

Editorial: Ecologies / second attempt

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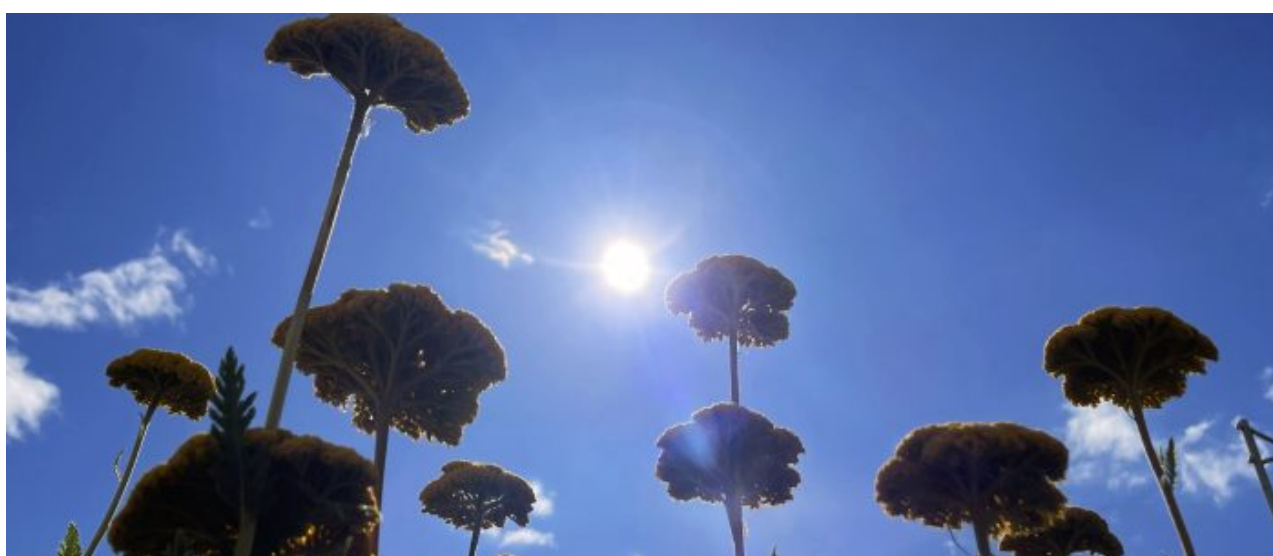


Image: Matthias Kispert

Is it really the case that 1211 days have elapsed between the publication of *Hyphen Journal* Issues 3.1 and 3.2? Undeniably, yes. Which suggests the question of what kinds of circumstances might bring about such extents of temporal dislocation. Put simply, the answer to this could be summed up in two words: academic precarity. The labour of editing a journal requires abundances of time, care and attention – all of which are resources that tend to be in short supply in a higher education sector straining under a decades-long project of imposing extraneous market logics onto work whose intrinsic motivations spring from very different realms, such as those of pedagogy and intellectual curiosity. Still, precarities are variable: even in the wastelands of a social order dominated by instituted logics of individualism and competition, openings still do appear, and it is in one such opening that this current issue has found its home. Moreover, notwithstanding the fallibility of any kind of prediction in the current times of heightened uncertainties, future instances of the journal are in the works at the time of writing, and all signs point to these seeing their completion within a less expansive time span – the coming six months, at current predictions.

Speaking of uncertain times, if the moment at which Issue 3.1 was published was marked by several insecurities and upheavals, global crises can only be said to have proliferated with reckless abandon since then: from the ongoing genocide in Gaza being live-streamed to anyone who cares enough to watch, to the genocidal civil war in Sudan that receives far less international attention; from warplanes of imperialist

nations yet again attacking an oil-rich country in the Middle East, this time Iran, to the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine; from the escalation of anti-migrant politics including more-or-less arbitrary detention and deportation motivated by spectacularised cruelty, to the increasingly draconic silencing of critical voices and incarceration of peaceful dissenters, whether they are defenders of Palestinian self-determination or opposing the destructive trajectory of petrocapiatalism; from the widespread revival of ultra-reactionary and fascist politics, to the continuously accumulating climate and ecological catastrophes, which despite their urgency tend to recede into the background of public attention amid the general malaise; the list could go on. There seem to be few grounds for hope: now is the time of monsters.

How do the concerns raised in this issue of *Hyphen Journal* speak to all this trouble? Taking stock of the continuing proliferation of calamities outlined above, the contention could be raised that the means and ends available to the kinds of work under discussion here – artistic research, critical thought and the like – appear to be feeble when viewed in relation to the urgencies of the moment. More direct forms of activism and resistance might be called for, and they undeniably are an absolute necessity particularly at times like these. On the other hand, what also needs to be considered is that it is precisely the spaces, communities and networks in which curiosity, care and critical reflection and exchange can be nurtured that deserve to be defended more than ever at a time when the naked exercise of power is increasingly the order of the day. Holding these kinds of spaces, on varying scales and in different contexts, represents one of the many necessary ways of resisting the encroachment of countless forms of violence and toxicity on public life. Moreover, struggles for a more just world play out along different modalities and scales, and the lasting reverberations of any given intervention cannot be accounted for in advance. In this sense, this issue could be read, among other things, as a missive that puts forward ways of being in the world ecologically, that is, with care, joy, interdependence, more-than-human socialities, respect for past and future generations, as much as with indignation, defiance and demands for justice. Ecological being means, in the spirit of Félix Guattari (2000) whose writings informed the callout for this issue, attending to the interconnectedness of mental, social and material realms of being, as well as acknowledging the ways in which politics are articulated on scales ranging from the molecular to the planetary.



Elżbieta Kowalska at the launch of *Hyphen Journal* Issue 3.2. Photo: Matthias Kispert

This concern with different magnitudes subtends Elżbieta Kowalska’s contribution ‘Mapping the gut buddies’, in which the imbalance in bacterial communities that characterises the digestive disorder of gut dysbiosis provides the grounds for autoethnographic reflections which trace the ways in which bacterial relations are deeply intertwined in the conditions of bodies as much as climate systems. Invoking the co-constitutive ethics entangled with Karen Barad’s notion of intra-action, Kowalska’s text questions the diagnostic practices prevalent in western medicine, with their reliance on quantitative data arranged in tabular form, a practice with roots in colonialism and the slave trade. The alternative notions of mapping proposed by Kowalska are informed by the author’s own drawing practice, as well as Indigenous healing traditions and theories of cognitive mapping.

Reverberations of colonialism also inform, and are in fact central to, the work of Roshini Kempadoo, whose ‘Like Gold Dust: Provoking us to change the world’ discusses the artist’s eponymous research and exhibition project in which media such as montaged photography, sound installation and video are mobilised to investigate histories and contemporary manifestations of petrocapialist extractivism in Texas and Guyana. Through archival research and work with female artists and environmental activists, Kempadoo’s project is informed by a critical interrogation of the visual language of extraction. The work that emerges from this combines elements of documentary and fabulation to envisage restorative ways of being beyond the social and ecological injustices wrought by transnational extractive capital, by centring on women’s practices of care, resistance and refusal.

Owain Jones's 'Toxic Dwelling? Speculations on why transformations away from the ecocidal impacts of modern globalised consumer cultures of capitalism are proving so hard to make' investigates forms of capitalist capture that are deeply invested in mental and affective spheres. The article analyses how global capitalist consumer culture emanates artificial lifeworlds that colonise humans' innate capacity to dwell in the world. Dwelling, as described by Martin Heidegger and Tim Ingold, is a kind of relational being in time and place shared between human and non-human animals, and consumer culture continuously produces a vast proliferation of products and experiences that give rise to what Jones describes as toxic forms of dwelling. The harms that this engenders cross the three realms of ecology identified by Guattari as outlined above, and it is their sheer overabundance that stands in the way of any meaningful transition away from continuing ecocidal destruction.

Toxicity also is a central motif in Erik Verheggen's photo essay 'In the Thicket: Exploring Nitrogen-Laden Ecology', in which diaristic reflections weave their threads in conversation with the author's photographic practice. Wandering through the peri-urban landscapes of Rotterdam whose vegetation has been indelibly changed through excess nitrogen deposits caused by human activity, Verheggen's images and writing foreground environmental aesthetics with reference to the work of photographers such as John Gossage and Tim Carpenter. The thinking informed by lens-based practice that this gives rise to makes sensible both biodiversity loss and the capacities of plant ecologies to reorganise in unpredictable ways in the face of ecological imbalances.

In 'The Phantoms of Film Curation', Natasha Palmer also takes us for a walk, this time through the nocturnal passageways of the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed in England, visiting the 2019 iteration of the Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival (BFMAF) which featured the curatorial project *Animistic Apparatus* by May Adadol Ingawanij and Julian Ross. As roaming film viewers chance upon screenings in disused buildings and gardens, Palmer reflects on the alternative models of film exhibition and spectatorship proposed by both BFMAF and Ingawanij & Ross. The latter's practice is informed by itinerant film troupes traversing Thailand in the twentieth century, a culture in which film screenings were offerings to spirits as much as they were intended for human viewers. Following these trails through the deserted streets of Berwick, Palmer observes how abandoned architectures, dust particles, bats and moths all become integral parts of the projection of work by filmmakers such as Lav Diaz or Apichatpong Weerasethakul, while the presence of human spectators turns out to be merely incidental.

Anastasia (A) Alevtin's audio essay 'A poetic truth about living a non-binary body in affinity with ambivalent gerunds of ice: After Kid Kokko's *Disappearing – A Passion*', with sound by Joni Judén, develops affinities between bodies of ice and non-binary human bodies. In playfully poetic explorations that speak to a series of images – extracts from Kid Kokko's book, digital and hand-written notes, exhibition documentation and the like – Alevtin's voice gently yet persistently lets rigid fixities dissolve in shimmering watery encounters with fragments of thought and experience. At the same time, the ice disappearing most alarmingly at the current moment is that of glaciers, whose melting away in a rapidly heating climate is a corollary of the violence intrinsic to capitalism, a violence that is also meted out on trans, queer and gender non-conforming bodies. The affinities and undoings of categories developed here seek out alternative modes of more-than-human togetherness.



Kornbongkoch Harpinijsak, Juan Rojas Meyer and Frankie Hines at the launch of *Hyphen Journal* Issue 3.2. Photo: Matthias Kispert

Somewhat more troubled kinds of encounters are explored by Juan Rojas Meyer in ‘Pandaemonium, 2020 Hindsight and Animal Life’. Here, the periods of domestic confinement that were implemented by government decree during the course of the Coronavirus pandemic provide the grounds for extensive reflections on state power, human-animal relations and the ways in which the latter are culturally interpreted through images of many different kinds and social functions. Informed by Giorgio Agamben’s figure of *homo sacer* and notion of bare life, the text traverses a panoply of issues that include spatial and body politics, territorial negotiations, states of exception and other legal precepts, anthropological perspectivism, monstrosity, electronic media and viral reproduction.

Addressing being on an even more minute scale than the viral, Andreas Erhart’s ‘Co-Existence in Particle Physics’ mobilises insights gained from the probabilistic worldview operative in quantum mechanics as provocations that allow for thinking which exceeds the destructive notions of bounded individualism undergirding the project of the European Enlightenment. Erhart sees the Enlightenment and its legacies of anthropocentrism, illusions of racial superiority and environmental degradation paralleled in atomistic ontologies in which existence can be broken down into discrete, indivisible units. Particle physics, on the other hand, emphasises co-existence, as is exemplified by the figure of the landscape-laboratory, a research facility in which the surrounding geography is as much part of any experimental arrangement as are the technologies, knowledges and social relations that are mobilised in the course of laboratory investigation.

Dealing with altogether different hybridisations between technologies and more-than-human natures, ‘Sensing Our Environment – the “Sounds and Sweet Aairs” Project’ by Sensory Experience Design Studio (Nong Hua Lim, Kornbongkoch Harnpinijesak and Weichen Tang) discusses a project that develops synthetic sonic ecologies informed by memories of environmental sounds. For *Sounds and Sweet Aairs*, Sensory Experience Design Studio developed a series of ‘critters’ – small-scale sculptural objects made from discarded materials that emit sounds reminiscent of, for example, rain or the song of crickets. Variouslly placed in exhibition venues, co-working spaces and collaboratively constructed with participants, these critters subtly shift the sensory textures of the spaces they inhabit, and their ontologies suggest questions on the boundaries between the synthetic and organic ecologies.

Beyond the themes that echo and reverberate among the various strands of thought and practice that congregate in this issue – more-than-human socialities, visualities, wanderings, relations between scales, hybridisations and non-binaries, and toxicity among others – the contributions brought together here gather as one possible articulation of the manifold, vibrant open-endedness of ecological thinking and being-in-the-world. One aspect that nevertheless gathers these different shoots and strands is attunement to an understanding of ecology as premised on relationality and interdependence, and it is qualities such as these that need defending more than ever in our monstrous times.



Rhona Eve Clews, Elżbieta Kowalska, Beatriz Paz Jiménez and Arne Sjögren at the launch of *Hyphen Journal* Issue 3.2.

Photo: Matthias Kispert

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