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Queer Ecologies

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FRONT COVER IMAGE: Cat Jones

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FROM THE

Guest Editor



This issue of *Quarterly* inherits the ecosexual/sensual embrace of *Q17: Sense and Sensuality*, adapting to explore queer theory, art and trans*ecological kinships. Queer ecologies slither through the wanton materiality¹ of naturecultures, embracing the polyamorous tendrils of mulberries, the deep futurity of plastic, the polymorphous fecundity of landscapes, amphibious perversity, piscine metaphysics, the tranimacies² of scent, and oh and oh and oh...yes yes yes. We stroke queer resistances of anti-normativity, anti-futurity and anti-reproductivity and the precarious possibilities of performativity, diversity and kinship. The authors slide through sustainability and slip into compostability,³ sifting through the transient, the fecund, the toxic, the enduring, the deviant, the moist, the odoriferous, the colonised and the colonial, unearthing the spacetimemattering⁴ of proliferation, extinction and thenowwhen.

This issue entangles queer and ecological aesthetics in companionate portions for your degustation, encouraging you to take pleasure in your decolonisation and propagate mycelia of pre-care-ity and response-ability.⁵

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia [and the world] and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. I pay respect to them and their cultures; and to elders both past and present.

Enjoy,

Tarsh Bates

*Tarsh Bates is an artist/researcher. She has worked variously as a pizza delivery driver, a fruit and vegetable stacker, a toilet paper packer, a researcher in compost science and waste management, a honeybee ejaculator, an art gallery invigilator, a raspberry picker, a lecturer/tutor in art/science, fantasy, art history and gender & technology, an editor, a bookkeeper, a car detailer and a life drawing model. Tarsh is a Research Associate at SymbioticA, UWA, concerned with the aesthetics of interspecies relationships and the human as a multispecies ecology. She is particularly enamoured with *Candida albicans*.*

FOOTNOTES

¹Wendelin M. Küpers, "Embodied, Relational Practices of Human and Non-Human in a Material, Social, and Cultural Nexus of Organizations," *On_Culture 2* (2016), <https://www.on-culture.org/journal/issue-2/kuepers-non-human/#>.

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³Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁴Barad, Karen. "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice to Come." *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240-68.

⁵Astrid Schrader, "Responding to *Pfiesteria piscicida* (the Fish Killer): Phantomatic Ontologies, Indeterminacy, and Responsibility in Toxic Microbiology," *Social Studies of Science* 40, no. 2 (2010): 275-306.

OLFACTIVE ECOLOGIES

By Cat Jones

Perfumery is...effectively a network, where text meets practice, trade, geography, politics and religion in a literal and material manner.

—James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion*¹

I am drawn to (and repulsed by) the way scent can surround, be on and inside you at the same time; a permeating entry and reaction with the human body. Scent is tactile and chemical, and creates internal landscapes that are both physical and metaphysical. Often operating at a subconscious level, scent plays with psychologies of survival, pleasure, attachment, memory, conditioned association, ritual and imagination. It is part of a complex sensory cross-over in the human brain, reflected in our semantic confluences of odour and taste: the sweet smell of honey or the sour smell of vinegar.² Suggestion and illusion can influence how a scent is perceived or perceive a scent where none exists. I am attracted to these margins and borderlands, the olfactory transformations of body and mind.

Smell has been marginalized...by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency. —Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma*³

Scent shares a proximally potent “intangibility” with live art.⁴ The live works described here draw the taboo act of smelling into the public realm. My artistic practice weaves scent through diverse relational aesthetics (psychological intervention, augmentation of reality, crowdsourcing scent narratives and design), experimental composition methods (including literal and conceptual aromas and odours), and specific multi-sensory combinations (such as tactility, audio and linguistic modalities).⁵ These works explore the complexities of collection, distillation, composition, propulsion, surface interaction, and human perception of scents, and in the process consider the ethics of their source materials, sustainability and toxicity for the subject and in disposal. They encourage audiences to set aside inhibitions, although residues of these internal struggles often remain.



SCENT DANK, DAMP CEMENT. THE HARDNESS AND SHINE OF M
A FEMINIST ON A BUILDING SITE - THAT'S WHERE I L
SHADES OF
PAT FISK



LEARN'T TO FEEL AND LIFT MY OWN WEIGHT
MACHINE METAL, AND THE IRIDESCENCE OF GREEN FERNS
E

METTLE



*Anatomy's Confection, Cat Jones, Fremantle Art Centre,
Proximity Festival 2014*

TACTILE EMBODIMENT

*Anatomy's Confection*⁶ is an experience in which participants sculpt an anatomical clitoris using soft confectionery and the physical action of suturing in a “social surgery.”

An intense atmospheric sugar aroma emanates from the sculpture materials. The majority of participants visibly gulp the air, smile and laugh on entering the room; their pleasure and unmistakable desire suggests a conditioned response to this familiar material and scent. The desirable, smellable, edible, *touchable* nature of the material dissolves emotional resistance and begins an automatic, complex emotional bond with the subject. Language and behavior shifts to reflect agency and ownership of the anatomic form. The olfactory pleasure, emotional arousal and tactile embodiment encourages empathy. Conditioned behavioural responses and implicit biases to the clitoral subject matter and suturing action are overridden by scent.

ILLUSORY TRANSGRESSIONS

Somatic Drifts is a live sensory experience that explores inter-species empathy, enabling participants to experience the body of another entity through a whole-body illusion. Participant bodies and the narratives that inhabit them accumulate in a 3-channel video installation—a metaphysical journey through identity, gender, species, temporality, consciousness and other transgressions.

Scent is used in *Somatic Drifts* to enhance and propel the illusory state, to convolute the boundaries of the real and virtual body.⁷ Wet earth, the first scent, is suggestive and perceived before the participant experiences a visual-tactile virtual plant body—a large fern. The second scent is of a local aromatic plant (like sweet smelling *Acacia suaveolens*), sourced from the plant itself. The plant is smelt, then felt by the real body, then seen around the real body and mixed with the participant body in the virtual world.

*Radical Ecologies*⁸ transposes participant narratives of time, geography, evolution with the intervention and experience of the female artist body from *Somatic Drifts*. A limited-edition perfume expresses the metaphysical elements from the live work. *Radical Ecologies* comprises the perfume contained in a ceramic urn and an epitaph of poetic entanglements, grafts between matter, the female, landscape, illusion, and consciousness. The scent is a miniature ecology that combines earth, ocean, botanic, animal and human elements. It moves from evolutionary beginnings to the post-human.



*Anatomic sculpture, Anatomy's Confection, Cat Jones,
Fremantle Art Centre, Proximity Festival 2014*





Somatic Drifts, Cat Jones, Vitalstatistix, Adhocracy 2014

My tears, collected through moments of grief, are included in the scent, specifically incorporating the female body. The tears extend the physical intervention of my body in the participant's illusory transgression. Tears actively decrease testosterone in those to whom they are exposed⁹ and reference the salty waters from which life evolves.

SENSORY FUTURES

*Century's Breath*¹⁰ commemorates the *Climate Century* by asking audiences to design future olfactory landscapes. As the installation progresses, crowdsourced speculative futures accumulate for all to read and selected scents are composed and added to the exhibition.

Future thinking beyond the lifespan of self is a form of abstract thinking. *Century's Breath* breaches this abstraction by blending personal, alternative, predictive futuring with the participant's olfactive phenomenology, memory and imagination. Scent becomes an expansive, tangible resource that spans intimate, social, ecological, industrial and political worlds. Accumulated narratives tell of apocalypse recovery; of cultural shifts; new sensory perceptions; of dark matter; other planets; of attitudinal change; old ways and pre-technology crafts; moments of pleasure in everyday wreckage; new diets and flavors; and forgotten smells and cultures.¹¹

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHIES OF THE CITY/POLITICAL SCENTS

*Scent of Sydney*¹² captures the identity of the city through the personal and political narratives of its inhabitants, distilled into scent. The work combines provocative themes with scent, enabling new kinds of conversation around social politics. The project is influenced by practices of smell mapping and the psychogeographies of scent in the work of artists such as Kate McLean.¹³

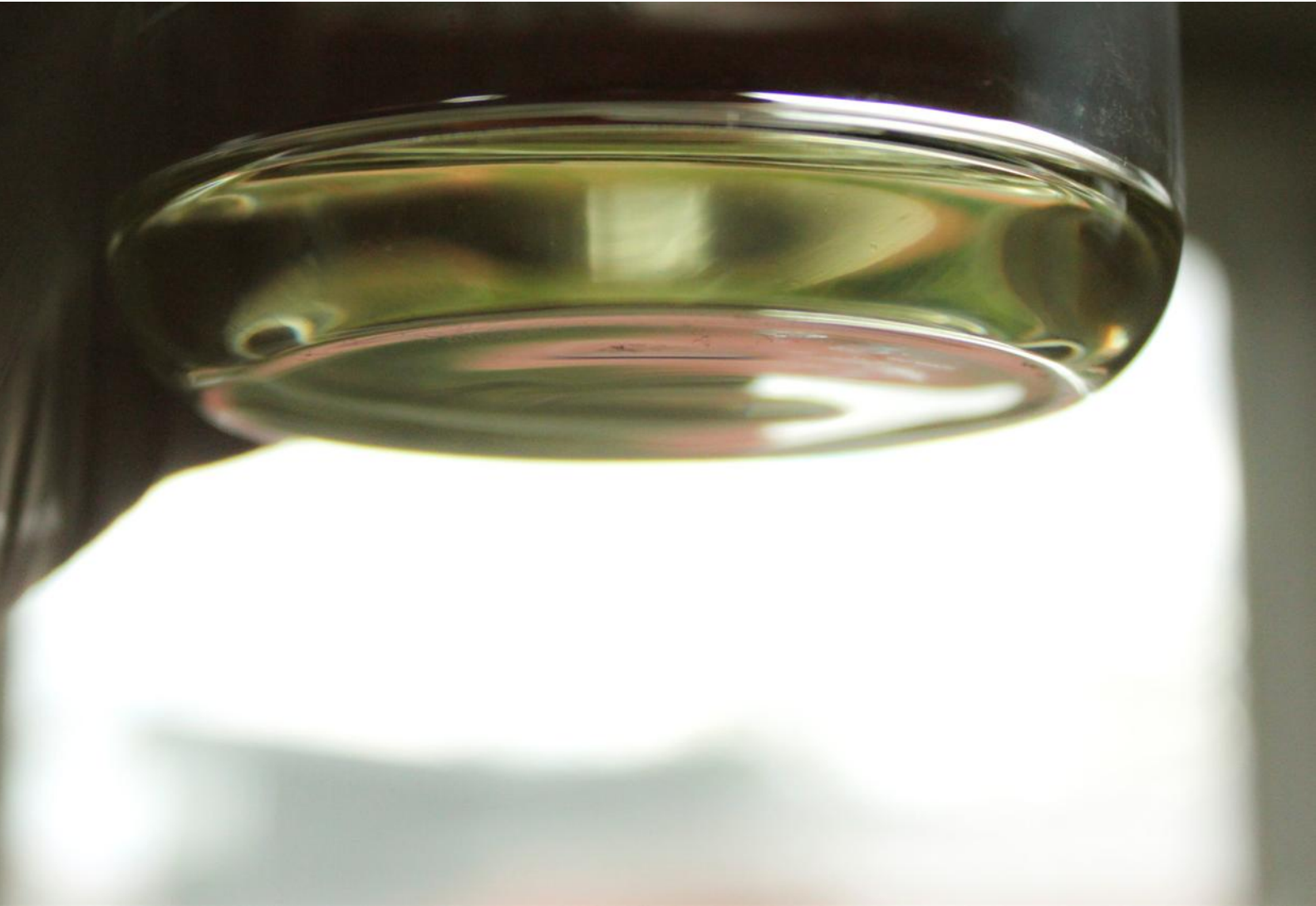
As in *Century's Breath*, interviews elicit descriptions of aromas and odours from which scents are composed. The interviewees in *Scent of Sydney* are community leaders whose personal accounts blend their experiences and identity within the city and the social politics of Sydney around themes of *Democracy*, *Extravagance*, *Resistance*, *Competition* and *Landscape*. Audience contributions accumulate in an online anthology. Scent is a linguistic starter: exposure triggers descriptive, emotionally charged narratives of family, time, place and meaning. Abstract political rhetoric takes into account diverse, deeply personal and intimate

SCENT OF SYDNEY

CAT JONES





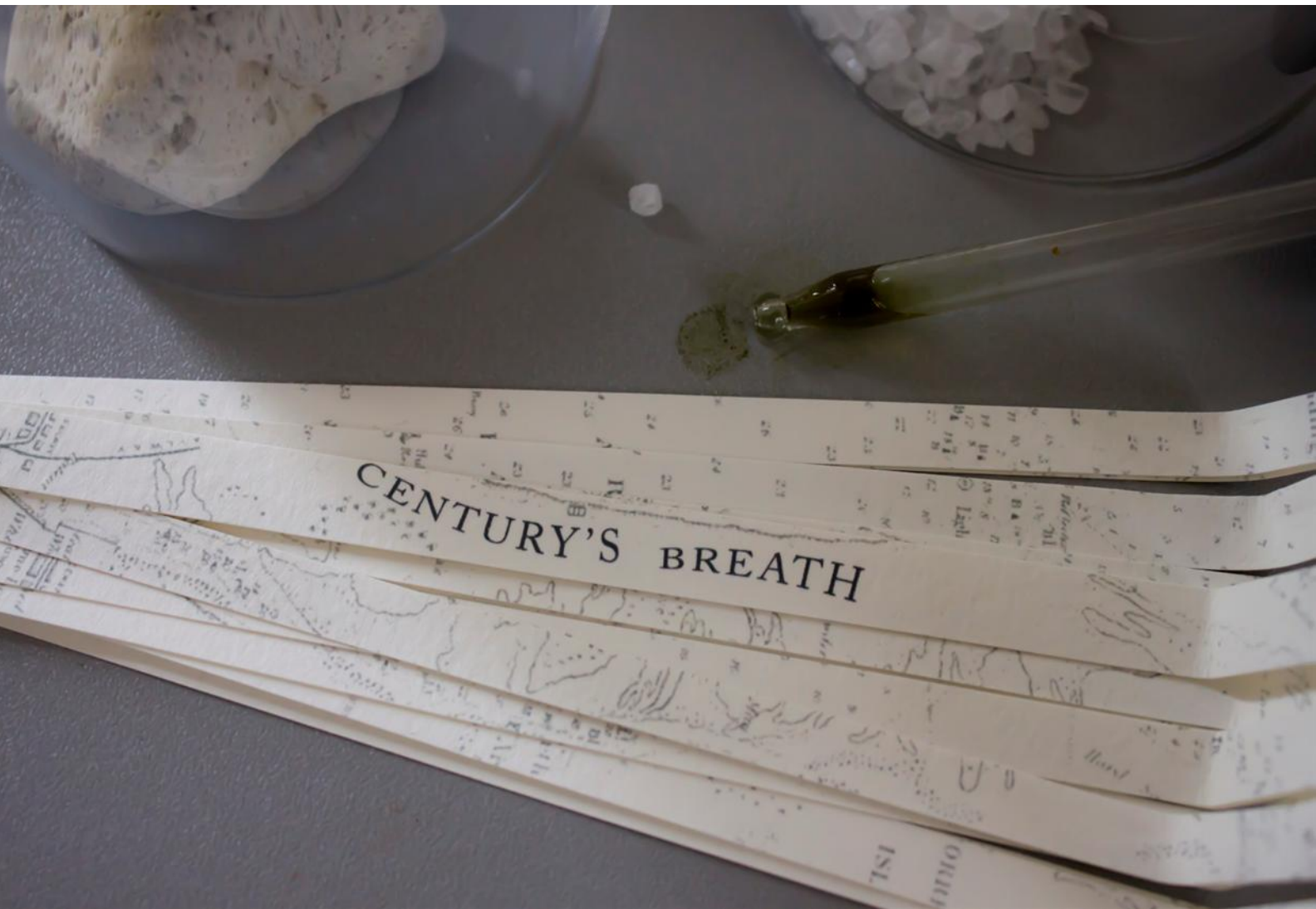


*Radical Ecologies limited–edition scent from
the Somatic Drifts series, Cat Jones 2016*

layers of relational experience. Rare conversations are opened, intricate with psychogeographies of place and identity. Scent catalyses conversation, complicating theories that smell is a sense for which we lack language. Inspired by the science of plant signaling, inter-species communications, and the penetrative nature of those communications to behavioral effect, smell, touch and taste have become the media of an artistic practice that navigates sensual, emotional, political and ethical landscapes.¹⁵

Inspired by the science of plant signaling, inter-species communications, and the penetrative nature of those communications to behavioral effect, smell, touch and taste have become the media of an artistic practice that navigates sensual, emotional, political and ethical landscapes.

Cat Jones is an interdisciplinary artist, writer and researcher with a special interest in audience psychology. Jones is a Creative Australia Fellow, an affiliate of the Sansom Institute, Body and Mind, University South Australia and winner of the Sadakichi (Experimental) Art and Olfaction Award 2016. www.catjones.net



*Century's Breath, Cat Jones, Vitalstatistix,
Climate Century Exhibition 2015*

FOOTNOTES

¹James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8, Kindle.

²Avery Gilbert, What the Nose Knows, *The Science of Scent in Everyday Life* (Synesthetics Inc, 2014), Kindle.

³Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott, Aroma, *The Cultural History of Smell* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

⁴Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, *Performing Proximity: Curious Intimacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 40–41.

⁵Jay Gottfried and Raymond Dolan, “The Nose Smells What the Eye Sees,” *Neuron* 39, no. 2 (2003): 375–386. doi: 10.1016/S0896-6273(03)00392-1.

⁶Cat Jones, *Anatomy's Confection*, last modified 17 June, 2014, accessed 22 June 2017, <https://catjones.net/2014/06/17/anatomys-confection/>.

⁷Cat Jones, *Somatic Drifts*, last modified 11 August, 2016, accessed 22 June 2017, <https://catjones.net/2016/08/11/somatic-drifts/>.

⁸Cat Jones, *Somatic Drifts, Radical Ecologies*, last modified 10 August, 2016, accessed 22 June 2017, <https://catjones.net/2016/08/10/radical-ecologies-limited-edition-scent/>.

⁹Shani Gelstein, Yaara Yeshurun, Liron Rozenkrantz, Sagit Shushan, Idan Frumin, Yehudah Roth and Noam Sobel,

“Human Tears Contain a Chemosignal,” *Science* 331, no. 6014 (2011): 226–230. doi: 10.1126/science.1198331.

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¹¹Cat Jones, *Century's Breath—Mudlhangga—LeFevre Peninsula*, Vitalstatistix, Adelaide: South Australian Maritime Museum, 2015, exhibition catalogue. https://issuu.com/jonescat/docs/project_century__s_breath_-_book_o_28c42db7bcf440.

¹²Cat Jones, *Scent of Sydney*, last modified 26 October, 2016, accessed 22 June 2017, <https://catjones.net/2016/10/26/scent-of-sydney/>.

¹³Kate McLean, “Smell Map Narratives of Place—Paris,” *New American Notes Online* 6, Cartography and Narratives 2014. <http://www.nanocrit.com/issues/6-2014/smell-map-narratives-place-paris>.

¹⁴Cat Jones, *Scent of Sydney*, accessed 22 June 2017, <https://scentofsydney.net/>

¹⁵Asifa Majid, Gunter Senft and Stephen C. Levinson, “The language of olfaction,” in *Field Manual Volume 10*, ed. Asifa Majid (Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, 2007), 36–41. <http://fieldmanuals.mpi.nl/volumes/2007/language-of-olfaction/>

!ATTENTION!

THE PIRATE NUN HEREIN NOTIFIES
ALL INTERESTED PARTIES:

THE DEATHBOAT LIFEBOAT HAS BEEN ACCEPTED IN GOOD
FAITH AS A GIFT FROM GOD FOR THE PURPOSES OF
PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF LIBERATION TO ALL PEOPLES
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BIBLICAL SCRIPTURE OF THE
JUBILEE. IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD AND
SAVIOUR - AMEN



DEEP REFLECTIONS:

An interview
with Helah Milroy

By Tarsh Bates for the CSPA Quarterly

Q: How do you see your relationship with the more than human world?

MILROY: Keeping an open mind, I see the phrase “more than human” as inclusive of the transcendent and/or supernatural dimensions of existence. I first became conscious of my relationship with the “more than human” world through contemplation on the Buddhist notion of self/no-self, for in maintaining a neutrality of awareness my sense of connection to the external world was increased. In this sense, my relationship to the “more than human” is based on connection. I try to foster a sense of stillness free from thought projections, so that the “more than human” world can fill that space with its presence.

I do however conflict with the “machine.” Sometimes I think machines are “alive” and don’t like me. It’s a playful paranoia, spurred on from a conversation I overheard once about the ghost in the machine arising from random bits of data self-organising into unique formations. I try to keep an open mind, for I find it quite impossible to fully comprehend our relationship to the “more than human,” especially the machine. I once prayed over a broken mobile phone and it started working again! So, did I bring it back to “life”? It makes me wonder if perhaps we are living in a simulation...

Q: So, is there a real?

MILROY: Who knows? Philosophically I suppose I’m agnostic. However, experientially I think there is something to be said for truth. Though as far as truth extends beyond our experience, I see this as a wager of faith. I know where my faith is, but it’s still a wager.

Q: What does art do for you?

MILROY: It’s a therapeutic tool for personal transformation. I do not know where it will take me, as it is not a process whereby I have an idea of what I want to say and/or make and then set about constructing it. I have no desire to move forward with my own thought projections. I prefer the mystery of not knowing what I am going to do and allowing the artwork to emerge through me. It’s a vulnerable process to inhabit as you really have to put yourself out there. As social creatures, we want to define ourselves. To say that this is who we are and what we stand for and then defend that claim. My process takes that opportunity away from me. I am on a constant journey of discovery and re-discovery of my shifting consciousness and its representations. Sometimes it seems contradictory, but that’s ok. I have learnt to live with this.

Q: What is your relationship with text and materials?

MILROY: I have been fortunate enough to create a little anthology of autobiographical works documenting my journey. Inserting the “I” into your text as an academic is not usually the done thing. So, my work is a little unorthodox in this respect. You could say my texts serve to subvert any view which seeks to ascribe me to the status of object, for they give me a voice which extends my identity beyond the present moment. As such, the text becomes the object of my self-creation. It would be incorrect to say that the text is “me,” for I am alive and the text is a re-presentation of this “me” which exists. I feel there is always something lost in the translation of presence to text. My creative approach to text is informed by this understanding of loss.

Found objects have great significance to me when they appear with a symbolic resonance to what’s going on in my life at the time. They represent the meaningful interaction of our intersecting histories. I respond to the objects as though our meeting was intentioned, so their significance is in the context in which our paths cross and the new direction this creates. Therefore, I feel obliged to respond accordingly to accommodate the new information they present me with.

Q: How do you see your work connecting in a broader social context?

MILROY: While my work is deeply personal, it is more accurately transpersonal due to my process of self-surrender. It is a process which requires extreme trust and faith. To me, this is a really powerful mode for being in the world, which reaffirms itself by demonstrating that there is something greater to this life and to our existence than we can possibly comprehend. It excites me to be a part of this mystery, but it requires self-surrender and that is what faith does. In a social context, I think such a path has the potential to create a resonance wherein we could understand each other without words. With such understanding, I think we could achieve great things.

Q: What is the relationship between life and death in your work?

MILROY: My work draws on Terror Management Theory¹ and so I often view life and death in terms of how our worldview affects our biological being. It has been said “*he who will find his life shall lose it.*”² Keeping an open mind, this statement could be about the flesh and life eternal, or about the way in which we view the world. Does one hold on to their rigid beliefs in the face of new information, or not? To do so would



seem to go against the flow of life, for that which is rigid breaks easily.

Q: How do love and sensuality and sexuality fit into things?

MILROY: You have to be vulnerable to be intimate with somebody, for intimacy confronts us with the possibility of loss.³ This is especially apparent with the loss of a loved one. In order to avoid the grief associated with loss, we close ourselves off from close relationships with others. Sexual intimacy is even more problematic, for along with the possibility of emotional suffering there is the possibility of physical suffering.⁴ My work deals a lot with the issue of boundaries around love and emotional intimacy, sexuality and responsibility.⁵

Q: Your work often engages with the water, its depths and the things which live within it. Yet recently you have been talking about moving onto the land. What has shifted for you?

MILROY: The idea of the land and sea are representations of things that are affecting me symbolically, but that reflect me also. My work is a way for me to try and make sense of this. Being boundless, I went deep into those waters and well...you are very alone when you are that deep. You might be surrounded by people but there is not a lot of care. It's a pirate's code of freedom, where you do what you want and I do what I want and whoever loses, well who cares? That's the risk you take and that's the risk that bonds you together in the first place. But such relations can be extremely destructive and harmful. I had fun in that space, but it wasn't where I wanted to end up. I thought that kind of freedom was love, but it was an illusion of love. So, while I thought that this kind of freedom was the most loving gift you could give anybody, in the end it was a false love and a false promise.⁶ It is difficult to explain without drawing upon my personal experiences.

For instance, whilst writing "My Boat" H. P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu* started calling me.⁷ It was really creepy. Suddenly all these ocean metaphors were infiltrating my psyche and reminding me of Old Testament law. There was some sort of an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth mentality at work and then I got really sick. Watching the movie *Dagon*,⁸ I was exposed to the idea of people's bodies getting really sick as they prepare to return to the ocean. So here I am getting sick and wondering what on earth is going on and thinking oh my goodness the call of Cthulhu is infecting me! I really wanted to be saved from that. I remember the 'pirate monk'⁹ saying to me that you have to want to be saved in order to breathe underwater. And that's when I ended preaching the gospel which was even more weird!¹⁰ But it got me free from the Cthulhu so that was nice.

Q: That's interesting because the way I understand Haraway talking about the "Chthulu" is not as a figure of hope, but more as a cyborg. There is a potential in the "Chthulu"...

MILROY: When I read about Haraway's "Chthulu" in *Manifestly Haraway*,¹¹ Lovecraft's Cthulhu was still impacting me. I was cautious, as I saw a threat of violence which dismissed the hope of a transcendent saviour in favour of an immanent one. One whose character was evident in her call to arms and reflected the carnality of such thinking. I kept wondering if the earth really needs more blood? If an Old Testament style blood sacrifice was really needed to settle some debt? And this is where Jesus kept popping into my mind, because we are told that his blood settled all debts. So, if that is the case, why are we spilling more blood? And if it's not the case, that's just really scary and I think we need to be careful about what we set our compass to.

Q: One last question, you talked about your art practice being a process of therapy and transformation, does that mean it's your tool for hope? Or that there is hope for you in that process?

MILROY: there is definitely hope in a path of surrender and faith as an artist, or otherwise. As a process, it constantly reaffirms itself. But you know...it led me to some very strange places. Furthermore, I think giving yourself the freedom to allow the truth to emerge needs to be a hopeful endeavour. You need to have faith that it's going to be ok, that you can let go and enjoy the mystery. It really comes down to intent. So, I guess my biggest hope is in the sincerity of my intent, that it will be the seed of good fortune, not just for myself but for others as well.

Helah Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people, Port Headland/Marble Bar. Her Indigenous heritage is not her main focus of her artwork, however, its influence is evident within her methodological approach, reference to Indigenous knowledge and concern for the natural world, alongside her desire to overcome 'otherness'. Her work is informed by her background in Philosophy, Gandhian Non-Violence, Theatre Performance, Environmental Conservation, and more recently Biological Arts. She is currently exploring the balance between Feminist, Indigenous and Christian worldviews in terms of the tension between positive and negative theology, with regard to the practice of Synthetic Biology.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Holly A. McGregor, Joel D. Lieberman, Jeff Greenberg,



⁶Milroy, "My Boat", 39–40.

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²Anna Kingsford, in reference to Mathew 10:39 King James Bible (Anna Bonus Kingsford. "No. 7 Concerning the Fall," in *Clothed with the Sun* (London: John M. Watkins, 1889), http://www.thenazareneway.com/Clothed%20With%20The%20Sun/clothed_with_the_sun_part_1.htm).

³Beverley Clack. *Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2002): 133, 135.

⁴Helah Milroy, "Romancing Death" (Honours Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2013), 19–20, 24–25.

⁵See Milroy, "Romancing Death" and Helah Milroy, "My Boat" (Heritage Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2016).

Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush: A Queer Botanical Meander

By Catriona Sandilands



Here we go round the mul'bry bush: the nursery song tinkles in my head, on repeat, channeled from my childhood directly into this essay. Except that mulberries don't grow on bushes. They grow on trees. In my city, Toronto, there are beautiful, old ones in front of 1920s art deco apartment buildings; small,

*weeping ones in precise circles carved from tidy suburban front lawns; and scraggly little feral ones around the forgotten borders of parks and ravines. When you look for them, you can see mulberry trees everywhere. Their tricky leaves in multiple, filigreed shapes give them away: here a *mul'bry*, there a *mul'bry*.*

Mostly, though, unless they are making a mess on the pavement or spewing allergenic clouds of pollen into the air, they go about their *mul'brying* business largely unnoticed.

Mulberries are delicious (they are actually “multiple fruits,” not berries: the distinction is a bit complicated). They are sought-after early summer treats here, even though they stain everything they touch an indelible, bruisey purple. They are slightly too good to be true: unlike, say, blackberries, which you have to fight for through thickets of impenetrable, brambly spikes, with mulberries, if you just stand under a laden tree for long enough, a mulberry will fall into your mouth. There's something *lascivious* about their dark, mulberry fecundity. Hisham Matar, in his 2006 Booker-nominated novel *In the Country of Men*, goes so far as to point out a relationship between mulberries and the fall from Paradise:

as punishment. God knew of course, He's the Allknowing, but he liked the idea and so let the angels carry out their plan. I plucked one off and it almost melted in my fingers. I threw it in my mouth and it dissolved, its small balls exploding like fireworks. I ate another, and another.¹

Another, and another, and another: mulberries may be a crop of the angels, but they also taste, as Matar describes, of temptation, excess, and the consuming sins of the body. They remind us of the squishy stains of fleshiness, desire, and even mortality: still life with sidewalk and dropped fruit. They are way sexier than apples, what with apples' self-contained, white crispness and head-bopping, Newtonian implications. Mulberries are not about Enlightenment; they are about the fleeting immediacy of desire and its sweet, sometimes dangerous fulfilment. Sweetness that stains. Sweetness that pops onto the pavement without an accompanying promise of redemption. Sweetness that



I decided that mulberries were the best fruit God had created and I began to imagine young, lively angels conspiring to plant a crop in the earth's soil after they heard that Adam, peace and blessings be upon him, and Eve, peace and blessings be upon her, were being sent down here to earth

tastes of pleasure for its own sake.

Maybe that's *queer* enough. Maybe the mulberry reminder that fecundity is not always already in the service of heteronormative, capitalist reproductive futurity is sufficient to break apart the tight “anti-social”

narrative in which, qua Lee Edelman,² the best queer rejoinder to life is death? Maybe queer life is instead, sensually and in-the-moment, about forms of “biological exuberance,” as Bruce Bagemihl puts it,³ that demonstrate the ways in which fruiting and proliferating are not confined to narrow, evolutionary narratives about seed-spreading, but rather gesture to forms of interspecies living that exceed the confines of a single species’ rather self-absorbed narrative of birth, reproduction, and death in the service of future generations of its own kind? Maybe mulberry fecundity is a model for a queerer, and more exuberant, understanding of evolution?

Yes. But I think mulberries have even more to say about *queer*. Specifically, I think they draw attention to the ways in which their sex and gender lives – the lives that stain the sidewalks with fruit and fill the

binary world. Here’s what mulberries have to say on this count. Some mulberries are male: the ones that eject the wind-borne pollen into allergic eyes. Some mulberries are female: the ones that produce the berries that stain the sidewalks. This *dioecious* state of affairs is fairly common in plant worlds: holly, ginkgo, and sassafras all involve both male and female trees in their reproductive processes. But mulberries are also, sometimes, *monoecious*, meaning that they include both pollen-bearing and fruit-bearing parts on the same plant or tree (also not uncommon: think about those squashes growing in your garden, and also birches, oaks, and corn). Some mulberries, sexed female, are able to produce fruit without the influence of any male plants at all. And some mulberries change their sex, apparently at will: the internet is full of stories of fruit growers puzzled about the absence of berries on their (sex-changed) trees and, at the other end



air with pollen – are, perhaps, not always what you might think: not what you might think about female and male, not what you might think about the nature of sexed and gendered life in a dominant, gender

of the spectrum, of allergy-suffering cities that try to turn their male trees to females by grafting berry-producing scions onto “male” branches. Recently, on a rare visit to a big-box chain store in Toronto, I

happened across an array of weeping mulberry trees advertised as a “non-fruiting variety,” presumably to entice consumers more concerned about mess than edibility. Every one of the little trees in the display showed dark, ripe berries. So much for stable gender identity. So much for plants as well-behaved commodities.

In their refusal to be one thing or another – neither essentially male nor female nor both, neither essentially art deco nor suburban nor feral – mulberries are pretty good plants to think with to work toward a good, planty sort of *queer ecology*. I don't mean to suggest that their complicated sex/gender/species lives should naturalize the living of other complicated sexualities and genders, as if their particular species-being could justify queer lives in other species, as if to take the parameters of one

imagine that our lives as human animals might be just as complicated as these planty, mulberry ones are, as they grow in front of solid 1920s buildings, in suburban front-yard circles, and in neglected spaces across the city.

Mulberries are *intersectional*: they cross class lines, race lines, gender lines. Mulberries are *intersexual*: they complicate gendered and sexualized narratives of origin, identity, and becoming. And mulberries are *international*: although I can't begin to narrate their diverse geographical origins and global proliferations here, let's just say that the white mulberry (*Morus alba*) was one of the first tree species to make its way to almost all corners of the earth specifically on the back of *people's* desires for profit: *M. alba* feeds silkworms, silkworms produce silk, and silk was a critical industry for several major empires (not to mention other



kind of life to normalize the socially and politically enmeshed becomings of others (see Stacy Alaimo⁴). I do mean to say that mulberries might cause us to *think and imagine*: to *think* in relation to mulberries, and to

empires that *wanted* to include silk production in their colonial ventures even if the experiments didn't quite go as planned).

For the time being, however, let's return to the mul'bry "bush" that inserts its presence into the Toronto landscape in so many different ways. As the nursery song repeats in my head, I wonder about what we have to learn from mulberry fecundity, mulberry complexity, and mulberry variability in the midst of a city that, like so many other cities, wants its plants to be "in their places" in order to rope botanical sensibilities into specifically *capitalist* narratives of fecundity: liveliness mobilized in the service of private property and economization via commodification. Mulberries invite us to think about gender complexity, to be sure: their queer inspiration is, on this count, definitely important. But mulberries also queer life more broadly. They remind us to ask: What might it mean to think about queer, multispecies *possibilities* for life in the context of a history, and an ominously neoliberal present, that bends all life to profitized

ends? Here, mulberries invite us to think about queer time and place, qua Jack Halberstam,⁵ in a specifically botanical light. Despite centuries of effort to make them into one thing or another, they consistently refuse to be contained, and go about their mul'brying business on their own, complicated terms. In my life in Toronto, I take inspiration from them: if mulberries can live sideways to neoliberal, heteronormative urbanism, then why shouldn't I?

NOTE

Many thanks to Jennifer Mae Hamilton and Tarsha Bates for their excellent comments on an earlier draft of this meander, and to my writing group co-conspirators – especially Liz Maderic, Sheelagh O'Donovan, and Jill Tomac – for their generous support of my mulberry obsession as it has woven through many writings.



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MARÍA
FERNANDA
CARDOSO:
Queering
the Natural
History
Museum

By Vera Coleman

Corona para una princesa chibcha (Crown for a Chibcha princess) María Fernanda Cardoso 1990 Preserved lizards (Anolis carolinensis, USA) and metal.

Indigenous and other-than-dominant cultures of Latin America and around the world have for thousands of years developed sophisticated understandings of sexual diversity and gender performativity within and beyond the scope of the human that resist Western categorizing regimes.¹ Ritual shape-shifting practices that traverse species lines are often associated with fluid, amorphous corporealities and sexualities. Such multispecies relationships and artistic forms that blur the boundaries between genders, sexualities, and orders of life can help us dismantle patriarchal, colonial, and anthropocentric discourses about what constitutes the “natural” while resisting oppressive forms of cultural appropriation. With particular attention to sculptural installations by Colombian artist María Fernanda Cardoso, I argue that more-than-human queer performativities help us imagine landscapes of multispecies flourishing and eco-social justice beyond environmental collapse.

María Fernanda Cardoso's impressive body of work constantly queers the categories of nature and culture while delving into the natural sciences' problematic histories. Born in Colombia in 1963 and currently residing in Australia, Cardoso draws on a wide range of sculptural techniques and materials ranging from taxidermy to rapid 3D prototyping, as well as historical and cutting-edge research methodologies in the biological sciences, in an exploration of sexual diversity in the more-than-human world. While Cardoso may be best known for works such as the performance-installation *Cardoso Flea Circus* (1994–2000)

and the large-scale research project *Museum of Copulatory Organs* (2008–), her earlier work exhibited at the II Biennale of Bogotá in 1990 is no less compelling. This work featured preserved specimens arranged in abstract patterns and symbolic shapes that reference indigenous knowledge systems and colonial histories, particularly those of the Chibcha-speaking Muisca people of the Colombian Andes.

Classification, Colonialism, Heteronormativity

Art in Latin America, and Colombia in particular, draws on a long history linking scientific methodologies with artistic practice.² Many European naturalists and explorers, such as Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, and the Spanish botanist José Celestino Mutis (who introduced Humboldt to the region that is now Colombia), combined scientific analysis, empiricism, and artistic production. They documented the organisms, geological formations, and local knowledges they encountered throughout the Americas through detailed drawings and illustrations, while collecting specimens to fill the museums of colonizing nations.³ Such early documentation of Latin America's rich biodiversity and natural resources became tied up in the extractive colonial practices that led to the displacement and subjugation of indigenous peoples and the destruction of species and ecosystems. For example, after repeated European expeditions into the northern Andes and the subsequent Spanish conquest of present-day Colombia, the indigenous Muisca people found themselves subjugated through the *encomienda* system, forced to

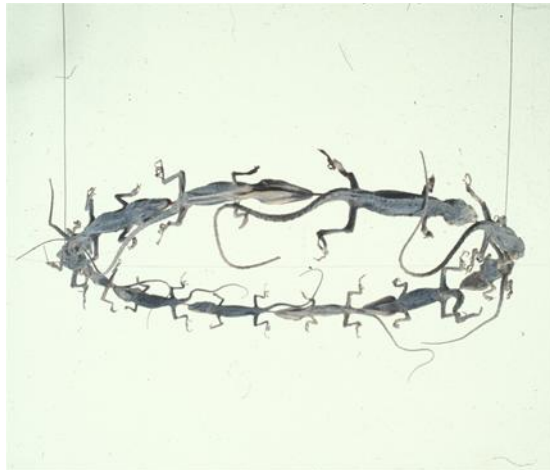
work in gold mines and perform hard agricultural labor to support the expanding colonies. Abel Fernando Martínez Martín and Edwar Javier Manrique Corredor document the deleterious impact such exploitive practices had on Muisca society and culture, as well as the resulting ecological destruction and species extinctions that swept the Altiplano Cundiboyacense.⁴

Interestingly, the ties between the classification of nature, colonialism, and heteronormativity run deep. Lynda Birke and Luciana Parisi demonstrate that the prevailing biological classification system developed by Carl Linnaeus in the early eighteenth century relied heavily on patriarchal concepts of gender and sexuality prevalent during his time while simultaneously reinforcing anthropocentric and racist notions of (certain) humans as superior to other beings.⁵ Furthermore, the entire taxonomic rank of “species” is predicated on reproductive imperatives. Gathering up the sensibilities of Myra J. Hird, Donna Haraway, Joan Roughgarden, Bruce Bagemihl, Stacy Alaimo, and others working in the burgeoning field of queer ecologies, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson argue in their introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010) that “repro-centrism” has enacted a series of “sleights of narrative hand by which nonreproductive sexual acts are rendered necessarily irrelevant, secondary, or degenerate in relation to reproductive sex,” and gender dimorphic heterosexuality takes precedence as the only “natural” sexual possibility.⁶

Absence/Presence

Critiques of the problematic linkages among classification, colonization, patriarchy, and extinction pervade Cardoso's entire body of work, but are particularly apparent in projects produced in the 1990s and early 2000s. On the occasion of the II Biennale of Bogotá in 1990, Cardoso exhibited a collection at the Museo de Arte Moderno with sculptural pieces composed of taxidermied amphibians, reptiles, fish, and insects arranged with wire into varying geometric shapes hung on walls or suspended in the air. The pieces in this collection explicitly uncover Muisca ritual symbolism and knowledge about sexuality and the nonhuman world while materializing overlapping histories of social and environmental exploitation in Colombia.

In *Corona para una princesa chibcha* (*Crown for a Chibcha princess*, Figs. 1 and 2), a ring of lizards with limbs bent out at right angles hangs head-high from a thin metal arch—the empty space below the crown highlights the absence of the crown's intended wearer. The titular Chibcha princess and the histories of colonial and ecological violence that have led to the near-erasure of her culture are strikingly present in this work because of the princess's physical absence. When read through Jacques Derrida's notion of the *trace*, the space below the crown becomes a “mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present.”¹⁷ The fluidity embodied in the princess's absence/presence offers an artistic strategy that departs from forms of cultural appropriation which are complicit in the colonial processes that continue to dispossess indigenous peoples



Corona para una princesa chibcha (*Crown for a Chibcha princess*) detail. Maria Fernanda Cardoso 1990 Preserved lizards (*Anolis carolinensis*, USA).

of their cultures, languages, bodies, and lands. In addition, the lizards' preserved bodies provocatively foreground the ways in which the colonization, displacement, and exploitation of indigenous peoples are intimately linked to historical and contemporary processes of ecological destruction, resource extraction, and species extinction. The complex linkages between conservation and social justice that Martínez Martín and Manrique Corredor have documented in Colombia's colonial period continue today as contemporary Muisca communities struggle to preserve the ecosystems and sacred landscapes pivotal to their survival.

Subversive Taxidermies

Far from gratuitous, Cardoso's utilization of taxidermy at the II Biennale enacts a deliberate and sophisticated cultural critique of the natural sciences' historical obsession with collecting and preserving “specimens” while deconstructing through a queer frame the heteronormative semiotics of the natural history museums whose displays those specimens filled. As much an art as a science, taxidermy began to flourish in Europe and the United States around 1890 when the demand for dioramas featuring whole, lifelike organisms and “habitat groups” rapidly increased

at institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History and the British Museum.⁸ As Haraway explains in *Primate Visions* (1989), displayed specimens were often arranged in species-specific family groups consisting of one female and one or two offspring centered around a large, virile, vigilant male, the lead actor in a carefully staged “morality play” reinforcing hierarchical, heteronormative, and repro-centric conceptions of nature and society.⁹

While Cardoso's sculptural groupings at the 1990 Biennale are also species-specific, her arrangement of the taxidermied animals in numbers far exceeding what can be considered “nuclear families.” Her geometric configurations include rings and webs, provocatively queering the heteronormative visual semiotics of traditional natural history museum displays while disrupting “repro-centric” constructions of family and kinship. The pieces reflect differing understandings of gender and sexuality among Chibcha-speaking people, for whom traditions of *cusmos* (men gendered as women) and homoerotic behavior predate the time of first European contact.¹⁰ In addition, Cardoso's chosen organisms—diverse species of amphibians, reptiles, insects, and fish—evoke what Bagemihl calls “biological exuberance” by highlighting the pervasiveness of hermaphroditic and asexual configurations in the animal world.³¹

Ranas bailando (Dancing frogs), for example, was displayed alongside *Corona para una princesa chibcha* at the 1990 Biennale of Bogotá. Frogs and lizards are important symbols of water, abundance, and sexuality in Muisca culture,¹² and many present-day Chibcha-speaking communities continue to use the distinctive calls of species such as the green Bogotá savanna frog to accurately forecast the beginning of the rainy season.¹³



Ranas bailando (Dancing frogs) detail.
Maria Fernanda Cardoso 1990.

In this context, Cardoso's displays ironically appropriate museum aesthetic conventions and taxidermic technologies developed relatively recently by Western naturalists. She turns them on their head in order to foreground the complex and sophisticated ecological knowledge systems the Muisca have developed over millennia.

Strange Encounters, Queer Futures

Cardoso's nonhuman "specimens" on display engage in encounters across what Haraway calls "contact zones," in which processes of "becoming-with" make "a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind."¹⁴ Cardoso's bioregional focus on the northern Andes at the II Biennale underscores the extent to which human and nonhuman species are mutually implicated in both local and global dynamics of colonialism and patriarchy in the age of the Anthropocene. Cardoso's works forge more sustainable and equitable coalitions beyond planetary collapse by mapping the intersections of biological diversity and sexual diversity while uncovering the queer, knotted, messy becomings of human

and nonhuman species.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ The modern Euro-American biological sciences have also engaged to a certain extent with questions of species, classification, origins, and sexual diversity, as expressed for example in Darwin's "pleasant genealogy" that connected *Homo sapiens* to an ocean-dwelling, hermaphroditic ancestor (quoted in Carl Zimmer, *At the Water's Edge: Macroevolution and the Transformation of Life* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 23).

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Plastiglomerate sample/ready-made collected by geologist Patricia Corcoran and sculptor Kelly Jazvac at Kamilo Beach, Hawai'i, 2012. Photo: Kelly Wood. Courtesy of the artist.

PLASTIGLOMERATE

By Kirsty Robertson



Plastiglomerate sample/ready-made collected by geologist Patricia Corcoran and sculptor Kelly Jazvac at Kamilo Beach, Hawai'i, 2012. Photos: Jeff Elstone. Courtesy of the artist.

What is a beach actually? It is marginalia, a footnote to the essay that is the ocean. Beaches are in constant motion, as wind and water wear away at rocks, coral, shells, and other matter. They also stretch across time, as certain minerals, such as quartz and feldspar, are chemically stable and strong enough to last through erosion, often forming the base of beaches millennia old. When plastics are released into the ocean, they join this process, breaking down into smaller and smaller parts and adding to the sand mixture.

Kamilo Beach, Hawai'i, is a node where the ocean gets rid of foreign substances. Kamilo has long been known as a way station: pre-contact, native Hawai'ians used the beach to harvest logs that had drifted in from the Pacific Northwest, and shipwrecked bodies often turned up there.¹ Currently, Kamilo is a terminal point in the circulation of garbage. The beach and adjacent coastline are covered in plastic: as much as 90 percent of the garbage strewn across the sand is plastic.

In 2012, geologist Patricia Corcoran and sculptor Kelly Jazvac travelled to Kamilo Beach following a tip from oceanographer Charles Moore that the beach was covered in a plastic-sand conglomerate. Bonfires on the beach had created what Corcoran and Jazvac named "plastiglomerate," a conglomerate that combined plastic waste and beach detritus into a single substance. Molten plastic had also in-filled many of the vesicles in the volcanic rock, becoming part of the land that would eventually be eroded back into sand.

The term "plastiglomerate" refers to "an indurated, multi-composite material made hard by agglutination of rock and molten plastic. This material is subdivided into an in situ type, in which plastic is adhered to

rock outcrops, and a clastic type, in which combinations of basalt, coral, shells, and local woody debris are cemented with grains of sand in a plastic matrix."² More poetically, plastiglomerate indexically unites the human with the currents of water; with the breaking down, over millennia, of stone into sand and fossils into oil; with the quick substration of that oil into fuel; and with the refining of that fuel into polycarbons—into plastic, into garbage. From the primordial muck, to the ocean, to the beach, and back to land, plastiglomerate is an uncanny material marker. It shows the connection of all matter, from the micro to the macro.

After collection, the samples gathered at Kamilo Beach were analyzed to categorize the plastics and the natural sediments that together created the plastiglomerate whole. Following this, Jazvac showed the plastiglomerate in art exhibitions as sculptural ready-mades to demonstrate human impact on nature. Finally, museums, among them the Yale Peabody Museum, the Het Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam), and the Natura Artis Magistra (Amsterdam), reached out to collect and display the samples as specimens that captured changing natural history. These three paths bring up a number of questions. What does it mean to understand part of the geologic record as a sculptural object? Can art make visible a problem too large to otherwise understand? What can art tell us that stratigraphy cannot?

PLASTIC ECOLOGY

The invention of plastic is so recent. Its rapid accumulation is as young as it is overwhelming. Considered against Earth's five-billion-year life span, it appears to arrive and cover the world in one simultaneous instant, unfolding through time and space into a future we cannot yet see. Noted for its convenience and durability, plastic emerged in part as

a promise to displace other products that relied on animal remains and natural resources: bone, tortoiseshell, ivory, baleen and whale oil, feathers, fur, leather, cork, and rubber. "As petroleum came to the relief of the whale," stated one pamphlet advertising celluloid in the 1870s, so "has celluloid given the elephant, the tortoise, and the coral insect a respite in their native haunts; and it will no longer be necessary to ransack the earth in pursuit of substances which are constantly growing scarcer."³

In the past, it might have been assumed that "nature" was the one thing that could never be made from plastic, but plastiglomerate suggests that this is no longer the case. It is an ecological paradox such that the mind struggles to separate its plasticity from its telluric oily past. Take, for example, a sample collected from Kamilo Beach that is clearly a lighter and sand. And yet it is not. These are not two substances glued together, but multiple substances that are one another. The lighter was likely one of the billion plus made in China and Taiwan each year from parts sourced all over the world.⁴ It had already travelled the globe prior to ending up on Kamilo Beach, where it melted, along with other microplastic flakes and confetti, into a single substance, a glomerate with a history as long as the sand and as short as the invention of plastic polymer in a laboratory in the 1950s.

As Heather Davis notes, plastic is immensely destructive, ecologically devastating both in the intensity of resource extraction required to make it (a staggering eight percent of the world's oil production goes into the manufacture and production of plastics) and in its disposal.⁵ The few minutes or days in which it might be used as a takeaway container, a lighter, or a toothpaste tube belies both the multimillion-year process of its making, and the tens of thousands of years it is expected to last before



Plastiglomerate samples/ready-mades collected by geologist Patricia Corcoran and sculptor Kelly Jazvac at Kamilo Beach, Hawai'i, 2012. Photos: Jeff Elstone. Courtesy of the artist.

breaking down, finally, into its molecular compounds. It is usually quickly disposed of, making its way to landfills, but also into sewers or streams, where it often ends up in waterways and on shorelines.⁶

VIBRANT MATTER

As a geological artefact, plastiglomerate is an indicator of human impact on the ecology of the Earth. As an artwork, plastiglomerate makes the familiar unfamiliar. It reifies the unfathomable, consolidating and attesting to difficult-to-substantiate material and social-political issues. Plastiglomerate is a remainder, a reminder, an indicator of the slow violence of massive pollution. It brings together deep geological time and current consumerism. It also takes on the properties of what Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter,” a lively thing made by certain actions and off-gassing in its own strange geological matrix.⁷

The history of plastics, tied up as it is in colonial exploitation and resource extraction, clearly illustrates the unevenness at the heart of defining the Anthropocene. Those profiting from extraction are often not the same as those dealing with its most extreme consequences. Additionally, the way the Anthropocene is seen as always-already underway highlights a distinction and by proxy a hierarchy, between humans and nonhumans (or “more-than-humans”) that perpetuates a nature-culture divide and suppresses ways of understanding the world that might be more relational than taxonomic. As Métis scholar Zoe Todd writes, “I think that the danger in any universal narrative or epoch or principle is exactly that it can itself become a colonizing force.”⁸ She reminds us that Indigenous knowledges have space for the connection of all matter,

while by contrast, settler knowledge requires the vibrant matter of a plastic stone to tell this story.⁹

Plastiglomerate clearly demonstrates the permanence of the disposable.¹⁰ It is evidence of death that cannot decay, or that decays so slowly as to have removed itself from a natural lifecycle. It is akin to a remnant, a relic, though one imbued with very little affect. As a charismatic object, it is a useful metaphor, poetic and aesthetic—a way through which science and culture can be brought together to demonstrate human impact on the land.¹¹ Thus, to understand plastiglomerate as a geological marker is to see it as unchanging. Plastiglomerate speaks to the obduracy of colonialism and capitalism. The melted veins of plastic that actually become the rock speak to how difficult it is to undo unequal relations of destruction.

Nevertheless, plastiglomerate is a seductive substance, attracting artists to both collect and display it, and to make it. What does turning plastiglomerate into an artwork do? To understand it as art is, potentially, to see it as a call to action. But that latter interpretation demands seeing it as art made by the Earth, with humans only as anonymous actors, as midwives lighting the fires on the beach. After all, it is made from the most banal of substances: rock and plastic, both easily available and easily melded into one. Although there are plenty of artists using plastic to comment critically on waste, labor, and production, those specifically drawn to plastiglomerate seem rather to be oddly inspired by it, occasionally even going so far as to manufacture it themselves. To make such an object in order to question its making seems a deeply problematic tautology.

But why should finding plastiglomerate and displaying it as a ready-made be any different? Plastiglomerate is what Heather Davis calls “accidentally or incidentally” aesthetic.¹² It is precisely the facticity of plastiglomerate, its constituent components and analysis as both artwork and geological specimen that make it fascinating. Plastiglomerate demonstrates an already existent artistic relationship between human and planetary action that can’t be improved by rendering that relationship as solely human. Or perhaps more disturbing still, it demonstrates the Anthropocene as a performance, an artwork with the end act of planetary destruction.

The extensive life spans of plastic and rock do not need any further intervention to illustrate their force. Perhaps, as Jazvac does when she shows the plastiglomerate as ready-made sculpture, we need to delve into what we already have, using plastiglomerate as object, sample, metaphor, talisman, and evidence. Following Todd, Jazvac remarks on her uneasiness with the way that she is often described as having “discovered” plastiglomerate, a word that has strong colonial connotations, and that imagines a manufactured landscape as something like a frontier to explore and possess. Every time plastiglomerate is shown, Jazvac notes, it is evidence of removing and describing something from a land that is not hers—an action that is misunderstood and perpetuated constantly in the coverage and use of plastiglomerate as material. Perhaps, then, it is an anticolonial and a feminist action to refuse to see plastiglomerate as an ideal object or substance that can be discovered, extracted, gathered, and used to bolster careers in a capitalist system or to highlight the “newness” of an anthropogenic substance. The readymade geologic being of

plastiglomerate speaks to more than pollution: also geology, the deep time of earth, colonization, human–animal knowledges, currents of water, and the endless unfolding and collapse of life on earth.

I would like to thank Kelly Jazvac and Kelly Wood for their help with this text. It was written in my role as writer for the project Understanding Plastics Pollution: Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Forensic Methodology, developed by the Great Lakes Plastics Pollution Think Tank at Western University, Canada

This article is an excerpt from a longer version of this essay, which was published in e-flux 78 (December 2016)

Kirsty Robertson is an Associate Professor of Contemporary Art and Museum Studies at the University of Western Ontario. My research focuses on activism, visual culture, and changing economies. I'm currently finishing my book on this topic: *Tear Gas Epiphanies: New Economies of Protest, Vision, and Culture in Canada*. More recently, I've turned my attention to the study of wearable technologies, immersive environments, and the potential overlap(s) between textiles and technologies. I consider these issues within the framework of globalization, activism, and changing economies. My co-edited volume, *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture, and Activism in Canada*, was released in 2011.

FOOTNOTES

¹Kenneth Weiss, "Plague of Plastic Chokes the Seas," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 2006 <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-me-ocean2aug02-story.html>.

²Patricia L. Corcoran, Charles J. Moore, and Kelly Jazvac, "An Anthropogenic Marker Horizon in the Future Rock Record," *GSA Today* 24, no. 6 (June 2014) <http://www.geosociety.org/gsatoday/archive/24/6/article/i1052-5173-24-6-4.htm>.

³Susan Freinkel, "A Brief History of Plastic's Conquest of the World," *Scientific American*, May 29, 2011 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-brief-history-of-plastic-world-conquest/>.

⁴Lighters are manufactured all over the world, but the vast majority of cheap plastic lighters are manufactured in China and Taiwan, many of these in the Chinese city of Wenzhou. Michael Backman, *Inside Knowledge: Streetwise in Asia* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 23.

⁵Heather Davis, "Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015) <http://heathermdavis.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Life-and-Death-in-the-Anthropocene.pdf>

⁶Corcoran, Moore, and Jazvac, "An Anthropogenic Marker Horizon."

⁷Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–20.

⁸Zoe Todd, "Fish Pluralities: Human–Animal Relations and Sites of Engagement in Paulatuuq, Arctic Circle," *Inuit Studies* 38, no. 1–2 (2014): 217–38.

⁹Distinct from but paralleling

Todd's argument is that of Rob Nixon, who addresses what he calls environmental "slow violence," the violence enacted by extraction, emissions, and pollution, which unveils itself slowly across time, as an "unevenly universal" burden, one that will tend to be experienced inequitably. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹⁰Heather Davis, "Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and Other Queer Futures," *PhiloSOPHIA* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 233.

¹¹It should be noted, however, that the term "Anthropocene" tends to be taken as a given in art and culture spheres, but its potential acceptance in science/geology circles lies far in the future (if it is accepted at all).

¹²Davis, "Life & Death in the Anthropocene," 348.

YOUR TOUCH UNSETTLES HOW I SEE: SENSUAL TOUCH AND THE COLLAPSING OF DISTANCE BETWEEN HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN

By Alize Zorlutuna



a touchable distance, 2017

For non land-based people, land is an idea.

—Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*

We tend to think of the erotic as an easy tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us towards living in a fundamental way.

—Audre Lorde, *Conversations with Audre Lorde*

I find myself returning to Lorde's discussion of the erotic almost forty years after its first utterance because it touches upon something fundamental to my practice: the capacity of the erotic to *move us*. The statement also points to the complexity of the erotic as something that exceeds mere titillation. Rather, the erotic is much deeper and fundamental—rooted in the body—with the potential to impact our lives in essential ways.

I begin with this quote because the artworks I discuss here enlist the erotic and its capacity to provoke affective responses in the body. These works solicit sensual touch (or the performance of sensual touch for video) as a means to intervene in the representations of landscapes and natural elements. The evocation of desire unsettles ways of being with the non-human; ways that destabilize normative western epistemologies, relationships to landscape, and land and nature while proposing a reconsideration of human and non-human subjectivities.

In the last five years, I have been particularly interested in processes of queering. Drawing on the root of the original word, queering is fundamentally about making

strange. I have taken this up in my work, attempting to make strange what is familiar. Through exploration, this has involved various interventions/interferences in modes of representation. Most relevant to this issue of *Quarterly* is the work that attempts to intervene in or queer landscapes and engagements with the non-human.

Perceptions of land, nature and the non-human are informed or framed by “landscape” in pivotal ways. According to W.J.T. Mitchell,

landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.¹

Especially in Canada, where landscape is almost synonymous with the nation, its ongoing representation as largely uninhabited, wild, and pristine is integral to a national mythology that erases the lived realities and histories of Indigenous people. It also elides the ongoing environmental exploitation wreaking havoc on the natural environment while packaging the nation's natural environment as a commodity for consumption and national pride. As a settler and an artist working in Canada, I feel it is important to take a critical stance regarding relationships with land and landscape. It is my responsibility to challenge these mythologies and posit other ways of imagining connection with land, nature and the non-human in general that affirm intimacy with place as complex, multifaceted and specific.

becoming oblique of the world (2015) and *a touchable distance* (2017) engage directly with representations

of landscapes, while Stroke (2014–) takes up queering in relationship to non-human natural elements. Deploying various types of touch, the works attempt to break down the distance between human subjectivity and the potential subjectivity of non-human natural elements and forces. In some instances, the touch is explicitly erotic—provoking desire as a disruptive force in our apprehension of the material. At other times, the touch is sensual, but not erotic. This touch—a caress, a gentle tracing of form, is an attempt at collapsing proximity, bringing closer that which is generally represented as being at a distance to us. This touch bridges what we see and where we are, asking us to reconsider how intimacy with place might be configured as not-landscape.

Lucy Lippard describes landscape as something that “can only be viewed from the outside, as a backdrop for the experience of viewing.”² Her characterization of landscape is rooted in this distance between the body and place.³ While place is fundamentally intimate and is experienced from the inside, “a lived-in landscape becomes place.” For Lippard, place is a “spacial metaphor for temporal distance”—place is sensual, while landscape is visual.⁴ In this conceptualization, landscape is always distant and primarily visual (for viewing), whereas place is rooted in an experience of locality intertwined with culture, time and specific histories. I find myself intrigued by this dyad and the way in which it frames engagement with land through its representation (as landscape) as a primarily visual experience.

Taking up Lippard's challenge in my video installations, I disrupt the smooth viewing experience of landscape by intervening in both the visual field and the



becoming oblique of vthe world, 2015

viewer's apprehension of it. I do this through narrative audio that directly addresses the viewer in *becoming oblique of the world*. In the performance/installation *a touchable distance*, I insert my body into the visual field (tracing the horizon with my hand) and literally slicing the horizon line in a large-scale projection. These strategies invite an embodied, subjective experience of place into the work—one that goes beyond the visual apprehension of landscape, bringing awareness to the body and its proximal relationship and connection with place:

How do you touch an impossible thing?

an imagined place, a crease in the continuity of distance.

How do you connect with something deemed a thing for eons,

even as eons are alive in its very material?

How do you feel its rhythm, its time signature—a different baseline?

'Let your imagination change what you know.'⁵

I'd like to return here to the explicit use of the erotic in my work as a strategy for disrupting normative relations with the natural order. In a number of works, sensations of misplaced desire through touch transgress normative proscriptions and boundaries around what is and should be desirable—a queer touch. At once strange, enticing and unsettling, this touch disorients. Sarah Ahmed describes the experience of being queer in the world as a feeling of disorientation, a "becoming oblique of the world."⁶ Embodying desire that has historically been characterized as unnatural places the queer body at an angle to the norm; not totally askew but not comfortable either—slightly off kilter. By engaging

with the natural world in unnatural ways, I unsettle our sense of order, destabilizing the way Enlightenment rationalism has framed/informed relationships between humans and nature.

The ongoing series *Stroke* (2014–) is another example of the erotic as a disruptive force in my work. As suggested by the title, these videos involve stroking, a kind of touch that evokes or mimics sexual touch on natural forms that resemble human sexual anatomy. In these videos, a feminine hand strokes a tree, a hole, sand, and flowers in a manner that recalls queer sex—mimicking mounting desire and climax through speed and technique. The interspecies eroticism can be quite rousing and unsettling. As the hands stroke, the forms are transformed into something other than objects and viewers become party to an intimate act. Observing this engagement stimulates sensations from arousal to sexual excitement, from surprise to discomfort—affecting people in unanticipated and unnerving ways. One viewer told me, “it is the most erotic thing I have ever seen.” Another said that he had been “doing everything all wrong” and learned a lot from watching the work.

Provoking an involuntary erotic response in the body, the work suggests a “wildly anarchic desire.”⁷ What does a “wildly anarchic desire” look like? Feel like? A desire that is truly transgressive, that pushes against the very boundaries of what we consider to be appropriate, is a desire that exceeds limits. I argue (along with Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson) that “the possibilities of queer desire for nature offer not just moments of pleasure, but . . . moments in which we can make the necessary connections between the policing of sexuality and the increasing destruction of

non-human life.”⁸ In the experience of being stimulated by *Stroke*, we are made aware of the self-regulating regime imposed upon our sexualities by heteronormative frameworks, which themselves are legitimized through an appeal to what is or is not natural. In our arousal, and our discomfort at our own arousal, we are faced with the embodiment of those frameworks and the *unnaturalness* of our own desire.

The red nail polish on the fingernails of the hand in *Stroke* is a deliberate attempt to evoke a queerness that speaks back to this regime. While the nail polish is not necessarily queer in and of itself, enlisting this form of feminine adornment designates a deliberately feminine hand. A hand that moves in relation to that which has been designated feminine, thus positing a femme-on-femme intimacy—a queer intimacy. Ultimately, “desire is always surpassing the frames established for it, and a queer politics of desire allows us to become open to what exists beyond the discursive frameworks that have been established for these experiences.”⁹ A queer politics of desire allows for transgressions that move us beyond established frameworks, creating space for radical manifestations of desire—desire that bridges human and non-human.

My art practice emphasizes queer sensations in the body; an embodied experience that challenges our sense of the existing order and proposes something different. This work opens space for reconsidering human and non-human subjectivities—unsettling our relationships with landscape, land, nature etc., as constructed by western discourses. This embodied experience re-evaluates land, nature and the non-human, no longer considering them as resource, or place, or necessarily related to human

history, but as concrete entities and forces with subjectivities that normative Western discourses cannot account for. This work proposes a transformation, a *becoming other* of what we think we already know, both about ourselves and the non-human. A *becoming other*, where that which has been characterized as non-sentient, an unaffected/unaffected thing, is imbued with subjectivity. A *becoming other*, where we are somehow less human and more the thing we desire.

Alize Zorlutuna is an interdisciplinary artist who works with installation, video, performance, and material culture, to investigate themes concerning identity, queer sexuality, settler colonial relationships to land, culture and history, as well as labour, intimacy, and technology. Her work aims to activate interstices where seemingly incommensurate elements intersect. Drawing on archival as well as practice-based research, the body and its sensorial capacities are central to her work. Alize lives and works in Toronto

FOOTNOTES

¹W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” in *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2002), 5.

²Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York Press: New York, 1997), 8.

³Ibid., 7.

⁴Ibid., 7.

⁵Alize Zorlutuna, “a touchable distance,” Exhibition catalogue for *ThirstDays #12* (VIVO Media Arts Centre: Vancouver, 2017).

⁶Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke University Press: London, 2006), 162.



a touchable distance, 2017

⁷Dianne Chisholm, "Biophilia, Creative Involvement, and the Ecological Future of Queer Desire," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Bruce Erickson and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 376.

⁸Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 37.



White Tree, Stroke, (2014–)

2017 EDINBURGH FRINGE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE AWARD



Creative Carbon Scotland and The Center of Sustainable Practice in the Arts announced the winner of the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe Sustainable Practice Award at the Scottish Poetry Library.

Poet Harry Giles presented the winners, Outland Theatre with the award for their 2017 production at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, *Towers of Eden*. Founders of the company, Simon Christian and Melissa Dalton received a hand-crafted piece from Glasgow based designer, Chris Wallace, which was made with reclaimed copper wire and reclaimed roof slate. Ceremony attendees included Fringe participants and others from the Scottish and international cultural and sustainability worlds.

With applications open to all 3,398 shows performing at this year's Fringe, a high number and quality of applications were received, and whittled down to 18 shortlisted productions, 5 finalists and one overall winner. Judges assessed shows based on their artistic quality as well as their engagement with themes relating to social, economic and environmental sustainability, and sustainable practices they adhered to. This year there were many unique ideas and concepts which engaged audiences, both young and old.

The award winner, Outland Theatre's production of *Towers of Eden*, portrays a dystopian future where environmental disaster has struck, traditional agriculture is no longer sufficient to feed the ever-growing population and the government offers a solution which becomes corrupt. They convinced judges with their unique concept and gripping theatrics which accurately conveyed their sustainable messages. Moreover, they were conscious of the sustainability of their production

by considering the carbon footprint of their show, including the impact of their marketing, travel options and sustainable engagement through a crowd funding initiative to support their trip to Edinburgh.

Ben Twist, Director of Creative Carbon Scotland, said:

“The award recognises the very best in sustainable practice at the world’s largest arts festival, and we hope that it will encourage future performers, producers and venues to consider social, economic and environmental best practice in the future. We’re delighted to be able to present this award, and are enormously grateful to our partners the Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, PR Print and Design, and The List to enable this to happen.”

Four other finalists were also recognised at the ceremony for their significant contribution to sustainable practice at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. These were:

- Home Sweet Garden by Asylon Theatre at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh – John Hope Gateway
- Last Resort by 2 Magpies Theatre at Summerhall
- Me and My Bee by This Egg and the Pleasance at Pleasance Courtyard
- Tribe by Temper Theatre at Zoo Southside

The Edinburgh Fringe Sustainable Practice Award is a collaboration between its founder, the Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts (CSPA), and Creative Carbon

Scotland (CCS), working together with the List magazine and supported by PR Print & Design.

Stay tuned for more information on the development of the Fringe Sustainable Practice Award in our Next Issue, *Q20: Self-Care*.

END NOTES



Guest Editor Tarsh Bates is no stranger to discomfort. Her fantastic artistic work with *Candida albicans* asks viewers to regard the organism, usually associated with disgust and disease, with awe and reverence. Through her work, she asks, "How might we co-exist?"

This question pervades this issue, using Queerness as a lens through which to understand nature's multiplicity, its responsiveness, its sensuality, and its unfamiliarity. We are asked to confront ecology not as an idealized, romanticized "other," but as a complex entity that is knarled up in our own human failings. It can sometimes make us uncomfortable. Our relationships with ecologies is stunningly embodied in Kirsty Robertson's writing on *Plastiglomerate*-- not separate entities but another, fused thing. Individual materials bound together.

Bates also makes us aware, consistently throughout the issue, of the influence of indigenous cultures—not only by recognizing their relevance to the sites and artists discussed, but by acknowledging the cultural debt owed to them as a whole. This is common practice at public events in Australia, where Bates is completing her PhD, but is less often practiced elsewhere.

The issue expands on themes brought forward in *Q17: Sense and Sensuality*, and the same urgency applies. That to accept the multiplicity and weirdness of non-human entities is to expand our capacity for empathy, our capacity to accept others. Queer Ecologies seek to love, not to take on new lovers. Queerness, when it is truly inclusive, is not just another tribe, label or paradigm. It forces us to look beyond our myopic focus on our own identities, and to accept an expanded view of the world. It requires that the

privileged volunteer space and time to communities who have been denied recognition and agency. It reminds us how privilege often blinds us to the beauty of multiplicity.

Here are Queer Ecologies: they confront us with their weird ways, and cause us to reflect on the concepts of "weird" and "normal," asking, "How might we co-exist? How do we work for the betterment of our fused existences?"

Thanks for reading,
Meghan Moe Beitiks



Editor
Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts Quarterly



UPCOMING ISSUES

Q20: SELF-CARE

For this, our 20th issue, we take a moment to look back at the history of the quarterly, and examine our own self-care, while inviting contributions from artists and thinkers who address self-care in their process and practice. How do we sustain ourselves, when everything around us demands sustenance? Featuring contributions from John K. Grande, Perdita Phillips, Sarah Berkeley, and more.

Q21: MATERIAL FUTURES

Guest Editor: Whitefeather Hunter

The Material Futures issue unpacks productive “troubling” of the processes and materials that creative fields and practitioners engage with. This troubling is done via re-visitation or reclamation of traditional art/ craft/ design methodologies and topics, as well as innovating within critical materiality, #futurecraft or future-now initiatives. Circular design, carbon negative/ zero waste production, materials science and biomaterials, and disruptive technologies are research-creation-production foci that mean to shift away from trends in over-consumption and the unsustainable towards recuperative, remedial, regenerative paradigms and practices.

Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis for inclusion in the CSPA Quarterly.

Send your proposals, papers, images, and reports to moe@sustainablepractice.org

The Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts [CSPA] provides a network of resources to artists and arts organizations, which will enable them to become ecologically and economically sustainable while maintaining artistic excellence and innovation. The CSPA views sustainability through environmentalism, economic stability, and strengthened cultural infrastructure. The CSPA gathers and disseminates information through daily blog feeds, monthly electronic newsletters, a quarterly publication, national and international conference attendance, and occasional published reports.

The CSPA was founded in 2008 by Ian Garrett and Miranda Wright and is currently operating digitally between Los Angeles and Toronto.

The CSPA is a for-profit LLC. The decision to become a for profit entity came from a desire to break the conventional 501(c)3 dependency, and to have the ability to engage politically. The CSPA explores hybrid business models, and seeks to re-invest into the arts.

We hope you'll join us in our cause by becoming part of our expanding network.

www.sustainablepractice.org



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