

REGARDING THE EARTH: ECOLOGICAL VISION IN WORD & DEED

Editors' Note

This bumper issue of *AJE* arose from the 2012 ASLEC-ANZ Biennial conference, hosted by Monash and RMIT universities, with the support of Monash Research in Literary Studies and RMIT's School of Art. Following on from our previous conference, which was held in Launceston in 2010 under the theme of 'Sounding the Earth: Music, Language and Acoustic Ecology' this conference initiated the investigation of the senses as a key figure for reflecting upon human relations with, and representations of, non-human others and more-than-human environments. 'Regarding the Earth: Ecological Vision in Word and Vision' invited participants to consider the ecological implications of different ways of perceiving, imagining, valuing and representing Earth, whether understood as planet, place or collective, comprising a multiplicity of more-than-human entities, agencies and processes.

To 'regard' the Earth is, to begin with, to make it a matter of concern. For citizens of the global 'North' (including most inhabitants of this 'great southern land') this involves a concerted effort to overcome that peculiar forgetfulness that is fostered by the prevailing ecosocial conditions of industrial modernity: above all, of the impacts of our high-consumption, fossil-fuelled life-ways on frequently far-distant others and environments, along with our own vulnerability to dynamic physical forces, which are incompletely understood and outside human control. Moving beyond mere recollection, the challenge of 'regarding the Earth' might also be seen to comprise an ethical dimension, namely, that of acquiring greater respect for non-human others, animate or inanimate, naturally arising or humanly manufactured (or, like most things these days, a combination of both). Most obviously, however, to 'regard' the earth is to look upon it, rendering one or more things of earth an object of the gaze. Unsurprisingly, then, of the seventy or so papers presented over the course of a packed few days, around a third pertained to the visual arts, and this issue opens with a group of essays based on a selection of those presentations.

The cover image for this edition of *AJE* is a work by Melbourne-based artist Harry Nankin whose reflection on the non-human world through the patient artistic processes of camera-less photography reveal the fragility of the Bogong moth as a keystone species of the Victorian alpine region. Nankin's article is followed by Linda Williams's extension of her plenary paper in a wider questioning of the current critical status of environmental art as an effective conduit of public communication on the global issue of climate change. Williams focuses on the 'Spatial Dialogues' international art project addressing the cultural meaning of water in the Asia Pacific region, and this article is followed by Charles Dawson's discussion of the theme of water in his account of how contemporary video installation art from New Zealand affectively reveals the vital significance and poetry of rivers. In the next article Luke Fischer draws poetic correspondences between the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and the paintings of Franz Marc, particularly in the ways

they articulate biosemiotic encounters between human and nonhuman animal life. This section on visual culture then concludes with Andrew Goodman's theoretical exploration of the environmental ethics of art and performative events.

In addition to the formal papers presented at the conference, attendees were also treated to a poetry reading and discussion, featuring the work of Miriel Lenore, Louise Crisp and Susan Hawthorne, and named in honour of one of Australia's pioneering ecocritics and foundation members of the ASLEC-ANZ Advisory Board, Bruce Bennett. Poetry and poetics also featured in a number of the scholarly presentations, as in the second segment of articles in this special issue.

We kick off with Cassandra O'Loughlin's ecocritical examination of the work of nineteenth-century Australian poet, Charles Harpur, followed by John Stockfeld's philosophical reflection on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, inflected by his rendering of Heideggerian ecopoetics. Next up is Stuart Cooke's discussion of Chilean poet Leonel Lienlaf's songpoetry in relation to the oral traditions of both Lienlaf's Mapuche heritage and Australian Aboriginal culture. This section closes with a hybrid piece by Susan Pyke, which conjoins lyrical life-writing with philosophical reflection, informed (among other things) by the onto-poetics of Australian ecophilosopher Freya Mathews, who was one of the plenary speakers at the conference.

The final segment of this issue features articles addressed to works of narrative fiction, beginning with Deborah Jordan's ecocritical reconsideration of the work of two novels by Australian authors of the inter-war years, Vance Palmer and Katherine Susannah Prichard. The remaining articles in this segment are all devoted to works of science fiction that regard the Earth from the perspective of an imagined future of ecosocial collapse. First up is Andrew Milner's examination of Australian author George Turner's climate change dystopia, *The Sea and Summer* (1987), set largely in Melbourne's inundated bayside suburb of Elwood (where Milner himself lives), two parts set in the mid twenty-first century, and a frame narrative set a thousand years later, with a far-future coda featuring a utopian community living in the Dandenongs. Milner recently published a monograph on science fiction, which is reviewed in this issue.

Milner's article is followed by Burcu Kayisci's analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) as works of 'comic apocalypse' (a designation that holds good also for the third book in this trilogy, *MaddAddam*, which appeared too recently to be included in Kayisci's discussion). The final article in this segment, and the issue as a whole, is Emma Nicoletti's consideration of the filmic narrative, *12 Monkeys* (1996), directed by Terry Gilliam, in the philosophical frame of Gilles Deleuze's concept of time as repeated difference and the ecological understanding of 'thinking big' put forward by Timothy Morton. Morton gave one of two keynotes at the conference, the other having been presented by Ursula Heise on the engaging topic of animals in children's animated cinema.

This collection of papers in the third volume of AJE brings together new perspectives on how we regard the earth through the words, images and sounds that are emerging as the

new cultural contours of the Anthropocene. *AJE* is now a well-recognised Australasian journal in the field of ecocriticism and cultural ecology, and the editors of this edition would like to acknowledge the work of CA. Cranston, both for her invaluable assistance in the production of this issue and, as the general editor of *AJE*, in ensuring its continuation as a significant contribution to the field.

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[Continuing the theme of investigating of the senses as a key figure for reflecting upon human/non-human relations and environments, The Fifth Biennial Conference of The Association for the Study of Literature, Environment and Culture—Australia and New Zealand (ASLEC-ANZ) is titled ‘Affective Habitus: New Environmental Histories of Botany, Zoology and Emotions’. To be held 19-21 June 2014, Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra]