . The first premise of a truly radical ecology should be, "Nature doesn't exist." . . . So again what we need is ecology without nature, ecology that accepts this open, imbalanced, denaturalized, if you want, character of nature itself.[27]

The right course for ecology is not to choose between forging ahead into the "brave new world" of technocratic posthumanism or returning to Gaia. Chaos and catastrophe and pain and waste and dirt and grime are all worth affirming. There is no duality between man and nature, there is one world, a knot that cannot be untangled, or cut. Only through self-conscious affirmation of our imperfections, our wastes, our technology, our impressive but often futile attempts to change, can we truly begin to flourish and begin to see alternatives for an art of living in and with nature.

III. Music and Nature

> Do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!"[28]

Will to power is Nietzsche's term for the nature of ultimate reality. Although the phrase has an unfortunate teleological ring, for Nietzsche there is neither an agent who wills or a final goal for power to aim for. Will to Power is a boundless force that constantly creates and destroys, crystallizing into forms which are subsequently imploded:

> This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as by a boundary . . .[29]

Although the boundless and surging will to power can never be defined or perceived "in-itself", music is, or can be, an echo of nature's power.

As opposed to a musical experience of the world, our scientific understanding reduces nature to a pragmatic *logos*. No matter how sophisticated our sciences become, their interpretations of nature and life are "stupid" in the sense that they do not yield any insight into why we are doing the things we do or what our creative alternatives might be. Nietzsche writes,

> A scientific interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the most stupid of all possible understandings of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning . . . an essentially mechanical world would be a meaningless world. Assuming that one estimated the value of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a "scientific" estimation of music be! What would one have comprehended, understood, grasped, of it? Nothing, really nothing of what is "music" in it.[30]

Nietzsche included philosophers in this critique, claiming,

> Having "wax in one's ears" was then almost a condition of philosophizing; a real philosopher no longer listened to life insofar as life is music; he denied the music of life—it is an

> ancient philosopher's superstition that all music is siren's music.[31]

In Nietzsche's criticisms of science and philosophy, music is posed as a deeper form of understanding. We are urged to, "look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life."[32] Even language, and presumably poetry and literature, cannot approximate the power of music to disclose the innermost heart of music because language, no matter how poetic, bears a trace of utilitarian, pragmatic, reference to nature.[33]

> What could have been more useful for the ancient, superstitious type of man than rhythm? It enabled one to do anything—to advance some work magically?; to force a god to appear, to be near, and to listen; to mold the future in accordance with one's will; to cleanse one's own soul from some excess and not only one's own soul but also that of the most evil demon: without verse one was nothing: by means of verse one almost became a god.[34]

Those who can maintain an unmediated musical relation to the reality of nature as a will to power are closer to it than scientists or philosophers, whose conceptual constructs conceal more than they reveal.

However, even for the most attuned listeners, not all types of music will do. Nietzsche describes the wave and beat of the rhythm in Homeric poetry in terms of its military applications, as "a Doric architecture in tones . . . whose formative power was developed for the representation of Apollonian states."[35] He contrasts this steadily marching Doric wall of sound with Dionysian music which exemplifies "the emotional power of the tone, the uniform flow of the melody, and the utterly incomparable world of harmony."[36]

He also associates Dionysian music with the earthiness of peasant folk songs, with their "continuously generating melody" that "scatters image sparks all around, which in their variegation, their abrupt change, their mad precipitation, manifest a power quite unknown to the epic and its steady flow."[37]

Despite this gesture toward populism, Nietzsche was opposed to music as an entertaining distraction.[38] He took music seriously, as a purer form of poetry, which was a purer form of philosophy. He understood that philosophy and science are excellent tools for creating the useful and necessary illusions of balance, hierarchy, and order. The problem is that our Apollonian constructs can only take us so far. As an ideal, the scientific illusion of nature as predictable and balanced is more likely to generate its opposite. That is, every temporary gain in ontological security comes with a price; the sudden shock and sense of crisis brought about by the unintended consequences of human technological interventions. The solution to this problem does not necessarily lie in a romantic return to mother nature, off-the-grid living, or luddism.

Instead, we should seek opportunities to prepare ourselves for the shock of nature's sudden catastrophes by cultivating an understanding and appreciation of the transitory, fugitive, and ephemeral aspects of nature and life. For this we need to cultivate an openness to the Dionysian music in the "monster of energy" we call nature.

IV. John Cage: There Would Be No Need for Musicians if We Had Ears

In a passage from his autobiography, John Cage tells us, perhaps tongue in cheek, that attempting to improve the world will only make things worse:

> I began my Diary: How to Improve the World: You Will Only Make Matters Worse. Mother said, "How dare you!"[39]

What would a twentieth century Dionysian music of nature sound like? Would it consist of *protest* music that critiques our relentless desire to control nature, or songs that encourage us to get back to nature and *celebrate* the sun and the earth? It may be better to ask what effects a twentieth century Dionysian music would generate? Would it pulverize and destroy the norms of mainstream society? Would it generate an ecological subculture or counterculture? Would the ensuing resistance and rebellion eventually assume the form of a greenwashed commodity? Would all such music composed intentionally as protest or celebration be susceptible to the perils and pitfalls of neutralization and cooptation?

It may be wiser to ask if there is a form of music whose non-intentional structure emerges sui-generis, irreducible to a priori forms, patterns, or concepts? Would this music produce a suspension of judgment about the Real that would open the listener's ears?

I'd like to consider the music of John Cage in this light, relating some of the themes about nature, music, and ecology discussed thus far to Cage's work and thought.[40] Cage favored openness, indeterminacy, and chance. His modus operandi involved creating music whose emergent, undetermined, rhythms open a distance between the composer and the work. His works aim to problematize the difference between subject and object.

Traditionally, musical composition has consisted in the art of arranging sounds in a melody and combining sounds in a harmony. Composers aim to produce a variety of sounds which may be considered beautiful, sublime, shocking, and so on. The point of composition is that sounds must be intentionally arranged so that they may be experienced by the listener. The expectations of the audience meet the intentions of the composer. Leaving aside the mundane point that one might raise about pandering to the audience or preaching to the choir, at a more fundamental level, even the most experimental, avant-garde music has aims and intentions. Does nature have

aims and intentions? Does sound itself have any necessary relation to other sounds, or to the ear? Cage explains:

> A sound does not view itself as thought, as ought, as needing another sound for its elucidation, as etc.; it has no time for any consideration—it is occupied with the performance of its characteristics: before it has died away . . .[41]

Like Nietzsche, Cage denies that there is any necessary structure, purpose, or aim in nature. This one reason why his compositions rely on aleatory techniques, so that sounds may be liberated and emerge as what they are rather than what we expect them to be. In his *Autobiographical Statement* Cage describes his technique as,

> a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.[42]

Our need to identify and define the world around us often follows a path of disenchantment and reification wherein the map becomes the territory and serves as the basis for our experience. Our life experience begins to consist of representations of representations. This can happen to the arts, as genres solidify and become familiar but formulaic.

Compositions such as Cage's *Living Room Music* (1940) and *Water Walk* (1959) are attempts to create music that cannot become formulaic because, by definition, each performance will differ substantially in form and content. For example, *Living Room Music* consists of four movements: *To Begin, Story, Melody,* and *End*. The performers are instructed to use available household objects such as magazines, books, floors, and walls. The first and the last movements are percussive. In the second movement the performers are instructed to speak or sing from Gertrude Stein's nature-themed children's book, *The World Is Round*.[43] They are, in a sense, remaking sound, nature, and the nature of sound as they perform this piece. The third movement, *Living Room Music* is optional and ensures that each performance will differ because it suggests that any one of the performers should play a melody of indeterminate length on any suitable instrument at hand.

Water Walk was composed in 1959. Cage performed it in January, 1960, on the Television Show *I've Got a Secret*. This performance, which can be viewed online[44] involved a water pitcher, an iron pipe, a goose call, a bottle of wine, an electric mixer, a whistle, a sprinkling can, ice cubes, 2 cymbals, a mechanical fish, a quail call, a rubber duck, a tape recorder, a vase of roses, a seltzer siphon, 5 radios, a bathtub, and a grand piano.[45]

Cage self-consciously promoted an affirmation of life without attempting to control its underlying, chaotic dimension. He also evinces a Dionysian perspective on nature. The Dionysian, Nietzsche tells us, affirms "the joyous sensation of dissonance in music."[46] In Dionysian music, we hear "the roaring desire for existence pouring from [the heart chamber of the world will] into all the veins of the world, as a thundering current or as the gentlest brook, dissolving into mist."[47]

If we understand the following quote in the context of his published reflections,[48] it is evident that Cage thinks that what makes nature more interesting than humans is its elusive and indeterminate power. Note that he doesn't fall into a simplistic dichotomy; nature is good and human control of nature is bad: "To be perfectly honest with you, let me say I find nature far more interesting than any of man's controls of nature. This does not imply that I dislike humanity."[49]

The result of these compositions should be an affirmation of the primordial unity of humans and nature, such that, "one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact, everything is gained."[50]

Like a Nietzschean Taoist, Cage knew that rational thinking, concepts, and presuppositions are necessary illusions that our minds require to understand the world but they prevent a deeper, more intuitive understanding. Cage also wished to create music that would highlight the absurd and the irrational in nature and life. Writing in a decentered style using aleatory methods allowed Cage to position the listener to experience an unmediated relation to music and to develop the capacity to relate to nature's shifting structure through unconscious musical relations. Besides, it is futile to imagine that nature can be represented with human categories, "a measuring mind can never finally measure nature."[51]

In conclusion, a genuine music of nature need not be about nature. It must simply bring the listener nearer to the monster of energy that Nietzsche affirmed and recognized as world, nature, music, and truth.

Notes

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7 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 42-43.
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12 Weber, Max, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, translated and edited by H. H. Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. New York: Free Press. 1946. [Originally, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, 1918]
13 http://www.historvius.com/ancient-greek-sites-and-ruins/pe113
14 This quip from Nietzsche is found in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "But the fight against Plato or, to speak more clearly and for "the people," the fight against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia—for Christianity is Platonism for "the people"—has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which has never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals."
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32 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 2.
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34 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 84.
35 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 2.
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38 "What now? One gives the mole wings and proud conceits - before it is time to go to sleep, before he crawls back into his hole? One sends him off into the theater and places large glasses before his blind and tired eyes? . . .The strongest ideas and passions brought before those who are not capable of ideas and passions but only of intoxication!" Nietzsche*, Birth of Tragedy,* 6.
39 http://johncage.org/autobiographical_statement.html John Cage delivered "An Autobiographical Statement" at Southern Methodist University on 17 April 1990, first appeared in print in the *Southwest Review*, 1991.
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41 Ibid.
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Evacuated Ecologies: H.G. Wells and the Evolutionary Aesthetics of Extinction

Robert Pasquini
McMaster University

Of the many provocative topics in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, one which still attracts considerable attention is the extinction of species. Darwin's claim that "we marvel when we hear of the extinction of an organic being, and as we do not see the cause, we invoke cataclysms to desolate the world" speaks to the imaginary and often speculative responses to the threat of extinction in fiction.[1] By the nineteenth century's conclusion perhaps no other post-Darwinian writer was as well-versed in the possibilities of biotic annihilation as H.G. Wells. His early works reflect a preoccupation with vanishing species, including humans. In the 1887 essay "A Vision of the Past" Wells satirizes progress narratives which precluded humankind from extinguishment by conjuring a primitive "philosophic amphibian" which, without the privileged hindsight Wells possesses, believes its species to be "the culminating point of all existence."[2] Wells debunks the idea by pointing out their humanized defects. He meditates on humanity's collapse in the 1891 text "Zoological Retrogression" by projecting our expected replacement by a fitter species: "Nature is, in unsuspected obscurity, equipping some now humble creature with wider possibilities of appetite, endurance, or destruction, to rise in the fullness of time and sweep *homo* [sic] away into the darkness from which his universe arose." By distinguishing the "Coming Beast" within the "Coming Man," Wells crystallizes the anxieties of a society enraptured by progress yet increasingly aware of its futility.[3] Further, in the 1893 essay "On Extinction" Wells anticipates that the "'swarming' of the whole globe by civilized men" will induce our evacuation from the natural order. He concedes that "the list of destruction has yet to be made in its completeness."[4] That notion of absolute biotic liquidation would be fully realized in 1895's *The Time Machine* in the form of the evolved descendants of humans, the Eloi and the Morlocks, then millennia later in an apotheosized scene of ecological uncertainty: the nightmare biota of the deep future. My views build on Henry M. Cowles's

postulation that "Extinction was a Victorian idea" which surfaced in its modern form after the popularization of *Origin*.[5] Through Wells's novella, I trace the aesthetics of extinction which still resonate in our contemporary moment of accelerated species loss. Visions of collapse suffuse the stories which modern humans tell about themselves and the ways in which we envision their futures, haunting assumptions of possible cultural, social, or species-specific prestige.

As spectacular or hyperbolized as depictions of extinction may seem, their impact on the modern imagination is inevitably bound to the issues provoked by the topic's ethicality; to foresee the earth depopulated of humans, quiescent only to unbreakable natural laws, is to reduce all human progress to absence and to draw attention to the audience's contemporaneous trajectory towards such desolation. The Time Traveller—the last survivor and anachronistic remnant of *Homo sapiens*—quickly arrives at the realization that his human form is the prototype rather than the type. He senses himself as "an old world savage animal" in the midst of unusual fauna. When upon the machine and hurtling through time, the Traveller faces "new sensations" and discerns that, with "a certain curiosity and therewith a certain dread," that there will be "strange developments of humanity." He raises the questions which the very contemplation of a post-human form compels: "What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful?"[6] The Traveller becomes the figure of degeneracy, an atavism purged of its exceptional status. As Stephen Arata attests, degeneration anxieties were especially rampant in the 1890s, especially in portrayals of "national, biological, [and] aesthetic" deterioration across the social echelon.[7] They were roused by what was seen as a decline or dropping-away from a normative type. "Like the earth itself in Victorian paleontology," Arata suggests, "the self could no longer be imagined as immutable. Instead it was riven by history, sedimented by innumerable strata of earlier lives and fates, molded into its present shape by an ineluctable and almost unimaginably distended past."[8] The notion of the human as atavistic is vital to the theorization of evolutionary aesthetics. The human must become atavistic in order to perceive future changes in a world evacuated of humankind. Because of this narratorial dilemma, literary observers of extinction are often framed as the last of their kind, of their species, or like the Traveller beyond the year of 802, 701, possibly of the earth. Rather than just being concerned with the past's influence on the present, writers like Wells worried about the traits of their present-day humans infiltrating the lives of future progeny. Drawing on evolutionary theory, they envisaged human forms transformed into unrecognizably abject bodies. The human could be relegated to a background entity of nature, consumed and overgrown by wilderness, a scintilla of its previous form, usurped by grotesqueries of the evolutionary imaginary. Wells rose to fame in a period of great transition wherein a triumphalist attitude towards nature was encroached

upon by a fatalist one; the unpredictable schema of nature, he realized, made humans expendable and forgettable but not, as will eventually be demonstrated, unaccountable.

Naturalizing Loss: Evolutionary Views of Extinction, Speciation, and Recovery

Like Wells had done during his training in biology, I turn to Darwinism to qualify my understandings and interpretations of the concepts "species" and "extinction." In *Origin*, Darwin considers "species" as a term "arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, [but one that] does not essentially differ from the term variety."[9] A taxonomical classification does not portend stability; instead, over innumerable generations, species transform as subtly as the tectonic upheavals of mountains. Darwin posits that "over the whole world, the land and the water has been peopled by hosts of living forms." He discerns that "an infinite number of generations, which the mind cannot grasp" have continually "succeeded each other in the long roll of years."[10] His effort to cognize the immense possibilities of bodily form indicates the imaginative effort required to depict the simultaneity of incipient varieties coming into being, and of entrenched species collapsing.

Evolution reinforces differentiation and mutation—species speciate into nothing special at all. Origins are only nebulous epicentres of expanding genealogies. The passage toward extinction reveals slippage between taxonomical outgrowths and the entities which those taxonomies attempt to index. Darwin naturalizes irreversible losses of life by postulating that "the appearance of new forms and the disappearance of old forms, both natural and artificial, are bound together" in processes of decline and generation, in populations transformed and collapsed.[11] Gillian Beer notes the "optimistic" use of extinction in a Darwinian context; because "the world was always full, even over-full" with struggling creatures, "hyperproductivity" could help mitigate and balance extreme losses of life.[12] This proliferation rather than containment of possible bodily form makes the imperfectability of form manifest. *Origin* concludes by forecasting the continued transition of biota into unknowable future forms. Out of the struggle for existence, "endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."[13] Darwin stresses sustained transformation as generations pressured by contingency and necessity secede to disaggregation. Like the literary minds inspired by his theory's ramifications, Darwin aestheticized the inexplicable, transferring to the realm of culture the anxiety-producing sensations of unknowingness, contingency, and variability. Darwinism's ever-branching public presence gave writers a materialist framework in which to interrogate a changing world where "the forms of life change almost simultaneously"[14] and the human becomes just another "progenitor of innumerable extinct and living descendents."[15]

From a literary perspective, Wells was not alone in cultivating the aesthetics of extinction which dominated many popular nineteenth-century works. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, Robert Cromie's *The Crack of Doom*, Richard Jefferies *After London; or Wild England*, and M.P. Shiel's late-period *The Purple Cloud* are but a few examples of a literary trend which addressed extinction in some form: via catastrophe, genocide, or divergence. Yet all these works did not capture the public imagination the way in which Wells's *The Time Machine* had. In scenes of environmental collapses or ecological disturbances, non-professional multitudes could reflect upon the ethical exigencies of their over-populated and oft-destructive circumstances. Readers who devoured scientific romances at the climax of *fin de siècle* anxieties became witnesses to future scenes of biotic changeovers. I wish to extend Paul Fayter's argument for a dialectical relationship between Victorian science and print media here. "Professional sciences not only helped shape science fiction," Fayter insists, "in many cases their work was shaped by it."[16] Because of this discursive reciprocation between domains, I contend that concepts like extinction, collapse, atavisms, or post-humanism could be made more effectively palatable for the curious reading public through literary rather than purely theoretical imaginings, hence my focus on the scientific romance.

The possibility of population collapse was not novel to Victorians. French naturalist Georges Cuvier's brand of catastrophism was widely influential in the pre-Darwin era. His well-known "Preliminary Discourse" of *Recherches sur les ossements fossiles* argues for the reconciliation of geographic formations and fauna depletions with a series of catastrophic events: great floods. These episodes strengthened their connections to natural theology as catastrophism's reputation increased. Robert Chambers's wildly popular *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* brought ideas of extinction and transmutation into direct contact with plebeian audiences. Its speculations prepared the reading public for future negotiations with evolutionism. Eventually geologists and naturalists like Sir Charles Lyell and Darwin recognized the flawed extrapolations of catastrophism or cosmic evolution. By the time Darwin's argument was gaining traction in professional and colloquial circles, catastrophes of Malthusian proportions were presented as inescapable. Some began realizing that mass extinction and background extinction events do not always denote the absolute liquidation of all biota, making extinction a ubiquitous topic surrounding everyday moments of struggle. David Jablonski explains that following "any extinction event, the biota of a given region has three components: local survivors, newly evolved lineages, and invaders that were present elsewhere and enter the region in the wake of the extinction event."[17] Three phases accompany extinction events: the actual "extinction phase" where diversity diminishes, the "survival or lag phase" entailing intensified struggle, and then the "recovery phase" entailing "diversity increase."[18] Any catastrophe matters less than the "recovery phase" and the struggle for unoccupied niches thereafter.

The causes of extinction are as diverse as authors' speculations on which entities will territorialize the vacant space once occupied by humankind, and each type extrapolates from scientific theories and colloquial anxieties of the era. The most obvious examples of extinction events are those instigated by catastrophe or disaster. Other "biotic types" of extinction such as inter-species "competition," "[b]iological "invasions," or "[p]redation and disease" were often depicted less frequently than "abiotic" forces like "volcanism, bolide impacts, sea-level rise, sea-level fall, anoxia, global warming, global cooling and changing continental configuration."[19] Late Victorian culture expanded on such calamitous possibilities. The vast archive of possible cataclysms included conquest by machines in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, toxic urban pollution in William Delisle Hay's *The Doom of the Great City*, an obliterative comet impact in George Griffith's *Olga Romanoff*, and even extraterrestrial invasion in Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. Yet Wells most thoroughly addressed the topic in his oeuvre.

Humanity Resurfaced: The Human as Atavistic

Before examining Wells's text more in detail, it is important to expand on how Victorians were provoked by the ascension of evolutionary discourse to reassess ideas of human exceptionality and humankind's dominion over the natural world. At stake was the sustainment of a moral order inscribed upon a material one which, by the era's end, would acquiesce to instability as Victorians deliberated the degeneration of their models of knowledge. In these visions of extinction events and perpetuated speciation, the human becomes a genealogical lacuna—the missing link—and accordingly relegated to the lower rungs of a culturally-produced hierarchy of the animal kingdom. I identify these speculations as "atavistic futurities." They aestheticize the human as outdated, degenerate, or obsolete within ecologies evacuated of our presence, and undermine notions of progress and human exceptionality in a purely materialist environment. These visions do not necessarily depict a return to the earth's originals state as degeneration discourses would suggest. Instead, a primal figure re-emerges in the present as an atavism. Atavistic futurities project renascent human qualities which re-surface as our present form transitions into a post-human condition. The term "atavism" did not enter into common usage until nearly the mid-nineteenth century. The *OED* defines the term—descended from *atavus*, or ancestor—as a "[r]esemblance to grand-parents or more remote ancestors rather than to parents," or more pertinent to this investigation, the "tendency to reproduce the ancestral type in animals or plants."[20] I contend that this recurrence of attributes previously thought lost (or entirely unthought of) aptly analogizes the restoration of a human-less order.

Lesser known to mainstream audiences yet strikingly astute in exploring the laws of heredity, Darwin's 1868 monograph *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* offers important insights into the period's

understandings of atavistic features. While popular attitudes toward atavisms often favoured regressionist sentiments, Darwin naturalized reversionary tendencies and transformational bodies as generative moments of becomingness absolutely vital for continued biotic diversification. He compels his audience to look toward future forms, not just their interminable origins. Although he deals primarily with domesticates in *Variation* (multiple generations could be witnessed and far-fetched interventions could be conducted in one breeder's lifetime) Darwin still highlights the continuum within which all biota struggle, develop, and deviate within. Such struggles double as the transformative forces in nature which permit "the incessant appearance of new characters." He explains that new characters,

> whether beneficial or injurious,—of the most trifling importance, such as a shade of colour in a flower, a coloured lock of hair, or a mere gesture,—or of the highest importance, as when affecting the brain, or an organ so perfect and complex as the eye,—or of so grave a nature as to deserve to be called a monstrosity,—or so peculiar as not to occur normally in any member of the same natural class,—are often inherited by man, by the lower animals, and plants.[21]

The naturalization of these recurring traits aligns them with ongoing transformative processes. An inability to "transmit [an] original form," no matter how many generations lay uncountable between the prototype and deviation, implies a lack of permanence in regards to bodily form. From an evolutionary perspective, "no character appears to be absolutely fixed."[22] Applied to the grander natural world outside our perception, Darwin calls upon anti-teleological process, noting that there is "an ample provision for the production, through variability and natural selection, of new specific forms."[23] In this view, the prepotency of *Homo sapiens*, like all other creatures, becomes endangered rather than ensured.

Darwin's peers also shed light on the associated anxieties regarding atavistic resurfacings, especially misunderstandings of the concept. In *Evolution and Disease* Sir John Bland Sutton, the future President of both the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Society of Medicine, admits that atavisms were too often misunderstood as aberrative. Deconstructing biases surrounding abnormality and mutation, the same biases which exacerbated anxieties surrounding national degeneration as well as pathologized criminality, Sutton echoes Darwin: "in many instances we shall find conditions which we regard as abnormal in man, presenting themselves as normal states in other animals." Atavisms are more than just "reversionary phenomena."[24] During an earlier 1886 address on the topic to the Zoological Society of London, Sutton describes offers a more positive description, calling atavisms the "development of transmitted characters normally latent."[25] The past, whether idealized or primitivized, intervenes in the present; the materialist forces of the natural

world which deny stability of form and promote form's unceasing plasticity are inexorable. Late Victorians were engrossed with the depictions of these inhuman conditions, and how their form could be altered, in subtle ways, over long spans of time and innumerable generations until the residuum of humankind becomes an atavistic interpolation, and obsolete.

Perhaps the best example of the atavistic resurfacing of the human is a redacted passage from *The Time Machine*. The Traveller attempts to capture a specimen of one of the rabbit-like "grey things" he encounters. He stones one in order to inspect its anatomical features. He realizes with a "disagreeable apprehension," that their "five feeble digits" and "projecting" foreheads and "forward-looking eyes" indicate that the post-human Eloi and Morlocks had continued their evolutionary transition into this creature.[26] He cannot fully incorporate the specimen into any established taxonomy. A metallic beast interrupts his investigation. Perturbed, yet unfazed, he continues into the deep future, aware that "there is no reason why a degenerate humanity should not come at last to differentiate into as many species as the descendants of the mud fish who fathered all the land vertebrates."[27] The end of humankind does not mean the end of all life, as earlier works like Shelley's genre-defining *The Last Man* insinuate; a species' end often connotes the perpetuated becoming and sprawling speciation of life continuing outside any anthropocentric purview.

Inhuman and abject figures in the evolutionary imaginary—inclusive of our anthropoid progenitors, simian facsimiles, and horrifying future forms—are culturally linked by their oppressed agencies and overlooked subjectivities due to their placement within a classificatory system which privileges human-specific cultural constructions of identity. Nature must include room for what George Levine calls "the unique, the individual, the aberrant, [and] the grotesque."[28] They are integral to the unfolding trajectories of divergence across the natural world. From a perspective shaped by Darwinian as much as Bergsonian and Deleuzian discourses, Elizabeth Grosz has discussed how the human species will eventually adopt that "inhuman" condition again. She explains life as "temporal, durational," as a process unhindered by "repetition" yet regulated by "continual invention."[29] Inherent to Darwinism is a re-orientation of the spatial distribution, cultivation, and maintenance of the earth's biota. Duration connotes a condition of becoming. It embodies the "inevitable force of differentiation and elaboration." Divergence is that "elaboration of a difference within a thing, a quality, or a system that emerges or actualizes only in duration." A nuanced understanding of extinction includes an ominous implication regarding any species' chance of guaranteed preservation: "duration is that which undoes as well as makes."[30] Certain evolutionary contexts necessitate transformation instead of destruction. A variety can advance its autonomy into species status, or dominant creatures may become peripheral players in their respective bioregions. What follows the human species might very well be a pejorative rendition of the human, a derivative advanced by degrees into divergent forms, into the very specimen

which inherited Victorian racial and species-specific prejudices abhorred: an othered kind, disagreeable yet uncanny.

Evacuated Ecologies and the Aesthetics of Extinction

While inconsistent in motive and style, late-Victorian scientific romances shared aesthetic qualities while representing the unrelatable experience of extinction. They isolated by process of literary aestheticization the entangled experiences of eradication and transformation. The evocation of evolutionary transformation in literary form compels speculation. In *Darwin's Plots*, Beer describes this inherently innovative quality of deviative processes of becoming by comparing origins and futures. "Originating is an activity, not an authority," she explains, just as "deviation, not truth to type, is the creative principle."[31] These traits of extinction narratives appear in three distinct ways: the uneasy production of inhuman figures or conditions already addressed; the dissolution of taxonomical partitions along with the rise of inter-species bridges; and the inadequacy of language to articulate extinction experiences, evolutionary processes, or absent figures.

The Time Machine serves as the best case study for qualifying these aesthetic traits. Examining the presence of extinction in popular literature focalizes the century's cultural tensions between transformation and fixity, between progress and degeneration. Much like Darwin's conceptions of nature, Well's vision ruptures the bodily, spatial, and temporal consistencies which progress narratives typify in order to circumvent serious narratorial and conceptual issues. Because extinction encompasses the mnemonic and phenomenological lacunae which defines its paradoxical presence in anthropocentric terms, Wells was faced with serious representational conundrums: how could the amorphous be represented? Can ecologies evacuated of *anthropos* be signifiable? How can events be narrativized if spatial and bodily transformations occur independently of human perception? Only the atavistic human could attempt to formulate responses to these queries.

Extinction narratives often abandoned distinctly human sensations of experience in favour of unexpected futurities. Time functions independently of human perception. Teleology acquiesces to a plurality of possibilities. For example, in *The Time Machine* the Traveller distinguishes that "It would be hard to convey the stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over."[32] While this passage alludes to the vacuity or "voiceless solitude" which dominates *The Last Man*, I also perceive a negative evocation of Darwin's entangled bank.[33] Instead of highlighting nature's interconnected diversity, Wells underscore its antitheses: desolation and disconnection, waste and detritus, impotence and sterility. Only the abject are vivified in this anti-anthropic space as Wells associates the environment and progeny of a post-human futurity with protoplasmic origins in a grand levelling effect.

Extinction narratives also dissolve taxonomical partitions to promote notions of genealogical unfolding or divergence unprescribed by social expectations, utopian trajectories, or progressivist prejudices. Aesthetic traits need to spotlight the sustained ambiguity and indistinctness of ongoing speciation models which display forms on the brink of solidity, though never approaching total or absolute substantiation. The unnoticed and unobservable passages of forms over the span of a single human lifetime became an obstacle to representational coherence in narrative form. Over long enough periods, the specialized nomenclature which signifies distinctness among beings and completeness of taxonomic documentation eventually yields to inter-species interstices, thereby producing inhuman figures descended from other humanoids. The historical understandings of modernity acquiesce to obsolescence. Indifferent natural laws outlive any intelligible sense of historical reference or conscience. *The Time Machine* destabilizes rather than verifies historical causality, and opens up the fossil record, that incomplete narrative of biotic existence, to future interventions. What seems at the outset as distinct entities—humans, Eloi, Morlocks, "grey things," tentacular monstrosities, protoplasmic ooze—eventually become linked by their affiliative markers within an evolutionary context. The Traveller cannot help but analyze the affinities with "a scientific spirit," but still resists the dismaying conclusions of affiliation and animalization which Darwin's theory gave legitimacy to. The Traveller can only conclude in abject horror that he is amongst "inhuman sons of men."[34] As the earth's biota transforms without us, the natural world's emptying of personification enables its indifference to collapses.

The aesthetics of extinction also destabilize the human symbolic order and the authority of Western cultural standards. The resulting dissolution of sensory comprehensibility suggests that the era's progressivist promises could be reduced to incoherence. Wells therefore had to desert anthropocentric models of nature, knowledge, and identity to conjure a glimpse of earth's inevitable end. Oblivion obliges severance from traditional human epistemes. Resistance to historical closure and a resulting volatility of authorial authority ensue. Paradoxically, extinction narratives envisage and illuminate temporal and spatial ellipses which cannot be authenticated or cogently narrated. "I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world," the Traveller admits in the planet's twilight.[35] His observational powerlessness analogizes a resistance to representation.

While experiencing the sublime magnitude of a global extinction event, the Traveller also undergoes deep-rooted, visceral disturbances which induce animalized manifestations of dread and horror. "For a long time I must have been insensible upon the machine," he later realizes.[36] His body's instinctual response to the threat of annihilation interrupts his account. Such feelings, according to Darwin in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal*, "may be accounted for through the principles of habit, association, and inheritance."[37] Once threats are realized, astonishment transitions into fear. Inter-species instincts erupt next: "remaining motionless, staring intently with

widely opened eyes, . . . eyebrows being often moved up and down," faces appear as though "lengthened." Some anthropoids retreat but cannot help but turn back and observe "intently."[38] Similarly, because a "rayless obscurity" exists beyond the Traveller's human comprehension of space and time in *The Time Machine*, his astonishment transforms into a dread as his body instinctively reacts to the peril. He describes his reactions to the "horror of this great darkness" during the final stage of a planetary eclipse:

> The cold, that smote to my marrow, and the pain I felt in breathing, overcame me. I shivered, and a deadly nausea seized me. . . . I got off the machine to recover myself. I felt giddy and incapable of facing the return journey. As I stood sick and confused I saw again the moving thing upon the shoal . . . Then I felt I was fainting. But a terrible dread of lying helpless in that remote and awful twilight sustained me while I clambered upon the saddle.[39]

Astonishment's conversion into horror then dread signifies as an affective disturbance or provocation. Grosz suggests that cultural stimuli, like those cued by Wells, may garner significant responses from their audiences if they are elicited through "[s]ensations, affects, and intensities"[40] which testify to "the body's immersion and participation in nature, chaos, materiality."[41] We see how the instinctual response to threatening stimuli induces narratorial paroxysms. Wells would expand on such a sensation in *The War of the* Worlds, describing it in a complementary style to extinction's paradoxes as a "Grotesque gleam of a time no history will ever fully describe!"[42]

In humankind's passage to animal to human and to animal existence again, there is no possibility of stasis or maintaining genetic simulacra. The processes of recovery and divergence render unstable conclusions. In an evolutionary framework, an aesthetic depiction of the human is continually deferred. Individuals as much as species are but fleeting translations of prior models which, generation by generation until our species' cessation, fade away from their original relatable structures. The imagined trajectory of humankind (as a racial type, distinct species, or moral class) becomes increasingly dissociated from stable models of representation. Accordingly, in *The Time Machine*, our species fades into insignificance, presenting urgent ethical challenges to its readership.

Self-Preservation and Evolutionary Models of Obligation

By expressing in cultural terms the tangibility of massive biotic losses and the precarity of humankind's place in the natural world, Wells transferred to his readership a resultant sense of obligation towards the victims of species collapses. The limits of Darwinism surface here, as does the resilience of humanism. The human, charged with the responsibilities spurred by an

imaginative envisioning of a threatened future, comes to mind as the only agent who can delimit the threat of our very depopulation (or in some cases, our depredation). In the cultural imagination, ethical humanist considerations ultimately trump indifferent material ones. As will be shown, obligation is not necessarily incommensurate with Darwinism proper, demonstrating that humanist impulses still lingered at the heart of scientific romances as much as professional sciences. Destructive impulses often became replaced by altruistic ones. Evolutionary understandings of catastrophe and collapses provoked social changes before metaphorical eradication became tangible reality. Generating social awareness as much as ecological attentiveness, writers like Wells crafted utility out of oblivion. The reproachful tones of extinction narratives provoked readers to be accountable for past atrocities and to deter future ones. These narratives' shared resistance to established realist tropes and prevalent progress narratives mark them as productive. Like Kelly Hurley's positing of the Gothic as "a *productive* genre," I frame extinction narratives as similarly productive because they offer "new representational strategies" in which to cope with post-Darwinian disruptions of human identity and history.[43] The implied morphic volatility of our species instilled a deep and often contradictory tension in the modern consciousness. By recognizing the possibility of their own demise, Victorians could perceive the artificiality of their species' claim to superiority over all other biota and could begin to rectify the maladies of society and environment. Like holdover taxa having survived catastrophe, this obligatory attitude still resonates in our own post-colonial historicity.

The era's preoccupation with degeneration was not solely focused on its accompanying anxieties, but also, I argue, on the positive yet *cautionary* potential of biotic transmutation; evolution surfaces as a model obligation, not just contingency. Morton D. Paley describes how the "apocalyptic sublime" or catastrophic imaginary which Wells's works frequently inhabit imbues nature with "catastrophic possibilities," but also coerces a reception which "compels" observers to feel "powerless."[44] I posit that similarly sublime and affective depictions and experiences of extinction were galvanized by representations of our powerlessness to grandiose evolutionary processes, leading to an empowerment of the masses through a strengthened environmental conscience. Victorians still abided by humanist conceptions of nature, but their destabilized position in nature and recognition of animalized pressures in their modern lives sparked inter-class activist sentiments. Ursula K. Heise notes that due to the rise of environmentalist and conservationist sensibilities, reports of species losses become catalysts for socio-cultural and environmental critique. "With mass extinction as a narrative backdrop," Heise argues, cultural productions

> focus on the fate of a particular species in such a way that its endangerment or extinction comes to form part of the cultural history of modernity. The endangerment of culturally

> significant species turn into a vehicle for the expression of unease with modernization processes or for an explicit critique of modernity and the changes it has brought about in humans' relation to nature.[45]

Environmental crises could be mapped onto cultural crises; laments for dwindling or biodiversity became dirges for cultural exceptionality. Kathryn Yusoff echoes these sentiments when discussing expiring or extirpated biota by advocating a position in which "the consideration of violence" could be made "part of the ethical sense of our relation to non-human worlds."[46]

While it seems that an evolutionary model of obligation seems more closely aligned with eugenicist or Social Darwinistic rhetoric than Darwinism proper, Darwin does provide evidence in *The Descent of Man* that proves the difficulty of completely extricating humanist values from speculations on the future welfare of our species. Darwin declares that we "cannot avoid looking both backwards and forwards, and comparing past impressions." This ability to review and to *project* future conditions has been essential to our species' rise to terrestrial dominance and continued survivability. Darwin expresses our projective conscience as a moment when an individual "feels that sense of dissatisfaction which all unsatisfied instincts leave behind them, he [or she] therefore resolves to act differently for the future."[47] In *Expression*, he seems to connect horror and dread to feelings of accountability, empathy, and obligation, discussing how due to "the power of the imagination and of sympathy we put ourselves in the position of the sufferer, and feel something akin to fear."[48] Extinction narratives affectively produce alternative behaviors to destructive ones. However, Darwin does confess in *Descent*'s finale that the "advancement of the welfare of mankind is a most intricate problem," and that future generations will continue to "remain subject to a severe struggle."[49] While he does not offer further conjecture beyond retaining "hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future," his latent suggestion of obligation to the healthful perpetuation of our species influenced cultural producers like Wells to pursue those hopes for an improved future condition.[50]

As though anticipating our own contemporary environmental urgencies, Wells's didactic provocations induced a social pedagogy of sorts in order to rectify environmental or ecological disturbances caused by social transgressions. The epilogue of *The Time Machine* offers a rationale for Wells's foray into the deep future congruent with this obligatory stance. "Or did he go forward," the tale's frame narrator wonders, "into one of the nearer ages, in which men are still men, but with the riddles of our own time answered and its wearisome problems solved?"[51] Although the Traveller never returns to verify the species' future achievements, the narrative makes clear Wells's attitude toward improving his present national and social conditions. The Traveller's earlier realization of "humanity upon the wane" and the "odd consequence of the social effort in which we are at present engaged" suggests alterations in behavior to help offset future difficulties, or else the human species risks

desolation.[52] Detecting the inevitable fatalism inherent to his own Victorian moment, the Traveller realizes: "the sanitation and the agriculture of today are still in the rudimentary stage. The science of our time has attacked but a little department of the field of human disease." He recognizes that the cures for alike ailments are beyond the reach of his generation's timeline. In beginning of the novella, he believes that "the whole world will be intelligent, educated, and co-operating," yet by earth's end, the Traveller understands the impossibility of the perfectibility of humankind.[53] Miles Link suggests that Wells's motive was to assess "the soundness of a system by examining how it could collapse."[54] Such a view connects well to the often-radical political views held by Wells over his life. Wells's vision of a world devoid of anthropocentric or nationalistic illusions emphasizes the period's warnings about unrestrained scientific progress, destructive tendencies of imperial processes, and the discomfort of humanity's realigned position in the natural world. His fictions were instrumental to collapsing the imperial-era mythologies governing the perceptions, bodies, and spaces of national and racial exceptionality.

Speculative accounts of the planet's *fin de siècle* were marketable for this didactic functionality. They productively scrutinized their present socio-cultural order, and they transferred a similar productivity to their readers. To cease being, to not become, to fail in the struggle for existence (the aggregate plight of over-produced progeny), and to enter into extinction—that outcome awaits the human species, pending, of course, drastic interventions by cooperative rather than competing efforts. Borne out of the evolutionary imagination and propelled into the cultural consciousness by populist writers, the threat of extinction continues to instill a visceral need for self-preservation, and therefore a more sustained focus on the animal, economic, and social costs of population and species collapses.

By cultivating aesthetic traits which could depict protagonists teetering on the precipice of our human memory where humanity is only significant insofar as nature may appropriate our ruins, extinction narrative disrupt progressivist assumptions about the stability and exceptionality of the human. The aestheticization of extinction connotes resistance to genealogical closure, and provokes questionings about preservation itself: of individual, of nation, and of species. When foreseeing human-less futurities, writers like Wells (having been influenced by creative minds like Shelley or Jefferies, and scientific minds like Malthus or Darwin before him) embraced the naturally unfamiliar, countered ideas of biotic difference deeply entrenched, and found hope in impossible situations. Impassioned by the evolutionary imaginary, they aspired to alternative and improved worlds by scrutinizing domestic population pressures as much as environmental disasters. To surpass the threshold of ecological or humanitarian collapse and to conjure a sublime oblivion lacking *Homo sapiens* is to demand a transformed contemporaneity, and to re-imagine our self-preservation.

Notes

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[4] H.G. Wells, "On Extinction," in *H.G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley: California UP, 1975), 170-171.
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[10] Darwin, *Origin*, 233.
[11] Darwin, *Origin*, 258.
[12] Gillian Beer, "Darwin and the Uses of Extinction," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2009): 324.
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[22] Darwin, *Variation*, 58.
[23] Darwin, *Variation*, 61.
[24] J. Bland Sutton, *Evolution and Disease* (London: Walter Scott, 1890), 147.
[25] J. Bland Sutton, "On Atavism: A Critical and Analytical Study," in *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (London: Longman, Green, 1886), 558.
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[27] Wells, *Time Machine*, 112-113.
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[29] Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 31.
[30] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 43.
[31] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 59.
[32] Wells *Time Machine*, 99.
[33] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Anne McWhir (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996), 209.
[34] Wells, *Time Machine*, 72.
[35] Wells, *Time Machine*, 97.
[36] Wells, *Time Machine*, 100.
[37] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. Joe Cain and Sharon Messenger (London: Penguin, 2009), 284.
[38] Darwin, *Expression*, 134-135.
[39] Wells, *Time Machine*, 99.
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[44] Morton D. Paley, *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), 3-4.
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[49] Darwin, *Expression*, 414.
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Sense of Place and Sense of Taste: Thoreau's Botanical Aesthetics

John Charles Ryan
Edith Cowan University

Introduction

The influence of 19th-century naturalist Henry David Thoreau's body of writings on contemporary American environmentalism has been extensively documented and theorized by literary scholars.[1] Thoreau's prose evokes the natural world in scientifically precise terms and in combination with philosophical ruminations, historical references, and aesthetic judgements.[2] As a transdisciplinarian, Thoreau's fascination for the local environment of Concord was not only scientific, but also cultural, historical, and spiritual. Bradley Dean[3] sees Thoreau as a "protoecologist" whose later work anticipates the birth of modern ecology through its meticulous description of natural occurrences. Four years after Thoreau's death in 1862 from tuberculosis, the German biologist and follower of Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, would propose the neologism *Oecologie* as "the science of the relations of living organisms to the external world, their habitat, customs, energies, parasites, etc."[4] Both terms *economy* and *ecology* share the Greek root *oikos*, originally denoting the daily operations and maintenance of a family household.[5] As many contemporary environmental writers have underscored, ecology is the study of the earth "household."[6] At the heart of Thoreau's protoecological writings is an aesthetics of the natural world. His ecological aesthetics resists paradigms of beauty that privilege art over nature, humanity over nonhuman life, and vision over the non-ocular senses of sound, taste, touch, smell, and spatial orientation. Moreover, Thoreau's aesthetic approach to ecology and the natural world is an embodied—rather than visually distanced—one.[7]

Thoreau's aesthetic engagement with nature is acutely evident in his posthumously published botanical writings composed approximately from 1859 until his death in 1862.[8] These works include *The Dispersion of Seeds*[9] and *Wild Fruits*[10] as well as a number of essays, such as "Wild Apples," culled by Thoreau from his manuscripts and submitted to *The Atlantic Monthly* and other

journals. The unfinished manuscript *Wild Fruits* principally reflects his unfulfilled desire to write a comprehensive environmental history of Concord, Massachusetts, focused on the seasonal patterns of local plants, animals, and weather. The natural phenomena observed and reflected upon in *Wild Fruits* are presented in order of their appearance from the emergence of the first fruits of spring (the winged seeds of elm trees in early May) to the last fruits of winter (the berries of *Juniper repens* in March). Thoreau referred to this ambitious undertaking as his "Kalendar," reflecting his familiarity with English gardener and diarist John Evelyn's *Kalendarium Hortense*, or *The Gardener's Almanac* (originally published in 1664), "directing what he [the gardener] is to do monthly throughout the year and what fruits and flowers are in prime."[11] As evident in these two manuscripts, Thoreau's botanical writings consist of factual information about the size, shape, and distribution of fruits blended with subjective, embodied, aesthetic, historical, environmental, and even political observations. The blended prose of *Wild Fruits* includes the visual accounting of botanical characteristics, reflections on historical sources such as the works of the sixteenth-century botanist and herbalist John Gerard, and evocations of nibbling, tasting, or consuming berries *in toto*. More importantly, plants in his oeuvre are not treated merely as the objects of scientific evaluation or visual appeal, but as subjects of complex embodied and multi-sensory human exploration of the natural world.[12]

This article will examine Thoreau's aesthetics of gustation—of taste—in *Wild Fruits* and, more specifically, his use of poetic language to express aesthetic experiences of tasting, sampling, eating, or rejecting as unpalatable Concord's local fruits. Thoreau's ecological gustation intersects with French philosopher Michel Serres' claim in *The Five Senses* that language mediates the sensory world and brings aesthetic experiences to reflective consciousness. Serres rejects the historical understanding of taste as a base or primitive sense, "the least aesthetic" of the five.[13] The problem of taste, as such, is one of language. "Taste is rarely conveyed well [as though] language allowed it no voice," Serres claims, because "the mouth of discourse excludes the mouth of taste, expels it from discourse."[14] Thoreau's gustatory writings in *Wild Fruits* return discourse to taste and give voice to experiences of consuming the botanical environment—perhaps the most sensuous and aesthetically rich interaction one can have with nature. In doing so, his writings affirm the environment as a valid subject of aesthetic inquiry but also the sense of taste as an appropriate faculty of appreciation. Furthermore, rather than base or unrefined, Thoreau's ecological gustation, as presented in the text, is nuanced and discerning. Through taste, Thoreau distinguished the relative virtues of wild fruits, for example, considering the "bitter-sweet of a white acorn" more pleasing than "a slice of imported pine-apple."[15] We thus find proto-bioregional traces in *Wild Fruits*, praising the consumption of local foods and constructing *sense of place* through *sense of taste*, in this context, achieved through indulging in the pleasures of non-cultivated fruits. Indeed, Thoreau's critique

of the aesthetic sensibilities of his era, particularly "the coarse palates [that] fail to perceive" the flavors of wild fruits[16] could be relevant to us today.

Science, Sense, and Sexuality: An Embodied Aesthetics of Flora

For Thoreau, the beauty of nature always inherently exceeds that of art. As apparent in his "scattered remarks on problems of aesthetics,"[17] Thoreau maintained a critical posture both toward humanist aesthetics that place art above nature and, later in his work, toward the picturesque preoccupation with vistas. Landscape art, such as that of the Italian painters Guido Reni and Titian, whom he mentions in his journal, should not be conflated with nature as "bald imitation or rival."[18] Reflecting the development of aesthetic sensibilities linked to place consciousness, Thoreau largely dismissed English art critic John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (originally published in 1843) as a book that "does not describe Nature as Nature, but as Turner painted her, and though the work betrays that he has given a close attention to Nature, it appears to have been with an artist's and critic's design."[19] Rather than nature represented or mediated by artists and in works of art, Thoreau became acutely interested in immanent nature "as she is"[20]—an aesthetics of direct contact with the world that would come to underpin the detailed botanical writings of *Wild Fruits*. It is also documented that Thoreau studied the works of English artist and theorist William Gilpin, credited with conceiving of the idea of the picturesque, "at greater length […] than any other non-contemporary figure."[21] Through the positive effect of Gilpin's insistence on language as a fitting medium for picturesque representation (analogous to paint itself, so Gilpin suggested), Thoreau's journal underwent a transformation from the mundane accounting of facts and occurrences to the intricate textual illustration of natural phenomena and their cultural contexts. Additionally, Thoreau was also known to carry a Claude glass (a small convex mirror that imparts a painterly ambience to what is viewed) as part of his recording of the Concord environment (human and nonhuman, natural and cultural) in his notebook.[22] However, unlike Gilpin's emphasis on scenic grandeur and broad vistas, Thoreau would eventually gravitate toward less picturesque landscapes, such as wetlands, with keen attention to recording their minutiae and temporal changes. Hence, it could be said that one reason for Thoreau's departure from the picturesque aesthetic was geographic. The landscape of Concord is sufficiently different to that of Gilpin's English countryside and necessitates aesthetic ideas and approaches that deviate from conventions formulated elsewhere. Coming to regard the vista as an outmoded Romantic preoccupation, Thoreau attended to the minuscule detail of his environs, developing an attentive practice of multi-sensory environmental portraiture that reaches its zenith in *Wild Fruits*.

Thoreau's reinterpretation of humanist aesthetics and his valuing of wild nature over art were critical to his development of a particularly American mode of environmental thought and representation in the late 19th and early

20th centuries.[23] Specifically, his botanical aesthetics involve visual appreciation of flora in close connection to sensorial interaction with plants and their environments.[24] His mode of immersive corporeal engagement with the botanical world resists the predominantly ocular approach of scientific authority, as achieved in taxonomic classification and morphological description. Thoreau's embodied aesthetics of plants also intensely contrast to Kantian formalism and, principally, the contested notion of "disinterestedness." Based in the paradigm of aesthetics as a "science" of sensory perception, this principle dictates that "the pleasure which grounds a judgment of taste should not be desire-related"[25] and, even in "strong, moderate, and weak" forms, seeks to exclude highly subjective or idiosyncratic reactions to art and nature.[26] Abandoning the possibility of disinterestedness and the detached aesthetics of the picturesque, Thoreau affirms that our aesthetic tastes originate in our bodies in vibrant relation to nature.[27] Whereas Kant devalues sensuous experiences of human pleasure, particularly eating, Thoreau embraces them as part of a corporeal epistemology of the environment—one particularly centering on knowledge gained through acts of tasting, smelling, and touching.

Indeed, rejecting Kantian skepticism, Thoreau adopted a form of sensuous and even erotic empiricism involving contact with nature through "the bodily eye."[28] Rather than treating imagination and understanding, the body and the mind, science and art, as opposed terms, Thoreau sought their complementariness.[29] His perceptions of the environment are direct, affective, and, at times, idiosyncratic—in other words, anti-Kantian in their subjectivity. He recognizes the immanence of nature and resists its reduction to the moralistic symbols or figures of transcendence that define the Romanticist version of nature.[30] The sensuous "aesthetics of engagement" evident in his work regard the natural world as an active phenomenon – one that is contingent on human interactions with other living beings, natural elements, and ecological processes.[31] Dana Phillips 1) argues that the aesthetic and the erotic intermingle in Thoreau's prose, resulting in "an aesthetics of sheer sensual abandon."[32] For example, regarding high blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), the bushes during winter bend over "nearly to the ice […] with lusty young shoots running up perpendicularly by their sides, like erect men destined to perpetuate the family by the side of their stooping sires."[33] In addition to imparting humor and lightness to the text, the eroticizing of plants reflects Thoreau's "embattled approach" to scientific knowledge, with which he was both conversant and critical.[34] Indeed, alongside his use of caricaturization and eroticization, he consistently inflects scientific understandings of plants in *Wild Fruits*, even speculating on the exact taxonomy of certain species, including a variety of high blueberry: "narrow leaves, and a conspicuous calyx, which appears to be intermediate between this and the *Vaccinium vacillans* or *Vaccinium pennsylvanicum*."[35] His prose (in its more descriptive and perhaps mundane moments) demonstrates an awareness of the botanical knowledge of his era, especially the taxonomic relationships between

plants: "Huckleberries are classed by botanists with the cranberries (both bog and mountain) […] plants of this order (*Ericaceae*) are said to be among the earliest ones found in a fossil state."[36]

While Thoreau's visual perception was acute, as exemplified in his careful observations of high blueberry, his prose shuns distanced ocular representation for more intimate contact with the environment. As some critics have observed, an aesthetics of the natural ornament can be found in his writing.[37] For example, Thoreau describes the berries of red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) as "the pendant jewellery of the season dangling over the face of the river and reflected in it."[38] Represented as an ornament, nature reflects the balance, symmetry, and pleasing coloration of aesthetic beauty, or, conversely, nature becomes a template or model for the human creation of non-living ornaments.[39] However, rather than internalizing a concept of stasis, Thoreau's aesthetics of the ornament involve the instability and dynamism of natural objects—animate and inanimate.[40] His aesthetics of natural beauty do not adhere to a humanist paradigm of an artist shaping the natural world in his or her image; instead, form is the outcome of inherent temporal forces, or *poiesis.*[41] Ultimately, Thoreau's environmental ethos led him to reject aesthetic framing in terms that would have been familiar to Gilpin and other painters of the picturesque. A critique of the ornament is evident in *Wild Fruits* when he asks, "what, for instance, are the blue juniper berries in the pasture, considered as mere objects of beauty, to church or state?"[42] The visual beauty of the berries as ornaments is aligned with the dogma of church and state—those twin foundations of American democracy. In contrast, the sensuous and edible attributes of the berries embody the obverse: wildness. Whereas an ornament is visual rather than functional (excepting, for example, some architectural ornaments), the blue juniper berries are beautiful (visually appealing), sensuous (edible), and serviceable (used for the production of alcohol). This underscores that fact that Thoreau's embodied aesthetics is concerned with wild plants – those that consort with him in loosening the humanist grip on tenets of beauty defined through art and sight. In many instance, he refers to the "wild flavor" of certain fruits,[43] or those like the wild gooseberry that are "rather acid and wild tasted."[44]

From Kant to Thoreau to Serres: Reclaiming the Sense of Taste

One of the ways in which Thoreau develops an aesthetics of flora and thereby rejects the ocularcentric Kantian tradition is through the radical acts of nibbling, tasting, consuming, and processing as food the berries of the Concord area. The sense of taste, however, has a much beleaguered position in the history of Western aesthetics. Aristotle only recognized four senses, correlating them to the four elements: vision with water, sound with air, smell with fire, and touch with earth. He regarded taste as a derivative of touch.[45] Later philosophers would pejoratively consider the olfactory and gustatory to reflect base or primordial levels of being.[46] For German philosopher Immanuel

Kant (1724–1804), interested in establishing a system of aesthetic judgements based on pure beauty, taste is not the sense itself but a metaphor for aesthetic sensibility in general (i.e. as Taste).[47] What results from Kant's metaphysics is a sense hierarchy, segregating judgements based on the distal senses of vision and hearing from those derived from the proximal senses of pleasure.[48]

The sense of taste as gustation, for Kant, entails bodily sensation not free from desire (hence not disinterested) and, therefore, fails to lead to the pure aesthetic judgement of beauty. As base, primordial, and carnal drives, hunger and sexual appetite interrupt pure aesthetic contemplation and the formation of judgements that could be considered valid between people and thus universal.[49] Kant distinguishes between the "objective" senses of seeing, hearing, and touch in contrast to the "subjective" senses of smelling and tasting: "The subjective senses are senses of enjoyment, the objective senses, on the other hand, are instructive senses."[50] For Kant, whereas the three objective senses principally (and more consistently) convey information about objects, the two subjective senses lead to highly subjective experiences of pleasure or displeasure. In his *Lectures on Metaphysics,* presented between the 1760s and 1790s, and later published, Kant asserts that "if one merely smells or tastes, one can not yet distinguish one thing from another. I cannot know color, shape, etc. […] We can fall into a swoon from strong odors, and from foul taste nausea can be aroused and thereby set the entire body into convulsions."[51] As the hallmarks of visual beauty, color and shape relate to cognitive knowledge. In sharp contrast, smell and taste can result in negative effects on the body that occur regardless of our conscious faculties.

The contemporary French philosopher Michel Serres counters the Kantian hierarchy of the senses that largely privileges the distal over the proximal senses—vision and hearing over touch, taste, and smell. For Serres, the intermingling of the senses is the mechanism through which the body interacts with the world and transcends the physical and existential boundaries of human subjectivity.[52] Serres disturbs the Kantian paradigm by stressing the correspondence between the sense of taste, the attainment of knowledge, and the faculty of language. "What we hear, through our tongue, is that there is nothing in sapience that has not first passed through mouth and taste, through sapidity."[53] Sapidity (the quality of having flavor) mirrors sapience (the quality of having wisdom and discernment)—the two words sharing an etymology in the Latin *sapere*, meaning both to taste and to be wise. In other words, both the experience of taste and the enunciation of wisdom (in the form of language) pass through the mouth and involve the tongue as the shared organ.[54] *Homo sapiens*, then, are beings who both taste and know; or know *through* taste. "Wisdom comes after taste, cannot arise without it, but has forgotten it […] taste institutes sapience."[55] The modes of abstraction and analysis associated with sight and hearing "tear the body to pieces," negating taste, smell, and touch.[56] The antidote is a "return to things themselves,"[57] a return to the proximal senses, those which put human experience into direct, unmediated contact with the world and the body. On the contrary, logic and grammar (the

tenets of language) become "dreary and insane when they deny themselves bodies."[58] A language of taste is necessarily situated in the body; the tongue of taste *is* the tongue of language. However, the experience of taste is never confined to the physiological actions of the tongue in which taste receptors receive sensations from the substances of food and drink. Instead, using the example of wine, Serres constructs taste as the integration of climatic conditions, soil formations, wind patterns, water conditions, sun angles, and cultivation practices.[59] Put differently, taste is *a priori* an environmental sense that experientially maps onto its ecological provenance. Its boundaries (which separate it from the other senses) dissolve as its effects intermingle with the environment, the body, and sensation itself.

In *Wild Fruits*, Thoreau expresses this latter aspect of Serres' philosophy of taste eloquently. The taste of the wild-crafted berry embodies the taste of the earth, the environment, the seasons, the soil, the elements, the stars, the wetlands. One of the earliest wild fruits of spring, the strawberry makes possible a gustatory experience of the earth specific to this time of year:

> What flavor can be more agreeable to our palates than that of this little fruit, which thus, as it were, exudes from the earth at the very beginning of the summer, without any care of ours? What beautiful and palatable bread! […] I taste a little strawberry-flavored earth with them. I get enough to redden my fingers and lips at least.[60]

This passage disrupts an aesthetics of the ornament (of "this little fruit"), focusing instead on the strawberry-infused taste of earth and the tactility of reddening fingers and lips. Thoreau likens the strawberry to a "concentration and embodiment of that vernal fragrance with which the air has lately teemed."[61] The condensation of spring's fragrance is both in the image and taste of the strawberries. The fruit as a "palatable bread" reflects Thoreau's knowledge of Native American cultures, particularly the reliance of some societies on pemmican, a dense mixture of fat, protein, and, depending on the season or ceremony, fruits. Moreover, the acidic fruits of high blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) "embody for me the essence and flavor of the swamp"[62] with their "little blue sacks full of swampy nectar and ambrosia commingled, whose bonds you burst by the pressure of your teeth."[63] We thus find in Thoreau's aesthetics of flora a distinctive ecological aesthetics of taste in which gustatory experiences of fruit are implicated with the environment in which the fruit matures and from which the fruit extracts a particular local flavor. The Serresian mingling of the senses, in this instance, involves synergism between vision ("little blue sacks"), touch ("bonds you burst"), and taste ("swampy nectar"). Other examples are apparent throughout the text. The early low, or dwarf, blueberry (*Vaccinium pennsylvanicum*) bears "a very innocent ambrosial taste, as if made of the ether itself."[64] The taste of the fruit is the taste of "ether," from the Latin *aethēr* for pure, bright, rarefied air; and invoking the

ancient alchemical element—the fifth, after air, earth, fire, and water—thought to be ubiquitous in the heavens but out of the reach of human perception. In contrast, the fruit of late low blueberry (*Vaccinium vacillans*) is "more like solid food, hard and bread-like, though at the same time more earthy,"[65] further revealing Thoreau's elemental ideas concerning plants and their fruits. Finally, the pores of a pear "whisper of the happy stars under whose influence they have grown."[66]

Thoreau's Ecological Sense of Taste: Themes in *Wild Fruits*

Turning from the conceptualization of taste (with a lower case "t") in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies, this section will analyze the dominant themes in *Wild Fruits* that coalesce Thoreau's ecological gustation. The gustatory philosophy presented in *Wild Fruits* follows Serres' assertion that, rather than an undeveloped, isolated, and merely carnal sense, taste imparts complex knowledge and wisdom; and that taste intermingles with our other senses in our experiences of it and the natural world. To taste is also to smell, touch, hear, see, think, dream, and imagine. For Thoreau, the practice of tasting (or, often, nibbling) fruits is continuously informed by Native American and Anglo-European botanical traditions, both of which are contingent upon largely proximal – rather than entirely distal –interactions with plants satisfying the (unmistakably "interested") carnal drive to consume foods and medicines, to attain nourishing substances, to find relief from disease, and, eventually, to survive and even flourish in one's environment. Conversant with these traditions, Thoreau references key studies along with his personal observations of Native American and Anglo-European ethnobotanies. Through these means, he develops a sophisticated empiricism of taste, which cultivates, rather than mutes, the discriminatory and knowledge-making capacities of this most "subjective" and primal sense. Although Thoreau[67] at one point characterizes the sense of taste as "commonly gross," he suggests that regular practices of gustation assist in developing human acuteness of perception.

In *Wild Fruits*, taste is not isolated from its manifold sensory, environmental, *and* cultural contexts. The sensuous aesthetics of *Wild Fruits* is ostensibly informed by Native American traditions of harvesting wild foods and, in particular, consuming berries. Lawrence Willson and, more recently, Timothy Troy have noted Thoreau's intensive interest in the cultural traditions of Native Americans.[68] Thoreau also made use of what we would today call ethnographic approaches, particularly one-on-one field interviews and "mobile ethnographies"[69] involving walking and other forms of movement, to access environmental knowledge and understand the natural history of the Concord area. In his extended rumination on the black huckleberry, Thoreau observes plainly that "the berries *which I celebrate* [and which most other Anglo-Europeans do not] appear to have a range, most of them, very nearly coterminous with what has been called the Algonquin Family of Indians […] these were the small fruits of the Algonquin and Iroquois Families [emphasis

in original]."[70] In fact, he derived some of his knowledge of edibles from "walking behind an Indian in Maine and observing that he ate some [berries] which I never thought of tasting before."[71] Thoreau was also an advocate for the use of the Native American names for plants, in lieu of "the very inadequate Greek and Latin or English ones at present used";[72] alongside Latin designations, he presents the common, folk, local, indigenous, and historical names of flora.

However, other aspects of Thoreau's ethnobotanical knowledge were second-hand, as he references, for instance, French explorer Jacques Cartier's observation of indigenous Canadians drying plums for the winter, just as the French did.[73] As well as Native American sources, Thoreau draws from Gerard's *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597).[74] Like ethnobotanical traditions, herbal knowledge is based upon proximal interactions of tasting, smelling, and touching plants as medicines. Thoreau commends Gerard's careful, embodied reporting of sensations produced by plants and seems to prefer his accounts of English flora to those of other nineteenth-century botanists and naturalists.[75] The example of the sweet flag is indicative of the extent of Thoreau's reading, encompassing indigenous, ancient Greek and Roman, and contemporaneous sources. Thoreau quotes Gerard, who explains the esteem that Tartars held for the root: "they will not drink water (which is their usual drink) unless they have just steeped some of this root therein."[76] In the same passage, Thoreau subsequently refers to the nineteenth-century Scottish naturalist and explorer Sir John Richardson's documentation of the Cree name *watchuske-mitsu-in* for sweet flag and its use by Native Americans as a treatment for colic. However, knowledge of the palatability of the "inmost tender leaf" was, at least by the mid-nineteenth-century, preserved among Concord children as the folk knowledge of those who went "a-flagging" (sweet flag harvesting) in the spring.[77] Again, in his passage on wild strawberries, Thoreau quotes Gerard, who depicts their taste as "little, thin and waterish, and if they happen to putrify in the stomach, their nourishment is naught."[78]

Subtleties of language and expression reveal Thoreau's discerning between pleasurable, neutral, and repellent tastes. Gustatory variations between the opposite poles of agreeable and disagreeable are expressed in his work. Thoreau's acts of nibbling local plants and forming opinions about their qualities underlie an empiricism of taste, in which, contrary to Kant but affirmative of Serres, information is derived through gustation and knowledge is gained. Indeed, his occasional walking companion Ellery Channing discussed Thoreau's "edible religion" involving sustained devotion to sampling, through taste, nearly every wild plant that he could access.[79] The red low blackberry has a "lively acid but pleasant taste, with somewhat of the raspberry's spirit. They both taste and look like a cross between a raspberry and a blackberry."[80] Here, Thoreau contemplates the natural hybridization of the raspberry and blackberry that has resulted in a berry with a "raspberry's spirit"—one in which its taste is tantamount to its visual appearance. This practice of empirical deduction constructs the sense of taste not only in terms of generalized

appreciation of nature but for its capacity to inform aesthetic judgements, underpin ecological knowledge, and prompt the differentiation between species according to their gustatory qualities (rather than their visual attributes in the Linnaean genus-species taxonomic model, which largely ignores taste). Regarding the smooth sumac, he notes "that sour-tasting white and creamy incrustation [*sic*] between and on the berries of the smooth sumac, like frostwork. Is it not an exudation? Or is it produced by the bite of an insect?"[81] Taste (sour and creamy) precedes sight (frostwork) and initiates deductive questioning regarding the ecological purpose of the unusual encrustation.

The dynamics between taste, smell, vision, and sensuality more broadly constitute a salient theme in Thoreau's ecological gustation. As such, *Wild Fruits* compellingly illustrates Serres' notion of the mingling of the senses. On the late low blueberry, Thoreau observes that "these almost spicy, lingering clusters of blueberries contrast strangely with the bright leaves."[82] This statement is a surprising instance of synaesthesia in which the sapidity of the berries (their piquancy) is pitted against the visual characteristics of the leaves (their intensity). Usually, tastes are compared to other tastes; sights to other sights; but Thoreau disrupts this kind of experiential correspondence and expectation. The dynamics between the senses sometimes result in an opposition, rather than a contrast or complementarity, as the flavor of the blueberries "prevents our observing their beauty."[83] We find an aesthetics that counters the idea of nature as an ornament or decorative object. Thoreau's immersive sensuality—one can imagine his whole face plunged into the bush, mouth ready and lip taut to pluck the berries—diverges sharply from the disinterested contemplation of beauty inherent to Kant's aesthetic philosophy. The volatile chemicals of fruits are often smelled before they are tasted or seen in an uncanny inversion of visual order and an interpenetration of the senses. The fruit of a particular wild apple tree has a "peculiarly pleasant bitter tang, not perceived till it is three-quarters tasted. It remains on the tongue. As you eat it, it smells exactly like a squash-bug."[84] The mingling of taste (the apple's "bitter tang") and smell (pungent "like a squash-bug") has much to do with the physiology of smell. Olfaction occurs *orthonasally* (through the nostrils into the nasal cavity itself) and *retronasally* (via the palate within our mouths), the former also being the pathway of taste.[85]

Wild Tastes and Local Foods: Thoreau's Aesthetic Lessons

Much of *Wild Fruits* concerns finding the appropriate and most evocative language to capture, convey, and give voice to experiences of tasting fruits (and a few roots) in prose. Ultimately, Thoreau confers a discourse to taste that involves the human *sensorium*—the sum of a being's perception linking sense experiences together as bodily sensation in a place or bioregion. The botanical aesthetics of *Wild Fruits* give discourse to the wild—and at times unruly and unpredictable—tastes of local foods. Thoreau suggests that their abandonment occurs as Anglo-European palates become increasingly accustomed to

cultivated varieties. For instance, some wild fruits are highly astringent and largely considered unpalatable in quantities. Referring to chokeberry (*Pyrus arbutifolia*), "I *eat* the high blueberry [a prized wild fruit among locals], but I am also interested in the rich-looking, glossy-black chokeberries, which nobody eats and which bend down the bushes on every side – sweetish berries, with a dry and so choking taste [emphasis in original]."[86] By late August, the chokeberries have "a sweet and pleasant taste enough at first, but leave a mass of dry pulp in the mouth."[87] These are uncelebrated fruits, their profusion a result of their disregard—their disregard a reflection of their caustic flavor and its unsettling physical sensations.

A cloying effect is also evident with the choke cherry (*Cerasus virginiana*), which "[so furs] the mouth that the tongue will cleave to the roof, and the throat wax hoarse with swallowing those red bullies."[88] Using an apt metaphor from domestic life for their astringency, Thoreau observes that "the juice of those taken into the mouth mixed with the saliva is feathered, like tea into which sour milk has been poured."[89] However, this "natural raciness" could have less to do with the inherent qualities of the fruits themselves and more to do with their human reception, as "the sours and bitters which the *diseased* palate refuses, are the true condiments [italics added]."[90] In terms that pathologize civilization, Thoreau implies that a "diseased" palate is one which is no longer in a natural state—one which refuses to accept wild sourness and bitterness because of its prolonged, even inherited, exposure to the supposedly more refined tastes (sweeter and less bitter) of cultivated fruits. Whereas Thoreauvian taste is wildly disconcerting at times (as the furring sensation of the choke cherries and chokeberries indicates), the Kantian aesthetic paradigm would seek to dismiss wildness as an embodied taste in favor of wildness as a perfected image, in the tradition of the painters Guido Reni, Titian, and Caspar David Friedrich. However, Thoreau seeks to navigate the intricacies and entanglements of taste rather than reducing the natural world in his prose to a series of images.

Other variations of wild taste are more pleasurable and desirable than their cultivated counterparts, at least to Thoreau's sensibilities. With an air of regional and national pride, Thoreau emphasizes that these flavors distinguish the Concord (and, more broadly, the American) landscape. The taste of wild apples is "more memorable […] than the grafted kinds; more racy and wild American flavors do they possess […] an old farmer in my neighborhood, who always selects the right word, says that 'they have a kind of bow-arrow tang.'"[91] Moreover, the apple's flavor is contingent on its environment and dramatically transforms for the worse when brought indoors, that is, as it becomes domesticated. The fruit, "so spirited and racy when eaten in the fields or woods, being brought into the house, has frequently a harsh and crabbed taste."[92] In this statement, we find a friction between the tastes of domestic (or cultivated) and wild (or uncultivated) fruits, the latter needing to be consumed in the environment in which it matured in order to be fully appreciated. Thoreau explains that wild flavors are designed for savoring in their natural

settings and with the same freedom of spirit exerted during their collection: "the Saunterer's Apple not even the saunterer can eat in the house. The palate rejects it there, as it does haws and acorns, and demands a tamed one."[93]

Coming to know the wild fruits (and other foods) of one's area necessarily involves becoming physically immersed and sensuously interconnected. Thoreau explains that "our diet, like that of the birds, must answer to the season."[94] Regardless of the effects of modernization and industrialization on food production and consumption, "it is surely better to take thus what Nature offers in her season, like a robin, than to buy an extra dinner."[95] While some wild flavors, such as chokeberries and choke cherries, require the re-education of the human senses to appreciate, others are immediately pleasing and without parallel: "No tarts that I ever tasted at any table possessed such a refreshing, cheering, encouraging acid that literally put the heart in you and set you on edge for this world's experiences, bracing the spirit, as the cranberries I have plucked in the meadows in the spring."[96] This demonstrates the true range of wild tastes and the discourses given to them, from "encouraging acid" to "bow-arrow tang." As Thoreau dismantles the distance between himself (as subject) and fruits (as objects), and discovers the language for doing so, he at the same time reveals the complexity (and joys) of the taste faculty and the fruits it promises for a more sustainable and sensual future.

In closing, I suggest that Thoreau's botanical aesthetics, as enunciated in *Wild Fruits*, can be understood as "proto-bioregional" (as well as proto-ecological). An environmental movement inaugurated in the Western United States in the 1970s, bioregionalism values the importance of "place" (delineated according to natural boundaries), including the foods that are local and well-matched to one's seasons and environment, in contrast to those imported from elsewhere.[97] Indeed, Thoreau entreats us to consider the practical benefits and bodily pleasures of local consumption; his endorsement of the local was a precursor to bioregionalism's commitment to regions as potentially self-sufficient entities, particularly in relation to their food economies. Thoreau evokes a bioregional ethos, through gustation, in praising the "bitter-sweet of a white acorn" over the intense sweetness of "a slice of imported pine-apple."[98] Whereas the pineapple is indigenous to South America and suits tropical climates, the white acorn is the local food—literally the bread—of Thoreau's home region, which he considers more broadly than Concord town and (defying Anglo-European political boundaries) aligns with the Algonquin and Iroquois nations. Thoreau's position is crucial for us today as the production, transportation, and consumption of food are recognized as important aspects of contemporary environmental sustainability.[99] In *Wild Fruits*, Thoreau compellingly suggests that living locally can be an immensely gratifying experience—one which also connects us to the human and nonhuman inhabitants of our home region and better ensures vibrant and *tasteful* lives for all.

Notes

[1]for example, see Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995 and Dana Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics and 'The Domain of the Superlative'" in *Environmental Values* 15 (3) (2006): 293–305.
http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/5967.

[2] John Charles Ryan, *Unbraided Lines: Essays in Environmental Thinking and Writing*. (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing, 2013), 13-25.

[3] Bradley P. Dean, 2000a. "Introduction." In *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript*, edited by Bradley P. Dean (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000a) xii.

[4] Quoted in Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 192.

[5] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* 192.

[6] for example, see Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*. New York: New Directions Books, 1969.

[7] Daniel Dillard, "'What is Man but a Mass of Thawing Clay?': Thoreau, Embodiment, and the Nineteenth-Century Posthuman." *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 26 (3) (2013): 254–269.

[8] Bradley P. Dean, "A Thoreau Chronology." In *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript*, edited by Bradley P. Dean, 273–275. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000b), 274.

[9] Henry Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993.

[10] Henry David Thoreau, *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript*. Edited by Bradley P. Dean. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

[11] John Evelyn *Kalendarium Hortense or, The Gard'ners Almanac*. London: George Haddleston, 1699.

[12] John Ryan, *Green Sense: The Aesthetics of Plants, Place and Language*. Oxford: TrueHeart Academic Press, 2012.

[13] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. (London: Continuum. 2008), 153.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 3.

[16] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 75.

[17] Horstmann quoted in Jannika Bock, *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry Thoreau and John Cage*. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 100.

[18] Henry David Thoreau, 2005. *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 176.

[19] Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, 1837–1861*. (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2009), 458.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Harding and Meyer quoted in John Conron, *American Picturesque*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 291.

[22] Ibid., 292-294.

[23] Theo Davis, "'Just Apply a Weight': Thoreau and the Aesthetics of Ornament." *ELH* 77 (3) (2010): 563 doi: 10.1353/elh.2010.009.

[24] Arnold Berleant, *Thoreau's Aesthetics of Nature*, http://www.autograff.com/berleant/pages/Thoreau%27s%20Aesthetics%20of%20Nature%20.6.htm. n.d.
[25] Christopher Janaway, "Kant's Aesthetics and the 'Empty Cognitive Shock'." In *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, edited by Paul Guyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 71.
[26] Norman Kreitman, The Varieties of Aesthetic Distinterestedness. *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 2006 http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=390.
[27] Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics," 303.
[28] (1993, 26)
[29] Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics," 302.
[30] Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics," 304.
[31] Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
[32] Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics," 30
[33] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 34.
[34] Phillips, "Thoreau's Aesthetics," 299.
[35] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 34.
[36] Ibid., 34
[37] Davis, "Just Apply a Weight."
[38] (2000, 123).
[39] Davis, "Just Apply a Weight," 561.
[40] Ibid., 564.
[41] Ibid., 572.
[42] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 5.
[43] Ibid., 59.
[44] Ibid., 62.
[45] Steven Connor, "Introduction" In *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, 1–16. (London: Continuum, 2008), 2.
[46] Maria L. Assad, *Reading with Michel Serres: An Encounter with Time*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1999), 84.
[47] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 54.
[48] Ibid., 54.
[49] Ibid., 56.
[50] Kant quoted in David Berger, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: The Beautiful and Agreeable*. (London: Continuum, 2009), 34.
[51] Immanuel Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Metaphysics*. Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 251.
[52] Connor, "Introduction," 3.
[53] Serres, *The Five Senses,* 162.
[54] Assad, *Reading,* 84.
[55] Serres, *The Five Senses,* 154.
[56] Connor, "Introduction," 26.
[57] Serres, *The Five Senses,* 112.

[58] Serres, *The Five Senses,* 235.
[59] Assad, *Reading,* 83.
[60] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 12.
[61] Ibid., 12.
[62] Ibid., 31.
[63] Ibid., 33.
[64] Ibid., 22.
[65] Ibid., 36.
[66] Ibid., 128.
[67] quoted in Victor Karl Friesen, *The Spirit of the Huckleberry: Sensuousness in Henry Thoreau*. (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1984), 15.
[68] See Timothy Troy, "*Ktaadn*: Thoreau the Anthropologist." *Dialectical Anthropology* 15 (1) (1990): 74–81; and Lawrence Willson, "Thoreau: Student of Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 61 (2) (1959): 279–289.
[69] James Evans and Phil Jones. "The Walking Interview: Methodology, Mobility and Place." *Applied Geography* 31 (2011): 849–858.
[70] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 46.
[71] Ibid., 46.
[72] Ibid., 50.
[73] Ibid., 112.
[74] John Gerard, *The Herball or General Historie of Plantes*. London: John Norton, 1597.
[75] Friesen, *Spirit of Huckleberry,* 70-71.
[76] Ibid., 8.
[77] Ibid., 7.
[78] Ibid., 11.
[79] Friesen, *Spirit of Huckleberry*, 27.
[80] Ibid., 26.
[81] Ibid., 125.
[82] Ibid., 37.
[83] Ibid., 33.
[84] Ibid., 86.
[85] Cain Todd, *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty and Intoxication*. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26.
[86] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 66.
[87] Ibid., 66.
[88] Ibid., 72.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 87.
[91] Ibid., 84.
[92] Ibid., 85.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 107.
[95] Ibid., 142.
[96] Ibid., 106.
[97] for example, Peter Berg, *The Biosphere and the Bioregion: Essential Writings of Peter Berg*. Edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Eve Quesnel. Milton Park: Routledge, 2014.
[98] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits,* 3.

[99] Peter Oosterveer and David Sonnenfeld, *Food, Globalization and Sustainability*. Milton Park: Routledge, 2012.

Copy as Creation: Ecological Aesthetics in Xu Bing's Forest Project

Pao Chen Tang
University of Chicago

Introduction

"Can art inspire conservation? Can conservation inspire art?" These questions motivated the formation of the interdisciplinary art project *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet* co-organized by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, and the conservation organization Rare in 2003.[1] In 2004, *Human/Nature* commissioned eight renowned artists to travel to UNESCO-designated World Heritage sites and to create new works of art in response to their traveling experience. The Chinese artist Xu Bing was one of the eight chosen people and he willingly accepted the invitation because the form of the project reminded him of the days when he practiced "delving into life" (*shenru shenghuo*) in the 1970s during the Cultural Revolution.[2] Of all the World Heritage sites around the world, Xu chose to set foot on Africa. As an artist who had been engaging with live animals for artistic creation since the early 90's, Xu was most interested in visiting Kenya—a land "full of wild animals" in his imagination.[3] Xu's eventual response, the Forest Project (2005-ongoing), nevertheless expressed its main concern not so much in animals as in trees. In Xu's own words, this was because "everything there is related to trees: politics, economics, and the lives of people and animals."[4] Thus the goal of Forest Project is to create a recursive system that could initiate and sustain processes of afforestation and reforestation.

From its inception in 2005, the Forest Project has had four major installments: Mount Kenya region in 2008, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, China in 2009, São Paulo, Brazil in 2012, and Pingdong, Taiwan in 2014. Each installment operated on similar procedures. First, Xu visited the selected regions and conducted on-site lessons to local children between 6-12 on how to depict trees creatively. Subsequently, Xu selected some of the drawings by the participating children and placed them on an online platform for auction.

The funds that the auction collected were used to purchase seedlings for forestation in those regions. Before these drawings were on sale, Xu would manually copy and juxtapose each of them into large-scale assemblage. The end products were several copies of the children's drawings by Xu himself (fig. 1-3).

Fig. 1) *Forest Project 1*, 2008-9, ink on paper, 146.5 × 341 cm. Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.

Fig. 2) *Forest Project 3*, 2009, ink on paper, 116.5 × 344 cm. Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.

Fig. 3a) *Forest Landscape: The Blue and Green World*, 2014, ink and color on paper, 98 × 744 cm (section 1). Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.

Fig. 3b) *Forest Landscape: The Blue and Green World* (section 2). Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio

At first glance, the eco-oriented Forest Project seems distinct from Xu's other works that famously explore the natures, compositions, and communicative functions of languages. Its philanthropic goal also makes it seem motivated more by charity than artistic creation. My essay, however, places the Forest Project back into the context of contemporary Chinese art and Xu's *oeuvre* and writings. The Forest Project, I would argue, reflects Xu's conception of the purpose of contemporary art in relation to political ecology and the tradition of Chinese visual culture, especially through his act of copying which is by no means realistic imitation but his reflection on the traditional Chinese aesthetics of *linmo*: the bettering of one's own artistic development through apprehending the forms of others. In copying, Xu reinterprets and transforms the children's drawings into his own artistic visions and social critiques. The Forest Project thus does not merely illustrate certain political agenda of conservatory ecology but demonstrates how ecology can be carried out in the very act and process of artistic creation.

A Forest of Networks

The structure of the Forest Project mobilizes, configures, and reconfigures the resources of American museums and environmental NGOs, local people and schools, and global auction websites. Xu, who initiated each installment by traveling and teaching, concluded it through copying and juxtaposing the children's creations. These operational procedures of the Forest Project form a structure of virtual circulation bookended by Xu's physical presence and manual labor. The Forest Project's logo—composed of an icon of a man, a symbol of dollar, and a Chinese character of wood in oracle bone script surrounding Xu's signature in Square Word Calligraphy, his 1994 self-invented writing system—succinctly visualizes this structure by emphasizing Xu's authorship in the interconnected forces of manpower, money, and art. (fig. 4)

Fig. 4) The Logo of Forest Project. Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.

There are, however, subtle differences among the four installments. The lesson primers used in different countries are translated into different languages and they include drawings produced in previous installments as artistic inspirations. The 2014 primer for the Taiwanese children, for instance, includes some of the Kenyan children's drawings in 2008. This inclusion of previous works introduces a temporal dimension into the Forest Project, transforming it from a unifying structure that keeps on repeating itself into a cumulative teamwork that allows two types of communications: an inter-communication between Xu and the children, and an intra-communication among the children themselves. While the second type of communication might be unidirectional from the temporal former to the latter, the first type is by no means one-way as exemplified in Xu's act of copying which transforms the giant of contemporary art into a studio apprentice, rigorously imitating the styles of old masters. These differences within repetitions, especially the interactions between Xu and the children, are crucial and they will be addressed later. Here I want to pause for a moment to think about the structure of repetition, specifically its relations to broader discourses surrounding the network aesthetics of contemporary Chinese art.

In *After Art*, the art historian David Joselit calls for a revision of critical approaches to contemporary art that corresponds to the shift from "an object-based aesthetics in both architecture and art to a network aesthetics premised on the emergence of form from populations of images."[5] In a world with Google and of globalization where images reformat, travel, and disseminate across borders effortlessly, "network" has become not only a buzzword in theoretical writings but also the ultimate art object that artists consciously seek to produce. If art traditionally refers to processes and results of artistic productions, then art with the prefix *after* implies "a life of image in circulation following the moment of production" and "a new kind of power that art assembles through its heterogeneous formats. Art links social elites, sophisticated philosophy, a spectrum of practical skills in representation, a mass public, a discourse of attributing meaning to images, financial speculation, and assertions of national and ethnic identity."[6] Thus while Xu

confesses that "[i]s this thing [the Forest Project] that I'm working on a work of art? I can't tell," it would in fact embody, according to Joselit's view, the very condition of contemporary art making.[7]

Joselit's privileged examples of contemporary art practices that best exert art's "new kind of power" are surprisingly not works by digital artists but works by internationally renowned Chinese artists, especially Ai Weiwei. As per Joselit, art's power reaches its peak in Ai's work as he radically levels his art objects with other components in the network that he lays out:

> Ai Weiwei has *speculated* on the international profile he built through his notoriety in pioneering new exhibition models and working environments for artists in China and his success in the Western art world of museums, galleries, and biennials.[8]

His work has never simply dwelled on or departed from art objects but created through venues of connection and circulation that Joselit lists: exhibitions, museums, galleries, and biennials. Ai's goal is to exploit art's power and formulate multidirectional forces through carefully constructed networks rather than creating material, discrete objects—indeed, he "*speculates* on" art's power.[9]

While Joselit's interpretive schema ambitiously approaches not only Chinese but all contemporary artworks from the perspective of network aesthetics, when it encounters the Forest Project the situation gets tricky.[10] Why would Xu, after formatting a perfectly horizontal system of circulation like Ai does, physically jump back into the scene and meticulously copy one tree after another by hand? Don't these large-scale paintings (especially *Forest Landscape: The Blue and Green World* with the size of 98 by 744 cm, fig. 3a/3b) directly contradict the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's description of contemporary society as liquid modernity wherein

> [t]raveling light, rather than holding tightly to things deemed attractive for their reliability and solidity—that is, for their heavy weight, substantiality and unyielding power of resistance—is now the asset of power?[11]

If, as the curator of the Forest Project in Taiwan Shin-Yi Yang claims, "the Forest Project embodies an attitude of the artist's engagement with globalization," exactly what kind of attitude does Xu's act of copying embody?[12]

Into the Woods

The network aesthetics of the Forest Project serves a very political purpose. Due to Kenya's colonial past, in the eyes of the West the country is "primitive, savage" and it can only grow out of this underdeveloped state with the help of

the West's "sympathetic" hand.[13] Many westerners who had come to Kenya to do humanitarian work ended up as full-time fundraisers, constantly raising money from the West in order to support all kinds of local activities. Fundraising is thus now a common profession in Kenya, but by no means is it an easy task. According to Xu, this type of fundraising sometimes fails to sustain the source of income because of its unidirectional nature—the West gives, Kenya receives; it is also not cost-effective due to the amount of cost, human labor, and traveling time involved in the fundraising process.

To avoid said problems, the Forest Project acknowledges, practically if not somewhat cynically, that give-and-take is a better fundraising strategy than one-way solicitation: it's easier for people to pull out their wallets knowing that they will receive concrete feel-good entities (a Kenyan child's painting). It also acknowledges that donors want to know and see the results of their charitable acts. Originally Xu planned to install large LED boards in museums and public libraries in New York, informing people the up-to-date number of trees planted in Kenya. This plan was not put into practice but in subsequent installments it took up different forms. In Taiwan, for instance, the Forest Project's official Facebook page has constantly updated information regarding the number of participating children, the number of the paintings sold, and pictures of on-site tree planting.[14]

Behind all these strategies of fundraising the Internet plays the key role that enables the Forest Project's enactment. Xu's reliance on the Internet recalls Ai's famous tweet that declares:

> [m]y motherland, if I have to have one, would be the Internet because it can fulfill the space and boundaries of my imagination. As for the other so-called countries, you can have them.[15]

This is not to say, however, that the world is now flat and that the Forest Project dwells in a virtual sphere. Rather, Xu uses the Internet and its familiar characteristics such as instant transformation and low cost to foreground substantial differences in economic conditions between regions. "Two dollars which can cover the fee of planting ten trees in Kenya," Xu writes, "can only pay for a subway ticket in the US."[16] Unlike Ai who abandons traditional boundaries between nations and calls the Internet his "motherland," Xu's Internet is not the destination but a process for his appropriation of the classical economic principle of comparative advantage to achieve conservatory goals.

One would not necessarily be unreasonable to criticize that all the aforementioned moves are bourgeois gestures that only satisfy the patron-donors in the name of art. However, as if Xu feels the need of self-defense, his writings constantly reveal the political implications that the Forest Project carries. As Xu notes, Kenyan government used to have a policy that encouraged farmers to plant trees that would benefit their living.[17] The policy

was abolished when Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, implemented her grassroots environmental policy from the late 1970s that aimed to restore the original landscapes undisturbed by human activities. The trees planted and nursed needed to be trees native to the lands rather than those related to farming. Some local people criticized her policy as "idealism" in the sense that it excluded the room for human activities in the big picture. Xu sides with the local people: "supporting Maathai," he says, "more or less bears the trace of value system of Western intellectuals."[18]

Herein lies the radicalism of the Forest Project in Kenya: it is not a wholehearted tree-hugger that seeks to return to a golden age before the Anthropocene. Rather, it foregrounds the needs of local people and believes in the possibility of peaceful co-existence between people and trees. This is not to say, however, that Xu does not care about restoring lost or demolished natural landscapes. The Forest Project in Taiwan, for instance, expressed its concern less in fostering human-tree co-existence than in restoring the natural landscapes in Sandimen County in Pingdong, a region destroyed by Typhoon Morakot in 2009.[19] Judging from its different goals in each installment, the Forest Project is a flexible matrix that metamorphoses into distinct shapes corresponding to distinct needs.

The inclusion of human agency is informed by Xu's belief that aesthetic value derives not from art objects themselves, but their embeddedness in ordinary life. "The source of natural beauty," Xu says, "lies in the objective connection between life and nature, and the most direct connection between natural things and life is at its strongest in the things commonly seen by people's sides."[20] Xu's view in fact reflects that of Mao Zedong's in that art is not an object of objective, external contemplation, but a way of being in and acting upon the world. As a sent-down youth (*zhiqing*) during the Cultural Revolution, from 1974 to 1977 Xu lived in Shoulianggou Village, an extremely poor rural area about forty miles north to Beijing. [21] This experience significantly shaped the Forest Project's conception. When he was teaching the Kenyan children in 2008, Xu wrote,

> I'm sitting in a garden hotel of extremely colonial style, but my gaze differs from other tourists for I used to worry and live together with people poorer than the Kenyan. That experience makes me less curious and sensitive to the wasteyard-like markets of daily goods and the medieval pastoral life of people in Marseille taking place on Nairobi streets. Rather, it allows me to bypass the seduction of these wonderfully artistic and picturesque scenarios and capture the parts of life closer to people's survival.[22]

It is noteworthy to point out that even though Xu cares about poverty, he is not interested in representing poverty from the distant observatory for, as he notes elsewhere, "as a poor country, we [China] used to be gazed upon in such

a way."[23] Living through Mao's China exposed Xu to the lower depth and formulated his sensitivity of and wariness about class and culture hierarchies as reflected in his efforts to enact positive changes on people's living conditions, and his encouragements of the viewer's active participation.[24] Indeed, when Xu was once asked in New York: "why do you work on something so experimental when you come from such a conservative country?" he simply responded: "you guys were taught by Joseph Beuys, I was taught by Mao Zedong; Beuys pales in comparison with Mao."[25]

Dialectics of Control and Chance

The Forest Project's engagement with the people invites the people's agency to shape the end result of the its each installation. In leaving room for the human variables in the neatly constructed framework, Xu has aligned himself with a trend of contemporary art devoted to the exploration of intersubjective communications which his own work helped to foster, particularly those that engage with nonhuman lives.

In 1994 alone, Xu presented four artworks involving the use of live nonhuman animals: *A Case Study of Transference*, *Cultural Animal*, *Parrot*, and *American Silkworm Series Part I: Silkworm Book*. Each of them required Xu's innumerable investment of time and attention. *Cultural Animal*, for instance, as the art historian Wu Hung points out, reveals "Xu Bing's fascination with the control of animals. Because this and similar works required animals existing in special states, how to control animals and induce such states became a goal of his artistic endeavours."[26] To successfully enact his control over animals, Xu placed himself in the position of animals to observe and learn their behaviors. For instance, Xu mentions that the preparatory work for *Silkworm Book* included:

> reading many books, counseling many specialists, and raising two groups of silkworms at the same time. In America, I had to purchase the silkworm eggs from "child education department" and place them in my fridge. Before officially starting to work on *Silkworm Book*, I had to document every period of their growth, such as their changing color after feasting on a certain number of mulberry leaves—silk spinning—cocoon forming—breaking through the cocoons—egg laying—and hatching again. Only by so doing could I match the opening of the exhibition with the times of taking the eggs out of my fridge or from underneath my bedclothes.[27]

In other words, Xu's tight controls were based on his personal encounters. Before turning animals into Cartesian automata that acted accordingly to his plans, Xu had to first meet his animals halfway (or under his own bedclothes).

His top-down control is thus also a bottom-up process; the use of animals as media entails the pre-medium condition of being-with-animals.

Similar moves appeared in the Forest Project, but the level of interaction shifted to the human realm. To achieve the grand goal of fundraising, Xu started from traveling to different continents and taught the local children in person. His means of "controlling" the children was embodied in a set of standardized strategies of transforming signs and symbols into pictorial trees as laid out in the primers such as "use the original shape of letters in a word" and "use the lines of the English letters to create leaves and branches of varied shapes." [28] (Here I do not wish to conflate children with animals even though I am consciously referring to the commonplace that children "pass" between the animal and the human. Based on this notion, many writings surrounding stage performance and film acting consider that child actors are more likely to deliver unpredictable performances.[29])

Yet strategies were the best things Xu could provide. Just like Xu's approaches to the interiority of animal-others came without any guarantee of the eventual outcome, it was not up to him to decide the final contours of the children's drawings. And while there were processes of selection before putting the drawings up for sale, Xu could neither singlehandedly decide which drawings to select, nor could he predict the outcomes of the online auction.[30] And as aforementioned, Xu did not predetermine what kinds of trees to plant in the final act of planting either. Aleatory and unpredictable movements are allowed in the highly structured and consistent frame wherein the external artist plays the role in triggering the release of internally determined actions of the children, online buyers, and local conservatory organizations. No single element in this recursive organization exists in its own right or serves as the basis for the others, and collectively they respond creatively to its outside. This complex interplay between pre-planning and spontaneity does not cause anxiety, however. Rather, Xu quite enjoyed it: "I like to work on something challenging, something that is difficult enough to stimulate my involvement. Otherwise there is no reason to spend my time on it."[31]

Amidst all the elements in the Forest Project, the children's drawings best embody the element of autonomy. According to Xu, "each child has his/her own tempo, which belongs to a part of his/her personality and physiology. This is the source behind each child's unique formal quality and brush stroke—an internal clue."[32] Autonomy manifests itself when the children seek a reason to bring forth and materialize this inner tempo. Yet this reason comes not from Xu's instructions but "out-of-nowhere"—whether it is unconsciousness or human nature, this reason is "an internal clue" that Xu as an outsider attempts to grasp.[33] Indeed, while the children rely on strategies in the primers for their tree depictions, they also depart from them in creating all kinds of original motifs and compositions. "No existing theory and analysis can explain the children's fantastical imagination," Xu acknowledges, "the visual knowledge and experience you possess appear passive and fall behind the children's steps. Their drawings better my eyes." Xu goes on to say that the

real trees native to Kenya look equally fantastical to him, but this alone does not account for the children's wildly imaginative drawings for they are not realist depictions of the nature but the results of "knowledge's acceptance of soul's inspiration" and the "commingling of written signs and nature in the raw."[34]

Syntheses through Copying

In one of his copies of the children's drawings, *Forest Project 1* (fig. 1), Xu inscribed on the paper "I have copied the work of these children just as if I were copying from a book of old masters. I haven't dared make any changes; to me, like real trees, they are a part of nature, you must perfect them." Several Chinese words, including *lin*, *fang*, and *mo* can be translated as "copying" but each may have a specific meaning in a particular context. Xu's inscription was originally written in Square Word Calligraphy so he literally used the word "copied" in English. In the article of "Zhaohui dasenlin" on Xu's official website, however, Xu translates this inscription into Chinese himself. The specific word he uses for copying is "*linmo*," the traditional aesthetics of which involves not faithful imitation but active engagement with and transformation of existing images. Contra his statements of "I haven't dared make any changes" and "you must perfect them," Xu did not faithfully reproduce but in fact transform the children's paintings.

What follows takes *Forest Landscape: The Blue and Green World* (fig. 3a and 3b) produced for the Forest Project in Taiwan as a case study. I argue that this painting embodies the space that copying provides Xu to engage art with ecological politics. Among all of Xu's copies, this painting stands out for four aspects. Firstly, it is about two times longer than the other copies. Secondly, it is the only colored blue-and-green copy. The other three copies are black-and-white. These two aspects align the painting with ambitious blue-and-green works by the old masters such as Wang Ximeng's *One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. Thirdly, it deploys a deep-staging composition with flexible arrangements of pictures planes, which are unseen in the other three copies where trees are rigidly placed next to one another with outright frontality. Lastly, it is the copy produced for the only installment of the Forest Project that specifically serves the purpose for the reforestation of a post-typhoon devastated area. Closer scrutiny at this painting, I would argue, reveal Xu's reflections upon the traditions of Chinese painting, policies regarding ecology, and the ways in which both of them can be thought through together.

Attempts to view *Forest Landscape: The Blue and Green World* immediately encounter a basic problem: the viewing direction. Standard viewing direction tells us that scrolls are viewed from right to left, as one reads in (traditional) Chinese. Xu's inscription at the top of the painting, however, is written in Square Word Calligraphy that runs from left to right. Taking this cue, my view starts from the left section of the painting, where a cluster of trees floats midair. Here a mist of blue and green pigments blurs the boundaries among

the figures. The singularity of each tree, insect, animal, and child as established by the contour lines is deemphasized in the service of an atmospheric rendering of the Pingdong forest destroyed by and still recovering from the devastating typhoon in 2009. At the right end of this cluster, the top of a tree branches out of the blue-and-green mist—lines arise out of colors. Below the protruding lines is a block of freestanding hue unattached to any line. This small block of color mirrors the quickly and spontaneously applied block of translucent hue that occupies the left edge of a second cluster of trees in the background. In this area, color ostensibly expands its territory to fields exterior to the trees' contours, freely taking up blank spaces and creating an illusion of the collectivity of a forest. On the vertical axis from the point of the outstanding tree branches in the foreground to the point of overshadowing blue-and-green cloud in the background, a dimensional drama takes place between the two picture planes and a pictorial drama between color and line, themselves a dialogue between the clarity of a particular tree and the overarching color that blends individual trees into a unifying whole.

Further on, the first cluster of trees disappears; the second cluster persists. A large piece of rock idiosyncratically appears in the foreground, declaring a third cluster of trees. By idiosyncratically, I'm referring to its framing of two colors—dusky blue and latte brown—neatly within separate domains as delineated by the lines. Such style drastically differs from those of the previously seen trees. Even at the bottom of the rock, where the lines fail to extend, the colors hold their shapes all the way down towards the bottom edge of the scroll as if following the guidance of some invisible lines. Next to the rock, the trees stand, for the first time in the scroll, upon a solid ground whose flat surface recalls the Qing dynasty master Wang Yuanqi's signature depictions of hills (*lutai*). That the ground provides basis for at least five trees indicates that it does not originate in any child's drawing but Xu's own artistic intervention.

Marching on to the right, the ground disappears and the trees in the foreground float midair. Despite the groundless quality, however, these trees distinguish themselves from those equally groundless counterparts in the background in terms of the line-color relationship. Similar to the rock that declares the coming of the foreground landscape, the colors used to depict the trees in this area are so densely applied and highly decorative that they immediately attract the viewer's attention. Regarding the line-color relationship, here the colors stay inside the lines. On the rare occasions when the colors are unbound by the lines, they turn themselves into representational objects such as the fruits and leaves on the sixth tree from the left. Elsewhere in the foreground, slightly right to the central vertical axis of the whole painting stand four tall flowers depicted entirely in white. Their stems are so thin that the white pigment used to color them becomes the contour lines. Such emphasis on linear quality through the use of color spotlights each tree's individuality, drawing a sharp contrast with the atmospheric rendering of forest in the background.

A fourth cluster of trees emerges to serve as a bridge between the foreground and background—the distinct styles between these two parts begin to merge. Trees in the foreground increasingly overlap with one another; their similarly tall, slim shapes and intertwined branches make it difficult to tell them apart. And while trees in the background are still covered by the misty hue, the overall mist cracks open to create blank spaces between the trees and thus differentiate one tree from another. Instead of an overarching blue-and-green band covering barely legible lines, there are now several umbrella-shaped color blocks encircling the trees. In addition to the stylistic merge, the foreground and the background also move closer to each other physically. Towards the right end of this cluster they converge into a middle ground where neither lines nor colors dominate. Each tree here is depicted with carefully delineated contours and gently applied colors that are neither atmospheric nor outstanding. We see each tree clearly while we appreciate the color's grounding of them as a whole.

Up to this point, the painting has presented two dialectic processes—a formal one between color and line and a symbolic one between the collectivity of a forest and the singularity of trees—and generated one synthesis with twofold significance. The first dialectic presents Xu's engagements with the traditional aesthetics of painterly and linear qualities. From the wild lines that penetrate colored blocks from within, and the volume of hues that exceed the linear confinement in the first three clusters to the carefully delineated and colored trees in the fourth cluster, Xu has arrived at a fine balance between the two pictorial energies of line and color.

As my above analysis has suggested, Xu's emphases on either line or color in the first three clusters respectively draw our attention to the specificity of individual trees (if not branches) or the homogenizing force that groups trees into a forest. However, Xu pays equal amount of attention to both line and color in the fourth cluster, and consequently he gives equal weight to the specificity of trees and the collectivity of a forest. Recalling the bifurcation of forestation policies in Kenya, this move signifies a desire to pursue an ecological middle ground, itself literally the perspectival middle ground of the composition. In this both conceptual and pictorial middle ground, the conservatory policies of Maathai's radical creation of a native forest and Kenyan farmers' needs to live with particular trees meet each other halfway. The double harmonies in the fourth cluster also signify that the gap between art and ecology is not as distant as it might seem. Tensions between different formal devices share similar concerns with those between different conservatory strategies. In this light, the unity of content and form in the fourth cluster is so airtight that one cannot tell if the means has determined the end, or the other way around. A stylistic arrangement is at once an ecological choice. They are very much one and the same, through which we catch a glimpse of the indexical trace of Xu's creative mindset.

Further on to the right, the fifth and final section of the painting adds another layer of significance to the twofold synthesis. A magnificent tree

flourishes; lurking behind it are a bandaged tree and a man strolling under the tree with his wheelchair nearby—damaged nature and vulnerable people. A solid land like the one in the third cluster created by Xu encloses and supports all of the figures upon a rock-framed ground. While the twofold synthesis gives positive answers in response to the two questions that open this essay—"Can art inspire conservation? Can conservation inspire art?"—the final section stands as a reminder: connections between art and conservation in the age of globalization cannot exist in virtual spheres or in idealism without paying attention to the physical, material "globe" made of trees, soils, and stones where people dwell. Through this final section of the painting, itself the final stage of the Forest Project's latest installment, Xu grapples with the material and corporeal conditions underlying virtual circulation and shows how the Forest Project's connectivity with a Maoist twist differs from the connectionist network aesthetics. As such, it states that the Forest Project will continue to see the forest for the trees, and the trees for the forest as future installments pick up where the painting ends.

Notes

[1] "Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet," UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, accessed February 8, 2015, http://bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibition/human_nature.
[2] For details of Xu's "delving into life," see "Zhaohui dasenlin" [Retrieving the Forest], *Xu Bing*, accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/chinese/texts/zhao_hui_forest/. This article has three sections. According to a note on Xu's website, the first two sections were based on an interview on August 8, 2008. The final part was added a year later on October 8, 2009, which briefly discusses the subsequent goal and development of Forest Project after its first installment in Kenya.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid. Aside from personal observation, Xu's interests in the trees' role in Kenyan society came also from conversations with local institutes devoted on forestry and protection of native wildlife and forests.
[5] David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 43.
[6] Ibid., 90-91.
[7] "Xu bing tan chuangzuo" [Xu Bing on Creation], *Xu Bing*, accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.xubing.com/index.php/chinese/texts/xubingoncreating/.
[8] Joselit, *After Art*, 93.
[9] Ibid. 94.
[10] Joselit admits that "[n]ot every artist has the opportunity and capacity to speculate on art's power exactly as Ai has done, but all can—and I think *should*—do so in some way." See ibid.
[11] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 13.
[12] Shin-Yi Yang, "Xubing yu 'mulinsen jihua'" [Xu Bing and the Forest Project], *Bulletin of the National Museum of History* 24.4 (April 2014): 19.
[13] "Zhaohui dasenlin."

[14] See, for instance, the 2014 posts on April 21, April 22, April 25, April 28, May 1, and June 5.
[15] Quoted in William A. Callahan, "Citizen Ai: Warrior, Jester, and Middleman," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73.4 (November 2014): 903.
[16] "Zhaohui dasenlin."
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid. Similar debates have also surrounded China's air pollution problems since the 2000s. To solve the problem, some have proposed shutting down small factories in the northern part of the country. This view has been criticized as a neglect and sacrifice of the local people's needs. My citation of Xu's view on Maathai's policy comes from an interview conducted in 2008, a time when such environmental issue became a topic of heated debates due to China's hosting of the Summer Olympics in Beijing.
[19] One might criticize that Forest Project lacks efficiency in raising large number of funds within a short period. This is true considering that it only raised 379,000 NTD (roughly 12,000 USD) in Taiwan, a number not particularly impressive in itself. Nevertheless, the number becomes significant given the fact that there had been a 5-year gap since Typhoon Morakot hit Taiwan in 2009. Here Forest Project provides a useful tool to think about strategies of fundraising for areas still haunted by distant disasters that have been gradually forgotten by mainstream media and thus the general public.
[20] Quoted in Shelagh Vainker et al., *Landscape/Landscript: Nature as Language in the Art of Xu Bing* (Oxford: Ashmolean, 2013), 19.
[21] Xu chose to go to rural areas also for practical reasons. "In all honesty," he admits, "apart from the romantic notion of throwing myself into the vast landscape, I did have a selfish reason for insisting on being sent down. As an educated youth, my chances of getting into the Central Academy were greater than if I had gone on to work at a neighborhood factory in the city." Ibid. 27.
[22] Xu Bing, "Yumei zuowei yizhong yangliao" [Ignorance as a form of Nourishment], *Jintian* 105 (February 2014): 25.
[23] "Sixiang rang yishu jianjie" [Thoughts Simplify Art], *Xu Bing*, accessed February 28, 2015.
http://www.xubing.com/index.php/chinese/texts/xubing_simplifyart/.
[24] According to Peter D. McDonald, initiatives like Forest Project and *Square Word Calligraphy Classroom* are both examples of such active viewer participation. See Vainker et al., *Landscape/Landscript*, 197.
[25] Xu, "Yumei zuowei yizhong yangliao," 25.
[26] Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Artists* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2009), 34-35.
[27] "Sixiang rang yishu jianjie."
[28] See "Primer for Forest Project," *Forest Project*, accessed March 4, 2015.
http://www.forestproject.net/zh/index.php?option=com_flippingbook&Itemid=95&book_id=1.
[29] Karen Lury, for instance, points out that "As child actors are unlike adult human actors, there is frequently an uncertainty as to the value of qualitative judgements made about their performance. […] Ridout suggests that this kind of assimilation is akin to the domestication of animals as household pets." See Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales* (New Brunswick*:* Rutgers University Press, 2010), 146.

[30] Take the selection process of Forest Project in Taiwan for instance, five other judges join Xu to comment on and select the drawings. See Yang, "Xubing yu 'mulinsen jihua,'" 19.
[31] "Sixiang rang yishu jianjie."
[32] "Zhaohui dasenlin."
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

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Metaphors we die by: The Aesthetics of Nature in Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*

Oliver Völker
Goethe-University Frankfurt

In 2005 the German film maker Werner Herzog released a film about Timothy Treadwell, a man who passed several summers in Alaska close to wild grizzly bears. This closeness eventually proved fatal both for Treadwell and his partner Amy Huguenard, as they were killed by one of the bears in October 2003. Treadwell was a filmmaker himself who put much effort into the documentation of his own work. And even though Herzog is deeply fascinated by Treadwell´s footage and uses it extensively in his own film, he manifests a rather reserved, even skeptical stance toward Treadwell ´s understanding of himself and his relationship to wild animals:

What haunts me is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature.[1]

Herzog´s film articulates two questions that will haunt my own paper and will reoccur in several forms: The first is how, if at all, can we conceive of a kinship between humans and non-human animals? Second, how can art or, more specifically, literature help us to understand this relationship?

Many scholars have suggested that the significance of literature lies in its ability not only to understand but to actively shape and change the ideological conceptions about ourselves and the natural world we inhabit. In this vein, the literary scholar Ella Soper stresses "literature´s ability to revolutionize thought and language."[2] Regarding the ethical status of animals she insists on the need for "new poems, plays and narratives in order to cultivate the empathy requisite for us to extend justice for animals."[3] In a similar vein, Timothy Morton stresses the importance of aesthetics in shaping our general outlook on the world and the environment: "Coming up with a new worldview means

dealing with how humans experience their place in the world. Aesthetics thus performs a crucial role, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place."[4]

This understanding of literature seems promising to me. But in order to develop potential new ways of thinking and writing it strikes me as necessary to keep in mind past conceptualizations of nature and its aesthetics. Therefore, I will take the risk of a small digression: in the first part of this paper I intend to reconstruct how nature is used as a metaphor for the human mind and its various faculties in Ralph Waldo Emerson´s writings. In the second part I am going to discuss a recent novel by the writer Lydia Millet and ask how this metaphorical structure is changing in a moment of environmental crisis.

II. *"Man is an analogist"*

In his well-known essay from 1836, bearing the short as well as weighty title *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson declared a far-reaching relationship between the material world and the meaning of human language. Emerson argued that concepts applying to the realm of mental or cultural phenomena, the words we use to talk about our thoughts, feelings or ethical judgements, originate from the tangible environment we live in. They are "words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated to spiritual nature."[5] Using the verb "to borrow," Emerson echoes a classic definition of metaphorical tropes as a transference of words from one semantic field to another. Quite similar to thinkers such as Giambattista Vico or Friedrich Nietzsche, metaphors for Emerson are not some exceptional curiosity of poetic writing that human beings easily could do without. According to him, the most important parts of our language, concepts we use to define our cultural identity, are the result of a transference, a figurative and creative act that took place in an early stage of human development. People might have forgotten about it but there is no possible distinction between poetry and everyday-language.

Consequently, Emerson proceeds to stress the insoluble relationship between nature and the human mind:

> Every natural fact is a symbol of spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.[6]

Or, as he puts it at a different passage, "parts of speech are metaphors because the whole of nature is a metaphor for the human mind."[7]

Emerson makes two points that I want to linger on for a bit longer. Firstly, in order to understand the actual workings of the human mind we need to look at the metaphors a speech community creates. The human mind can only be conceived with reference to the natural environment it uses as the material of its tropes. Emerson thereby anticipated a much later idea by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson: in the now classic book *Metaphors we live by*

they argued that metaphors are not mere linguistic phenomena but conceptual tools by means of which we grasp the world and make it meaningful. Secondly, Emerson´s more specific proposition that the most important source-domain is the world of natural beings and processes clearly cuts across any neat distinction between the workings of the mind and the natural realm supposedly beyond it. There is no subject left that could be separated from any external environment. Therefore, it is no contradiction when Emerson inverses this relationship and denotes nature as a book which is open to read for everyone. After having served as the metaphorical source-domain for human affairs, natural phenomena such as rivers, trees, or forests are interwoven by meaning.

Having said this, it has to be kept in mind that Emerson´s text displays a highly anthropocentric view on nature. There is no doubt for Emerson that mankind is "placed in the centre of beings."[8] Animals, plants or landscapes have no significance of their own and beyond the realm of humanity. The very idea of a completely external realm was, I would suppose, simply inconceivable for Emerson.

Given this interrelationship between environment and thought, we can now proceed and ask to what extent the present-day destruction of nature and the shrinking biodiversity affects our identity as cultural beings. What happens when the words borrowed from nature are finally claimed back? What are the metaphors we die by? To consider to these questions, I will take a closer look at Lydia Millet´s novel *How the Dead Dream*.

II. *"In the library of being"*

To a certain extent, *How the Dead Dream* could be read as a contemporary engagement with the Entwicklungsroman. Even in his early childhood, the protagonist, who is referred to both by his mother and the narrator simply by T., shows a strange tenderness for money: he keeps coins in his mouth and sleeps with dollar bills under his pillow. Later we see T. as a distanced person who takes no particular interest in the usual pastimes of his fellow male students: drugs, sports, and women. Without any emotional attachment to the people around him, he simply seems to possess no faculty for any ethical quarrel. Finally, these qualities of control and aloofness are condensed into his profession as a resort-property developer who is particularly pleased by the perfect workings of human society. "This was the apogee of civilization,"[9] he once remarks, contemplating one of his construction sites.

Having thus set the terrain, Millet confronts her figure with several experiences of loss and crisis that gradually destabilize his allegedly secure world-view and will lead to an almost complete dissolution of his personal self. To begin with, the marriage of his parents is falling apart in the aftermath of which his mother suffers a stroke. At the same time, T. falls in love with a woman for the first time in his life: "This was how he lost his autonomy – he had moved along in a steady pace and then he was flung."[10]

This love relationship, however, is integrated into the novel only to be taken away shortly afterwards by sheer contingency: without further ado his fiancée dies from a "sudden cardiac death" while driving her car. T. is overwhelmed by feelings of grief and stubbornly refuses to participate in any ordered ritual of mourning. This dimension of personal loss is intertwined with several situations that confront T. with forms of non-human suffering: When his car hits a coyote, Millet´s protagonist encounters the sheer corporeal presence of a suffering and finally dying being that seems to haunt him from now on. All of a sudden he searches the physical proximity of animals, especially those at the brink of extinction. After having spent several evenings as an apprentice of a locksmith he systematically takes to breaking into zoos at night time only to sleep close to elephants, hippos, wolves, and alligators. T. himself understands this as an idiosyncratic form of mourning no one else would be able to understand.

This repeated act of incursion seems to re-enact the structure we have recognized in Emerson´s remarks on metaphor. The original meaning of the Greek word *metaphorá* is spatial. It means to transfer, to carry a thing over to another place. When T. climbs fences and picks locks in order to get into zoos, he therefore performs metaphors in the literal sense of the word: He tries to transgress spatial as well as symbolical boundaries between culture and nature. However, and different to Emerson, he finds no communication or even recognition in these encounters as we can see in the following passage:

> He had wanted the old wolf to come close to him, head down, softening. … It was a habit gained from expecting each other to do this, from expecting this of other people, not knowing anything beyond them. That was another kind of solitude, the kind where there was nothing all around but reflections.[11]

This moment of disillusion seems to echo Werner Herzog´s remark on the "overwhelming indifference of nature." Furthermore, T.´s attempts as an intruder have to be regarded as a meta-fictional reformulation of the very same problem. While Herzog is questioning any possible kinship between humans and animals, Millet asks to what extent literature can leave its own solitude and deal with the disturbing otherness of nature. How can an art form that is made of language be open to something that seems to have no articulate voice on its own and no comportment that could easily be translated into meaningful terms?

I would like to propose that Millet´s novel manifests a certain ambiguity towards this problem: On the one hand, Millet leaves no doubt that the disappearance of species ushers in a crisis of human identity. Thus when T. is pondering on the possible consequences of extinction he uses the metaphor of the written text: "And yet a particular way of existence was gone, a whole volume in the library of being. Others were sure to fall afterwards."[12]

As we can see here, the disappearing species is conceived of in terms of a lost book. Extinction therefore is depicted as an event that cannot be placed in some external natural world out there. Instead it concerns the library, an institution of human language and culture that is slowly falling apart. Consequently, this ruination of the self also becomes manifest in the narrative framework of the novel itself. In the course of the events T. gradually loses any security and orientation his former identity seemed to offer. This is most evident in the novel´s last chapter: in an allusion to Joseph Conrad´s *Heart of Darkness*, T. is lost in the wilderness of Belize, a place he originally visited to spot jaguars. After the unexpected death of his guide, the inhospitable landscape is referred to as a terra incognita outside of any meaningful order. Millet´s novel therefore puts the disintegration of the natural world in close correspondence to a hurtful fragmentation of human subjectivity and thereby undermines the notion of a human exceptionalism.

On the other hand, however, Millet´s narrative seems to offer no simple way back to an unproblematic relation between species since its protagonist finds no consolation in the obviously disturbing encounters with animals. The presented life-forms are not easily loveable or even readable: they stink, bleed and bite you in the calf. Any short-cut to the allegedly harmonious relation proposed by Emerson thus is dismissed as overtly anthropocentric.

I would like to propose therefore that the whole point of this ambiguity is that it cannot and should not be resolved: the loss of biological diversity leads to a diversification of meaning that disturbs the protagonist´s as well as the reader´s identity. So even if Millet´s novel is not able to revolutionize our self-understanding in relation to nature, it clearly disturbs and condemns the usual possibilities of anthropomorphism on the one hand and sheer ignorance on the other. While the novel depicts the intimate and corporeal relationship between humans and non-human animals, it seems also to argue that any solution to the environmental problems we are facing lies in a radical openness to different life-forms without the assumptive security of mutuality, understanding, and a common language. Thereby it realizes a specific form of environmental aesthetics Timothy Morton described as a critical, or progressive elegy: "progressive ecological elegy must mobilise some kind of choke or shudder in the reader that causes the environmental loss to stick in her throat, undigested."[13]

Notes

[1] *Grizzly Man*. Dir. Werner Herzog, 2005. Film.

[2] Ella Soper, "Grieving Final Animals and Other Acts of Dissent: Lydia Millet´s *How the Dead Dream*," in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20.4 (Autumn 2013), 746.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.

[5] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* [1836], in Lawrence Buell (ed.) *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 43.
[6] Ibid., 43.
[7] Ibid. 46.
[8] Ibid., 55.
[9] Lydia Millet, *How the Dead Dream* (London: Vintage, 2009), 86.
[10] Ibid., 58.
[11] Ibid., 138.
[12] Ibid., 166.
[13] Timothy Morton: *The Dark Ecology of Elegy*, in Karen A. Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 256.

"Weaving" a New Dialectics of Ecology: Reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the Anthropocene

Alden Wood
University of California, Irvine

In *Ecology Without Nature*,[1] Timothy Morton argues for an ecocriticism injected with skeptical self-criticism. He claims that this self-criticism should intend to trouble the clearly delineated categories such as "nature," "human," "culture," and "environment" that are often taken as presupposed in contemporary ecocritical discourse. Against the position asserted by deep ecologists, namely that "we need to change our view from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism," Morton intends to queer this position by challenging ecocritics to "think through an argument about what we mean by the word *environment* itself."[2] Because much contemporary ecocritical writing "keeps insisting that we are 'embedded' in nature" and claims that "nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being" such writing, again according to Morton, "can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society."[3] This is ostensibly a call for a move toward a dialectical understanding of ecology. It is a position that eschews the notion of ecology as a static, closed, system of fixed categories such as "nature" and "human," which interact with each other in their singular particularity, to the greater or lesser detriment of their existence as a totality (usually conceived of as "Earth"). Instead, a dialectical approach to ecology necessitates an open, porous, and continuously shifting conception of the terms at play.

In a manner analogous to Lisa J. Kiser's claim that "identifying and analyzing environmental perspectives in medieval texts can contribute both to the projects of medievalists [… and] ecocritics, who hope to comprehend how modern cultural assumptions about the environment have developed from their originary Western roots,"[4] this paper argues that the well-known Middle English chivalric romance poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is a text that troubles the dichotomy between "nature" and "human" in a way that avoids the logic that contemporary deep ecologists employ when they argue that

humankind is merely one aspect of a more totalizing ecosystem. Kiser goes on to claim that most ecocritical treatments of medieval texts present a standard "nature-culture dualism" in which "nature is opposed to culture" and "nature takes a subordinate position."[5] In defense of the medieval, Kiser locates such binary impositions in the later emergence of Cartesian thought. I hope to articulate a position, similar to Kiser's defense, that argues that medieval poetry can present a more nuanced understanding of the interrelationship between "nature" and "human culture" precisely by showing how *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "forces on our attention the question of how the construction of nature" is rooted in a dialectics of ontological becoming.[6] The poem offers readers in the Anthropocene a way in which to conceptualize an "ecology without nature" as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* weaves together difference, nonidentity, and contradiction while destabilizing categories of being through a continuous ontological process of dialectical assertion, opposition, and sublation.

The confrontation between similarity and difference is first depicted in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at the beginning of the poem, with the entrance of the Green Knight's queered body into the space of Arthur's court. Already at the poem's outset, a form of radical alterity is literally interposed into what appears at first to be a closed-system. Although the court and the Green Knight are often read[7] in binary opposition to each other, the "otherness" of both the Green Knight's bodily constitution and his demeanor is not merely juxtaposed against the "culture" of Arthur's court, as the Green Knight actually mirrors chivalric conventions in many ways as well. Yet, before accounting for the ways in which the Green Knight is similar to the knights of Arthur's court, an exploration of his difference is warranted.

The difference inscribed onto the Green Knight's body is so jarring to the courtly audience, that it almost appears as if the elements of the Green Knight's distinction obscure his elements of similarity. As the Green Knight is depicted by the poem's narrator as a green, "wondrous sight"[8] Arthur's court sits in awe of the presence before them: "Þerfore to answare watz arȝe mony aÞel freke / And al stouned at his steuen and ston-stil seten / In a swoghe silence Þurȝ Þe sale riche"[9] ("The many good men could not muster the courage / To speak, and sat silent as stones, truly awed / In the hall thus there hovered a harrowing quiet"). Here, the thematic opposition between exteriority and interiority, which is repeated throughout the poem, suggests a larger crisis of appearance versus reality. The shock of the Green Knight's presence renders Arthur's court silent and, perhaps more significantly, "ston-stil."[10] Carolyn Dinshaw briefly remarks that "the knights […] approach mineral status as they sit there as dumbstruck witnesses"[11] but perhaps this allusion to geological petrification affords further insight into the ways in the which the poem complicates nature/human duality.

Arthur's court is confronted by something that they immediately register as "other," yet tellingly, as a consequence of this shock, they figuratively

become silent and "ston-stil" which is antithetical to the normative model of the court as a space of gaiety and liveliness. Extending this metaphorical reading further, in encountering a form of their own nonidentity in the figure of the Green Knight, the members of the court are figuratively represented as non-human—as motionless as the natural stones found outside their interiorized court of "human culture." Thus, through an encounter with what appears to be non-human, Arthur's knights become, if only briefly and figuratively, non-human themselves. It is precisely scenes like this, in the words of Timothy Morton, that "beg the question of what precisely counts as human."[12] This ultimately runs counter to a more conventionally ecological reading of this scene, such as that of Carolyn Dinshaw who claims that the scene evokes the "outside world coming in" and "having arrived inside, the outside is discovered to have been there all along."[13] While this sort of reading suggests a cohabitation of inside/outside or identity/nonidentity, it still nonetheless relies on static categories of being and does not posit a new synthesis. Dinshaw's reading puts these delineated categories into play within a totalizing ecosystem of interaction, yet they still exist as distinct categories. However, the ecological reading I am attempting to put forward here, by way of Morton, is one in which the very boundaries between inside and outside, or identity and nonidentity become blurred—at times converging, and at times diverging, but always porous and shifting.

While the members of the court are so awestruck by the Green Knight's appearance that they overlook the ways in which aspects of his countenance mirror their own, the poem's narrator is adamant in maintaining the Green Knight's humanness, at least for the reader's sake. While the narrator concedes that this stranger could be mistaken for a "half-etayn"/"half-giant" he quickly reasserts that the Green Knight is nonetheless a "mynn"/"man."[14] The attention to detail between lines 150-230, which meticulously describe the Green Knight's appearance, tend to focus almost entirely on features and garments that are unequivocally thought of as conventionally human. In addition to primarily registering humanness, the Green Knight's overall appearance is in fact quite regal. Aside from his massive stature, wild hair, "berd as a busk"/"beard like a bush"[15] and the troublesome fact that he is entirely green, the Green Knight's vestments suggest those of a knight of sufficient stature to reside in Arthur's court. Here again the nature/human binary is problematized, insofar as the Green Knight begins to take on a liminal quality at this point in the poem. His holding of the holly and axe alludes to his ability to contain the contradiction between "nature" and "human culture" within his unitary constitution, as does his appearance and clothing which itself is the mutual interplay between green-as-nature and gold-as-human. The mere fact that the Green Knight's liminal constitution appears to be the simultaneous expression of "nature" and the "human," complicates the very boundaries of what each term as a distinct ecological category delineates—both categories become entirely destabilized. Thus, within the space of the poem from Fitt I onward, "nature" loses any pretense towards a

fixed referent, just as "human" does so as well. This allows for a more expansive notion of ecology that refuses to situate a fixed conception of the "human" as merely one aspect in the more totalizing fixed category of "nature." It is not the traditional deep ecology of interdependence, but rather an ecology of interpenetration and modification.

In *The Ecological Thought*, Morton uses the concept of "the mesh" as a particular form of shorthand to describe "the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things." It is important to call particular attention to the inclusion of "non-living things" in this sense of ecology, as "the mesh" ultimately "consists of [both] infinite connections and infinite differences."[16] "The mesh" is also porous as it "can mean the holes in a network and threading between them."[17] It also does not "suggest a clear starting point, and those 'clusters' of 'subordinate groups' [re: ecological categories] are far from linear […] Each point of the mesh is both center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge."[18] Extending this metaphor of "the mesh" to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I argue that an ecology predicated on interpenetration and modification finds its representation, in both form and content, through the notion of "weaving."

In my treatment of "weaving" I hope to elucidate two central concerns of its position as a metaphorical device within the poem. First, "weaving" indicates a process. This is central to the conception of ecology that I am attempting to extrapolate from Timothy Morton. For the sake of reiteration, this process-oriented ecology is opposed to the insistence of deep ecology's fixed Aristotelian categories (i.e. Morton's ecology is always *becoming*). Second, "weaving" indicates the interpenetration of disparate elements into each other as the constitution of something new. Morton argues that this version of ecology is in the vein of "how Hegel distinguished dialectical thinking from sheer [Aristotelian/analytic] logic," and that "at any moment, thought necessarily bumps its head against what it isn't."[19] This is a notion of "weaving" as an "encounter with nonidentity" and as the coming together of that which is and that which is not in the production of the new, which according to Morton, "has profound implication for ecological thinking."[20]

Extending the notion of "weaving" to the form and stylistics of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it becomes apparent that disparate structural elements interpenetrate each other as a means of constructing a new ecological composite in the form of the poem itself. The poem itself already meta-reflexively calls attention to its interpenetrated form as the narrator explicitly calls the reader's attention to the "letteres loken"/"letters well inlaid"[21] in the introductory preface. Stylistically the Pearl Poet's famous incorporation of the "bob and wheel" metrical device is an example of the way in which "weaving" functions on a formal level. The rhyme scheme of the "bob and wheel," ABABA, can be viewed as the integration of same and different into a composite whole, and perhaps, admittedly contentious, as a formalistic "encounter with nonidentity." Additionally, the "bob and wheel" is able to incorporate the difference between alliteration and rhyme into its essence as a

unified metrical device. Furthermore, after the alliterative structuring of the "stock," the interjection of the "bob" ruptures the alliterative continuity as the first utterance of alliteration veering toward rhyme, yet this process ultimately finds its synthesis and resolution in the "wheel's" weaving of Anglo-Saxon poetic convention with French poetic norms. Finally, the five-tiered nature of the "bob and wheel" alludes to the pentangle on Gawain's shield, itself a "woven" symbol, the significance of which will be discussed below. Perhaps imposing a dialectical conception of ecology onto the formal structure of the poem itself is too forced, but it nonetheless calls our attention to the interpenetration of form and content in regards to the poem as a narratological and ecological whole.

In regards to the content of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the most obvious allusion to "weaving" is the pentangle on Gawain's shield. Gillian Rudd writes that "the interdependence that characterises the concept of perpetually moving balance seems to find its emblem in the pentangle, with its five interlocking points and virtues."[22] While the Pearl Poet does indeed explicitly make the figurative representation of Gawain's pentangle as the embodiment of the five virtues, its direct correlation to fixed referents is complicated by the allusion to the "fyue wyttez"/"five fleshy senses," the "fyue woundez"/"five wounds" of Christ, and Gawain's own body through the reference to his "fyue fyngres"/"five fingers."[23] This blurring of specific symbolic referents can be interpreted as general allusion to the interpenetrated, woven nature, of similarity and difference. The pentangle suggests a composite totality, but it is important to note that it is not depicted as static as the Pearl Poet goes to great lengths to describe its infinite nature as an "endeles knot"/"endless knot"[24]: "Now alle Þese fyue syÞez forsoÞe were fetled on Þis kny3t / And vchone halched in oÞer, Þat non ende hade" ("Five pentads, each precious and pure; each joined / To another, never alone, never ending").[25] This radical interconnectedness suggests a sense of ecology that is predicated upon an infinite sense of weaving or interpenetration. It is a continuous process of constitution and reconstitution, "withouten ende at any noke" ("without end at any angle") and thus, "whereeuer Þe gomen bygan or glod to an ende" ("Where you started or stopped on the star was the same").[26] Here, Gawain's infinitely woven pentangle expresses similarities to Timothy Morton's ecological concept of "the mesh." This concept adds a level of greater significance to Gawain's pentangle in an ecological reading of the poem such as this. Read through Morton's "mesh," the pentangle allows for connection, but also slippage, and is paradoxically whole in its infinite interconnectedness. This notion of a nonhierarchical network that allows for "encounters with nonidentity" appears throughout *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, perhaps most notably in the famous beheading scene.

Carolyn Dinshaw writes that during the beheading of the Green Knight, his "queer body comes apart and functions perfectly without a sovereign at its top. Which marks it as ecological, too […] because it hints at a creaturely way of being that refuses hierarchy."[27] The non-hierarchy which is made manifest

in the liminal constitution of the Green Knight's body simultaneously asserts its particularity and totality, precisely through the act of severing as an attempt to disrupt the ecological whole. As the Green Knight "lays his neck bare" for Gawain's axe blow, it becomes very apparent that aside from being green, this is a neck all too human: "His longe louelych lokkez he layd ouer his croun,/Let Þe naked nec to Þe note schewe" ("His long, lovely locks he lays over his head,/So the nape of the naked, green neck is exposed").[28] As if to render the Green Knight even more human, the Pearl Poet sharply contrasts the color green (which has up until this point in the poem, been taken to signify "otherness") with the familiar human red of blood: "Þe blod brayd fro Þe body, Þat blykked on Þe grene" ("The blood quickly bursts out, shines bright on the green").[29] Thus, the two successive ruptures—first the beheading itself, then the bursting blood—trouble the boundaries between "nature" and "human." Paradoxically, through this act of literal and symbolic violence the Green Knight's splitting into two actually reasserts his mesh-like infinitude. Gawain's axe blow is ostensibly against the very humanness the Green Knight represents, and the bursting blood is the ruptural interpenetration of the "human" into the physical spatiality of "nature." In their contradictory exchangeability, both categories of "nature" and "human" are again rendered destabilized. The color red rupturing onto the green also recalls the Green Knight's entrance with the branch of holly, itself an "evergreen" that suggests an impervious infinitude. The fact that the Green Knight neither "faltered ne fel" ("falters nor falls")[30] after he loses his sovereign head, depicts a body-as-ecosystem that, in Dinshaw's words, "refuses hierarchy."[31] It is a body like "the mesh", woven together in rhizomatic fashion, where each point in its field is simultaneously the center and not-center, and is porous enough to contain its own contradictions.

Another example of the ways in which "weaving" functions as a metaphor for a dialectical ecology within *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is the weaving together of form and content in the well-known dichotomization of the bedchamber and hunt scenes in and around Bertilak's castle. This section, perhaps better than any other in the poem, reflects the way in which similarity and difference can exist within and create a process-oriented unity. From the section's outset it becomes apparent, as William F. Woods notes, that in an inversion of events, "the questing knight who hunts for the green chapel […] has become the hunted."[32] This inversion is furthered by the sustained metaphor of Bertilak's hunt of game in nature and Lady Bertilak's "hunt" of Sir Gawain in the bedchamber at Hautdesert. These two related narrative threads interpenetrate each other throughout the course of Fitt III, resulting in a narrative form that appears woven together. It is also telling that this is the only Fitt that deviates from a single linear perspective, which can be read as suggesting a moment of dialectical interaction that ultimately resolves itself in the synthesis of Fitt IV. The bedchamber and hunt are not isolated scenes in any sense, as they both express resonances and similarities to be found in other; often the figurative rendering in one scene lends insight into what is

happening in the other location (e.g. Lady Bertilak's kisses won from Gawain mirror Bertilak's successful kills, etc.). Thus, in keeping with the motif of the tension between interior and exterior, the internal world of "human" culture in Gawain's bedchamber collapses and becomes metaphorically synonymous with the external world of "nature" experienced in Bertilak's hunt. Additionally, certain actions within these scenes connect more broadly to instances throughout the rest of the poem, suggesting a blurring of the temporal boundaries within the poem as well. Bertilak's successful hunts, replete with decapitations ("Fyrst he hewes of his hed"/"Soon he hews off the head"[33]), connect in ecological unity with the past by recalling the Green Knight's beheading, and project into the future by foreshadowing Gawain's impending decapitation that never occurs.

The ecological unity within Fitt III is further rendered as one of dialectical dynamism, through the way in which the host/guest dynamic is portrayed. Initially, the boundaries between host and guest appear quite clear in Fitt III—Bertilak and his Lady are ostensibly Gawain's hosts, and the knight is their gracious guest. However almost immediately this is complicated as multiple tensions arise. Gawain, as guest, must navigate the tensions between chastity and chivalric courtesy in his gentle rebukes of Lady Bertilak's amorous intentions. Bertilak is explicit in positing the host/guest relation as exchange, under the pretense of a good-natured game, which itself recalls Arthur's early proposition of a game. Gawain breaks the covenant between host and guest as he lies to Bertilak, out of self-preservation, about receiving the Lady's green girdle. The hosts ultimately lie to Gawain as they keep their true identities and intentions hidden from him. All of this is to suggest that the relationship between host and guest is complicated, duplicitous, and ultimately untenable as a clearly delineated binary opposition. While perhaps contentious, this dissolution of the host/guest distinction has implications for the deep ecologist position that what is "human" is merely the "guest" of "nature" as "host." The complication of the host/guest dynamic in the poem, points to the way in which each seemingly isolated position (that of host and guest) only take on definition in opposition to the other position (i.e. a host is not a host without a guest and vice versa). This suggests a relational unity, which like Morton's "mesh," can navigate its own inherent contradiction. Extended further, this host/guest dynamic suggests that "nature" and "human" are signifiers that only take on the semblance of delineation through their relationship to each other, and any attempt to define them in isolation is ill fated. Thus, when Gawain is not beheaded, the very thing that is supposed to kill him paradoxically saves him and is a sort of Derridean *pharmakon*. The Green Knight is Bertilak just as "nature" is "human"—the stable boundaries of each ecological category break down and become reconfigured as a new ecological unity through their woven interpenetration. Thus, the act done to seal the covenant and exchange between Gawain and the Green Knight—the proffering of Gawain's neck to the blade of the Green Knight's axe—becomes

complicated as it is both the moment that signifies Gawain's death, but, ecologically, ends up being the synthesis of his renewal.

Beyond their mere symbolic linkage to the three times Bertilak exchanges his hunted winnings with Gawain and the nick of Gawain's neck as reprimand for lying about his possession of the green girdle, the three axe strokes of the Green Knight can be allegorized as the three successive stages of the "human" moving through its dialectical opposition to "nature" into a resolved synthesis of ecological unity. During the Green Knight's first axe stroke, Gawain looks up and watches as the axe "com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende" ("arced through the air to arrive at its mark")[34] and almost immediately "schranke a lytel with Þe schulderes for Þe scharp yrne" ("his shoulders shrank from the sharp, falling blade").[35] Gawain flinches and the Green Knight calls out the supposedly brave knight of Arthur's court for his human fragility and his incessant desire to live. This bodily assertion of human fragility is foreshadowed in Gawain's taking of the supposedly magical green girdle as a self-interested attempt to secure his fate.

After receiving the verbal berating from the Green Knight, Gawain steels his resolve and this reconstitution significantly takes the form of becoming like "nature." The second axe stroke comes down and:

> Gawayn grayÞely hit bydez and glent with no membre/Bot stode stylle as Þe ston oÞer a stubbe auÞer / Þat raÞeled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundredth (Staying firm and unflinching, as fixed as a rock / Gawain stayed just as still as a stump in the earth / That is gripping the ground with its great, hundred roots).[36]

Gawain here becomes like "nature," and is figuratively rooted into the earth itself, a reconstitution of character that pleases the Green Knight. The Green Knight again pulls the axe back, a move that exacerbates Gawain's growing impatience.

Finally, on the third axe stroke the Green Knight nicks Gawain's neck and the "exchange" which the entire narrative is built upon is finally complete. Gawain's droplets of blood fall onto the snow: "And quen Þe hurne seȝ Þe blode blenk on Þe snawe" ("He beheld his red blood shining on the snow").[37] This imagery is significant as it recalls the early rupture of blood from the Green Knight's neck, which renders the unfamiliar (the Knight's green body) familiar (human blood). Just as the Green Knight's beheading is what allows him to sublate the distinction between "human" and "nature," so too does Gawain's wound act as a synthesis of his own ecological existence. Gawain's human blood falls onto the immaculate blanket of the external world, as here snow signifies both purity and "nature." It is a moment of ecological resolution, when Gawain's presence and nature itself both become destabilized. It is the narrative representation of the conflation and subsequent collapse of the distinctness between the categories of "nature" and "human."

Thus through the three axe strokes, Gawain figuratively crosses the liminal threshold between "nature" and "human" into, according to Morton's logic, an ecology without nature or the human.

Reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the Anthropocene, our contemporary ecological moment where it appears that irreversibly detrimental alterations to what is conventionally called "nature" have been precipitated by "human" production and consumption, allows us to posit an ecological position that does not depend on the romanticization of a static conception of "nature" that exists as "other" to the "human." The poem allows for a more expansive understanding of the dialectical movement of the woven together unity and radical interconnectedness of *everything*—both living and non-living. Such a reading of this medieval poem, a text written well before it was even conceivable that life on earth could possibly eradicate itself *in toto*, implies a praxis based upon an understanding that where notions of ecological unity are today are not necessarily where they will be tomorrow. The poem allows for the positing of a new dialectics of ecology where any movement to sustain life on earth must be predicated upon looking for and harnessing processes of change rather than regressive idealizations of a nonexistent pastoral past.

Notes

[1] Morton, Timothy. *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
[2] Morton, *Ecology,* 3.
[3] Morton, *Ecology,* 4-5.
[4] Kiser, Lisa J. "Chaucer and the Politics of Nature." *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. (Charlottesville: Virgina UP, 2001), 41. Print.
[5] Kiser, "Chaucer," 42.
[6] Kiser, "Chaucer," 43.
[7] Such as in John Speirs's reading
[8] Finch, Casey, Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson. *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*. (Berkeley: U of California, 1993), 147. Print.
[9] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 241-243.
[10] Ibid., 220.
[11] Dinshaw, Carolyn. "Ecology." *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 356. Print.
[12] Morton, *Ecology,* 7.
[13] Dinshaw, "Ecology," 356.
[14] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 140-141.
[15] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 182.
[16] Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010), 30. Print.
[17] Ibid., 28.
[18] Ibid., 29.
[19] Ibid., 15.
[20] Ibid., 14.

[21] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 35.
[22] Rudd, Gillian. "Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature." *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 29. Print.
[23] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 640-642.
[24] Ibid., 630.
[25] Ibid., 656-57.
[26] Ibid., 660-661.
[27] Dinshaw, "Ecology," 357.
[28] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 418, 419-420.
[29] Ibid., 429.
[30] Ibid., 430.
[31] Dinshaw, 357.
[32] Woods, William F. "Nature and the Inner Man in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *The Chaucer Review* 36.3 (2002), 217.
[33] Finch et al, *Pearl Poet*, 1607
[34] Ibid., 2266.
[35] Ibid., 2267.
[36] Ibid., 2292-2294.
[37] Ibid., 2315.

Aesthetics in the Mother Tongue

Mary Sobhani
University of Arkansas—Fort Smith

The mother-voice
Half latina half americana
Rising like a loaf of
panecito fresco
You know the kind
Recién horneado
Warm like mmm
Franela-voiced

Those rounded a's
Those shortened o's
"La tierra es un solo país
y la humanidad sus ciudadanos."
The guide, the teacher,
Even when I'd rather not
Be student, daughter, listener
Those mocha-tones in step with rumba
rhythms, cumbia-fied
all softened b's and powered r's.
Not placid. Oh no.

The heart remembers
"Una lengua amable es
el imán del corazón," she'd say.
"Yeah, yeah. I *know*, Mom.
You've told me a *million* times."

I didn't realize
How words can linger
Their fragrance filling all those

Spaces

But she knew
the power of aesthetics
in the mother tongue.

Book Review

Ingo Arndt and Jürgen Tautz, *Animal Architecture* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2014.

Animal Architecture is a subject that can be easily overlooked, and is certainly less often recognized for its beauty and craftsmanship. Perhaps craftsmanship is not the right word, for it is not man that is the creator of these stunning works. Ingo Arndt spent years taking pictures and capturing the wonder and handiwork of a variety of creatures. This book also finds similarities that can be drawn between these animal architects and ourselves.

The photographs in this book capture the imagination and showcase the amazing feats of architecture that occur every day in nature. Photographs of the galleries bark beetle shows the art that their feeding habits create on the bark of trees,[1] demonstrating the primordial artistry of nature. The series of dwellings of various species and habitats of the caddis fly is an amazing reminder that great detailing can be found in small places. These homes are only a few millimeters long and the photographs allow readers to see beauty that wouldn't be seen with the naked eye.[2] Seeing a Penduline Tit's nest made from poplar and willow seeds[3] against a stark black background shows how the creation is almost otherworldly. Arndt intentionally photographs mixes of architecture against the black background as well as in nature to great artistic effect. I agree with Arndt that the studio shots together with those in their natural environment create an interesting mix for this topic.[4]

It is not only the photographs that draw attention in this book; the text added by Jürgen Tautz—German behaviorist, sociobiologist, and bee expert—tells us a story that lets us connect to and understand these creatures. The information presented describes the known motivations behind the architecture, but still leaves room for the unknown, such as the unexplained behavior of the carrier snail.[5] They collect items from their surroundings, such as shells or pebbles, and attach them to their own shell. The description in the text only enhances our appreciation for the attention to detail the carrier snail

gives when taking on the time-consuming process of attaching their new treasures.

In the introduction to *Animal Architecture*, the author opens our eyes to just how important an animal's dwelling is: "They offer the animal architects protection against adverse environmental factors and provide miniature universes for optimal living conditions."[6] Such a short sentence introduces a very large idea; the idea that something so crucial for basic survival can also be the entire universe to its inhabitant. In the same way people invest in making their home their own, animals put their life into their dwellings. This idea is later reinforced throughout the book that describes the ingenious ways that different animals create their habitats to be perfect for them.

From an aerial view, the Australian planes where compass termites build their homes look like a field of tombstones.[7] A closer view reveals that these structures average a height of 10 feet tall and are built with an inspired ventilation system. These structures are built tall and thin so that the sun's position hits the broadest sides of the dwellings to warm the inside, but only hits the thinnest part of the tower during the hottest part of the day. Of course, we can't talk about ingenuity without mention of the honeybee. The true embodiment of resourcefulness, the honeycomb is a bright example of how some creatures are self-made and self-sufficient. The author describes the individual roles of different bees and how each contributes to the masterfully created comb and the perfect temperature maintained at all times:

> Heater bees bring their flight muscles to a momentum that then delivers warmth to pupae in the brood. If it is too hot in the summer, the water collector bees snap into action and wet the walls of the honeycombs, whereupon the water's evaporation provides cooling. Ventilating bees work in close tandem by flapping their wings and generating a small cooling breeze.[8]

The author's comparison to the beehive as a superorganism connects the readers to an understanding of how it functions similarly to our own bodies.

Jim Brandenburg, an environmentalist and nature photographer himself, writes the foreword for this book which also reveals the subtle interplay between humanity and the animal architects. He states that "I found the animal architecture examples in this book a good counterpoint to and a stark reminder of the human need to express beyond practicality. Animals have no ego or pride to drive their needs to an impractical and environmental compromise."[9] The idea that the motivation for creation in the animal world is based on practicality is interesting, and the note that there is no environmental compromise is also powerful. Brandenburg's impression does not take away

from the insight we may gain from seeing ourselves in these animal architects, however.

Why and how these architects build their worlds reminds us of the same reasons that motivate us as humans. In particular, the stories of nest-building of the bowerbirds and the weaverbirds paint a picture that feels quite familiar. Starting with the weaverbirds, the males build intricate and visually astounding nests[10] to attract their females. It is the female who decides which nest will be suitable for them to raise their family. The interesting part about the male weaverbird is that they only loosely weave the nest initially, leaving the knots movable. This is done so that if the female doesn't approve of how the nest was made, the males can easily take it apart and rebuild it to the female's liking.[11] It's possible that some readers might recognize a familiar dynamic among human couples.

The different species of bowerbirds have a more artistic eye, and a more promiscuous nature about them. The female bowerbirds make their own nests where they will bear and raise their children, while the male bowerbirds create an attractive bachelor pad in order to seduce and mate with as many females as possible.[12] The bowerbird's skill and decorative eye is quite impressive. Male bowerbirds decorate their nest and the surrounding entrance with a colorful array of objects. This isn't done in a random manner; colors are grouped together with precision and create a truly eye-catching arrangement that is sure to attract the female bowerbirds. Photographs of their handiwork[13] are vivid in their natural setting. Even more interesting is the birds' integration of natural as well as man-made objects into their display. Bottle caps, plastic bags and the like are sorted by color and made into part of the masterpiece. These pictures, while beautiful, also serve as a reminder about the environmental compromise that Brandenburg mentioned.

Overall, this book is a stunning pairing of photography and text. The storytelling makes the reader appreciate the artistry of these animal architects and the intricacy of their work. The book adds perspective to the world we live in and draws connections between man and nature. We are able to explore a world of animal architecture and aesthetics that many would not have the opportunity to see otherwise, but the authors bring these dwellings close enough for the reader to feel as if these creatures aren't so different from us after all.

Courtney Miller
Jefferson College of Health Sciences

Notes

[1] Arndt and Tautz, *Animal Architecture,* 104-106.
[2] Ibid., 84-91.
[3] Ibid., 19.
[4] Ibid., 155.
[5] Ibid., 152.
[6] Ibid., 10.
[7] Ibid., 70-74.
[8] Ibid., 83.
[9] Ibid., 5.
[10] Ibid., 30-41.
[11] Ibid., 25.
[12] Ibid., 24.
[13] Ibid., 26-29, 42-49.

Book Review

Leslie Bedford, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions: How Story and Imagination Create Aesthetic Experience* Walnut Street, California: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2014.

Experiencing art is both profound to the individual human experience as much as it is impactful on one's view of culture. We often experience art for the first time in a museum or gallery setting, and such places can be sterile, clinical, and detached from human feeling and emotion. While this is not always the case, it is often true. Signs that say "Do Not Touch" remove from us one of our most basic senses, even though these protective orders are in place to help preserve art and museum exhibitions. While museum pieces on display can be, and often are, profoundly moving and can alter our human experience, they are still detached from us—we experience them from afar as opposed to a more immersive experience that we could otherwise have. Imagine, however, that the entire exhibit itself becomes art, including the pieces on display, thus allowing the viewer an immersive experience. This is what Leslie Bedford details in her work.

Leslie Bedford's book, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions: How Story and Imagination Create Aesthetic Experience*, is a labor of her love of museum studies and years of experience in that field. It is her doctoral dissertation revised into a book, providing further evidence of her enthusiasm for her topic. She wants her readers to learn about new modes of exhibition and, hopefully, a new form of art. Bedford's work is grounded in the notions of aesthetic and imaginative education as theorized by John Dewey in Art as Experience. With this framework in mind, Bedford posits that museum exhibits can be both an education experience and artistic one, while the exhibit itself is art.

Bedford's discussion of the interconnectivity of story and narrative in chapter two are important in that she lays the foundation of her own theory about the museum exhibit as art. She says that narrative "is *how* the story is told or represented by a particular medium" regardless of whatever form it takes.[1] One cannot exist without the other as the narrative gives the story its structure.

She notes that "finding and telling stories is so much a part of being human that it seems a natural, even critical strategy for museum program and exhibitions."[2] Story is essential to the human experience – it is natural to us as humans. We "seem to be hard-wired for story" as a species as evidenced by oral traditions being told to younger generations for millennia, as well as writers putting their stories down first on caves walls, then clay, followed by papyrus and paper, and now, digitally.[3] Museums are critical components of our society that tell us stories, and when we experience the story in a museum exhibit, our imagination takes root, giving us a unique experience not to be replicated by another exhibit goer.

Bedford's chapter on imagination explains her belief that museums are well positioned to provide an excellent and deep imaginative educational experience. She draws from the writings of Kieran Egan, in which understanding is described as a process of culturally accumulating language from a basic, oral form and arriving at habitually and highly reflexive form.[4] Bedford relates this to creating museum exhibits that purposefully attach themselves to the viewers' imagination, regardless of age. Egan says that the "first questions teachers should ask of any new content is 'What is the story?'"[5] If museum curators and exhibit creators think of themselves as teachers, and they often are, the story of the exhibit is critical in creating that emotional link with the viewer. Bedford discusses how the Boston Children's Museum created a hands-on experience for younger viewers in 1991, but the same hands-on experience can be translated into any museum exhibit that immerses the viewer. When the viewer becomes a part of the exhibit, is surrounded by it, imagination undoubtedly takes hold and the story the exhibit tells comes to life for the viewer. If the exhibit allows for a truly tactile experience, then a more complete bonding with the story is possible. Bedford says that the "way we process information isn't just shaped by doing something physically with our bodies," but that "thinking about, imagining, and seeing someone else do a familiar action also affects us physically and thus mentally."[6] When we see others immersed in a hands-on exhibit, we instinctively want to take part, and thus, we learn.

At the heart of Leslie Bedford's work are the theories of John Dewey, one of the most noted educational philosophers of modern times. Specially, Bedford focuses on Dewey's *Art as Experience* as it more directly relates to her hypothesis that a museum exhibition can be an aesthetic experience in itself. Dewey argued that all experiences contained within them three distinct characteristics. The first is Completeness, meaning that an experience "neither fades out nor comes to a sudden end. It has closure."[7] The second is Uniqueness, in that each experience is unique and whole, and cannot be taken apart and analyzed as it is happening. The third is Unifying Emotion, meaning that "we do not experience emotions independent of the context that gave them their meaning."[8] As a constructivist, Dewey believed that "learning is the

process of building on prior experience and, through reflection, gaining new knowledge."[9] Furthermore, imagination provided a mechanism for experiences to interact with and connect to prior knowledge. It is through their prior knowledge that the imagination is sparked for exhibit viewers. What they already know from past experiences and learning fuels their imagination for what they are experiencing for the first time in the museum.

Bedford concludes her work with a discussion of the creation of experience by means of the exhibition medium. She notes that "how we think about objects' roles in exhibitions" have changed.[10] Bedford argues that some exhibit viewers seem to view the exhibit with a postmodern lens. The viewer may be "unbound by institutional or professional concern for the historical record" thus making themselves "free to respond to objects" as they please.[11] This detachment from the historical record can extend to detachment from what is truly authentic as well. She says that "it appears that something doesn't have to be the real thing—in the sense of original or authentic—to generate strong reactions."[12] I agree with this idea as I have experienced strong, visceral reactions to reproduction items in museums as well as in hands-on exhibits. The objects, despite being fakes, nonetheless triggered my imagination and created within me vivid, telling experiences.

Bedford says that that "aesthetic experience is not about teaching—the dialectic telling—but closer to facilitating—the experiential showing or doing."[13] This is done through the design of the museum exhibit in such a way as to enliven the imagination of the viewer while at the same time conveying the story. Hopefully the viewers will have an aesthetic experience with what they see and possibly, within what they are immersed. She notes that many exhibit designers do not view themselves at artists, but that is the very place to begin the examination of an exhibit as an art form.[14] Moreover, she argues that "exhibition design is an instrumental or applied art in service to content…."[15] This design, in conjunction with the content, creates the aesthetic experience for the viewer, from their first encounter with the exhibit as a whole, and then with each individual piece therein.

With particular attention being paid to the museum exhibit, the meaning of the aesthetic experience will differ from person to person, but it can be initiated for each person by the exhibit itself. The museum is a place of stories, stories to be learned and imagined, and a departure point for the human experience. Bedford says that "no exhibition can respond to everything we ask of it" and that not every exhibition "should be designed as an aesthetic experience."[16] She does believe, however, that the museum exhibit can create that experience. It is an art form in and of itself, just as powerful as the pieces contained within.

Jamie Price
Jefferson College of Health Sciences

Notes

[1] Bedford, *Art of Exhibitions,* 57.
[2] Ibid., 61.
[3] Ibid., 60.
[4] Ibid., 68.
[5] Ibid., 72.
[6] Ibid., 76.
[7] Ibid., 80.
[8] Ibid., 80.
[9] Ibid., 81.
[10] Ibid., 92.
[11] Ibid., 93.
[12] Ibid., 94.
[13] Ibid., 115.
[14] Ibid., 116.
[15] Ibid., 117.
[16] Ibid., 133.

Book Review

Alexa Weik Von Mossner, ed. *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2014. 296 pp.

The result of a workshop held in 2011 at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, *Moving Environments* is the latest in a number of recent books that approach cinema and media from an ecological perspective.[1] By focusing exclusively on the role of affect (a near-automatic, visceral response) and emotion (our cognitive awareness of that response) in ecologically-minded films, editor Alexa Weik von Mossner both sets her anthology apart from previous ecocritical work on cinema (with the exception of Ivakhiv, who strongly emphasizes affect) and places it in conversation with other important theoretical approaches: phenomenology, affect theory, and cognitive psychology.

The inclusion of these diverse theoretical frameworks—which have sometimes been considered at odds with each other—is one of the strengths of *Moving Environments*. Von Mossner is careful to balance phenomenological and affect theory with cognitivist models. In the book's opening chapter, David Ingram even calls for a synthesis of these approaches: "A film theory that is concerned with spectatorship in terms of both emotional identification and embodied affect [will be] richer than one that focuses exclusively on one or other of these factors."[2] As examples of this combined approach, he offers the work of Greg Smith (leaning on the cognitivist side) and Laura Marks (from the phenomenological camp), and uses the work of these two scholars in interpreting *Local Hero* and *This Filthy Earth* as "eco-films."

Ingram's chapter opens part one of the book, which provides an overview of theoretical approaches to affect in ecocinema. In her contribution to this section, von Mossner asks whether eco-documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* engage emotion in ways that are fundamentally different from watching fictional films; while she works from Dirk Eitzen's proposition that part of

what distinguishes documentary from fictional films is the way that it compels viewers to believe in not only its nonfictional status but its "consequential" nature (that is, its importance in the real world), she also identifies cinematic techniques that work across genres and types of film to spark emotion in spectators. Nicole Seymour also contributes a chapter identifying the seriousness—and sometimes sanctimoniousness—of ecocinema, and suggests that these affective modes might actually work against films politically; as an alternative, she explores the tactics of irony and self-reflection in films such as *Idiocracy*.

Part two of the book focuses on nonhuman animals. Bart Welling explores the so-called problem of anthropomorphism and identifies documentary filmmakers' strategies of both "sameness" and "othering" to foster an emotional relationship with wildlife, focusing on *Winged Migration* and *Being Caribou*. Part two also contains two essays that contrast the affective rhetoric of *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The Cove*. Belinda Smaill argues that while both documentaries explore and critique fishing practices in non-Western countries, *The Cove* establishes a clear binary in which Western activists' integrity is juxtaposed with the unjustness of the Japanese fishermen, while *Darwin's Nightmare* suggests a far more complex network of environmental exploitation—one that ultimately can be traced back to European capitalism. Robin Murray and Joseph K. Heumman add in their chapter that the two films also have markedly different rhetorical strategies: *Darwin's Nightmare* (along with *The End of the Line,* another documentary about fishing practices) is immersed within the rhetoric of "wise-use" environmentalism, while *The Cove* stakes out a firmly animal-rights stance, using emotional appeals to provoke sympathy for the plight of the dolphins depicted.

Part three explores animated environments and their relationship to the real world. David Whitley compares the documentary *March of the Penguins* with the animated film *Happy Feet,* exploring the ways in which aesthetics of poetic realism in the former and comedic non-realism in the latter both engage viewers affectively to promote an ecocritical worldview. Adrian Ivakhiv analyzes the wide range of affects produced by *Avatar* and its unique, computer-generated ecosystem of the planet Pandora. And Pat Brereton provides an "eco-reading" of Pixar's *UP* (2009) via the bonus features on its DVD release: a short documentary extra explains how the filmmakers traveled to the Tepui cliffs of Venezuela for inspiration for the animated film's "exotic" topography, using the affect produced by a (real) place to create the visual style of the (fictional) animated film. The final section of the book, entitled "The Affect of Place and Time," feels somewhat less cohesive than previous parts, but contains several rich essays on "post-Katrina" eco-documentaries of New Orleans (Janet Walker); how Native American eco-films negotiate the stereotype of the "ecological Indian" (Salma Monani); and how experimental

films such as Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* use the passage of time to allow viewers to become affected by a film's environment (Sean Cubitt).

Several films are cited and analyzed by multiple scholars in this collection—which leads in some cases to interestingly discordant interpretations of a film's affective and emotional impact. For example, Nicole Seymour strongly critiques the pathos of *The Cove,* calling it "excessively melodramatic" and arguing that "*The Cove* teeters dangerously close to unintentional self-parody with its sentimental overtures, including activist Ric O'Barry's tale of how Flipper 'committed suicide' in his arms."[3] Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, however, assert that *The Cove* is a prime example of a "successful" eco-documentary (since dolphin slaughter in Japan has decreased significantly since the release of the film), and suggest that this success is due in part to its emphasis on emotional appeals to animal rights, which the film makes the case for by highlighting dolphin intelligence and capacity to connect with (or perhaps "be like") humans, as well as capturing evidence of animal suffering. (They also mention O'Barry's story of witnessing a dolphin suicide, but do not read it as "sentimental.")

This striking difference of opinion on the specific affective powers of eco-films—do the emotional appeals of *The Cove* move or alienate viewers?—is at the heart of Adrian Ivakhiv's chapter on the "global affects" of James Cameron's *Avatar,* which grapples with the profoundly different ways viewers have responded to the film. Ivakhiv argues that the film is important not only because it is able to be "read" in different ways but because it makes available to viewers a surprisingly wide range of "eco-affects"—and because those affective responses to the film both influence and are influenced by extra-textual frameworks and realities. Bart H. Welling asks similar questions in his chapter on anthropomorphism in wildlife films. "Does a scene like an early sequence [in the film *Being Caribou*] in which Gwich'in hunter Randall Tetlichi shoots and skins a number of caribou primarily (a) evoke audience members' sympathy for the animals, (b) reinforce a deeply engrained sense of dominion over them, or (c) carry out more complicated types of affective work?" He adds, "One of the clearest signals to emerge from our workshop at the Rachel Carson Center … is that the days of the 'ideal viewer' in the study of environmental film are over."[4] Welling, like Ivakhiv, calls for a broader engagement with the social sciences, suggesting that only detailed studies of audiences can resolve debates like the one he poses for *Being Caribou.*

Unfortunately, none of the contributors to *Moving Environments* are in a position—yet—to provide an example of a sociological study of the affective impact of eco-films on specific audiences. Salma Monani's chapter, for example, offers detailed readings of several films screened at the 2011 Native

American Film and Video Festival, which had the theme of "Mother Earth in Crisis"; perhaps a complementary approach of the type suggested by Welling (and others) would look something like an ethnography of the festival itself, incorporating interviews with festival organizers on the theme and the process of choosing films, descriptions of specific screenings, surveys of audience responses, and analysis of Q&A sessions with filmmakers.

Whatever the approach taken, the essays in *Moving Environments* demonstrate not only the need for more and diverse scholarship on eco-films but a concern among those working in the field with connecting that scholarship to a real-world political impact. However, Nicole Seymour concludes her chapter on irony and ecocinema by calling for caution around our analysis of a film's efficacy as an activist tool:

> We might scrutinize, for instance, the dearly held assumption that making a movie about environmental crisis will actually help resolve such crisis, or that *writing about* a movie about environmental crisis will actually help resolve such crisis. We might also consider that environmental art can have other ends besides "political action" (however we define that)—such as to diagnose our current moment, or to foster sensibilities suited to that moment. And in fact, in a political climate increasingly hostile to the supposedly useless humanities, we might ask what it means that so many of us on the Left are so similarly insistent that art be clearly "useful" or "impactful."[5]

Of course, self-reflection on the meaning of efficacy does not contraindicate attempts to be politically effective. Janet Walker suggests that it is exactly this kind of reflective power of the humanities—our "focus on the discursive realm," as she puts it—that might better enable us to act effectively; in the case of the post-Katrina documentaries she studies, Walker argues that humanities scholarship does not preclude, and in fact might foster, "[taking] seriously the tangible geographical constraints to rebuilding communities … to comprehend the epistemological aspect of the material environment and help enact the just remediation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast."[6] Taken together, the essays in *Moving Environments* have the potential not only to open up new paths for ecocritical scholarship but for linking that scholarship to political and social action—with a healthy dose of self-reflection and discursive analysis, of course.

Erin E. Wiegand
San Francisco State University

Notes

[1] See, for example, *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*, ed. Paula Willoquet-Maricondi; *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. Rust, Monani, and Cubitt; and *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, by Adrian Ivakhiv.
[2] Alexa Weik Von Mossner, ed. *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2014), 25.
[3] Ibid., 69.
[4] Ibid., 92.
[5] Ibid., 74.
[6] Ibid., 203.

An Interview with Cover Artist Elizabeth Demaray

Lee Ann Westman
Rutgers—Camden

Elizabeth Demaray is an interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Working in the fields of art and technology, new media and eco art, Demaray knits sweaters for plants, cultures lichen on the sides of skyscrapers in New York City and manufactures alternative forms of housing for hermit crabs, out of plastic.

Writing in a catalogue essay on her work, Richard Kline of the Aldrich Museum states, "Demaray provokes complex questions concerning memory, knowledge, and the collaborative cognitive process that exists between artist and viewer, while making a body of work that has consistently confounded expectations by creating connections between diverse and often contradictory bodies of knowledge."[1]

LW: Where did you begin as an artist?

ED: Ok, I'm actually going to tell you what happened exactly. I took an elective class in art when I was a junior in college. I was majoring in cognitive psychology and trying to get good grades, so that I could go to medical school. And, I figured that art would be a nice break from classes in my own major. The class I took was *Ceramic Sculpture* and it was taught by Richard Shaw, a famous member of the Funk Art Movement. It turned out that I loved the concrete nature of the medium and the fact that it allowed me to create forms

that were abstract and yet physically present. At the time, my own field of study was the biological basis of thought, in particular, something that was called the "Theory of Multiple Memory Systems (TMMS)." Based on the study of amnesia, the theory explains how an amnesic can lose their memory yet still know what words mean, which is something that actually used to drive me nuts as a kid. I used to wonder how it was possible for characters in movies to lose all their memories and still know what words mean. The TMMS proposes that humans have two partially dissociable forms of memory. The one we keep when we have amnesia is called Semantic memory, which is a storehouse of basic logical relationships, word meanings and procedures—knowledge that is made up of, but not dependent upon, specific moments or events. The one that amnesiacs loose, episodic memory, is a memory system for qualities and episodes or events, those things that are essentially non-linguistic in nature but give us a unique sense of time, place and who we are.

One afternoon, as I was hand building a clay sculpture in the ceramic studios, I had a startling experience. While I was working, I realized that I was pleased with the object that I was making because I was able to simultaneously present qualities that were totally contradictory in nature. The piece I had created was beautiful and, at the same time, very ugly. With the piece of art that I was making, I was asserting something that was completely illogical yet nevertheless true. I realized that in defying semantic labels, the sculpture was reflecting episodic thought and that that may in fact be, by extension, what art does. When we look at a painting or hear a poem that does not mirror expected semantic patterns, it makes us use the episodic part of our brain. Immediate, meaningful interactions with art are also characterized by other qualities of episodic thought. These moments are often experienced as a pause or as having the sense of being briefly arrested in time and the qualities that we experience at these moments are difficult to put into words or to use language to quantify.

LW: How did you develop an interest in combining natural elements with your work?

ED: I was originally trained in clay, but in grad school I found myself wanting to work with materials that embodied different kinds of intrinsic information. I also wanted to do something to help the natural world, but felt ineffectual and powerless to accomplish any sort of significant change. So I started knitting sweaters for plants (figure 1, *Giant Sequoia*), to communicate my desire to care for the natural world, but at the same time my feelings of futility. Once I began using plants in my work, it was a natural progression to consider my own cultural orientation towards nature. I became interested in biotopes, which are small environments that are shared by multiple species, including humans. My work also began to involve the notion of "trans-species giving"—the idea that

the commonalities between humans and other life forms are such that we humans may be able to give other creatures a "hand up," however misguided or conceptually hamstrung we may be by our beliefs about the natural world.

Figure 1, *Giant Sequoia*

My earliest project that grappled with the idea of "trans-species giving" was *The Hand Up Project*, *attempting to meet the new needs of natural life forms* (figure 2).

Figure 2, *The Hand Up Project*, *attempting to meet the new needs of natural life forms*

The project is dedicated to land hermit crabs, small crustaceans with thin exoskeletons that must adopt abandoned shells from marine gastropods to remain housed and protected from predators. The problem is that because there are not enough shells left on global shorelines for this animal to use, biologists routinely find them living in broken glass jars plastic bottle tops and any other form of refuge that they can get their pincers on (figure 3).

Figure 3

Based on what we know about the new needs of these animals, *The Hand Up Project* is dedicated to producing alternative forms of housing specifically designed for use by land hermit crabs. The project utilizes an adaptable AutoCAD design and a stereo lithography process for fabrication. The key to this new design is that it minimizes the spiral in the middle of a traditional shell, reducing the overall weight of each house and increasing its internal volume-to-weight ratio, which is something that the animal likes. In its beta version, *The Hand Up Project* was a great success. Twenty-five percent of the initial crab population chose to move into new, fabricated homes when presented with the structures for a period of two months.

As might be expected, the project produced what may be the most expensive hermit crab houses ever created and the funding needed to manufacture and distribute them is significant. Although this effort is a minor, genuine attempt to give a struggling life form a hand up via design, the "art part" of this endeavor centers on the way we propose to pay for the new dwellings. *The Hand Up Project* is currently soliciting corporate sponsorship to fund manufacturing and distribution—by licensing the houses for advertising. In exchange for financial support, the project will print a corporate logo on each alternative shelter before placing it in the wild.

LW: The theme of this issue is "environmental aesthetics"—how do you think

your work fits into this theme?

ED: As a sculptor, my primary area of enquiry is the interface between the built and the natural environment. In this vein, I culture lichen on the sides of building in NY City (*Lichen For Sky Scrapers Project*, figure 4), make listening stations for birds that play human music and build light-sensing robotic supports for houseplants.

Figure 4

This last endeavor, titled *The IndaPlant Project: An Act of Trans-Species Giving* (figure 5), entails creating moving floraborgs that utilize machine learning to allow potted plants to roam freely in a domestic environment in search of sunlight and water (https://vimeo.com/90457796). I think that each of these works go beyond the appreciation of art to the aesthetic appreciation of both natural and human environments.

Figure 5

LW: Some of the authors in this issue are critical of the ways in which humans

intervene in nature, but your work seems to have a very positive view of the impact humans may have on nature. Do you agree?

ED: Positive? I don't know if I would say positive. I used to think that human industry was the greatest threat to the continuation of life on Earth as we know it. I now fear that it is our primary hope**.**

LW: What role does art play in increasing our awareness of the environment?

ED: I think that art may play multiple roles in addressing environmental issues. The first that comes to mind is innovation. Artists often view problems from unusual vantage points and, in relationship to the environment, are innovating in unexpected ways. I also see that art may be able to play a significant role in addressing the kinds of emotional and cultural issues that we are already beginning to encounter in the Anthropocene.

On the topic of innovation, Sol Lewitt once said in his sentences 2 and 3 from *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, "Rational judgments repeat rational judgments. Irrational judgments lead to new experience." By asking irrational questions, art can push scholarly enquiry in often unanticipated directions. Three of the artworks pictured here exemplify this kind of enquiry. *The Lichen for Skyscrapers Project*, cited above in figure 4, has led me to pair with a scientist to identify the minerals that may be added to ceramic tiles to support lichen propagation on buildings. From an art perspective, these modified tiles will, I hope, allow me to completely coat a modernist building in a blanket of mature lichen. From the perspective of creating resilient human habitats, this kind of lichen propagation may serve to alleviate urban heat islands. Another example of art driving innovation is *The IndaPlant Project* (figure 5). A team of researchers and I have created a group of floraborgs—robotically supported houseplants that can respond to the built environment. This project has necessitated the design for a cyber-physical system that allows each floraborg to close the feedback loop between the plant and its robotic support. This system may, by extension, enable us to better access the unique information that plants gather from their immediate environment.

The Hand Up Project is also pushing science from an unusual applied perspective. The current iteration of this work aims to use biomineralization to fabricate the alternative crab dwellings directly out of calcium carbonate, the ideal material for a hermit crab dwelling. This artwork may, by extension, pioneer the use of calcium carbonate to "print" three-dimensional forms and to develop sustainable structures for use by humans. If this process can be used instead of plastic to fabricate three dimensional forms, it could ultimately reduce the amount of man-made materials in the built environment.

Your question was however about increasing our awareness of the environment. Artists have a long history of using humor and beauty to help us

address issues that we might rather not consider. From this perspective I think that art may play a special role in grappling with the issues of the Anthropocene.

This may happen in many ways. As an example form my own practice, in 2012 I started a project titled *The Songs We Sing* (figure 6) about the massive species die-off. In this artwork I have human volunteers listen to the calls of endangered bird species and then try to replicate the calls themselves. The project proposes that, after the species die-off, humans will have to create fictive environments in order to experience a sense of beauty and calm. The *Songs* project involves recording what are, for the most part, really bad human renditions of birdcalls. I then randomize and install these calls on audio playback systems in various outdoor locations, where they become part of the immediate soundscape.

Figure 6

I remember the first time that I gave a talk about the *Songs* project. The presentation was at the Lloyd in Amsterdam, where the project was created and installed in 2013. Right before the lecture I remember realizing, for the first time, that I was about to get up on a stage tell a big room full of people that we may be losing half of all of our companion species. In that moment I remember really wishing that I could make art that wasn't about such depressing topics. I was, frankly, also worried that while talking about the species-die off, I might actually start crying. Fortunately, the audio recordings from that *Songs* installation were really humorous, which allowed me, and I think by extension the audience, some emotional space in which to navigate through the sadness.

On a positive note, the other aspect of creatively addressing the Anthropocene is that right now we have the science to understand the necessity of every naturally occurring life-form and to marvel at the concert that all living things perform each and every day.

The heartening part of my practice as an artist is that, when the concepts are clear, the general public loves this kind of art, and this genre can become a

superb platform for the dissemination of scientific information. When the *Hand Up Project* was originally shown as part of an exhibition at the University Art Museum in Berkeley, CA, I would go every day to check on the crabs. And I discovered that the lion's share of the visitors, in the entire museum, could be found crowded around the hermit crab enclosure, watching the animal's behavior and considering the new needs of this natural life form.

LW: Your work "Upholstered Stones" appears on the cover of this issue. Will you describe the ways in which this work evolved? And what happens to the upholstered stones over time? Do you return and visit the stones after a period of time? Why or why not?

Figure 7

ED: Wow, those are such good question about that artwork! I started carefully mapping and then upholstering stones (figure 7) in graduate school because I was at an artist residency in Maine, where there were a lot of rocks, and I wanted to know if it was possible to make something hard, like a stone, any softer. To actually upholster a stone, I had to learn how to carefully map all of its surfaces. Because, unlike a piece of furniture, I was unable to simply pound nails into the object in order to hold the upholstery panels in place. With something like a stone, you must get all the faces patterned perfectly so that the upholstery panels will lay flat and join evenly at each seam. At first, I would go out into the Maine woods, find a wonderful bolder and upholster it. At the time I was really interested in the idea of an audience of one. You know, somebody who is walking through a landscape by themselves, who may come across a large upholstered rock and wonder about its origins. After working like this for about a month, I started rolling the boulders back to my studio and upholstering them on my workbench so visitors to my studio could see what I was attempting to accomplish. This was much easier than trying to actually explain what I was doing out in the woods. It was however still difficult for my viewers to understand what was inside of the upholstery coverings, and I really wanted people to think about how hard and potentially violent a rock can be.

So the upholstered rock piece led to *Good Baseball Rocks, please hold* (figure 8). This sculpture is a series of rocks, for which I have created leather baseball

coverings. These are two-part leather pattern pieces that are held together with a traditional baseball stich. So the artwork is supposed to be picked up and held in one's hand, which allows you to feel the weight and consider the kinds of impulses that might lead to throwing a rock. The thing that I really like about this work is that simply because I have titled it *Good Baseball Rocks, please hold*, the museums that own this artwork actually have to let visitors pick up the rocks.

Figure 8

In answer to your question about visiting the stones in the landscape, I've never gone back to see the original ones that I upholstered in Maine. I did those early rocks at the Skowhegan residency, which is in an isolated part of Northeastern Maine.

Notes

[1] Taken from her biography at https://elizabethdemaray.org/about/.

Notes on Contributors

Ivy Lai Chun Chun is a graduate of the University of Hong Kong where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature, with Minors in Linguistics and Philosophy, as well as graduate degrees in English and Literary Studies and Intercultural Studies. She is now an independent scholar as well as a university administrator in HKU. In her free time, she reads and writes, dances and sings, and explores herself more through academic works.

Maryam Foutouhi is a graduate student in the architecture program at Columbia University. She uses the Deleuzian understanding of body to rethink contemporary architecture beyond building(s) and to reimagine architectural practice as a creative, dynamic and performative process.

Tony Lack teaches humanities at Alamo College in San Antonio, TX. His interests include environmental history, comparative philosophy, and cultural and aesthetic syncretism. His most recent book is *Martin Heidegger on Technology, Ecology, and the Arts*, Palgrave, MacMillan, 2014.

Courtney Miller is the Online Learning Librarian at the Jefferson College of Health Sciences. She has taught many workshops on communication, information literacy, and using technology to enhance interpersonal communications. She has presented papers on topics covering embedded librarianship, technology tools, and web services. Her research interests lie in interpersonal communication and establishing self and community in the virtual arena.

Robert Pasquini is a Ph.D. candidate currently completing his dissertation in McMaster University's English and Cultural Studies Department. The project explores the everyday aesthetics, ethics, and bio-politics of extinction as represented in Late-Victorian media. He specializes in nineteenth-century culture and literature, especially as informed by the "ever-branching" ramifications of Darwinian theory. Robert earned his M.A. in Ryerson University's Literatures of Modernity program, and completed his Honors B.A. at the University of Toronto.

Jamie Price is the Clinical Research Librarian at Jefferson College of Health Sciences. He has taught courses in Humanities and History, including United States, European, and World history. Jamie has presented papers on fin-de-siècle Viennese culture and German memory and identity. In libraries, his research interests are informatics and the impact of quality information access on evidence-based care.

John Ryan was CREATEC Postdoctoral Research Fellow (2012-15) in Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University His diverse interests include the environmental humanities, poetry, practice-led research, academic writing and e-publishing. He is the author of Green Sense (2012, TrueHeart Publishing) and Unbraided Lines (2013, CG Publishing) and is currently working on books on the digital arts (Continuum, with Cat Hope) and vegetal ecocriticism (Rodopi).

Mary Sobhani is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith. Born in Costa Rica, Dr. Sobhani is fluent in Spanish. Her expertise in Costa Rica resides in personal experience, as well as the academic study of Latin America. She teaches Latin American Civilization at UAFS. Her interests in U.S. Latino Literature also includes Cuban-American drama, Puerto Rican poetry, and Dominican-American prose.

Pao Chen Tang is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago. His interests include representations of animals and landscapes in cinema, French cinema, Taiwanese cinema, Culinary Cinema and food Film.

Yi-Fu Tuan Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a Chinese-American geographer famous for pioneering the field of Humanist geography, a discipline that combines philosophy, art, psychology, and religious studies in an assessment of the myriad ways that humans interact with space and their physical and social environments. In 1974, Tuan published a vastly influential book, *Topophilia* which looked at the love of place and people's perceptions, attitudes, and values surrounding their environments. His other groundbreaking books include: *Landscapes of Fear*, 1970; *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, 1984; *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, Culture*, 1993; and *Romantic Geography: In Search of the Sublime Landscape*, 2013. Tuan completed his B.A. and M.A. degrees at Oxford. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1957. In 1987, Tuan was awarded the Cullum Medal by the American Geographical Society.

Oliver Volker studied Philosophy and Comparative Literature in Frankfurt and in Fribourg**,** Switzerland. He received his M.A. from the Goethe-University Frankfurt in 2011. Since 2012 he has worked at the Department of

Comparative Literature at the Goethe-University. He is writing a dissertation on the relationship between nature and catastrophe from Romanticism to contemporary literature. His research interests focus on the relationship between literature and nature, animal studies, and the theory of metaphor.

Erin Wiegand is a graduate student in cinema at San Francisco State University and a senior editor at North Atlantic Books. Her research interests include national and transnational cinemas, embodied trauma, affect, indexicality and realism, and critical animal studies.

Alden Wood is a Ph.D. student in English and Critical Theory at the University of California, Irvine. His primary research is focused on contemporary American literature and its relationship to political economy, critical finance studies, and the culture industry. He is currently working on discursive analyses of ecological rhetoric in relation to capitalist deindustrialization, the changing nature of global labor, and the rise of informal sector surplus populations. He is the author of *The Cultural Logic of Insurrection* published by Repartee/LBC Books (2013).

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