

Introduction: contexts and paradigms for ecological engagement

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Introduction

In *The future of environmental criticism*, Buell (2005) proffers a cognitive mapping of the future of ecocriticism in terms of the two-wave palimpsestic “trend-lines” of environmental criticism. To follow up on Buell’s observations of environmental twists and turns, Scott Slovic and Joni Adamson go a step further to welcome more inclusive wave theories of ecocriticism at the present time by ushering in “a new *third* wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries,” an attempt that “explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint” (Adamson and Slovic 2009, pp. 6–7).¹ In their adumbration, Adamson and Slovic feature those global concepts of place melding with neo-bioregionalism, such as eco-cosmopolitanism, translocality, post-national and post-ethnic comparative studies of ecocriticism, material ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and polymorphous activism, as a means to debunk the nature–culture binary. For both ecocritics, “material” ecofeminism stands as one component of the third wave of ecocriticism.

¹ In “Problems and Prospects in Ecocritical Pedagogy,” Gregory Garrad also recapitulates ecocriticism and environmental education in terms of Buell’s two-wave theory of ecocriticism. See Garrad (2010, pp. 233–245).

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More recently, however, influenced by the rapid ascendancy of the interdisciplinary environmental humanities, ecocritics have been moving beyond notions of the wave paradigm. In the “Introduction” to *Humanities for the environment: integrating knowledge, forging new constellations of practice*, Adamson reconsiders the field genealogies of ecocriticism, and other disciplines that are contributing to the expanding importance of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities. Since the entangled disciplinary fields that find confluence in the environmental humanities are arguably much older than the early 1990s dates usually given to the emergence of a “first wave” of environmental literary criticism, many ecofeminists, and environmental justice, postcolonial, ethnic, and Indigenous studies scholars are arguing that we must trace our intellectual genealogies back much further. The roots of ecocriticism might be found, in fact, in some of the “earliest cosmological narratives, stories and symbols among the world’s oldest cultures” (Adamson 2017, p. 5). These cosmologies tell not only of cultural origins, they tell of entangled human and nonhuman worlds, resistance or revolts in the colonial world, and suggest incisive critiques of imperialism, Western science, and Western religions. Tracing the roots of ecocriticism beyond a dual, or even tertiary wave paradigm more satisfyingly buttresses the most recent directions of ecocriticism, including material ecocriticism.

The “paradigm shift” that best describes the development of ecocriticism, Adamson and others, including Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, have suggested, is a tangled root system growing in many directions at once. We see references to the rhizome or root systems and entanglement in Stacy Alaimo’s theorization of the “material turn” in *Bodily natures* (2010), Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann’s *International perspectives in feminist ecocriticism* (2013), Helen Feder’s *Ecocriticism and the idea of culture: Biology and the bildungsroman* (2014), and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann’s co-edited book *Material ecocriticism* (2014). Together with the most recent speculative realism movement, this work is also illuminating a shift in ecocriticism in the direction of new materialisms that foresees “an extensive conversation across the territories of the sciences and the humanities” in recent years, encompassing fields such as “philosophy, quantum physics, biology, sociology, feminist theories, anthropology, archaeology, and cultural studies” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, p. 2). Reflecting recent developments in ecocriticism and the emergence of competing paradigms within the field, we have included papers exploring diverse new trends as situated in national and transnational contexts, and in broad cultural and cosmological contexts that delve into new materialisms.

In this special issue, most of the essays were originally delivered as conference papers at the “Sixth Tamkang International Conference on Ecological Discourse,” hosted by the English Department at Tamkang University’s Tamsui campus. The conference theme was “Speculative Materialism: Contexts and Paradigms for Ecological Engagement,” with a special focus on new approaches to environmental issues and cultural engagements. All the papers included here attempt to generate discussions on local approaches to new materialisms in all their forms in the context of literary and cultural production so as to advance dialogues between new

ecomaterialists and related interrogations of materialism in science, literature, and philosophy.

As a timely utterance among recent ecocritical explorations, “Speculative Materialism: Contexts and Paradigms for Ecological Engagement” will serve as an important landmark in the fourth wave of ecocriticism which recognizes material agencies in a universe of things by rebutting the centrality of humanism that underestimates the nonhuman others. As we know, discourses related to “thing,” “object” and “matter” argue against the “inequality” of power distribution: That agency [the capacity to act] is understood only as a human property is dubious. In the wake of post-structuralism, a comparatively systematic approach to this type of materiality studies principally springs from the international conference “Speculative Realism” held by University of London on April 4, 2007, where a new generation of philosophers and scholars, including Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, Levi Bryant, and Iain H. Grant, took “Speculative Realism” as the research topic for the conference, and attempted from different critical angles to probe into the ontology of “objects” to move away from the unknowable “thing-in-itself”.² According to Harman (2013, p. 5), speculative realism comes from Ray Brassier’s idea that it is possible to think about reality without having recourse to a [human] subject or consciousness.³ For these speculative realists, speculative realism turns away from “correlationism” (Harman 2013, p. 5), subscribing to the belief that “the world around us is real,” that “objects can be independent of human perception,” that “objects are not linguistic construction” (Bryant et al. 2011, p. 13), and that objects are not “for us.” However, being a Sellarsian transcendental naturalist, Ray parts company with Harman in that the former is an anti-scientist while the latter subscribes to the ideas of representation and objective truth (Bryant et al. 2011, p. 417).

Harman is a promulgator of this speculative realist movement. In “Postscript: Speculative Autopsy,” Ray Brassier regards Harman as an “indefatigable midwife” of speculative realism (Brassier 2014, p. 408). Here “realism” means things exist “as they are” and “they are utterly independent of our being” (Meillassoux 2008, p. 29), while “speculative” denotes “pre-critical,” “pre-individual,” and an adventure of ideas that might still be “controlled by the requirements of coherence and logic,” as suggested by A. N. Whitehead who assumes that “speculative” is a method of “imaginative rationalization” attempting to “frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted” (Whitehead 1978, p. 3) .

In spite of these shared non-anthropocentric concerns, Harman nevertheless asserts that “direct knowledge of anything is impossible” in principal part because

² See “The transcendental concept of appearances in space [...] is a critical reminder that nothing intuited in space is a thing in itself, that space is not a form inhering in things in themselves as their intrinsic property, that objects in themselves are quite unknown but mere representations of our sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no questions ever asked in regard to it” (Kant 1929, p. 74).

³ According to Meillassoux, speculative realism means to know “whether it’s possible to access an absolute that’s capable of being thought, not as a relative and cloistered outside, but as a Great Outdoors whose essence is irrelative to the thought of the knower” (qtd. in Gratton 2014, p. 13).

the true nature of object is its “withdrawal” (Harman 2013, p. 75). For Harman and others, the thing in itself is not unknowable; rather, we can still speculate on it. At the outset, speculative realism is a term for generating “a discourse on the nature of reality” (Brassier et al. 2007, p. 308), but its practices have become diverse and polyvocal as we know it. Thus they developed the theory of thing/object/matter so that we can have new angles or methodologies whereby to enter in. All in all, these speculative realist approaches to literature include: (1) new materialisms (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their followers, such as E. DeLanda, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett and others); (2) dialectical materialism (Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek and their follower Adrian Johnston); (3) speculative materialism (Quinten Meillassoux); (4) machine-oriented ontology (Levi Bryant); (5) actor-network theory (Bruno Latour); (6) object-oriented ontology (Graham Harman and Timothy Morton); (7) agential realism (Karen Barad); (8) thing theory (Bill Brown); (9) plastic materialism (Catherine Malabou), and so on. Among these ecocritical perspectives, we choose “Speculative materialism” as the theme of the “Sixth Tamkang International Conference on Ecological Discourse” mainly because we think it might help steer away from “the linguistic turn” that highlights the importance of language, consciousness, and representation while endorsing nonhuman material agencies and their agentic powers. This critical line of thought orients itself toward a speculative-material turn, pinpointing that the linguistic turn is susceptible of the “epistemic fallacy,” the pitfall of which either reduces “ontological questions to epistemological questions” or conflates “questions of *how* we know” with “questions of what beings *are*” (Bryant 2011, p. 60). Meillassoux even questions human access to “being” based on the correlation between thinking and world, and “never either term [is] considered apart from each other” (2008, p. 5).

In line with ecocriticism, Meillassoux’s “speculative materialism” is not naïve realism, but a form of “critical” realism aiming at freeing “the in-self” from anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. As one subset of speculative realism, speculative materialism, which is in consonance with object-oriented philosophy and other similar approaches, tries to undermine “correlationism,” in that the virtuality/potentiality of an object/matter/thing can be emancipated from human constraint, domination, and manipulation. Quentin Meillassoux cautions that if we want to break free from the domination of (humanist) thought over (nonhuman) objects, we need to disentangle the subject–object correlation. In an interview, he comments that.

Correlationism takes many forms, but particularly those of transcendental philosophy, the varieties of phenomenology, and post-modernism. But although these currents are all extraordinarily varied in themselves, they all share, according to me, a more or less explicit decision: that there are no objects, no events, no laws, no beings which are not always–already correlated with a point of view, with a subjective access.⁴

⁴ Qtd. in Gratton (2014, p. 14).

For Meillassoux, “speculative materialism” aims at going beyond the “weak” correlationism of Kantian transcendental philosophy of idealism, the “strong” correlationism of Heideggerian facticity of correlationism and (anthropocentric) theory of intentionality (for example: “every consciousness is consciousness of [...]”),⁵ and the linguistic turn of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Drawing on Meillassoux’s insights, an object is not to be regarded as matter of fact, but as matter of concern. In *After finitude: An essay on the necessity of contingency*, for ecocritics, perhaps we could learn from speculative materialism in three important aspects: (1) it goes beyond the humanist nature–culture binary; (2) it welcomes nonhuman forces, agencies, and speculative grace; (3) it is a discursive material formation through which the condition of possibility and impossibility of material agencies is acted out. Having said this, speculative materialism might arguably be looked at as one of the sources of inspiration that can help us revisit the contexts and paradigms of our ecological engagement.

All the essays in this issue touch on one or more facets of speculative materialism, or speculative realism in general, such as matter, agency, genes, animals, trees, ecosophic objects, food, cancer, radiation ecologies, vegetal violence, climate change, and intra-relational finites in contemporary literary and cultural texts, focusing on nations and cultures surrounding East Asia, Europe, and the North Pacific Ocean. Scholars from Turkey, Italy, Korea, Hungary, and Taiwan offer multifaceted perspectives on a variety of themes such as new materialism, dialectical materialism, indigenous traditions, animal studies, and other ecological issues.

The first cluster of four essays explore material ecocriticism, ecological and environmental issues: Serpil Oppermann, Simon C. Estok, Serenella Iovino, and Yalan Chang. In addition, Simon C. Estok, Serenella Iovino, and Yalan Chang also discuss the anthropocene with reference to the human species as a geological force that is now altering the planet’s biosphere and the environment. Though the anthropocene discourse poses more problems than it solves, it is still germane to the discussion of the relationship between the human and the environment. In 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer first used it as a geological term to denote “the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” (2016, p. 17). In the 2002 essay “Geology of Mankind,” Crutzen defines the term Anthropocene as “the present [...] human-dominated, geological epoch” (Crutzen 2002, p. 23), implying that the terraforming capability of humankind in the wake of the Industrial Revolution can lead to environmental changes. He points out that the age of the Anthropocene was activated when James Watt invented the steam engine in 1784, the year that marks the prelude of the age of humankind. For Crutzen, the core concern of the Anthropocene is with environmental disruptions leading up to ecological crises, such as exploitation of Earth’s resources, the human population problem, the loss of tropical rainforests, dam-building, agricultural fertilizers, the emissions of greenhouses gases, the release of toxic substances, the depletion of the

⁵ Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology tries to collapse things-for-us (phenomenon) and things-in-themselves (noumena). However, he is not interested in an object’s independence from human’s perception since his theory of equipment is still based on “holism,” meaning that man and tools are systemically embedded (Braver 2014, pp. 32–34).

ozone layer, and so on. For Crutzen and Stoermer, humans are a “major geological force”; therefore, they are expected to battle against these “human induced stress[es]” as “one of the great future tasks of man” (Crutzen 2002, p. 23). This line of remedial thinking is similar to what environmental sociologists, such as Niklas Luhmann, Ulrick Beck, Bruno Latour, have to say in their risk analysis. Crutzen’s ideas hint at a change of mindset, the human-regulating power, and species co-belonging in the face of an upcoming climate change. Here, the Anthropocene “re-enters” as a new epoch that emphasizes environment changes brought about by humans’ terraforming powers. Since humankind as a geological force has contributed to potential global catastrophes, Crutzen concludes that “[a] daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene” (Crutzen 2002, p. 23).

From Turkey, Serpil Oppermann begins her article, “Nature’s narrative agencies as compound individuals,” by introducing the American process philosopher Charles Hartshorne who coined the term “the compound individual” to mean “individual entities compounded of subordinate individual entities.” In other words, “all compound individuals display an ability to respond to their environment and, regardless of their size, all make an effect on surrounding entities, processes, and forces.” As a foundational figure in new materialist approaches to reality, Hartshorne brings new materialism, process philosophy, affects, becoming, agency, life, matter, and nature to bear with each other. Though ignored by critics in this field, Oppermann tries to salvage Charles Hartshorne and puts him in dialogue with Manuel De Landa, Stacy Alaimo, Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, Jeffrey Cohen, Bruno Latour, and so on. Basing her material ecocriticism on the storied world of living nature, Oppermann discusses nature’s narrative ability and shows how matter emerges in meaningfully articulate forms of creative becoming as narrative agency.

Canadian–Korean ecocritic Simon C. Estok, in “Back abstract: Material ecocriticism, genes, and the phobia/philosophy spectrum,” considers ecophobia (which he contrasts with non-ecophobic rational fears, such as of snakes, spiders, and darkness). In this paper, Estok compares and contrasts the “biophilia hypothesis” and the “ecophobia hypothesis” in order to show that it is ecophobia, not biophilia that is a causal agent in our social and environmental problems, “factory farms, rainforest destruction, the biodiversity holocaust,” and so on. In the age of the Anthropocene, the ecophobia hypothesis offers an analytical paradigm more grounded in the sobering material realities and histories of human/nonhuman interactions than the more limited and “cheerful” biophilia hypothesis, which (Estok urges) is not to deny or diminish the importance of biophilia but rather to see it as a part of a spectrum. Seeking to understand the “genetic roots of ecophobia” in order to equip the ecophobia hypothesis with more theoretical vigor, Estok, inspired by Joseph Carroll’s biocultural theory, Helen Feder’s ecocultural materialism, Wendy Wheeler’s biosemiotics, and Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino’s material ecocriticism, brings up the term “genetic ecocriticism.” For Estok, this type of ecocritical endeavor, fraught though it is with its own inherent dangers, offers to integrate biology and literature and to enable ecocritics to chart new theoretical terrain. Estok maintains that “to do material ecocriticism without

acknowledging and theorizing about the materiality and agency of genes would be like doing oceanography with acknowledging and theorizing about water.”

From Italy, Serenella Iovino’s essay “Sedimenting stories: Italo Calvino and the extraordinary strata of the anthropocene” follows her train of thoughts from Oppermann and her edited book *Material Ecocriticism* that, since all matter is “a storied matter,” “the world’s material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be ‘read’ and interpreted as forming narratives, stories.” In this essay, Iovino also maintains that “matter can be read as a text, and that each of our encounters with the world—including literary creation and critical interpretation—is a form of *diffraction*, an interference that ‘can make a difference in how meanings are made and lived’.” Looking at Italy’s industrial North, but with a gaze at a larger dynamics, Serenella Iovino uses Italo Calvino’s early urban works as tools for a “narrative stratigraphy.” Calvino’s imaginative dealings with the material world, she argues, emerges and evolves along with the landscapes of the Anthropocene that stratify over and within Italy’s bodies.

In a similar vein, Yalan Chang’s “‘Slowness’ in the anthropocene: Ecological medicine in *Refuge* and *God’s hotel*” compares and contrasts two healing narratives: Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge: An unnatural history of family and place* (1991) and Victoria Sweet’s *God’s hotel: A doctor, a hospital, and a pilgrimage to the heart of medicine* (2012). In Williams’s memoir, “ten women in her family have been diagnosed with breast cancer” due to the fact that nuclear testing has been conducted near her hometown—the Nevada Desert. Thus, Yalan Chang points out that, in *Refuge*, slow violence via nuclear radiation “could be the culprit responsible for decades of cancer diagnoses in people living downwind of the testing site in Utah.” Conversely, Sweet’s *God’s hotel* highlights the healing power of “inhuman agency”—rocks, sky, waters, the desert, wind, plants, and animals—to cure people of their diseases. For Chang, “the body” is her point of view, and by weaving together Joni Adamson’s environmental justice, Rob Nixon’s slow violence, Priscilla Wald’s structural violence, Stacy Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, Cohen and Duckert’s elemental ecocriticism, Chang brings the body to bear with the environment, disease, and new materialisms. To provide an “antidote” to the age of the Anthropocene, she turns to ecological medicine elements on the ground that they are “active forces” capable of awakening the healing energy from within the body.

In Taiwan, Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai and Peter I-min Huang devote themselves to new materialisms while Dean Brink deals with Badiouan ethics and agential realism. In recent years, scholars have become interested in Guattari’s conceptualization of ecology, especially in the ways in which they can learn ecology from Deleuze and Guattari. Bernd Herzogenrath’s *Deleuze/Guattari & ecology* sets an example for reading Deleuze and Guattari as new materialists. According to Herzogenrath, Deleuze and Guattari, matter is “molecular material” with “the capacity for self-organization” because “matter [...] is not dead, brute, homogeneous matter, but a matter-movement bearing singularities or haecceities, qualities and even operations” (Herzogenrath 2009, p. 6). Drawing from Herzogenrath’s ecological insights, Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai’s “Climate change, chaosmosis, and the ecosophic object in Norman Spinrad’s *Greenhouse Summer*” discusses Guattari’s

ecosophic object in four important aspects: (1) material, energetic and semiotic Fluxes, (2) concrete and abstract machinic Phylums, (3) virtual Universes of values, and (4) finite existential Territories. Moreover, Tsai scrutinizes Norman Spinrad's *Greenhouse Summer* in the light of Guattari's "chaosmosis" with reference to the crisis of reason, end-time apocalypticism, epistemo-ontological binaries between mind and matter, organic and inorganic, human and nonhuman, and personal and social. By way of an object-oriented chaosmosis, Tsai lays bare the politics of climate change in Norman Spinrad's *Greenhouse Summer* by looking at the ways in which corporate capitalism as represented by the Big Blue Machine zeroes in on the poor countries by selling them climate technology.

In his "Material feminism and ecocriticism: Nu Wa, White Snake, and Mazu," Peter I-min Huang, following Stacy Alaimo, Susan Hekman, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, adopts a material eco-feminist approach to revisit Taiwanese/Chinese legends of Nu Wa, White Snake, and Mazu. Huang argues that although Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs" still "generate[s] considerable interest among scholars who engage with theories of subjectivity," scholars underestimate the "agency" of "the body." As a site of "disarticulation," Huang argues, "the body" needs to be reconfigured as an interface, nexus, or middle place that connects the actual and the virtual, which is the basis of material feminist and material ecocritical, transcorporeal understandings of ethics and affect. For Huang, therefore, "the body without organs" is not to be seen as "a dead body" but as a "living body [that is] all the more 'alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization.'" His study of two Chinese deities—Nu Wa and Mazu—and the mythical figure White Snake forward an expanded Deleuzian notion of subjectivity, one that is free from the policing of patriarchal structures. As Huang also argues, Nu Wa, the "fixer of skies"; White Snake, "a hybrid female-animal creature"; and Mazu, a "protector of sailors, fish, fishers, and the sea," all have played and should continue to play a prominent role in the environmental justice movement in Taiwan precisely because of their material feminist and ecocritical significance.

Dean Brink's "Affective frames and intra-relational finites in Jorie Graham's *Sea Change*" situates Graham's collection of poems as an ecopolitical text departing from traditional nature poetry or ecopoetry in part by refusing to engage in "geographic specificity." Like Serenella, Brink is also inspired by physicist and philosopher Karen Barad, especially her notion of "intra-actions," to rethink agencies as "entanglements." Partly discursive and partly lyrical, Graham's poetry can be read in terms of Barad's post-phenomenological relationality of "intra-actions" between the human and nonhuman and complemented by a Badiouan ethics. In the title poem, the meaning of "Sea Change" is twofold: (1) a sea change has occurred both in politics (the Invasion of Iraq based on lies) and in reaching a transformative tipping point in global warming; (2) it is also a pun suggesting to "see change." For Brink, Jorie Graham's *Sea Change* exemplifies a new model for ecopoetry and antiwar poetry, in that her poetry is characterized by "a slippage between transitive and intransitive, inner force and outer pressures, transhuman dimensions and posthuman non humanities." Arguing against representationalism, neoliberalism, American exceptionalism, fixed ontology, and the "androcentric"

object-oriented ecocritical explorations, Brink not only adopts a “feminist discourse on shared responsibility and frames of otherness that include selves as posthumanist and inter-relational across species and among various forms of shared material organization,” but also looks at Badiou as an ally to further his argument on “acts” of literature. For him, “[p]oetry becomes a lyric dimension not of escape but recovery of our responsibility.”

From Hungary, Péter Hajdu’s paper “The rights of trees: on a Hungarian short story from 1900” starts with the first poem “Two Trees” in Scottish poet Don Paterson’s *Rain* to alert us to the attention of the ontological rift between two kinds of interpretation: a humanist reading and an ecohumanist reading. The former emphasizes human norms and values (such as Ms. L) while the latter attempts to “think like trees” (such as the narrator). In this essay, Péter Hajdu follows the latter, and his materially ecocritical analysis of Kálmán Mikszáth’s “The Heiress Trees” as a “thought experiment” pays special attention to an ethical paradox: What if we regard the non-human world as having rights? For Hajdu, this short story has “a plot that starts in 1736 and ends in the 1860s,” which insinuates that the story is either too “old-fashioned” with “slow and uneconomical narration” or a traditional narratorial structure that requires 130 years to accommodate “its backstory, main story and epilogue.” Like Yalan Chang’s treatment of plants as agents capable of meaning-production, Hajdu’s alternative interpretation of the trees as the “we-narrator” also gives the trees a [narratorial] voice. Thus, the story is seen not through a human eye but the trees’ eyes and the subject of the story is not about the human life, but “their [the trees’] life, or rather their right to life.” Lately, critical plant studies has become one of the nascent but important ecocritical practices. Michael Marder’s *Plant-thinking: A philosophy of vegetal life* (2013) laid out the foundation of such a type of ecocriticism to rebut the presumption of treating plants as non-objects which are obscure, voiceless, and soulless. Similar claims are made that, historically, plants, trees, or other nonhuman objects are regarded as “inert, passive, background objects,” devalued, ignored, and disposable (Stark 2015, p. 181). Thus, Marder suggests going beyond human/nonhuman binary since humans and nonhumans have common interests. One of the critiques directed at this type of argument is ethically-oriented human projections based on anthropomorphism since it would sound dubious to confer human rights to trees. In his treatment, Hajdu tries to look at the both with a possibility of hinting at an ecology of a nature-oriented mind: “The result is a paradigm shift we can nowadays make use of, accepting that justice is not or should not be limited to the human sphere.”

In “Back to the city: Urban agriculture and the reimagining of agrarianism in Novella Carpenter’s *Farm City*,” Shiuhuah Serena Chou argues that urban agriculture, a seemingly oxymoron, suggests something more than a simple transplantation of the rural small-family farming practice celebrated by agrarianism. By carefully examining Oregon-based urban farmer Novella Carpenter’s *Farm city: The education of an urban farmer* (2009), Chou shows that urban agriculture has uncovered the agronomic and spiritual potentialities of contemporary American inner cities by calling attention to the material agencies of urban matters and entities. Based on Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann’s eco-materialist observation that the world is a matter “far from being a ‘pure exterior’” and filled

with “intermingling agencies and forces that persist and change over eons,” Chou finds that Carpenter redefines cities as vibrant material beings in constant processes of becoming and generating an interconnected web of (biotic) community relations. Farming in the city not only debunks American agrarianism’s celebration of rurality through a rigid urban-as-barrenness/rural-as-abundance cultural binary but expands traditional agrarian notions of interconnectedness and stewardship to both the urban poor and the nonhuman entities and matters.

Hsinya Huang’s “After Hiroshima: radiation ecologies in the trans-indigenous Pacific” uses Gerald Vizenor’s *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* as an anchor text to explore radiation ecologies in the trans-Pacific, trans-indigenous context. “Radiation ecologies” is a term borrowed from postcolonial ecocritic Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s 2009 essay “Radiation Ecologies and the Wars of Light.” In this article, Huang focuses her attention on the interactions of Ronin Browne and Manidoo Envoy. Ronin is a hafu, a mixed blood Japanese; his mother was a Japanese bugi dancer, Okichi, and possibly an Ainu, a member of Japan’s indigenous people; his father was a Native American named Nightbreaker, an Anishinaabe from the White Earth Reservation. Manidoo Envoy is a native American who was a friend of Ronin’s father. It is the character Ronin who in person links the indigenous peoples across the Pacific and who decries the hypocrisy of the Peace Memorial Park at Hiroshima and the history of Japanese and American militarization and empire building leading up to the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II. The Pacific region has been the site of multiple nuclear tests over many decades, and it is the indigenous populations that have suffered from these tests and their aftermath. And it is also the indigenous populations that, in resisting and surviving, provide alternative ways of envisioning and positioning the human possibilities of “survivance” in the face of such catastrophic consequences.

In “An animal studies and ecocritical reading of animal hunting in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” Iris Ralph reads a text that continues to interest and challenge scholars notwithstanding existing critical studies addressing the poem within as well as outside of both animal studies and ecocriticism where little room have left for further inquiry. Ralph begins by briefly summarizing the history of the poem’s critical reception inclusive of recent arguments by animal studies scholars and ecocriticism scholars who specialize in medieval literature. Their arguments, as Ralph recapitulates, are revolving around ethical, conceptual, and cognitive distinctions between humans and animals in the medieval period. Citing the work of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Susan Crane, and Gillian Rudd, as well as a study by the animal philosopher Paola Cavalieri that examines classical attitudes toward and assumptions about animals that influences Christian theological doctrine in the medieval period, Ralph focuses on the triple hunt scenes of the poem. As she argues, its lesson in honesty or truth (*trawþe*), the first of the chivalric virtues of a knight, does not stop at the bounds of “the human” but extends into terrain that raises questions about the kinds of deceit and evasion—reasonable and not so reasonable—that humans practice on species other than their own. Specifically, she argues that the detailed and graphic descriptions of the hunting and slaughter of deer, a boar, and a fox do not function only or chiefly as an ingenuous rhetorical foil

to the playful toying, baiting, and trapping of Gawain by Bertilak at Hautdesert, or as content that reflects medieval codes of courtly conduct and social hierarchy. Past scholars, as Ralph emphasizes, have read the issue of Gawain's dishonesty and the Green Knight's exposure of it in manifestly anthropocentric moral terms. For Ralph, "[W]hat is not entirely satisfying" about that "standard reading" lies in the fact that it "omits the issue of another untruth," one that is as difficult to rationalize in the time of the *Gawain*-poet as it is in our own time: the deceptions that humans practice on animals as well as on members of their own species in the "hunting" of them for entertainment or sport.

In this special issue, all the papers focus on both fictional and non-fictional textual representations of speculative grace while paying particular attention to the ambivalence of humanist subjects and the unsustainable system of exploitation of the nonhuman. In their multiple crossings across theoretical, generic as well as geographical boundaries, all the authors in this special issue approach literary and cultural texts from a wide spectrum of transcultural positions in order to explore (eco)critical issues in speculative materialism in the hope of significantly expanding this field of study.

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