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Women and eco-poetics: an introduction in context

This introduction contextualises and introduces the material within the special feature on women and eco-poetics as well as exploring the contributors' and, on occasion, my own thoughts on the subject. I shall identify some common creative practices and ideological threads whilst respecting the sheer diversity of practitioners and practice presented here. After all, this issue features essays, statements, images, open form poetry, performance pieces, prose poetry, site specific work and found poetry from writers with experience as poets, critics, artists, educators, librarians and media workers. I have organised this work into sections as follows: **Poems** (selections of work from seven women poets); **Recycles** (selections of work making use of found text from eight women poets); **Essays** (seven essays on women poets from an eco-poetical perspective) and **Working Notes/Ecopoetical statements**. In addition to the working notes from featured poets which take the form traditional in *How2*, this section contains a number of short statements from writers made in response to the women and eco-poetics theme. Those that stand well alone also appear as "postcards" which has had the added advantage of their acting as a provocative "trail" for the special feature, as well as being a part of it of course.

Generic segregation and classification of contents is, in some ways, contrary to the spirit of *How2* and perhaps to eco-poetics too, yet it is I think helpful to reading work online to have some method of navigating our way around it. However, I should like to draw attention to the particularly hybrid nature of many of the contributions here. *How2* has always welcomed critical creative crossover pieces in the tradition of modernist hybrid work such as the prose-poems of Gertrude Stein or the "description-definition-literary artwork" of Francis Ponge (whose writing inspired the collaboration of Marcella Durand and Tina Darragh published here). Frances Presley's poetic use of images of pinkness, paleness, fences and grids plays in and out of her essay on "Common pink Metaphor". In her "essay-as-assemblage", Jane Sprague intersperses trenchant prose with her own and others' poetry. Her essay, like Linda Russo's, is meditative in form and does not exclude personal experience in favour of the traditional essay's fake objectivity.

Conversely, Kathleen Miller's poem "In Considering the Wild[er]ness, She, of Parking Structures" plays with the critical reference form commonly used in essays. Ann Fisher-Wirth's "Dream Cabinet" touches on journal and travel writing genres as it shifts sinuously between prosaic and poetic structures. The statements appearing in postcards also often occupy hybrid positions, I read Cara Benson's "it's high time" for instance as a witty, philosophical prose poem, a little reminiscent of Rosemarie Waldrop's work.

In the time that has elapsed since I was asked to edit this special feature, environmental issues, in particular that of climate change, are increasingly news-dominant. We are bombarded with familiar narratives of disaster and presented with awe and horror-inspiring visual images of the post-modern sublime, defined in this feature by Christopher Arigo (via Rebecca Solnit) as "the tension between ... tranquillity and beauty as juxtaposed with human intervention in the landscape, often in its most destructive forms". A quick glance at our contributors' biographies demonstrates the significant growth in environmental practice within the academic, artistic and wider cultural spheres. Ann Fisher-Wirth was president of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) in 2006, an important forum for writers and critics with an environmental interest boasting over a thousand members and branches all over the world. Jonathan Skinner is founder and Marcella Durand a key contributor to the journal, *ecopoetics*, founded in 2001. Evelyn Reilly and Christopher Arigo are both editing new books on ecopoetry. Susan Moore is the Postdoctoral Fellow in Literature, Sustainability, and Culture in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, Toronto. Siel Ju runs an environmentally-oriented blog at greenlagirl.com.

In the sometimes frenzied response to the contemporary crisis, it is easy to forget the past and yet this is always a mistaken elision. Elisabeth Joyce's essay on Susan Howe, "'Things Overlap in Space and Are Hidden': Susan Howe's 'Tuning the Sky'" reminds us of the sedimentation of the landscape in actual, cultural and poetic terms as well as offering a valuable detailed reading of the workings of a single poem. Joyce explores how Howe explodes the rigid and forged histories of our ancestors' relationship to the land through her poetic techniques. Howe is also engaged in an archeological examination of certain fragments of English poetic history, in particular from Edmund Spenser. Again, this is a timely reminder that our poetries have not sprung fully formed

from the womb. We need to explore our antecedents in this field, all the more so, since this, at least in its response to the environmental crisis, is a relatively new area of writing. Inevitably, at this stage poets and critics are seeking retrospective canons and some of the earlier ecocriticism was perhaps over-fixated on British and American Romantic poets.

Whatever, we may feel about the canon-making process, it is certainly worth seeking inspiration from past poets with similar concerns. Perhaps these may be found within the modernist poetry field: Lorine Niedecker, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan are all cited here. I would add the British Northumbrian poet, Basil Bunting, to that list. We may go further back of course, and some of the contributors do, to Dorothy and William Wordsworth, to Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. For most poets, and some (such as Kathleen Miller) specifically mention this here, a tradition for their writing is important. This has also been a valued part of How2's work on women writers of the modernist era. It is important that, in the archeological exploration of this relatively new field of poetry, we do not allow the references to William Wordsworth, Whitman and Olson to outweigh those to Dorothy Wordsworth, Dickinson and Niedecker, as so easily happens in the still male-dominated academy.

Ecopoetics

In this special feature, environmental awareness and/or ecological concerns permeate every piece of work, but the narrative and the form differ from the conventional. These are pieces which open up different angles on environment: they are written by and/or about experimental poets and they focus on the creative practice of women. In some cases, this makes gender itself an important aspect of these poetries. In others, it provides an interesting parallel or counter-discourse to that of ecofeminism, a subject to which I shall return. Before I do so however, I would like to focus on our contributors' responses to the gender-neutral term "ecopoetics" which is, after all, the banner under which this special feature sails.

"Ecopoetics" is a term which Jonathan Skinner's stimulating journal of the same name has made current for the readers and writers of contemporary American

experimental work. Christopher Arigo develops Skinner's interpretation of ecopoetics as "exploring creative-critical edges between writing (with an emphasis on poetry) and ecology (the theory and praxis of deliberate earthlings)." To summarise Arigo's subtle arguments, he defines ecopoetics as "an ecotone between ... ecology, poetry, and ethnopoetics", a practice which creates an "'edge effect,' ... where ecologies are in tension." As we shall see, there is much in this special feature that fulfils Skinner's and Arigo's reading of the term, not least Skinner's own essay on Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge in which he identifies and enacts an impressive interdisciplinary ecopoetic practice. It is not only Arigo who has found a useful jumping off point for his thinking about ecopoetics within this journal. Several of our contributors have done so.

However, although some of the contributors here come to this subject as landscape poets or ecopoets, others approach it from a feminist or environmentalist trajectory and still others have a primary identification with innovative poetics. Just as many of the poets published in *How2* over the years have struggled over whether to describe themselves as linguistically innovative, avant-garde, feminist or language poets, so the term ecopoet is not relevant to all. Skinner himself is still actively engaged in considering and re-defining the term six years after founding the journal as his recent piece for a 'New Nature Writing' panel, reprinted in the latest issue of ecopoetics, demonstrates. I see the critical and creative exploration, exposition and/or resistance of the term "ecopoetics" as a significant part of the work achieved by this special issue. Arigo himself entitles his essay on Juliana Spahr, "Notes *Towards* an Ecopoetics..." (my emphasis), acknowledging the tentative nature of a definition and expressing some dissatisfaction with the term as defined by Skinner. Jane Sprague goes further, writing:

I resist ecopoetics. And definitions of ecopoetics. I resist it as a neat category into which one might insert my own work, like some car slipping into its slot on the freeway. It's important here to mention gas, petrol, "birth of the crude." To work towards a poetics of relation in a consciously ecological way.

Sprague devotes her essay to challenging, critiquing and complicating "ideas of ecopoetics as genre". For her, "ecopoetry" is a limitation, a carving out of an area of "special interest" in terms of subject and form. As Sprague points out, such labels and definitions also lead to exclusions, so that a poet such as Harryette

Mullen for instance, whose work is deeply relevant to many of the concerns expressed by the writers featured here, would not be seen as “ecopoetical”.

It may be worth noting that for British writers and readers in particular, “ecopoetics” is associated with Jonathan Bate’s *The Song of the Earth* (2000), a critical work which uses the term to describe a rather exclusive club of neo-romantic, male poets (with one or two modernists among them, but no contemporary innovative poets). This in itself puts some women readers on their guard. Bate, Skinner, Cooperman and Arigo (in this issue) emphasize the root of “eco-” in the Greek word *oikos*, the home or dwelling place and thus the term “ecopoetics” as a making, through poetry, of the dwelling place or home. Here is Skinner’s meditation on this theme:

“Eco” here signals – no more, no less – the home we share with several million other species, our planet Earth. “Poesis” is used as *poesis* or making, not necessarily to emphasize the critical over the creative act (nor vice versa). Thus ecopoetics: a house making. (Skinner, 2001, 7)

This emphasis on the domestic space of “home”, the language of house-making, rather sticks in my throat. Frances Presley notes (in this issue) that, in Bate’s book, reference to the *oikos* as the “woman’s domain” sits alongside a return to “the principles of Romanticism in which the feminine male can speak for both genders” (Bate 76). This is not of course true of Skinner’s *ecopoetics* journal. Yet, despite Skinner’s emphasis on sharing the planet cited above, the home-making analogy is still uncomfortably domestic in its connotations, suggesting the human’s residence on earth as the centre of the universe. By metaphoric extension, the human ecopoetical product (poem or critical work) is also seen as the all-encompassing centre. For Matthew Cooperman “The poem is a house that *centers* our lives and our words” (my emphasis) (186). He sees the mapping of locations a poem enacts as “radii that extend from the poem” and are both *centrifugal* and *centripetal*” (my emphasis) (187). All this centring of experience in the “house” of the poem is reminiscent for me of the biblical Adam creating *his* dwelling place, naming *his* wife and *his* animals in the manner of the patriarchal Jehovah. This reading suggest that the physical world is “*our*” (or perhaps just *his*?) house above all else.

Linda Russo uses the “our” in “our planet earth” from Skinner’s definition of ecopoetics as the starting point for her essay “Writing Within: Notes on Ecopoetics as Spatial Practice”. Russo muses on the National Park sign, “You are Entering the Wilderness”:

In National Park lingo, “Wilderness” is that land we give back, so to speak, to things wild even as we set it aside for ourselves. It would have been truer if the sign had said “You are Entering our Wilderness.”

In her attention to public language here (an attention which characterises several of our contributions) we can see how Russo is worrying away at the idea that the land was “ours” to give back in the first place and yet how her language still preserves the sense of “ourselves” as distinct from the rest of the non-human world. As we have seen, it is almost impossible, at least in critical language, to imagine ourselves out of such powerful constructs as “ours”, “yours” and “mine”, yet in the creative practice of poetry we can perhaps be more radical in our approach to these powerful little pieces of language. In her current project, *echology*, a rawlings exercises a lipogrammatic constraint such as those practised by the French Oulipo movement. She confines herself to using only the sounds and letters to be found in pronouns, explaining in her writer’s notes that this is an exploration of the “English language user’s propensity towards pronoun-heavy, possessive, and humancentric syntax.” It becomes in practice a haunting howl of a piece, carrying emotional as well as intellectual power. Reading this special feature in its entirety, this is just one example of how answers to questions posed by the critical pieces seem to be proffered within the practice of the creative work.

rawlings’ piece could not be further from the poetry we find extolled by Bate who argues that it is poetic “metre itself – a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat that is “an answering to nature’s own rhythms, an echoing of the song of the earth itself” (76). This evokes of course a far more traditional poetics than that published by Skinner in his *ecopoetics* journal which raises another issue about the term itself. Is “ecopoetics” in danger of becoming the object of a custody battle between traditionalists who may argue that referential, even polemical, poetic language is central to ecopoetics and innovative poets who may argue that “poetics” itself implies an emphasis on form and the kind of critical/creative cutting edge poetry that the modernist tradition is so distinguished by. Skinner already foresees this I feel in his recent piece on ‘New Nature Writing’ in the latest issue of *ecopoetics*. Here he begins to carve up “new

nature writing” and “eco-poetics” into a “taxonomy” of four species of poetry in which issues such as the degree of reference, use of tropes, emphasis on materiality and process and the ethnopoetical are emphasized. A problem with his definitions as they currently stand is that he does not make clear which he considers to be “nature writing” and which “ecopoetry or ecopoetics”. He has usefully identified some trends here however and the process he begins is one which some of our contributors and readers may well be interested in becoming involved.

Others may throw up their hands in horror at such endless division and subdivision and simply wish to escape the classification project altogether. Skinner’s use of the word “taxonomy” does seem telling, evoking as it does the endless taxonomies of “living things” associated with nineteenth-century patrician science. Once again, the poetry offers an intriguing critique of the scientific, taxonomical process. Melanie Neilson’s powerful poem, “La Brea No. 5”, is saturated by Latinate and classificatory language exploding its elevated, somewhat sinister sibilance throughout the piece. There are many threads to be grasped from this piece, but I was drawn in particular by the play on classification as a form of consumerist ownership, a theme first brought home to me by Maggie O’Sullivan’s wonderful *Natural History in Three Incomplete Parts*. Neilson, like O’Sullivan, seems drawn to the spectacular language of classification even as she mocks its pomposity and assumption of linguistic power. The Latinate terms in Siel Ju’s Darwin poems evoke the same connotations, seeming almost to be sucking the struggling protagonist into their sphere. I read these poems as a dramatisation of the ambivalence eco-poetical writers feel in the face of Darwin’s writings. The emotive quality of this largely found text also exposes Darwin’s own feelings of powerlessness in the face of his own discoveries. An important poetic ancestor of ours, Lorine Niedecker, also wrote about Darwin using his own words in order to explore his significance to his and her own time. Whilst Niedecker made an inquiring study of encyclopedic and natural science books such as Linnaeus’ *Species Plantarum*; Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selbourne* and books by Audubon, Crèvecoeur and Fabre, she was also directly engaged with her own experience of the physical world. Her doubts about classification as a science of ownership and power are expressed in several poems, including “The Broad-leaved Arrow-head”. Perhaps this sense of balance, her own individualised interpretation of Objectivism, is one model we might explore when

considering our approach to systems of knowledge and power, botanical, literary critical, or otherwise?

I certainly see very little evidence here of poets simply taking “ecopoetics” or any other term for granted. I want to take a quick glance, in the light of Skinner’s “new nature poetry”, at some of the other terms in use. Where our contributors employ phrases such as “pastoral poetry”, “nature poetry” and “landscape poetry”, they are always qualified or in speech marks. I do think there are instances where such phrases may be appropriately used, as long as they are clearly described. I myself use the phrase “radical landscape poetry” about the work of poets who combine engagement with a particular rural or semi-rural area (usually, a less than sublime spot) with experimental poetics. I have identified a resistance in their work to the nexus of romanticism, sentimentality, nostalgia and the dualistic divide between rural and urban, cultivated and wild, natural and technological all of which characterise traditional pastoral (Tarlo 2000, 2008). Very often, the temptation, the lure to pastoral, is present within the work as a fruitful tension. This is true of Carol Watts’ poems from the emerging sequence “Zeta Landscape”. Watts set herself the task of confronting a specific farming environment through calculus and economics and juxtaposing this with close observation of the feelings evoked through encounter with landscape and animals. She opens up the world of small scale farming to an infinite number of questions, in particular questioning our notions of worth. While Watts refuses to romanticise farming, at a linguistic and sonic level, the work remains easily as beautiful and seductive as a piece of pastoral or nature poetry. Watts herself uses the phrase, “lyric nature poetry put under pressure”.

Perhaps the most significant reason why “pastoral”, “landscape” and “nature” poetry would not do as a generic or sub-generic catch-all term for the work presented here however is that all these terms perpetuate the division between rural and urban, cultivated and wild, natural and technological. To many of the poets here these separations are not only inaccurate in this largely post-wilderness world but also undesirable in a writing which tries to engage with the political significance of the environmental crisis. A striking example of this is Kathleen Miller’s “In Considering the Wild(er)ness, She, of Parking Structures” which breaks down the artificial construction of the rural/urban divide through its explorations of discourses around

parking, gender and weeds. This is not a poetry which attempts to separate rural and urban, poetical and political. Herein lies another difference between Bate's "ecopoetics" and the "ecopoetics" published here. Bate insists on a separation between ecopoetry and politics. For him "ecopoetics may properly be regarded as pre-political" as it is about the poet's experience of and "*revelation of dwelling*" (266, see also Peters and Irwin for a useful critique of Bate's use of Heideggerian notions of dwelling). He goes on:

Politics, let us remember, means 'of the *polis*', of the city. The controlling myth of ecopoetics is the myth of the pre-political, the pre-historic: it is a Rousseauesque story about imagining a state of nature prior to the fall into property, into inequality and into the city. (266)

In attempting to confine ecopoets and ecocritics to "reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth" Bate seems to trap them in a nostalgic and idealistic relationship to the world in which the city remains firmly set to one side. How different is this from Evelyn Reilly's argument here that, if we are to use the term "nature poetry" at all, there should be "a redefinition of all poetry as nature poetry – a recognition of our role as poets in a world in a continuum of crisis..." This is of course also idealistic, but it is not a retrogressive idealism, but a futuristic expansion, a statement that all poetry should be able to engage with the environment as it is now. A million miles from Bate's restricting and restraining gestures, this is closer to Sprague's feeling about the "ecopoetics" label, that it is, if anything, too containing for the poetry that the world needs to hear. She goes on to discuss some of the most interesting work around cities by contemporary women poets.

Sprague, Reilly, DuPlessis and many others here are attempting to open their poetry up to global issues and that of course includes socio-political ones. In his revision of the term "ecopoetics" Arigo notes the importance of adding the concept of "ethnopoetics" to that of "a complete ecopoetics, as humans are an integral part of the ecology". Arigo insists on the socio-political element of the poetry he admires, in particular its ability to produce a Revised Sublime in which images (such as that of 9/11) are revisited in the "context of inter-related ecological thinking". Arigo's brief reference to "ethnopoetics", the term created by Jerome Rothenberg around fifty years ago now, is an important one for ecopoetics. Rothenberg, at the end of the last century described his "focus on ancient & autochthonous cultures (often under threat of mass extinction or long since blown away" as, among other things

...a revival of the concern that we later came to call ecological, with an environment - local & global - under increasing developmental pressure, & the view - emerging from that concern - that just those cultures that were repositories of the old poetries were the models thereby for a more sane relation to the natural world & its other-than-human as well as its human inhabitants. (np)

As such, Rothenberg draws attention to the importance of safeguarding and listening to the people who inhabit environmentally threatened areas of the “fourth world”, and, most significantly though his influential anthologies, he also attempted to introduce his readers to a wider cultural range of poetry. The work of the Chilean poet and artist, Cecilia Vicuña, included in the second volume of Rothenberg’s and Joris’s *Poems for the Millenium* is particularly important to many readers of ecopoetry. He ends his talk on “Ethnopoetics at the Millenium” with a call to his readers that “our ethnopoetics will not stop with a useful but centrifugal *multiculturalism* but will push (again) toward an *intercultural* (centripetal) future” (np).

In the light of this, I was particularly glad to find a few pieces which escape the Anglo-American perspective which so often dominates academia and indeed web-based journals (though I should note that *How2* has always published special features from around the world). I was fascinated to read Latasha Diggs’ macaronic poems using one or more non-western languages. In “kantan pescado” Diggs, a sound poet and performer, explores the connection to the environment in original verses from the Chamorro people in Guam and the Mariana islands in the Pacific Ocean. She reaches out beyond her already multi-cultural experience of Harlem to imagine and engage with a different part of the world. Ann Fisher-Wirth’s “Dream Cabinet” poem can be read as a travel piece written on the island of Fogdö in Sweden, but it also reflects back and forth on Scotland, Haifa and the U.S., in particular its foreign policy, and acknowledges that “to write of peace right now is to be a tourist”. Arpine Grenier’s poetry moves with speed and style between the personal and the global perspective. a.rawlings’ and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa’s statements, written from within a Canadian and Japanese context, provide insights into their respective places of residence. The “eco” prefix then does at least signify a very evident political and global perspective for this special feature. The sheer energy and fruitfulness of the debate over “women and ecopoetics” and the

richness of the creative work I have received in response to this title has made me glad that, when Redell Olsen suggested it to me, I did not demur and elect a phrase a little less controversial.

Ecopoetics and Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is perhaps not mentioned as much as one might expect in the critical work presented here. Yet ecofeminist thinkers have explored the andocentric nature of our anthropocentric culture in ways that help us to understand where we are today and perhaps where we need to go next. What then is the resistance to ecofeminism? A sentence from Frances Presley's statement gives the clue: "Like most feminists I feel very uneasy about the identification of women with nature, in some essentialist manner". Although Presley does not explicitly associate essentialism with ecofeminism there is no doubt that many feminist critics are suspicious of ecofeminism's reclamation of the very link between women and nature that many feminists have spent years debunking. Addie Tsai for instance defines the "crisis of ecofeminism" as the fact that "women are often, unspokenly, implicitly, considered a part of the landscape". She refers of course to the dualistic equation of women with nature and men with culture so prevalent in Western culture and analysed so effectively by feminist thinkers such as H el ene Cixous.

The breaking down of dualisms, referred to explicitly by Tsai, Reilly and Fry and implicitly effected in much of the work here has of course been characteristic of women's writing in the experimental tradition and this may be seen to run counter to some of the earlier manifestations of ecofeminism. However, it is in fact central to current ecofeminist and environmental philosophy practised by critics such as Kate Soper and Val Plumwood to critique these simplistic distinctions regarding nature, culture and gender. In her particularly clear-sighted book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood has exposed the false dichotomies of the "mastery model" of oppositional dualisms, the complex differentiations of reason and nature, masculine and feminine, working towards a continuous as opposed to dichotomous model of non-hierarchical difference. Many of the poets here also explore dualisms, exposing them, denying them, re-evaluating their terms or collapsing them entirely, as is advocated by Addie Tsai:

I am most interested in composing (and reading) a poetics that merges the object with the subject without any clear distinction.... In my work, I attempt to force that merging of the natural/physical world and the emotional interior of the speaker.

Clearly ecofeminism has come a long way from essentialism since the 1970s in a journey not dissimilar to feminism's own often cited first and second waves. Recent scholarship, such as Stacy Alaimo's book, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* have contributed to a new and welcome ecofeminist scrutiny of the the language and cultural uses of place, space and environment. Building on earlier work by Annette Kolodny and Carolyn Merchant, Alaimo traces the reasons for "Feminist Theory's Flight from Nature" and argues for a return to a newly signified "undomesticated ground", freed of its domestic and gendered tropes, in which feminism can take root. Perhaps one of her most striking challenges is to articulate severe doubts about the very category of "essentialism" which, she notes, is itself predicated on the nature/culture opposition of sex and gender so ingrained into feminist theory. For Alaimo it is possible to explore the continuity between human and nature while still respecting nature's difference. Such work is undoubtedly of interest to ecopoetics, not least because Alaimo celebrates women's texts (sadly, like most ecocritics, these are confined to prose texts) that "inhabit nature in order to transform it" (13). Here is just one example of how more subtle and challenging spaces for ecofeminism are being opened up. As for mainstream feminism, poststructuralism has also been important for ecofeminism's recognition of the importance of cultural and regional differences being added to that of gender alone. Like many of the poets represented here, ecofeminists engage with third/fourth world, ethnic, racial, class and age difference when they consider people's relationship to their environment and are among the strongest advocates of environmental justice. In the future, the closeness of some current ecofeminist philosophy and practice and women's experimental ecopoetic projects may (perhaps even, should) bring these fields closer together to mutual benefit.

Nonetheless there are still ecofeminists (often, confusingly, called "radical") who confine women into "natural" roles which are problematic and restrictive and usually involve retaining the male/female nature/culture alignments but revaluing the nature/woman axis as superior. These are often associated with what Patrick Murphy calls the "sex-typing" of the planet as female through earth goddess worship or the Gaia

philosophy (Murphy 61, see also Garrard 172-5 and Alaimo 172-6). Frances Presley also sounds a note of warning when she writes about her “ironic play on the word ‘mine’ and the desire for cosmic possession which is often a feature of mysticism” in her poem “Minehead”. At the beginning of her essay on “Kristeva, Ecocriticism, and the Cult of the Virgin”, Susan Moore articulates her doubts about “Motherhood Environmentalism”, a trend associated with the maternalised image of the caring woman environmentalist. This image is linked to the cult of the sexless Virgin Mary as explored by Julia Kristeva. Moore argues that aesthetic, sensual and experiential elements of women’s environmental experience have been marginalised. Moore’s research is valuable precisely because she attempts to engage with women’s experience as it is in order to advance her theoretical position. So often, critics work the other way around. The visionary experiences of “an incredibly very very large feminine”, in particular in its Marian manifestation, that Moore’s interviewee, Amy, describes are reminiscent of those described by H.D. in her modernist epic, *Trilogy* and other texts. Although some materialist feminists may deplore the interest in mystical relationships with the earth that are commonly experienced and described in ecofeminist circles, to ignore them is to cut off one realm of experience that may change human attitudes to environment. In her working notes, Ann Fisher-Wirth describes the exploration of “coming-into-being-of-consciousness” connecting this to “knowing the more-than-human world” and writing “poems that share the *chi* of trees and water”. Two lines from her “Dream Cabinet” read “watch the light on water, day after day,/ empty out of my everlasting self-regard”. Whilst, for some writers, environmentalism is all about accepting difference between human and non-human, for many of the poets here, it is about the radical imaginings of finding connections, not least in order to foster responsibility. Such work may also go some way towards articulating what Moore (via Sara Beardsworth) describes as the “level of female experience deprived of discourse”, the maternal body that is “confined *with nature* in fantasy”. In analysing the way in which women and nature have been associated, be that in order to vilify, silence or worship, both, we can travel far. One conclusion I came to having read Moore’s piece is that it is possible to explore feminised mysticism while remaining cognisant of its social and cultural origins and effects.

However, there are dangers in separating the mystical, spiritual or simply mental realm from the physical. Moore’s interviewee, Amy asks, “how would I ever make a

connection between the spiritual and the sexual?" I am reminded of H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, written in 1919, in which, writing about the spiritual concept of the "over-mind", the writer abruptly, startlingly, asks: "Where does the body come in?/ What is the body?" (51) Amy links her experience to "patterns in the body" to which she has access as a "rebalancer". We cannot avoid the relevance of the physical body to eco-poetic concerns. Firstly, because the Platonic division between body and spirit or mind which H.D. was working her way through and ultimately against in *Notes on Thought and Vision* is one of a set of dualisms which allow us to distinguish ourselves as cultural beings from our own bodies and from nature. As we have seen above in the discussion of ecofeminism, if ecopoetics is to change or challenge the relationship human beings have to their environment, we need to challenge such deep-seated dualisms and to recognise our own mammalian bodies. Marcella Durand writes about the "prepositional mystery, whether we are *in* or *of* nature":

We live *in* nature, but are not *of* it, because why? Because we are human? Is what we make (manufacture) intrinsically set off from nature, because it came from our head and hands (and machines, with machines begetting machines)? Where does the line between us and nature begin and end? ... These are questions that poets can bring to poetry, and have been bringing for centuries... (Durand, 2007)

Experimental work, in which the symbolic is infused with the semiotic, to use Kristeva's terms, might help us untangle these intricate threads. Poetry is not only, though it is also, the key to culture. Evelyn Reilly's "Broken Water", published here, is a performance piece in which language referring to nature, female biological experience and water are interweaved, to use her own term. It seems to me to put pressure on the body/mind or physical/spiritual dualism as well as the biological essentialism versus social/cultural constructivism division which has been so dominant in feminism and ecofeminism. In keeping the challenge to the culturally constructed nature of language central to her piece, whilst simultaneously refusing to elide the woman's physical body, Reilly produces a witty and disturbing piece of work. It is notable that Reilly also preserves a sense of what she calls in her working notes the "actual bodies of water", including their polluted state, within this piece. She sets this against the cultural constructions of nature and water through, not only language, but various manifestations

of high art and popular culture. Reilly's doll, the classic gendered artefact, figures almost as an explorer of the polluted and gendered world through which she wanders, "examining the evidence" in a way that the children who figure in the poem cannot. Reilly's use of the phrase "the word" into her piece keeps the deconstructive attitude to language alive.

Both Reilly and Miller, through similar techniques, demonstrate that it is through the little words we use every day that our structures are held in place. Kathleen Miller's frequent and deliberately intrusive use of the word "she" in her poem, "In Considering the Wild(er)ness, She, of Parking Structures", destabilises our construction of gender, in particular in relation to spaces urban, natural and liminal. The "she" in this piece is slippery, yet strangely substantial. Again, we can read "she" as a language quest figure with an inquisitorial approach to gender. The confounding of grammar that "she" enacts once again shows the linguistically innovative to be a force that works through the incremental force of resistance to current orthodoxies as fixed in language and culture. The wild weeds prove liberatory to the form of the poem, as well as to our reading of it.

Ecopoetical forms and processes

Certain key forms lend themselves to ecopoetics and can be seen in action here. Perhaps the first we might think of is that of writing with an emphasis on the visual and spatial, whether you call it open form writing, projective verse or visual poetics. Anna Reckin's statement re-affirms the importance of open form writing to her own work and many of the writers included here would agree with the significance of Olson's and Duncan's concepts of "the primacy of space" and "the opening of the field." Many of these writers would argue that the more dynamic, open form style of writing, which makes use of the whole page-space to create, is more capable of reflecting and engaging with landscape, that the open form page-space is closer to an open field or a moorland or a hillside than closed forms of poetry. It is also more open to the reflection, or even embodiment, of the vast, complex, inter-related network of vegetation, insect and animal life that we call ecology and to intelligent reflection upon it. There is no room here to analyse the poetry published in depth, but I would like to briefly draw attention to the preponderance and diversity of open form techniques employed here, in particular Kathleen Miller's one line pages in which words are compacted together centrally and

intensely; the importance of the use of spaces within the line in Carol Watts, Melanie Neilson and Marcella Durand and Tina Darragh; Frances Presley's overlapping lines full of complex soundplay and use of left, right and centred justification of text; Ann Fisher-Wirth's use of incremental overlapping phrases (especially in sections 4, 5, 15, 17 and 20 of "Dream Cabinet"); the extraordinary scattering of fragments across the pages of Dorothy Alexander's texts; the juxtaposition of languages across the space of the page in Latasha Diggs' "kanton pescado" and Rachel Blau Duplessis's use of space to push the trajectory of the poem onward, even as certain emboldened lines jump out at the reader, literally disturbing the mental flow. These are pages which engage with the flow, the breath, the body and the sound of landscape, intelligent thought and emotional response (of writer and reader) through their dynamic spaces.

Visually orientated poets are always pushing at the possibilities of open form writing, not least, as Reckin is, asking questions which interrogate the idea of landscape as poem, poem as landscape. The link cannot be assumed and open form of course is not limited to this one direction. It has been explored, interrogated and expanded by poets such as Kathleen Fraser and Susan Howe, both of whom are acknowledged by Frances Presley as she describes her own experiments with visual poetics, particularly the grid, in her landscape-based poetry. It is no surprise in this context of visual experimentation that several of our contributors are engaged in creating artists' books and collaborating with visual artists. a.rawlings's *Wide slumber for lepidopterists* (Coach House Books, 2006) won the Alcuin Award for Book Design. Readers of *How2* may remember Anna Reckin's collaboration with artist Paulette Myers-Rich, *Broder*, which appeared in *How2* 1:5 (March 2001). Frances Presley has collaborated with the artist Irma Irsara, most notably in her volume, *automatic cross stitch* (London: The Other Press, 2000).

The importance of place and matter to much of this work is also worth noting. For some this practice involves what Presley identifies as "writing on site", a practice in which the specific time and improvisational interaction with place in the moment is as important as place. Presley's poems incorporate place and date references into the composition. Carol Watts' working notes stress that, amongst all its complexities, her piece is centred on a "particular Welsh hill farm during lambing time". The situating of Linda Russo's essay on a porch, with finches flitting in and out of their nest above her, is central to the form and content of her piece on "emplaced writing" as eco-poetics. Anna Reckin puts

this succinctly when she writes, “‘who’s telling the story’ is less important than where it is happening”. This shifts attention from the poet, thereby challenging the equation of environmental poetry with traditional lyric. As Marcella Durand and Tina Darragh write in their notes to “Deep eco pré”:

From Ponge, the collaborators took as their poetic practice the tracking of ‘things’ in terms of other ‘things’ in order to move away from the anthropocentric ‘nature poem’ as a representation of the poet’s ‘deep dark interiors’.

Here then we find the lyric “I” of nature poetry demoted in the quest for “Poems whose authority is not that of the dominant, domineering ‘I’”, as Ann Fisher-Wirth describes it. This may not seem so new to readers of women’s experimental work, but the eco-poetic resistance of the lyric I is often very different from the previous century’s obsession with what, in poststructuralist discourse, might be called “destabilising the subject”. In modernist work in particular, this was so often (and fascinatingly so) still a very human obsession, an examination of subjectivity in the context of other levels of the self or other human beings. Here we attempt to take that complex model of self outside human concerns and, in particular, as Evelyn Reilly describes it in her working notes, to “finally abolish the aesthetic use of nature as mirror for human narcissism.” In much of this work, the inner self/outer world distinction so dear to nature poetry through the ages has become outdated and perhaps even irrelevant rather in the same way as many of the dualisms I have mentioned throughout this introduction have done. Certainly in Skinner’s exploration of Berssenbrugge’s “Pollen” the barriers between the two seem porous and subject to constant change. He writes that “Just as Berssenbrugge’s composition departs from a theatrical staging of inner drama, she confounds distinctions between ‘inner’ emngrossment and ‘outer’ reality, between natural and social frames.”

In Durand and Darragh’s work, the sense of the body polluted is another more frightening way in which inner/outer distinctions are eroded. Here it is everyone, not just the poets themselves, who is exposed. It is notable that the avoidance of the lyric “I” also involves a shift towards a more communal rather than individual human perspective, one in which we see the human animal’s own endangering of itself alongside the rest of the non-human residents of earth. Once again, we begin to think globally, as well as locally. The micro and macro meet. Sprague remarks on this in

Juliana Spahr's "intentionally dilated and therefore utterly inclusive use of "we" in her work. Arigo emphasizes Spahr's notion of the "interconnectedness of individual via breath" as central to her "ecological perception". Once again, as Arigo points out, Spahr's lungs in *this connection of everyone with lungs* are clearly breathing polluted air. This shift towards the communal may involve the dislocation of the "lyric eye" as well as "I", as Presley elaborates in "Common Pink Metaphor". In her poetry, Presley attempts to emphasize "the plurality and the commonality" of seeing in the landscape.

Another form of dynamic writing which destabilises the single sovereign speaker in poetry, is of course collaboration, a practice which many of the women writers who publish in *How2* have engaged in at one time or another. Presley is a poet known for her collaborative work and indeed her "Stone settings" published here are part of a larger collaboration with Tilla Brading. Ju describes her Darwin poems as "both collaborations with and re-workings of poetry by Ava Chin, who reworked Darwin's words to create her own juxtapositions". Within this structure, the collaborating partners are as equal as possible in their contribution. As their working notes explain, Tina Darragh and Marcella Durand have worked together for some years now on the project *Deep eco pré*, an extraordinary work combining collaboration with the use of two key found texts, one which stimulates their thinking about poetics, Francis Ponge's *Making of the Pre*, and one which challenges them to think about deep ecology and ecological activism, Zimmerman's *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity*. Ponge's original French also finds its way into their text, pushing their linguistic explorations further. In the criss-crossing textual meeting of Darragh, Durand, Ponge and Zimmerman we find a poetic and deeply philosophical text engaging equally carefully with poetics and linguistics as with ecology and environment. Like DuPlessis, Durand and Darragh employ questions to stimulate the reader to engage with their material.

Is collaboration a particularly feminine or feminist practice? While I sympathise with the resistance to sex-stereotyping still so prevalent in contemporary culture and so resisted by mainstream feminism, yet I had expected some discussion of the "difference" of women's writing in the context of *How2*. I was interested that that only one contributor had made a claim for such "difference", and that tentatively. Note the parenthesis used by Arpine Grenier in the following quotation from her working notes: "Perhaps the (female) principles of inclusion and process rather than rejection or

criticism better address and deal with life issues, whether personal, regional or global”. Her comments raise the contentious and imminently debatable issue of whether this particular ecopoetics is also a distinctively feminine poetics. I leave that for postcards to come.

When I began to receive submission for this feature, I was struck by the number of pieces working with found texts ranging from Darwin to contemporary news reports. I decided to form a section specifically focusing on this work, not least because I found the diversity of techniques employed fascinating. Obviously the use of found text in the modernist tradition is not a new development yet it seems to me that some of these writers are pushing the practice further and are consciously engaging in it as a form of eco-practice, whether this be in a playful or serious spirit. As in collaborative work, there is a dynamism in poetry using found words as we point to, draw attention to, textual material other than our own, be it in homage or in a spirit of satire. Energy is produced from the meeting of *their* words with *our* words or, in totally found poems, simply in our arrangement, spatial form or structure. Siel Ju and Janis Butler Holm both create a dynamism across the centuries with their pieces using text from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see above for discussion of Ju). Holm (in an email to me) described the prose poems of “Seminar” as “reverse collages”, a term I find very suggestive. Here is a delicate touch in which it is omission that creates meaning. In leaving out the nouns from these passages from eminent nature writers the verbs of penetration and insemination leap out at us and provide their own gendered, cultural critique of the pieces Holm has found.

Recycling text does seem to me to have ethical implications, if not the exact same ones as recycling cans, bottles and plastics. The recycling of texts is about preservation of the valued resources of previous writing as well as being about acknowledgement of a world beyond the self, somewhat akin to the collaborative process. I am reminded of Anya Lewin’s “Infinite Fracture” published in *How2* 1:5 (March 2001) in which the reader travels from web reference to web reference and quotation to quotation in a complex spider web of a journey between valuable insights netted together with Lewin’s own meditations. It is important that poetry and poetics reach beyond an inclusive self-referentiality and the best avant-garde poetries have always done this. The

criticism of the experimental poetry world as elitist and insular has always been ill-judged in terms of its poetry, if not always its publication and promotion practice.

The world beyond the self is not all however about acknowledging valuable text; it is also about how we engage with the wider, sometimes oppressive, textual world around us. As Joritz-Nakagawa points out in her statement here, it is sometimes important to resist the over-simplifications and deceptions present in media representations and public speech. Here, in the recycled section of work, we see poets actively, sometimes savagely, engaging with a wide range of discourses and voices. Cynthia Hogue draws attention to her own reference to “domains other than the poetic” in her working notes. She draws material from politics, journalism, letters and fine art practice. Hogue is not the only writer to make use of print media sources. It is significant that several of the poets published here have chosen to work with “the vast plethora of news that washes over us”, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes it in her working notes. Our understanding of ecological disaster as a global phenomenon is particularly dependent on media representation. Joritz-Nakagawa’s statement piece vividly draws a picture of her frustration, rage and trauma in the face of such images. Yet, aside from a sense of helplessness, there is also, as I implied at the beginning of this introduction, a danger of desensitisation in the face of mass media “information”. Poets such as Hogue, DuPlessis and Alexander re-present this news material in innovative ways in order to confront us with important global and ecological stories, or with “information with feeling”, as DuPlessis describes it. In taking news headlines and making a “larger, darker font size underline our condition” DuPlessis resists the washing over effect. The headlines, in connection with each other, build into a bleak poetic picture of world politics. Hogue’s poem making use of print media is a more playful example. Reading her set of poems as a group, they feel almost painfully haunted by hope, by the fantasy of an alternative life. They are works of radical imagining, hence the “as if” of the line, “as if hardy/plants in peace took root”.

Alexander’s manipulation of print media through her word extraction and worming techniques has a very different effect again. As she herself says in her working notes the effect is to focus attention on the materiality of the word or indeed the individual letter. The fragmented appearance and feel of her work suggests to me a story that cannot be fully told or understood, but which we must attempt to grasp, to piece together, to be

responsible for. There is a playfulness to Alexander's work, as the first few words of her own text, following immediately on from the grave media citation regarding global warming, demonstrate. Opening her piece with the visceral, if bathetic response, "ugh", Alexander moves on to a satirical side reference to Virgil's "I sing of arms and of the man". On the one hand this strikes one as comic in its juxtaposition with "ugh" and its sheer seeming irrelevance and yet, perhaps, it is not so irrelevant after all. I begin to think of images of the human relationship with the natural world as it is so often portrayed as a war, first to conquer and exploit natural resources and then to solve the environmental crisis (all those headlines which see this as the greatest, latest (perhaps last), battle that needs to be fought). "oops" and "exit" serve to demonstrate the power of linguistic-led satire in the face of media representation and actual events.

Like Alexander, a.rawlins uses a single found text in order to generate her poems from the larger project *echology*. rawlings takes a single line, "Wolves evolve" from Christian Bök's lipogrammatic novel, *Eunoia*. Both writers then exercise a series of self-created restraints (including word searches, cut-up, repetition patterns) in order to generate text. rawlings describes this as working with "text as an environment (as its own ecosystem, microcosm) and ... text in its environment (context)." For Alexander this sort of found experiment is important for the "non-hierarchical and inclusive nature of its processes". For both writers then it seems that the use of text from other sources contributes to their pretty radical attempts to move outside of earlier notions of the poet as original creative genius and towards a writing in which language itself becomes opened up rather as open form writers open up the space on the page. For rawlings and Alexander, the page is an open space too, but language itself is a whole wide textual environment also. In both writers, the playful spirit of Gertrude Stein seems alive; both their submissions are simultaneously humorous and serious in their linguistic play.

The final point we may wish to consider in a feature like this is what this eco-poetical poetry might achieve. The most Jonathan Bate thinks is possible in his definition of eco-poetics is to reduce our sense of alienation from our environment. He remains focused on the poet's experience of the world and how that may be revealed. As Michael Peters and Ruth Irwin point out, Bate's argument is dependent on "the radical separation of discourses – theoretical/practical, poetic/political" (Peters and Irwin, 5; Bate 269). They quote Bate: "eco-poetics renounces the mastery of enframing discourses

and listens instead to the voice of art”, noting that he denies the possibility of a politics of nature. Conversely, Peters and Irwin argue that “we can talk unambiguously of a politics of nature that comes into being at the point when human beings become aware, simultaneously, of the adverse ecoeffects of industrial and capitalist practices and, collectively, of their power to reverse these effects” (6). The poetry published and discussed here erodes away at these “theoretical/practical, poetic/political” distinctions as it reaches out into a far wider arena of discourses and experiences, emotions and ideas than Bate’s model implies. As such, it is not afraid to make bold claims for the place of poetry in the world As Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her working notes, writes:

Will anything teach us? A poem with both affect and information has as much chance as anything to give rise to understanding, via an incantation of words that turns the mind, returns our thinking, makes us face our world, and, perhaps even motivates us to political action.

Thanks to all and thanks to our contemporaries who are important to our thinking and writing, but who appear here only indirectly: Rae Armantrout; Tilla Brading; Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge; Amy-Sara-Carroll; Jayne Cortez; Brenda Coultas; Laura Elrick; Kathleen Fraser; Carla Harryman; Lyn Hejinian; Mary Rising Higgins; Erica Hunt; Brenda Ijima; Susan Johanknecht; Bhunu Kapil; Joanne Kyger; Dorothy Trujillo Lusk; Helen MacDonald; Bernadette Mayer; Wendy Mulford; Akilah Oliver; Catalina Parra; Julie Patton; Lillianna Porter; Maggie O’Sullivan; Claudia Rankine; Joan Retallack; Denise Riley; Francesca da Rimini; Lisa Robertson; Kaia Sand; Leslie Scalapino; Susan Schultz; Eleni Sikelianos; Zoe Skoulding; Juliana Spahr; Monica de la Torre; Cecilia Vicuña. This list, compiled by all contributors, is also of course a list of “further reading”, as if all this were not enough....

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