

Composting Culture:

Literature, Nature, Popular Culture, Science

University of Worcester

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Abstracts

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Plenary Sessions

'Bringing in the Trash: The Cultural Ecology of Dada'

Professor Jed Rasula, Helen S Lainer Distinguished Professor at the University of Georgia

Commonly misconstrued as a nihilist gesture of defiance and a protest against the self-destructive paroxysm of the First World War, Dada has continuing relevance now as we approach its centenary in 2016. What's relevant is the cultural ecology central to the art of Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber, Hannah Höch and Max Ernst in particular. These artists largely abstained from the inherited materials and practices of the high art tradition, working instead with the readily available flotsam of industrial civilization and, in the case of Schwitters, literally bringing trash from the streets into the artwork. I will consider the ethics of practices that make do with existing material, repurposing and recycling as a strategic means of breaking the stranglehold of "originality" and uniqueness that continues to offer misleading models of human agency.

'Decompiculture: Decomposition of Culture and Cultures of Decomposition'

Professor Thierry Bardini, Université de Montréal

Looking at various contemporary artistic, literary and technological practices, the present contribution will attempt to describe in some details the present pervasiveness of junk and recycling as cultural tropes, or even as "signatures" (Agamben) of our time--that I have characterized as the fourth age of capitalism in *Junkware* (Bardini, 2011). Timothy G. Myles, an entomologist at the University of Toronto, coined the term *decompiculture* in 1993 to refer to "the growing or culturing of decomposer organisms by humans." Here I will consider decompiculture in the literal and figurative senses.

First, I will examine the decompicultural work of Jae Rhim Lee, a Korean-American artist who proposes, in her *Infinity Burial Project*, a set of practices consisting of cultivating decomposing organisms. It will lead me to wonder whether the human (dead) body is not, actually, the ultimate junk.

Second, I will describe the social and technological apparatus of urban composting culture, via the example of my own city, Montreal. Here, I shall be concerned with urban organic waste and make the case for a relational or ecological understanding of the accursed share (Bataille); I will also question the economic viability and the ideological undercurrents of these practices.

And finally, third, I will look at a variety of literary treatments of these questions, from early poems like Walt Whitman 1856 "This Compost" to the junk literature of Philip K. Dick and William Burroughs and more contemporary speculative fictions from the UK *Interzone* (e.g. Ian Lee) and *Collapse* (e.g. China Mieville).

'Adam Smith vs. Adam Bede: Work, Craft and Environment in a Green Economy'

Professor Molly Scott Cato, Roehampton University

The efficiency of the capitalist mode of production has been argued on the basis of specialization of tasks: this was one of the earliest insights of the 'scientific' approach to economics and has since been developed in Taylorist and post-Taylorist production methods. While attention has been paid to the social consequences of deskilling and the division of labour in work, the issue of the environmental consequences has been less widely considered. In this paper I undertake a phenomenological analysis of the process of work through comparing craft and industrial production, represented by Adam Smith and his example of production in the pin factory versus Adam Bede, the skilled carpenter of George Eliot's novel. I explore the disconnection that arises from the separation of work from the local natural environment, and examine the way that craftwork might permit a re-embedding that is necessary if we are to become ecological citizens living productive lives within sustainable and convivial communities. I hope to make a deeper argument that work can help to bring us to a more secure form of knowledge, that it is precisely the engagement with the material world through craft work that allows us to escape from the fruitless dispute between different epistemological positions, what Ingold (2010: 95) calls the 'endless shuttling back and forth between the mind and the material world'.

Themed Session

'Compiling the Compost Bins: Exploring New Forms of British and American Ecopoetry through the Anthologising Process'

Ann Fisher-Wirth, University of Mississippi

Laura-Gray Street, Randolph College, Lynchburg, Virginia

Harriet Tarlo, Sheffield Hallam University

In recent decades, both poets and literary critics have responded to the environmental crisis in their work. The anthologiser's work is somewhere between the two; she is in a unique position to explore this new sense of environmental awareness through a close examination of the forms and language of poetry as it is being produced now. In this session, three editors consider the evolving nomenclatures "environmental poetry," "ecopoetry," "ecopoetics," through the lens of our editorial experience. Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street are co-editors of *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, forthcoming in 2013 from Trinity University Press. Harriet Tarlo edited a special feature on "Women and Eco-Poetics" for *How2* Vol 3: No 2

(http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/index.html) as well as *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* for Shearsman Press in 2011.

We pay particular attention to composting as a pertinent model and metaphor for poetry, poetic formal practices, and the creative process of many poets. The process of compiling *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, has been its own kind of composting. Its initial, 130-page section presents poetry from Whitman to 1960; this "brown," or historical layer is followed by a 400-page layer of "green," or contemporary poetry. The poems and poets Fisher-Wirth and Street include are highly varied, and their broad lens for "ecopoetry" helps us to re-see poems not necessarily written as ecopoems.

Furthermore, the process of creating the book has involved a continual amalgamation and transformation, a "composting," of theories and tastes; the two editors have received and considered feedback from editors at the press, outside readers, and associates at conferences and in conversation. As Jed Rasula identified in his 2002 volume, *This Compost*, the American modernist tradition has its own "ecological imperatives". In her critical, editorial and creative studies of British and American ecopoetic and radical landscape poetry, Harriet Tarlo has considered open form,

found text and field poetics as very specific kinds of environmental and “recycling” practices within this tradition.

Poetry has always been closely associated with place, landscape and nature; perhaps these new forms and terms can be conceived as the biochemical aspect of these associations.

Artist's Talk

“It begins with a line in space: drawing and writing in landscape”

Harriet Tarlo, Sheffield Hallam University

Judith Tucker, University of Leeds

The poet, Harriet Tarlo, and artist, Judith Tucker, will show a selection of their Tributaries project comprising of monochrome drawings and poems-for-the-wall at the Composting Culture conference. In our evening talk, we will reflect on whether inter-disciplinary collaborative practice might be another form of composting culture, a way in which we might explore a more open, environmentally aware engagement with landscape and place. We reflect on how a collaborative practice might disturb and disrupt our understanding of both temporal and spatial relations with place.

We begin by introducing our two-year collaborative project, “Tributaries”, in which we are currently visiting and re-visiting a small local area of land in the Holme Valley, a place haunted by industrial and farming history, but now regarded as recreational semi-wilderness. We shall talk about how our work attempts to embody the process, movement and change that we see in the intricacies of the tributaries as they fall and flow into each other. We ask whether it possible that, in consideration of such micro and marginal processes, we can find resistance to the current “dominant culture of materialism, bellicosity, bigness/bestness, and fame” (Rachel Blau DuPlessis)?

We are both interested in whether it is possible to escape what the American poet Charles Olson has called “the lyrical interference of the individual as ego”, interference which has been ever-present in artistic and writing practices of the past. For Harriet Tarlo, this involves an ambivalent engagement with Romantic traditions of walking and writing and inspiration from Modernist (particularly Objectivist) ways of seeing. Judith Tucker engages in a similarly subtle disturbance of eighteenth-century Grisaille techniques through drawing that knows of photography and a radical revisiting of Neo-Romantic approaches to landscape.

How can drawing and poetry in conversation with each other, even as they battle with nostalgic forms and practices, present an audience with fresh perspectives on a specific place and the sense of the local itself? The talk will include readings of a few of the longer poems which are not on view. We should like this to be a relaxed dialogue and will be open to questions and discussion about the work and our reflections on it after the event.

Panels

1. Forests and cities

"Time spirals out of seed": dendrochronology and modern British poetry'

Amy Cutler, Royal Holloway, University of London

This paper will examine the linguistic tropes of the forest as reworked by late twentieth century and twenty first century British experimental poets. It will consider the 'composting' of legal, economical, political, botanical, curatorial, archival and lyrical discourses about the forest into particular poetic texts. Starting with a close look at the geometrical and mathematical lexis used to describe woodland in the work of the New Forest born poet Peter Larkin (*Leaves of Field, Terrain Seed Scarcity*), the paper will trace his conscious links with two European texts concerned with language philosophy in the model of the forest, Francis Ponge's *Notebook of the Pine Woods* and Andrea Zanzotto's *Book of Woodland Manners*, and their use in his dynamic composition of the environment.

I will then focus on how this composing process marks the configuration of the forest as a temporal space. This will involve overviewing the use of archaic forest references by the poets Eric Mottram (*Windsor Forest*) and Bill Griffiths (*The Great North Forest*), but also honing in on the use of tense in texts which deliberately take on the trope of forest as memorial and as synchronic space. There will be a close analysis of Zoe Skoulding's poem 'In the forest where they fell', in which history is presented as a fertile, vegetative space, and the forest a living archive of cross-fertilised time periods. I will finish by looking at the use of war-time archival voices in Edmund Hardy's *Forest: An Archive*. These readings will be presented in the light of the work of cultural geographers Owain Jones, Judith Tsouvalis and Stephen Daniels on the social constructs which shape the policy and literature of the British forest.

"Cities come and go like forests": Roy Fisher, Zoë Skoulding and urban ecocriticism'

Louise Chamberlain, University of Nottingham

Both Zoë Skoulding and Roy Fisher are exemplary in their poetic representations of intersections between the natural and the urban. This paper will argue that Skoulding and Fisher are part of a larger movement of contemporary nature poetry that transverses the natural-urban binary, as they represent what Maria Kaika calls 'the city of flows'. Like Kaika, Fisher and Skoulding's poetry interrogates the notion that the city is merely an urban construct; instead they present it as also natural, cultural, material, and social. Second-wave non-dualist ecocriticism has already begun the process of considering a wider range of literary texts that go beyond nature writing: here, I extend this progress of 'urban ecocriticism' into contemporary poetry as I re-consider the dialectic categories of 'urban poetry' and 'nature poetry'.

With an emphasis on J. E. Malpas's notion of 'place experience', this paper combines both ecocriticism and cultural geography in order to re-examine how Fisher's preoccupation with the urban spaces of Birmingham in *Birmingham River* are mapped onto an underlying presence of nature as a means of representing urban history. I will consider how Skoulding transforms her representations of city-space in *Remains of a Future City* from mapped, singular place, to plural urban-natural 'flows' perhaps best exhibited in her 'dual places' poems. This paper, then, considers 'urban environments' in poetry to be important for ecocriticism and cultural geography: do we need a re-categorisation of contemporary nature poetry?

'The given and the made: Zoë Skoulding's Future Cities'

Lucy Collins, University College Dublin

Zoë Skoulding's 2008 collection *Remains of a Future City*, explores the radical instability of built spaces and their complex relationship to the human and ecological dynamics of past and future. Layering natural and man-made phenomena in these poems, Skoulding explores their convergence by means of a displaced subjectivity: 'a dream/of my body/hovering above/its mapped co-ordinates//cities come and go like forests'. Such unsettling perspectives, though both emotionally and intellectually involving, cast doubt on the future role of humans in mediating these environments. Likewise, the cityscapes that are central to many of the poems are at once enduring and ruinous, containing within themselves the knowledge and inevitability of their own collapse. In light of these complex temporalities, the difficult history of Europe's cities becomes inseparable from their contemporary manifestations, from the fragile materiality of brick and glass. As concepts and as poems these environments are in flux, challenging the notion of organic unity and temporal coherence. Formal containment and dissolution are also held in delicate equilibrium, as Wendy Mulford has observed: 'There's a split-second balance; for now the slates hold.' This paper will consider the dynamics of making and unmaking in Zoë Skoulding's poems, in the context of both environmental and aesthetic risk.

2. Human-posthuman

'A posthuman empathy or the same old ecofeminism: Margaret Atwood recycles the ethics of care'

Adeline Johns-Putra, University of Surrey

In *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood imagines the replacement of the human race with an improved humanoid version. The text asks, 'What does it mean to be human?', and answers, 'the imagination'. The novel identifies the human imagination as both that which brings about ecocide (as in Crake's alignment of human desire with rampant reproduction) and that which enables an empathetic understanding of the environment (as in Snowman's lessons in survival in the post-apocalyptic world). In this second formulation, the novel posits imagination, framed as empathy, as a way forward. In the cliffhanger ending, Snowman confronts a group of human survivors and therefore anticipates a scenario in which his nascent imaginative empathy will be put to the test.

But what does Atwood do with this promise of posthumanist empathy in her follow-up, *The Year of the Flood*? This 'simultanial' novel describes a band of female survivors, remnants of an eco-cult called the God's Gardeners. Its protagonist, Toby, is the reluctant preserver of the cult's teachings, based on just the kind of imaginative empathy that the first novel sketches as a way out of the humanist paradox. I argue, though, that this second novel abandons the exciting possibilities offered by posthumanist empathy. Toby, Amanda and Ren are victims of a brutalist-masculinist-capitalist complex, emblematised by the monstrous alpha-predator Blanco. Adopting a narrative trajectory of female victimhood-turned-victory, Atwood responds to the innovative questions posed by her first novel by recycling the utterly predictable ecofeminist formula of an ethic of care.

'What intervention? Posthumanism in Winterson's repeating worlds'

Louise Squire, University of Surrey

Jeanette Winterson's 2007 novel, *The Stone Gods* deconstructs our conceptions of time and reality, exploring a pattern of repeating worlds. The perpetual nature of "life" and its relation to the void of non-being that is "death" are seen as part of the quantum nature of a universe that is neither random nor determined. As such, the problems of socio-political failure towards the sustaining of planetary integrity emerge as patterns, always to be repeated unless some intervention is made; but what intervention?

This paper will explore the way, in this novel, a nascent posthumanism appears within the collapse of an eternally bound dystopian transhumanism. As an (ironic) effect of Enlightenment progress, humanity has not advanced but regressed, while an evolving Robo sapiens recaptures the meanings of love and loss. Here, the "post" of posthumanism can be explored in terms of the novel's questioning of the human subject. In particular, I explore the trope of "death," which for the Robo sapiens is simply a recycling of the parts of the self. Nothing is wasted; only humans 'waste' and this wastage is related, in the text, to a desire to outdo death, as elicited by the narratives of religious practices and stone gods. "Death's meaning" is discovered – instead – in love; but also in the knowingness of loss that love must foretell. If love is the intervention, what does this mean for the world of the posthuman?

'Posthumanism and Consilience'

Erica Moore, Cardiff University

Posthumanism is a potential starting point for establishing a connection between humanities scholarship and a scientific understanding of the human and its environment. In recent years, a stance first outlined by C.P. Snow in 1959 and termed the 'two cultures' debate has morphed into an ongoing and seemingly irresolvable split between disciplines housed within the 'humanities' (literary studies, cultural theory, philosophy, and certain branches of psychology and the social sciences) and the 'sciences' (quantitative disciplines implementing empirical methodologies). Now commonly referred to as the 'science wars', the debate has continued, with far reaching implications for the type of research that occurs at universities, as well as the resultant interpretation and execution of research findings in spheres beyond the academic.

Drawing from E.O. Wilson's theory of 'consilience', this paper argues that the existing theoretical impasse that persistently divides academic cultures must be overcome, especially in light of developments in environmental sciences and ecological theory. Theories derived from and existing within branches of posthumanism level the space between human and animal, as well as between human and machine; posthumanism is therefore one possible theoretical path towards establishing some semblance of consilience in academic cultures.

Discussion will focus on issues surrounding posthumanism as a viable step forward, as well as reflecting on other tangentially related attempts to build consilience, including Harry Collins' work on 'expertise' and 'elective modernism', for instance. By initiating dialogue about these issues and by reassessing the role and influence of postmodern theories on academia, an increasingly applicable and appropriate theoretical standpoint can eventually emerge.

3. Carbon and alternatives

'Toxic shock: soot, smoke and squalor in Victorian art'

Adrian Tait

How did Victorian artists respond – if at all – to the process of industrialisation that transformed their environment, and to the pollution it trailed in its wake? For an earlier generation of artists like Philippe de Loutherberg and Joseph Wright, factory and furnace were a source of wonder, to be embraced on their own terms; for their Victorian successors, smoke-wreathed skies and soot-stained industrial landscapes were subjects to be avoided. Queen Victoria's diary of a visit to the Black Country accurately captures the toxic shock of environmental (and human) degradation; William Wyld's official picture of the visit (1852) safely situates a distant Manchester in the languid landscape of an Arcadian idyll. In bourgeois visions like this one, there is room only for blue skies, when the sky was in actual fact obscured by what the Victorians came to call 'day darkness'. Engagement has given way to erasure and escapism, and to a form of aesthetic resistance so persuasive and pervasive that perhaps it still shapes our own reluctance to engage with the environmental impact of an industrialising world. But is this the sum of the story, or were there moments when artists like Paul Maitland, Atkinson Grimshaw, and Edwin Butler Bayliss returned to and engaged with the prophetic legacy of forebears like J.M.W. Turner and John Martin? The aim of this presentation is to explore what appears to be, in this most rational of ages, a steadfast refusal to face the facts of it, but also to look beyond our conventional understanding of Victorian art to the margins where more radical (and ground-breaking) depictions of environmental toxicity were yet possible.

"Trading to a planet": JH Prynne and Carbon'

Sam Solnick, Queen Mary, University of London

What is scattered over those colliery towns
Is not soot or sulphur or coal or foaming
Detergent but the waste produced by
Mass-conversion of want (sectional) into
Need (social & then total)
- Prynne, "Die a Millionaire"

My paper will examine the changing representations of carbon in the poetry of Jeremy Prynne from *Kitchen Poems* (1968) to *Sub Songs* (2010). In the late 1960s Prynne honed in on the political economy of carbon - its relation to Britain's industrial tradition, energy generation and landscape. He also positioned carbon as common organic substance - we are all carbon based life-forms - in a manner which challenged readers' notions of timescale and environment.

I will show how Prynne's poetry since the millennium has married this early interest in the economy and biology of carbon with responses to some of the political and epistemological issues surrounding climate change: resource depletion, biofuels, the Alberta Tar Sands, fuel conflicts, carbon trading, the Copenhagen negotiations and, as ever with Prynne, the (mis)application of reductive quantitative thinking to complex systems. Prynne's fragmented and sometimes obscure poetry, I will suggest, provides an appropriate response to those aspects of the ecology of carbon which consistently confound, resist or exceed conventional modes of literary representation. As such it constitutes a more challenging and scientifically aware version of ecology than that presented in much contemporary ecopoetry.

'What are we laughing at when we laugh at scientists? Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Ian McEwan's *Solar*'

Daisy Hildyard, Queen Mary, University of London

The 'most ancient' occupant of the grand academy at Lagado is engaged, when Gulliver arrives, on a composting 'operation': 'to reduce human excrement to its original food, by separating the several parts'. Swift's fictional academy, discovered in Book III of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), parodies contemporary institutions set up for the advancement of learning. Other Lagado 'projectors' include a grubby, ragged, long-haired man who has been engaged, for eight years, on 'a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers'.

The protagonist of Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010), Professor Michael Beard, is the head of an environmental research unit known only as 'the Centre'. McEwan's fictional centre parodies contemporary research institutes, and is peopled with grubby, pony-tailed post-doctoral research assistants including a brilliant physicist called Tom Aldous. 'The fact is', Aldous tells Beard, 'no-one understands in detail how plants work' – despite the advancements made over several centuries of modern science. The 'solar' of the title is Aldous' original project: to generate energy from sunbeams by discovering, then copying, the workings of vegetables.

This paper will explore some similarities between the two satires: how and why the scientist seems funny; how notions of rationality and disinterest are upended by satire; and how the figure of the scientist is upheld as an informed and impartial observer of nature, while simultaneously pilloried for being radically disconnected from his environment. The paper will consider the significance of the convergence of and discrepancy between the eighteenth- and twenty-first-century novelists' portrayals, and of the meeting, or composting, of imaginative and factual discourses.

4. Recycling and waste

'Three 'r's in three poets: Mistral, Parra, Pinda recycle, recover and reuse'

Andrea Casals, Universidad Católica de Chile

Nicanor Parra, *antipoet* and *ecopoet*, supports the idea that everything has been created, prompting creators to cultivate the art of recycling. This paper explores the ways in which three Chilean poets, along our geography and time, practice recycling language and recovering the land and tradition: Gabriela Mistral, in an effort to display the local landscape before foreigners, recovers her childhood landscape; Violeta Parra, prompted by her brother Nicanor to do so, recovers poetic and musical tradition of the countryside, recycling it into her own creation; and contemporary Mapuche poet Adriana Pinda, in a dialogue with her ancestors, recycles her people's oral tradition into writing, renewing means of expression. All three poets fight back the overwhelming power of modernity that erases language and knowledge of the land, seasons and tradition. *Poema de Chile* is written from a distant land: she speaks as an urban pilgrim who describes the northern desert as she recalls it, reusing recurrent themes in her poetry; Mistral rejoices with the landscape she recovers. Parra, in her archeologist's quest, explores the farming region, recovering country wisdom, *décimas* and chants, recollecting many voices that merge with hers. Native to the southern rainforest, in *Üi*, Pinda speaks directly to her own ancestors but can write profusely only after she has dared to write down the language of the 'people of the land' (Mapuche).

'Developing an ethics of waste-full relations in *The Gleaners and I* and *Waste Land*'

Catherine Bates, University of Huddersfield

The Gleaners and I (2000) and *Waste Land* (2010) are both films which explore the potential in developing productive and affective relations with discarded objects. *The Gleaners* documents gleaners of all kinds in the French countryside and urban centres as they hunt for food, useful objects and personal connection; *Waste Land* documents the work of artist Vik Muniz, who travels to the world's largest garbage dump in Brazil to photograph 'an eclectic band of catadores' - self-designated pickers of recyclable materials. His subsequent collaboration with his photographic subjects involves re-making the photographs using material from the dump. Both films makes reveals how those who are involved with waste, while generally figured as waste by the rest of society, develop an affective relationship with it. This opens up the wasted objects into a participatory relationship with the subject's self constitution developing the notion that the waste becomes a fundamental part of their own subjectivity.

This paper will explore this connection between waste and subjectivity, using Gay Hawkins and Brian Massumi's theorising of affect in relation to "things". Hawkins writes:

What much recent writing on affect insists on is that affect is in many senses prior to feelings and emotions; having a feeling is not the same as knowing it's a feeling. Being able to name a feeling, to classify feelings within some kind of emotional taxonomy is to render affects available to consciousness, make them knowable, to recognise them. But we are in effect, participating, before this happens, affect precedes these kind of classificatory and cognitive activities. For Massumi the gap between affect and emotion is a protosubjectivity. Affects remind us of the body's intensities and multiplicities ... They are a surplus, an excess; they are about those registers of the self that escape the knowable, manageable subject: 'the unbiddeness of qualitative overspill'.

The two films allow a consideration of this qualitative overspill by focusing upon moments when this surplus is momentarily revealed through a revisioning of waste. This revisioning involves a recontextualisation of wasted products as useful, beautiful items, moving beyond limiting object/subject, waste/not-waste, thing/not-thing dichotomies. It allows us to acknowledge 'the tears of things'; the affect of waste which makes us accountable to it.

5. Animals/animot

"Men are Not Ants": considering anthropomorphic ants and physicalist ants in recent fiction'

Catherine Parry, University of Lincoln

Few twenty-first century humans would imagine their basic biological construction to be anything other than animal, but this physicalist reduction is an insufficient explanation for human experience of self and world as although humans may know themselves to be just one animal species among many other species, they also conceive of themselves as distinctively different to other animals: animals and humans are very alike, and yet not at all alike. Humans retell these similarities and differences as mythological, philosophical, literary and political analogies in the search for meaning in the world, and in so doing re-encounter animals as the Derridean *Animot*, incorporating them into culture in anthropomorphic masks but simultaneously encountering them as undeniably other.

Humans and ants are physically unlike, but ant behaviour and social structure has been put to work in myths, models and moral tales in most human cultures. Ants have functioned to represent

communist societies, a capitalist work ethic, altruism, science fiction Cold War fears, utopia and dystopia. The co-operative ant colony, with its complex social systems and leaderless governance, fascinates, but these attributes also cause analogies with human societies to founder at the reduction of individual uniqueness to a machinic, instinct-driven cell in an unindividuated, swarming, faceless mass. In readings of assorted recent fiction, including A. S. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia', E. O. Wilson's *Anthill*, and Carol Hart's *A History of the Novel in Ants*, and through ideas of faciality, otherness and the machinic body, this paper considers questions that ant analogies raise about the nature of the human-animal divide.

"Run, Chicken, Run!": globalisation and ethical food production in Marina Lewycka's *Two Caravans* (2007)

Nora L. Wiechert Kuster, University of Mannheim, Germany

This paper discusses the novel's portrayal of immigrant, seasonal workers in Britain, and positions it in relation to discourses on a globalised, free-market economy. The novel provides a critique of ethical food production and labour practices, demonstrating the impact of progressive, economically liberal political agendas on individuals, as well as local ecologies. In what is probably the most graphic and disturbing scene of Lewycka's *Two Caravans*, the conditions at a rural chicken farm as well as the processing plant are described. In one scene, the workers have spent the afternoon shoving chickens into cages, not caring whether the birds' wings or legs break, and by "the end of the afternoon, the floor is littered with dead and dying birds, some trodden into sawdust and excrement, some still flapping and struggling to stay alive" (129). In another, one of the Chinese workmen's thumbs is sliced off and disappears into the meat processing machine; the ensuing commotion showcases the failure of the brutal, mechanized slaughtering process, as after the chickens have been "cooked—boiled—complete with their feet still on and their innards inside them" (144), they are still half-alive and have to have their throats cut by said Chinese workmen. The parallels between the treatment of the animals and the working/ living conditions of the migrant farm and factory labourers, highlights the problematic interconnectedness of ethical food production and increasing globalisation. Furthermore, it points out the complexity of categories such as 'fair' labour practices, national identity, and gender equality. The novel can be read as an exploration of the impact of globalisation on ethical food production (and consumption) in a post-colonial and post-communist world. As such, it functions as a critique of economic laissez-faire policies, and their impact on local ecologies, while nonetheless acknowledging the inadequacies of other political approaches.

6. Gardens, landscapes and identity

'Biocentrism in Theodore Roethke's "Greenhouse Poems"

Amanda Bell, Mater Dei Institute of Higher Education, Dublin

This paper examines how knowledge of botanical forms and life cycles was pivotal to Roethke's development as a poet, informing his biocentric view of the world and the development of the human psyche. It focuses on how Roethke applied his botanical knowledge to convey the textual dissolution of the self, comparing it technically to Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel or 'playpoem' *The Waves*. The elemental battle waged by the horticulturalist on a daily basis reflects a macrocosmic connection in the world of green studies on the relationship between nature and culture. Theodore Roethke was born to a second generation market gardener, and brought up beside the family business in Michigan – a greenhouse covering 250,000 feet which provides the setting for 'the greenhouse poems' - thirteen poems constituting the first part of *The Lost Son and other Poems*

(1948). Literary merit aside, these poems could gainfully be used as a primer for botanists and historians of horticulture as well as for those wanting an insight into meteorological conditions in Saginaw in the 1920s. Roethke's immersion in horticulture provided not only a practical expertise but also an instinctive understanding of the futility of anthropocentrism. His practical botanical knowledge influenced his portrayal of the developing psyche, and also his understanding and use of poetic form. The paper examines parallels between formative processes in plant forms and in the poetic form chosen by Roethke to portray his own spiritual and poetic maturation.

'Beyond the Compost Heap: David Harsent's Edgeland Garden and the Breakdown of Human Society'

Garry MacKenzie, University of St Andrews

Gardens are defined by their boundaries, which mark them as a site of human intervention against the external world. However, they can only succeed as a collaboration between the gardener and non-human forces, such as climate.

For the poet David Harsent, gardens are an unsettling human imposition upon nature. In his 2011 collection, *Night*, gardens are not just enclosed by their boundaries, but are themselves an uneasy borderland, existing between a complacent domestic quotidian and the breakdown of order by external forces, including the poet's fear of irrevocable climate change.

By exploring Harsent's garden poems, and drawing from my own interview with him, I will situate gardens in the context of wider ecological understanding. For example, for environmental activists such as Jim Nollman, the garden is a place where humans can rediscover a relationship with the non-human world. Harsent's garden is a portent of change, offering a perspective on what is beyond the garden, as well as what's within the boundary of home; it is an edgeland, situated between human control and 'the ever notorious place beyond'. I will consider it in relation to phenomenological readings of gardens as well as Nollman's hands-on environmentalism, and show that the garden is a site of conflicting influences which give rise to unpredictable, and often undesirable, emotions.

7. Nature writing

'Literary consilience in practice'

Richard Kerridge, Bath Spa University

This paper will briefly re-examine the principles involved in the original 'two cultures' debate between Snow and Leavis, and some more recent reconfigurations of that debate, notably E. O. Wilson's account of 'consilience'. I will then discuss some literary examples of confrontation and reconciliation between scientific and artistic-humanistic approaches - moments in texts when the differences between these approaches emerge clearly and a dialogue takes place. I will quickly outline four or five such moments, in non-fiction nature writing, literary fiction and poetry, and identify the aspects that seem to me to have the most promising ecocritical potential.

In particular, I will be looking for textual moments when the two approaches seem to differ starkly, in that the traditional or spiritual or personal meaning of a creature or event comes into conflict with scientific understanding - a conflict in which neither side can or should simply relinquish the ground. What does the text do about this? I haven't yet identified all my examples, but they are likely to be drawn from works by Kathleen Jamie, Ian McEwan, E.O. Wilson, Ellen Meloy, Ruth Padel and Catriona Sandilands. I may also advance some examples from my own nature writing.

'Wanderlust: A History of Walking by Rebecca Solnit: Psycho geographical perception and the poetics of walking as performance'

Rumeysa Ozcan, King's College, London

The act of walking has been perceived to be the inter-animating phenomenon in the construction of the mind, the body, the landscape and the city. It is the performance in which the human body gets in contact with the earth and the environment that is the dialogical perception between the subject and the space. Rebecca Solnit writes "Walking is a subject that is always straying" and portrays a wide range of philosophies of walking from rural and urban walking, mountaineering, pilgrimage walking, the figure of *flâneur* to collective action of protest within the recent cultural theoretical context. From this point of view, it will be shown how the act of walking as a performance interacts with the environment of human space and the psycho-geographical mapping of human mind in regard with the act of writing. The experimental nature of walking will be demonstrated in parallel with the stream of consciousness of mind as double act of human mind and body in relation to his environment. Walking as performance art will be depicted through some metaphoric images and mythologies of nature. It will also be touched upon the changing perception of walking as a cultural conversion through Baudelaire's *flâneur* and Guy Debord's *dérive*.

'Tracing the Landscape in Kathleen Jamie's Nature Writing'

Deborah Lilley, Royal Holloway, University of London

This paper examines the presentation of landscape in Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005) and her new collection *Sightlines* (2012) and looks at its linkages with some archaeological and anthropological theories of interpreting landscape.

Jamie's perspective upon the places that she considers in her writing is informed by social, political, historical and ecological factors, creating a composite viewpoint from which to represent and reflect the complexities of the topography she approaches. This way of looking permeates the surface of the landscape and highlights the interrelationships of human and non-human elements that are evidenced within it. In so doing, distinctions between conceptions of the human and the non-human, or of the urban and the rural, are made less clear in her writing. I intend to compare these features of Jamie's writing to archaeological and anthropological formulations of the landscape theorised as a 'palimpsest', using the work of archaeological theorists Julian Thomas and Geoff Bailey and anthropologist Barbara Bender, or as a 'taskscape' as put forward by anthropologist Tim Ingold. I aim to show firstly the complexities and concerns inherent in conceiving and depicting the landscape as comprised of multiple layers of action and interaction, and secondly, the ethical and ecological imperatives to acknowledge the equally multiple ways that such conceptions and depictions may be interpreted. I will argue that Jamie's treatment of these issues through her version of nature writing shows sensitivity towards these imperatives and in the process, illustrates and extends the ways in which Lawrence Buell's ecocritical criterion that 'human history is implicated in natural history' can be understood.

8. Ruins and decay

'Excavating the ruins of colonial modernity'

Christina Britzolakis, University of Warwick

This paper will explore the aesthetics and thematics of ruination and salvage in the context of the postcolonial city. I shall focus on the texts of Ivan Vladisavic, a South African writer, in particular his prose meditation *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (2006), which documents the narrator's walks around the city, building up a collection of seemingly random, shifting and accidental data. The text disassembles and reassembles the component elements of the cityscape in an attempt to make sense of its colonial past and postcolonial present. Vladisavic's fragmented, aphoristic texts attempt to capture the radically unstable meanings of home, street and neighbourhood within the emerging topography of postapartheid Johannesburg. In this splintered metropolis, First and Third Worlds uneasily cohabit, as the urban poor prey on the margin of barred and gated communities occupied by the privileged. Vladisavic depicts this rapidly disintegrating urban infrastructure through the prisms of daily life, media obsessions, contemporary South African art, and the shards of collective historical memory, but also through a sustained engagement with modernist writers and thinkers, notably with Walter Benjamin as theorist of European metropolitan modernity. Through this dialogue with Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, centering on the dynamic of obsolescence in capitalist modernity, Vladisavic attempts to uncover a meaningful spatial history of the postcolony.

'Composing/Decomposing Landscape & Memory: Ruskin, Proust, Benjamin'

Roger Ebbatson, Lancaster University

In some of his autobiographical writing John Ruskin celebrates the paradisaical springs of the River Wandel as seen in childhood and deplores the 'forms of filth, and modes of ruin' with which industrial pollution has ruined the stream. This writing, which deploys a powerful sense of the materiality of language in its depiction of the 'sacred contagion' of modernity hinges upon issues of memory and landscape also expressed in Ruskin's disciple and translator, Marcel Proust, and in his translator, Walter Benjamin. Issues of ecological devastation may be refracted through Benjamin's sense of man's 'fall' into many-languagedness and the increasing muteness of nature. The decay and ruin apparent in Ruskin's diagnosis of the natural world, as in the 'Storm-Cloud' lecture, is homologous with Benjamin's definition of the decay of the aura of the work of art. In sum, the Edenic resonance variously attributed to South Norwood (Ruskin), the environs of Combray (Proust), or turn-of-the-century Berlin (Benjamin) is evoked dialectically in relation to the onset of industrial modernity, decomposition, material degradation and the 'administered society'.

'"Rummaging in the compost heap": How Romanticism's decay in Bunting and Stevens enriches ecocriticism'

Matthew Griffiths, University of Durham

This paper will examine how Stevens' and Bunting's complex, distinct responses to the Romantic inheritance also challenge first-wave ecocritical approaches to Romanticism, in a manner that I argue is vital to our consideration of the complex environmental crises arising from modernity. A key theme will be the breakdown of conventional human-natural boundaries, which not only leaves these poets' work open to contexts of nonhuman agency but also to future environments of reading. Rather than use the natural sublime to establish and invigorate a Romantic selfhood, poems such as Stevens' "The Man on the Dump" and Bunting's *Briggflatts* consider waste as a constitutive

counterpoint to civilised human existence; with this, transactions between lyric ego and the natural world are put under tension in interesting and productive ways.

This approach will enrich readings of both poets' more explicit engagements with Romanticism, and through a parallel analysis of Bunting's ode "I am agog for foam" and Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" I will show that in their questioning of the bounds of selfhood in relation to the sea, the poets are closer to one another than critics have conventionally allowed. Reassessing some key poems by both, I will offer some caveats and correctives to the yearned-for sublimity in works such as Jonathan Bate's *Song of the Earth*, outlining the kind of complexified 21st century ecocriticism they might entail.

'De-composing Heritage'

Phil Smith, University of Plymouth

In this paper I will describe a counter-tourism strategy for heritage sites, devised during three years of experimental interventions.

The paper will outline the principles of these interventions (made by myself or in co-operation with other artists, designers and performers), including the adaptation, redirection and redeployment of features and practices of conventional tourism: signage, mainstream guided tours, information films, souvenirs and tourist behaviours.

These experimental interventions sought to dismantle narratives and conventions, reconstituting them as recognisable, but transformed practices: as mis-guided tours, as signage of intrigue and uncertainty, as vibrant objects with which to re-experience heritage sites and as romantic narratives within instrumentalist documentaries.

Mis-guided tours were staged in Exeter, Plymouth, the Aldwych in London and the English Riviera Global GeoPark. Souvenirs were created for visitors to Plymouth's Royal William Victualling Yard. Four films were made with Siobhan Mckeown. Signage was created for Torquay, Cockington and, with Wrights & Sites, in Weston-super-Mare.

The main body of the paper will describe the development from these mostly single and separate breakings-down of conventional discourse to the dispersive practice of a counter-tourism accessible to, and only producible by, tourists enacting their own de-compositions and re-entanglements of their heritage tourism.

The three key theoretical principles driving this development are the idea of the agentive tourist (of tourists as the makers of their own tourism), the abject nature of heritage as a collection and collecting of waste, and the entanglement of multiplicity and *détournement* in the de-composing and re-cycling of dominant and homogenised discourse.

9. Border crossings

'From 'La Veneziana', to *King, Queen, Knave*: The Metaleptic approaches in Vladimir Nabokov's fictions'

Dexia Zhang, Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai), China

Metalepsis is a specific kind of border-crossing or boundary-crossing, as it is the transgression of narrative levels that conventionally cannot be crossed. Border-crossing is a repeated theme in Nabokov study. Jay Grayson has given it an in-depth analysis in her monograph entitled *Vladimir Nabokov* (2002). She discusses the trespassing between geographic and linguistic realms, reality and fantasy, sense and nonsense, to mention just a few (8). In her *Border-Crossing Imagination in Nabokov's Writings*, Xia Wang focused on border-crossings between the earthly world and the otherworld, between spatial and temporal dimensions, between his real and imagined space and between diverse disciplines (2007). However, little has been written in relation to the specific border-crossing termed metalepsis in Nabokov's works, in spite of the fact that it is frequently used by Nabokov. In this essay we will examine four of Nabokov's works ('La Veneziana' (1924), 'Recruiting' (1935), *Pnin* (1957) and *King, Queen, Knave* (1928 & 1968)), attempting to delineate the characteristics and evolution of Nabokov's metaleptic approach as he built up his unique voice. As we shall see, Nabokov's metaleptic approach evolves from being ambiguous to clear-cut, from the character's transgression to the use of surrogates and to the impossible: when it is as if the author himself enters his own works. Nabokov preferred physical rather than verbal metalepsis, intra- rather than extra-metalepsis, which is possibly in order to ensure the authority of the higher narrative-layer creator/narrator. Thus the higher-level authority is safe enough from being challenged, as Nabokov had claimed: '[m]y characters are galley slaves' (1994:95).

'Science? Fiction?: the Porous Boundaries between HG Wells's utopian fiction and popular science writing'

Christina Alt, University of Sydney

In his 1923 novel *Men Like Gods*, H.G. Wells imagines a Utopian world from which all species deemed harmful, unnecessary, or undesirable to man have been systematically eliminated through a prolonged campaign of extermination. Wells's narrator approvingly describes the "whole land" of Utopia as being "like a garden, with every natural tendency to beauty seized upon and developed and every innate ugliness corrected and overcome" (MLG 170). Significantly, the same image of a "world-garden" made possible through a systematic campaign of extermination recurs in *The Science of Life* (1929-30), a work of popular science writing that H.G. Wells authored together with Julian Huxley and G.P. Wells (SOL 880). *The Science of Life* became a standard reference work on biology and continued to sell as a textbook well into the post-war period. The fact that the exterminatory imagery of Wells's 1923 novel had a subsequent reincarnation in a work accepted as an authoritative précis of the modern biological sciences raises questions about the permeability of the boundaries between science and fiction in the early twentieth century. While studies of the exchanges between literature and science commonly trace the appearance of scientific ideas in literature, this paper will follow the example set by the work of Gillian Beer and focus instead on the ways in which fictional imagery can shape the articulation of scientific ideas.

"Roots of (In)justice": Tree "Terrorism" in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict"

Edna Gorney, Haifa University, Israel

The olive branch has become a symbol of peace. However, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the ensuing battle waged over territory and memory, trees have become weapons. Zionist immigrants longing to establish an intimate connection to the old-new land, planted trees both as a possessive act and as a symbol of rootedness. Tree planting after the 1948 war, on sites of destroyed Palestinian villages, fields and orchards cast long shadows, submerging previous existence and erasing past memories. In this context, the Jewish writer A. B. Yehoshua described the pine trees as erect soldiers and the soil as being devoured by the teeth of their roots.

Similar images are used today. Women in Green, a movement dedicated to safeguarding the Land of Israel for the Jewish people, by cultivating and planting trees, accused the Palestinians of waging an 'agricultural jihad' when doing the same thing – planting trees. "The tree is our literal soldier in the field, acting as a marker and stake in the earth and holding the ground for us". Not only in the occupied territories, but also within Israel, trees are planted by the Jewish National Fund in disputed areas, sometimes over sites of demolished Bedouin houses and uprooted olive trees. Israeli environmental organizations turn a blind eye to these issues of environmental and social injustice. Furthermore, they support at times planning policies that use forests and nature reserves to curb the growth of Arab villages, towns and neighbourhoods.

'Race, Socio-Cultural Dislocation, and the Environment in Kaine Agari's *Yellow Yellow*'

Sule Emmanuel Egya, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria

Since the pre-colonial time, the presence of foreigners, of diverse races, has been felt in the south-south or the delta region of Nigeria. The foreigners, mostly Caucasians, are either sailors or oil engineers/workers because it is a coastal, oil rich region. Their social interaction, specifically sexual relationship, with the native inhabitants of the region have resulted to the births of children known derogatorily in local parlance as yellow yellow, mainly because they are fathered by the Caucasians and are of light skin. Kaine Agari's *Yellow Yellow* is a fairly recent work of fiction that captures that phenomenon. In this paper, an attempt is made to do an ecocritical reading of the novel with focus on the socio-cultural dislocation engendered by the sexual interaction between the sea/oil experts and the indigenous people. The paper argues that the foreign experts whose professional activities (oil exploration, especially) harm the inhabitants and their environment commit further harms by fathering children that are alienated from their societies because of their skin, and their perceived fatherlessness.

10. Waste, trash and the visual image

'Ho, what a waste! An investigation into the agency of physical and virtual waste'

Tally Yaacobi-Gross, Goldsmiths, University of London

This cross-cultural research investigates the social and cultural perceptions of waste from historical and material perspectives. Applying qualitative methods of interviews and textual analysis to the study of the perception and representation of waste in the UK and Israel, this research suggests that waste is an active agent in the assemblage of forces, human and nonhuman, that shapes everyday life. As such the discarded has a key role in the re-narration of personal, cultural, and national narratives. While previous studies mainly addressed the status of the discarded through the perspective of the environmental crisis, here, I suggest a different viewpoint to the study of waste,

one that brings into consideration the ways in which rubbish relates to different perception of history, cultural memory, and trauma.

Furthermore, while previous studies mainly addressed rubbish as a physical artefact, this research asks to broaden this perspective and address the question of virtual rubbish. As so, this research explores the status of discarded information and littered virtual spaces, such as the cyberspace. The traces of information left behind, I argue, are an echo of the system as a whole, a trace of it. Whether is it an abandoned webpage, an old chat room, or information in the database (needed or unneeded), all are representations of the system they emerged from. In their lack of utility they signify the meanings and purposes of the system. Thus, they reveal (and re-tell) the historical narrative of the cultural from which they emerged and the historical narrative of perhaps one of the greater virtual dumps, the web.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre": Ima(gin)ing the Trash Vortex'

Micha Edlich, University of Mainz, Germany

Over the last several years, American photographer and filmmaker Chris Jordan has aimed to visualize that which usually cannot be visualized and thus can neither be fully comprehended nor ethically considered. In the first instalment of *Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait*, a series of digitally manipulated images begun in 2005 and collected in print format in 2009, Jordan interrogated, sometimes with acerbic wit, the excesses of a seemingly insatiable consumer society and grappled with the mind-boggling statistics that are commonly used to capture and, to some extent, mask the scope and detrimental impact of (late-)capitalist phenomena such as GMC Yukon Denalis or Barbie Dolls. In 2009, Jordan started a related albeit conceptually and aesthetically very different project investigating a major environmental problem that is usually literally out of sight and beneath the surface: On the Midway Islands, Jordan began to photograph and film young seabirds that were either painfully dying or had already slowly suffocated after being fed random pieces of plastic that their parents had unintentionally collected in the so-called trash vortex, a remote area in the North Pacific the size of Texas filled with flotsam and jetsam. To the casual viewer, these haunting images, particularly close and close-up shots of decomposing bird cadavers, their chests stuffed with gaudy, plasticky debris, evoke conflicting emotions similar to those triggered by, to give but one example, Emmet Gowin's austere black-and-white aerial photographs of the lunar landscapes of the Nevada Test Site. Jordan's macabre tableaux also issue a challenge to scholars in the fields of visual studies as well as environmental literary and cultural studies inasmuch as they point to an issue that has been, particularly in comparison to other long-term, large-scale, but similarly elusive environmental problems such as radioactive waste, toxic pollution, or global climate change, underestimated and neglected. Jordan's photographs and film project-in-progress not only pose pertinent and timely questions concerning ignored but nonetheless pressing environmental concerns such as plastic waste, but they also challenge viewers to consider how spatially removed, inaccessible, and hence invisible problems such as the trash vortex can be visualized, comprehended, and ethically considered. In addition to the issue of mediation, his photography and film project *Midway: Messages from the Gyre* thus highlights questions of affect, ethical regard and responsibility, as well as space and (global) (inter-)connectedness in contemporary environmental(ist) discourses. An investigation of these concerns in particular and Jordan's project in general, particularly in the light of recent discussions of "rubbish ecology" (Patricia Yaeger's term) in American Studies, trash and waste in ecocriticism (cf., for instance, Heise or Phillips), and the visual turn in environmental literary and cultural studies (cf., for example, Dobrin and Morley) is long overdue, and this paper aims to fill this critical oversight. By pondering the disturbing finds of Jordan's photographic and filmic beachcombing mission in Midway vis-à-vis a variety of related cultural representations, for instance online travel blogs or scientific papers dealing with the trash

vortex, this paper also attempts to trace and theorize the gradual emergence of an exemplary environmental problem from obscurity into ubiquity as well as from specialist to public discourses. In this respect, it also attempts to gauge the possibilities and potential pitfalls of transformation, magnification, and, perhaps, aesthetic distortion that an interventionist artistic project such as Jordan's necessarily entails.

'A miniature imprint of the great whole: Susan Derges' photograms of water and the legacy of Romanticism'

Mark Windsor, University of Worcester

Shortlisted in 2008 for the Prix Pictet – a leading international award in photography and sustainability – Susan Derges has, for the last several decades, been using experimental photographic techniques to offer unexpected, and often startling, visual perspectives on the phenomenal world around us. Her images, by fixing indexical prints of complex and transient forms, reveal the chaotic harmony of the natural world, and in doing so point to an underlying interconnectedness that conditions all.

This paper will adopt poetical and philosophical ideas drawn from High Romanticism as a means of approaching the aesthetic and conceptual significance of Derges' work; specifically, a selection of her photograms (photographic images made without the use of a camera or lens), for which she is perhaps best known, of water in its natural environment. Many of these images are reminiscent of the sublime visions of nature depicted by Romantic painters. But here, it is certain key Romantic ideas about art, nature and the spirit of 'the absolute All' that will be used to explore how Derges' photograms of water tacitly engage a holistic and cosmocentric understanding of the universe and creativity; to explore how her images facilitate our own sense of connection and interdependence with natural phenomena that we often perceive to be separate. By applying such approximately 200-year-old ideas to the work of a contemporary practitioner, the legacy and continuing relevance of the Romantics to the world of today – of art, the environment, and our place therein – will be suggested.

11. Animals and biosemiotics

'The natural and the super-natural: ghost dogs, science and sustainability in the writings of Catherine Crowe'

Ruth Heholt, University College Falmouth

This paper resurrects the prominent mid-Victorian Spiritualist Catherine Crowe, as an important and radical ecological writer. Ahead of all other Spiritualist writers, Crowe posited the naturalness of the super-natural and called on science to investigate. Crowe advocated a new kind of scientific investigation that was not just rational or objective, but which included experience and intuition. In her most famous book *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), Crowe gathered people's experiences of the ghostly and one of the things she documented was the phenomenon of ghost dogs and canine ghost hunters. An egalitarian, Crowe saw the non-human as a vital part of the environment and she looked towards a more sustainable way of the living and the dead, humans and animals to exist with each other. She denounced the idea that man is superior to animals saying: 'there is a deep mystery in the being of these creatures, which proud man never seeks to unravel' (1859: 9). For Crowe, dogs are the most intuitive, the most aware species and the spirits of the ghost dogs in her stories display love and loyalty from beyond the grave pointing to a relationship between nature, super-nature, humans and animals that is productive, emotional and symbiotic.

This paper explores the interconnections posed by Crowe between the natural and the supernatural, between science and intuition (the masculine and the feminine), and between the human and the non-human. Although largely forgotten today, I argue that Crowe initiated some of most important environmental questions of the C19th.

'Biosemiotic criticism: modelling the environment through literature'

Timo Maran, University of Tartu

Biosemiotic criticism is the study of literature and other manifestations of human culture with an emphasis on the biosemiotic understanding that life is, down to its most fundamental levels, organised by sign processes (Maran, forthcoming). Such approach means contextualizing human cultural activities within the environment that is semiotic because of natural signs embedded into material objects, and because of semiotic and communicative activities of other species. Manifestations of human cultural activities can be described in such framework as being comprised of several layers of modelling process (Sebeok, Danesi 2000). In their relations with the environment humans share with other animals zoosemiotic modelling, where signs are distinguished by the organism's species-specific sensory apparatus and aligned with its behavioural resources and motor events (Sebeok 1991). The verbal anthroposemiotic modelling is unique to the human species, and may link further to higher poetic, artistic, ideological or religious forms of modelling, denoted as 'secondary modelling systems' in Tartu-Moscow semiotic school (Lotman 1967). Whereas structuralist schools support the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and the independence of literary representation from the environment, in Peircean biosemiotic approach language is partially grounded in the material environment by iconic and indexical relations. Nature writing in this context can be considered as a sum of modelling activities of different levels, in other words, *every piece of nature writing is essentially a model of the human relationship with nature, both in its present state and as it is anticipated in the future*. By their modelled nature literary works can feed back to the human involvement in environment and shape the material structures of the world.

'The Book of Life: Selection and Play in Natural and Cultural Narrative'

Wendy Wheeler

This paper will focus on questions I have recently been addressing concerning biosemiotic criticism and especially literary biosemiotics. Starting from passages in Hoffmeyer's *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life* where he talks about the need to add 'natural play' to 'natural selection', and also his *Introduction to A Legacy for Living Systems* where he talks about 'natural stories', I shall argue that there are clear homologies of structure and development between evolutionary creativity and human narratives. Drawing also on Roman Jakobson's schema of paradigmatic selection and metonymic combination in the poetic function, especially as rearticulated by Terence Turner, I shall also argue not only that narratives, when read, share features with evolutionary creativity and are, in this sense, cultural organisms, but that human lives are, when fully lived, creative stories. The linking feature, as Bateson saw, is abduction, or metaphor. Following Turner, I shall suggest that selected features are themselves capable of building up stable metonymic narrative associations (patterns) which are, in turn, capable of becoming paradigmatically selected. In literary narrative this is very easy to see as the presiding metaphors develop via new metonymic associations, thus building up the web of meaning which is the whole story. The play with metaphorical and metonymical associations in which the reader engages in the growth of narrative meaning is, I shall suggest, both very similar to the processes of creative

discovery in human life, and must also describe developmental and evolutionary growth in natural systems.

12. Land, landscape, community

'Not a treatise on the economy': The ecology of indigenous Australia in Kim Scott's *Benang: from the Heart*

Jane Gleeson-White, University of New South Wales, Australia

Australian indigenous writer Kim Scott's four novels – especially his award-winning *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) and *That Deadman Dance* (2010) – have established him as one of Australia's most prominent contemporary fiction writers. But Scott writes from outside Australia's literary canon and from beyond its mainstream national narrative of whiteness. This national narrative is predicated upon an alien conception of the Australian land, dictated by globalizing capitalism, which has dispossessed its original inhabitants and disrupted their traditional ways of living with the natural world. And yet this ancient indigenous culture – whose remnants are traced in *Benang* – embodies a complex understanding of and relationship with the Australian environment which echoes cutting-edge contemporary economic thinking in response to the environmental crisis and the crisis in capitalism, such as the green economics of Molly Scott-Cato.

Through an ecocritical analysis of *Benang*, Scott's 'family history', this paper will argue that by incorporating the junked stories of dispossessed indigenous Australians into the nation's post-settlement story, Scott works not only to stretch the national literary canon, but, more importantly, to rewrite the history of white Australia. Further, this paper will argue that through rewriting Australia's past, *Benang* offers us ways into a more ecologically sustainable future. And thus the challenge posed by *Benang* goes to the heart not only of Australia's literary culture and white history, but of global capitalism itself.

'Palimtextual tracts: Susan Howe's American landscapes'

Mandy Bloomfield, University of Southampton

The American poet Susan Howe has long been interested in exploring the relations between poem and land – in particular the landscapes of North-Eastern America. 'Trust the place to form the voice', she says in an interview. This paper will examine how this relation is played out on a formal, and highly material, level. Howe's poems engage landscapes through an archival sifting and poetic recycling of multiple literary and historical texts: 'We go through the word Forest'. Her engagements with landscapes can usefully be described as 'palimtextual', a term coined by Michael Davidson to emphasise the 'multilayered quality of the material text' and its social and cultural interactions. Howe's palimtextual tracts offer ways of investigating a history of colonial mapping, appropriation and exploitation through which American landscapes are constituted. My paper will trace the thread of Howe's long-running poetic encounter with specific American geographies in three works: *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978), 'Thorow' (1990) and *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007). By engaging with places through a quite literal composting of source texts, these poems offer a critique of the material and conceptual construction of the landscape. But they also physically constitute themselves as places, 'word Forest[s]', which articulate both their complicity with prior cultural constructions and a desire to imagine ethical alternatives.

'Sifting Cities: Patterns of Reclamation in Surrealist Representations of Outmoded Spaces'

David Arnold, University of Worcester

Surrealism abounds with iconic images - the floppy clocks, the primitive masks, the furry teacups – but compost rarely, if ever, features in the surrealist catalogue. Completely organic, characterised by incremental transformation at a microscopic level, it seems beyond the pale of the surrealist project, launched as this mission was from a platform of radical juxtaposition, in the interests of shocking Western societies out of complacent habits of rationality into the convulsive beauty of 'the marvelous'. And yet, if the value of compost is in the potential of a transformed past to nourish a fruitful future, then there are grounds for a comparison. The outmoded held a special place in the poetics of early Surrealism, manifesting in explorations of Parisian sites such as the Saint-Ouen flea market and the Passage de l'Opéra. As critic Hal Foster has explained, this fascination contributes to a dialectical process of "ruination, recovery, and resistance" whereby the "bourgeois order" of the day was confronted with "tokens of its repressed past" (*Compulsive Beauty*).

Engaging from an ecocritical point of view is the way in which natural and cultural orders are also defamiliarised in this dialectical process: the modern presents as primal; cultural products are represented in terms of natural history. I will demonstrate this dimension of surrealist practice with reference to *Paris Peasant* (1926) by Louis Aragon. It was Aragon who was credited with the discovery of the revolutionary potential of the outmoded by Walter Benjamin, for whose Arcades Project the concept was crucial. Aragon's bold excursions into the 'modern mythology' of the liminal spaces of Paris also prompt some questions relevant to current ecocritical debates. For example, does the critical function of the outmoded grant access more generally to a form of Romanticism that is not socially conservative in its appeals to Nature? Also provocative is the suggestion that the city can itself be considered not simply as the vessel of contagion and the toxic but, in certain vertiginous conditions, as a site for re-enchantment.

13. Composting

'Composting dragons: recovery, radicalisation and re-enchantment of oral folklore in a Gloucestershire landscape'

Anthony Nanson, Fire Springs

Local folklore traditions are readily damaged by the same forces of transformation that damage local ecology. Oral storytelling occupies a marginal cultural space in contemporary England analogous to the marginal geographical spaces in which wildlife survives. Many traditional tales contain latent themes pertaining to ecology and social justice. This paper reports on a project to research the fragmentary folktales of Gloucestershire and reconstruct from them stories that are shapely enough to entertain a live audience and at the same time can speak to contemporary concerns. In its recorded form the tale of 'The Deerhurst Dragon' celebrates human domination of the land and extirpation of its megafauna. Historical information about the Saxon settlement of the Deerhurst area and field observation of the remaining slivers of wild habitat amidst a now intensively farmed landscape provide context for an imaginative retelling of the story as emblematic of wildlife extinction and habitat destruction, exposing the conflict between wild predators and the needs of an expanding human population, and the role of power hierarchies in exacerbating that conflict. By bringing back to the county's public consciousness this and other reconstructed local folktales, by means of publication and oral performance, the author hopes to provoke thought about ecological questions emergent from the stories and to re-enchant with a sense of heightened significance the localities in which they're set. This 'hope' operates within a cultural space marginal to dominant

cultural media, just as hope for wildlife conservation is emplaced in marginal geographical spaces of various kinds.

'Composting 20,000 saints – Bardsey (Ynys Enlli) and the trope of island spirituality'

Pippa Marland, University of Worcester

Medieval hagiography is the source of pervasive metaphors of island spirituality which inform later encounters with the spiritual island. Voyages to islands are liminal acts, spiritual border crossings, and islands themselves are bridges to heaven – spaces in which the barriers between world and spirit are paper thin. Bardsey Island's own particular spiritual heritage is enriched by the legend that 20,000 saints are buried there— reputedly “perfect skeletons of tall fine men lying perfect, in five separate layers, one above another” – and the island's tourist website has the banner ‘Bardsey Island: Gateway to Heaven’.

This paper interrogates the trope of island spirituality through readings of the literature of Bardsey, drawing on the 12th century hagiography *Vita S. Elgari* and focusing on the works of R.S. Thomas, Christine Evans, and Peter Riley. It explores the recycling of the legend of the 20,000 saints in its layers of re-emergence and re-interpretation in these writers' work – from the ecstatically embodied eco-spirituality and sense of belonging of Christine Evans to the difficulties and disappointments of the search for spiritual meaning in Thomas' and Riley's poems. In RS Thomas' *Pilgrimages*, the saints are stripped of substance, acted upon by the “slow chemistry of the soil, / that turns saints' bones to dust, / dust to an irritant of the nostril”, and in Peter Riley's *Sea Watches: the Blurp* the island poses the seemingly intractable question: “What do you bring to bear on this sense of aging purpose begging to be renewed?”

Drawing on a broader context, the paper explores the way in which, despite these postmodern uncertainties, the spiritual island still serves as “a kind of topographical ‘om’” (Longley, 2010: 152), and what this reveals about the interaction of the human and more-than-human, in the light of contemporary ecocriticism's engagement with the theme of spirituality.

'Organic forms and organic farms: Compost in Wendell Berry's poetry and prose'

Michelle Niemann, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Organic form in poetry and organic farming are just two among many discourses that understand an object—such as a poem, a farm, an economy, or an ecological system—by comparing it with an organism. While organic form in poetry and organic farming are both concerned with wholeness, closure, and emergence through process, there are not many historical links between poets and organic farmers. Wendell Berry is the most important exception: as a poet, farmer, and longtime advocate of organic farming, Berry explicitly connects organic form in poetry with organic farming.

In this paper, I argue that Berry makes the link between agricultural practice and poetic form through the trope of composting that appears in both his poems and his essays on agriculture. Berry addresses a question central to organic farming: is it possible to create a self-sustaining farm that re-uses its own wastes so effectively that it needs no purchased inputs? But his compost tropes also designate an ideal relation among energy, waste, and growth that is central to his poetics as well as to his agricultural theory. While Berry's poems are less linguistically innovative than that of the poets whose work Jed Rasula reads and re-mixes in *This Compost*, his work is of special interest in understanding the force of the compost trope in ecopoetics. Tracing the way in which compost

inflects the form of Berry's poems, this paper will ask whether compost tropes push ecopoetics toward holism and closure or toward open forms.

14. Environmentalism versus capitalism

'Through the looking glass of climate change'

Lucy Burnett, University of Salford

This creative presentation / reading will explore the processes involved when climate change shifts from being an object or a subject of creative work to providing a means of reconsidering our understanding of the world around us, and in turn our understanding of ourselves. What would the altered world the far side of the looking glass of climate change look like? And what would climate change make of us? In this presentation a range of poems will be presented which use climate change as a means of reinterpreting, rewriting and recycling a wide range of the material and cultural 'texts' which constitute our current understanding of 'the world'. A range of techniques for exploring this creative endeavour will be discussed including collage, writing through existing texts, a range of experimental translation, erasure and substitution techniques as well as a range of poems which more loosely use the looking glass as of climate change as means of reconceptualising the way we see apparently familiar aspects of our world. This paper could be adapted to either a discursive reading or a creative presentation, both of which would consider the rationale behind such an exercise, provisional creative discoveries, and the extent to which this successfully responds to the challenges climate change presents to creative writers.

'The Ecological Imagination: the ecocritical response to structural violence of capitalist economies'

Chris Maughan, University of Warwick

This paper will examine the intersection between forms of environmental activism and contemporary literary production. Specifically the way in which ecocriticism is dealing with increasing claims that position it as a necessarily 'engaged' political form of literary production and criticism. I will examine these claims (made by critics such as Jonathan Bate, Lance Newman, and Lawrence Buell) alongside readings of mainstream novels such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, which see their imaginative landscapes as 'a symptom of the inability to imagine alternatives to capitalism's entropic, eternal present'. Ultimately I will ask if literary production is, as Lance Newman would put it, 'not ecological enough' to move beyond the 'destructive habits of thought' that propagate capitalist economic forms.

To answer this question I will draw heavily on the work of David Graeber which suggests direct links between physical experiences of activism – such as a 'line of riot cops' as the 'the point where structural violence takes tangible shape' – and their ability to '[create] a kind of imaginative wall, a barrier it is impossible for the mind to penetrate'. This dynamic is one which authors and critics are becoming increasingly aware of. I will argue that Maggie Gee's 'The Flood', for example, in its dramatization of structural violence of the sort which Graeber describes, demands a confrontation with the extent to which capitalism occludes political solutions which entail its own obsolescence our destruction. It is my contention that the implications of such a demand is indeed truly ecological and that through a fostering of such a 'social ecology of the imagination' that we will begin to conceive of solutions commensurate with global environmental crisis.

'Climate change: our responsibility'

Malgorzata Jagiello, Warsaw University, Poland

Never must the existence or the essence of man as a whole never can be made at stake in the hazards of action.

- Hans Jonas

Many previous interferences of humans and our civilization in the natural environment were and still are a violation of the principles of responsibility. Some of our action cause irreversible effects, like destruction of the environment and climate change. Developed countries, who are the main cause of climate change, must assume their responsibility and recognize and honour their climate debt in all of its dimensions as the basis for a just, effective, and scientific solution to climate change. These countries have a historical (due to colonialists policy) and social responsibility to the hundreds of millions of people who will be forced to migrate due to the climate change. They have also an environmental responsibility and debts to Mother Earth and all, threatened by extinction, living beings. These countries - their politics and citizens must act!

The philosopher Hans Jonas says, man is the only being who is capable of responsible behaviour and, what is really special, man can choose the burden of responsibility voluntarily. Unfortunately very often we ignore the interests not only of endangered non-human beings, but also that of the other endangered humans: inhabitants of the third world and our future generations. That is why the collective (the fore of international politics) and individual (our sustainable behaviour) acting play a very important role in determining the existence and welfare of the whole world. We, older generations, have a moral duty to save the Earth for future generations in as good, if not better, state as when we found it.

15. Place

'Critical ecotopias – Indigenous and literary'

Geoffrey Berry, Monash University

In a time when dominant media interests suppress the enormity of the climate crisis in order to protect the one grand narrative left virtually unchallenged across the globe – the project of profiting as much as possible from the earth in order to fund unsustainable and socially inequitable corporate profligacy – we may find alternative conceptions of culture/nature relations both increasingly marginalised and invaluable at once. Although the dream of unending progress is long dead, many remain devoted to their faith that an unending stream of plenitude in hyper-modern cities of light will deliver them from the corporeal stagnation of the hoi polloi. The cult of acquisition endlessly promotes yearning for the culmination of the quest of capital – which is eternal feasting upon the commodity, funded by the conversion of fossil fuels to carbon – while the world burns around them. But the high tech magic of those with vested interests in protecting this racket can also be used as a method of constructive opposition. Yanyuwa aboriginal elders from northeast Arnhem Land in Australia, in an effort to get the youth of new generations interested in their culture – the lore of which has been dying with their language – asked anthropologist John Bradley to record some of their songlines (or kujika). Naturally the children are more inclined to take notice of their millennia old culture now that it is on tv. The 'critical ecotopia' will be discussed as a companion genre to such indigenous songlines; as a set of stories open to self-reflexive critique even as they offer hope for a more ecocentric world.

'Pastoral accumulation: three conventions of "new" nature writing'

Matthew Walker, Trinity St David, University of Wales

Based on an examination of selected recent works of contemporary British nature writing, this paper will identify and explain three key features of contemporary British nature writing, which are as follows:

- 1) Threshold Statements
- 2) Wild epiphany
- 3) Pastoral Intertext

By illustration with textual examples, this paper will demonstrate the way in which common textual features of nature writing can be identified and examined in order to understand the way in which nature writing operates. A discussion of these characteristics will also consider their potential to act as a means of analysis, which will be applied to some of the broad themes of contemporary nature writing and their interaction with ecocritical concerns. This paper will conclude by considering these features within a wider context of British nature writing.

The aim of this paper is to encourage discussion and analysis of a genre that has remained relatively unexplored by ecocriticism, and that may also reveal elements of British nature writing that have critical significance.

'Edward Thomas and places where nothing happens'

Sue Edney, Bath Spa University

There are some places that have become names more filled with significance than seems possible for the places themselves to contain. There are other places that are rich repositories of accumulated cultural shifts, yet remain apparently unmemorable: 'To name a thing beloved man sometimes fails', as Edward Thomas notes in his poem, 'Women he liked', a poem that traces the changing aspects of a place in which man has invested something of himself: 'the name alone survives'. Thomas also provides us with the most memorable place name in twentieth-century poetry – Adlestrop, where 'no one left and no one came'. He was aware, with a melancholy precision, of how names 'half decorate, half perplex'; what cannot be forgotten is the 'empty thingless name' of experience.

The varieties of place-experience are revealed in the continuing story of former landfill site Bidston Moss on the Wirral, a 'blank zone on the map', the unstable surface of salt-marsh, quarrying and rubbish collection finally committed to 'green space for the community'. But the Moss is known for its instability, as Adlestrop is for its sense of permanence. It shares its insecure history with other former landfill sites, like John Clare's 'Swordy Well', for whom the name remains 'the whole / that's left'.

Trains, especially, have given us glimpses into the commonplace extraordinariness of these places where nothing happens – they have this in common; they are passed by, or through, or round. What happens beyond the track? Mitchell Thomashow, in his exploration of 'place-based transience' asks 'Where then might rootedness reside?' I would like to explore his question in this paper by considering how inhabitation of these places is altered by cultural accretions of assumption and expectation – in poems, for example – about what makes a place somewhere where 'something' happens.

16. Poetry and embodiment

"The Nervetree": Ronald Johnson's metaphor of embodied mind'

Sonnet L'Abbé, University of British Columbia

The work of American poet Ronald Johnson (1935-1998) was a lifelong investigation of the relationship of "mind" to "nature" that took place in the mid-twentieth century. His was an era where an animal-libidinal and instinctual model of mind had yet to be fully succeeded by computational models of mind. In research that I have presented to neurologists at the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, I argue that Johnson's poetry anticipates the broad acceptance of behavioural neuroscience's discovery of brain plasticity by about forty years. Ecocritics will be most interested in how Johnson's plant representations, which rework tropes from Goethe, Emerson and Thoreau, can be read as a system that constructs a poetic history of embodied mind. While neuroplasticity's metaphors are conventionally drawn from the language of electrical circuitry, I take my cue from Bryan Kolb, who wrote the book *Brain and Behaviour*, when he explains: "The dendrites of a [neuron] cell function as the scaffolding for synapses, much as tree branches provide a location for leaves to grow and be exposed to sunlight." Johnson's poetics recuperate Western European tropes of the sylviculture and horticulture of minds to show how metric language acts "concretely" upon the living brain as light upon Whitman's leaves of "hopeful green stuff." I will focus my talk on Johnson's trope of *the nervetree* as a key figure in Johnson's landscape of polymorphic plant-mind metaphors, that maps one mind's self-conscious engagement with its own capacity to use language to (re)organize synaptic structures.

'Edward Thomas, ecopoetry and birdsong: "a pure thrush word"'

Anna Stenning, University of Worcester

Edward Thomas's poetry is filled with birdsong. Is it (merely) a symbol for the new-found creativity of the poet, an obsessive 'birding' tendency, an ambient 'aeolian' rendering of the sights and sounds of the countryside, or something else? My analysis of Thomas's poetry emphasises the idea of 'ecstasy' as the literal standing out of place. I argue that Thomas's emphasis on the auditory sense demonstrates what he believes is central to poetry: the possibility of merging with something outside the self. Birdsong combines movement outside oneself into the surroundings, and a new self-awareness as we find ourselves aware of the being spoken to through 'the pure thrush word', rather than a symbolic projection of self onto world. For Thomas, poetry is able to recreate the phenomenological moment through the rendering of such 'though moments'. This is Thomas's version of Schiller's sentimental poetry – it's not just that our fleeting ability to unite thought and feeling requires a complex aesthetic to convey it, but that our awareness of nature impacting on our consciousness is best conveyed by the 'external' rigours of form, language and metre.

For Jonathan Bate and Robert Pogue Harrison, the ultimate 'place' of human engagement with nature is language, which creates 'a space' outside of nature's closure. I argue instead that the non-verbal communicative qualities of rhythm and tone, available in bird song and human song, offer a true 'ecopoetic' that includes us within a habitat, rather than 'dwelling' outside it. Thus, we also add our meaningful sounds of protest at its destruction.

“It is a calling an octave higher”: resonant geographies and auditory worlds in the contemporary Anglophone poetry of Romaine Moreton and Mzi Mahola’

Antonio Cuadrado-Fernandez, University of East Anglia

In line with oral/aboriginal cultures, the contemporary Anglophone poetry of Indigenous Australian Romaine Moreton and South African Mzi Mahola shows a rich auditory sensitivity, which can be seen as traces of the writers’ local epistemologies that reflect Indigenous worldviews. The acoustic attuning to nature emerging in the poems’ imagery call for a change in the west’s relation to the environment and of its understanding of the modern, Cartesian self towards a possible posthuman scenario of more profound ecological interrelatedness and empathy with nature. In this sense, the Indigenous poetic text is not merely a surface to be scanned in pursuit of meanings but also a sensory space of dynamic and creative engagement for readers.

This paper analyzes interrelations of mind, body and environment as they are elaborated in phonosemantics, cognitive poetics and linguistics (in dialogue with neurophenomenology, anthropology, biosemiotics and the theory of complex systems) which regard language (and literature) as connected to the body’s perceptual system in interaction with the world. In this interaction of the method of reading with the writers’ auditory geographies, the paper aims to articulate bodily experience to the poems’ resonant environments through the concepts of iconicity and sound symbolism, which are also features of pre-industrial life. In this way, the reading of Indigenous poetry can be seen as making a contribution to a new ecology of life which regards Indigenous poetry as part of a constantly unfolding process of biological and cultural life by helping readers attune with the writers’ auditory worlds.

17. Ecopoetry

“All havoc and weakness” (Alice Oswald), The Contemporary Long Ecopoem’

David Borthwick, University of Glasgow

Commentators on the long poem have argued at various times over the past twenty years that the form is no longer possible. ‘The world is no longer something that can be narrated,’ argues Geoffrey Squires, blaming ‘the anti-narrative stamp of modernist writing.’ Yet Brian McHale is clear that successful long poems continue to be written, albeit relying upon strategies such as ‘fragmentation, interruption, dispersal, and juxtaposition’: ‘strength through deliberate weakness.’

John Kinsella advocates just such an approach, arguing that ‘games of dismantling and rearranging, of exquisite corpse and chance, are all part of the science of a poem... they are just different systems of knowledge.’ These impulses of ‘interruption’ and ‘dispersal,’ ‘dismantling’ and submitting to chance, are emblematic of the ‘nutritive sensibility’ involved in Rasula’s notion of ‘composting,’ relying as they do on recycling elements of earlier modes, deploying sensory and scientific information, activist intent and aesthetic strategy, but always emphasising hybridity, the re-composition of elements and the acknowledgement of multiple ‘systems of knowledge.’

In the paper I will consider ecopoems by writers including Alice Oswald and Sheryl St Germain in order to examine strategies employed in contemporary long poems which address environmental concerns (directly and indirectly) such as exploitation, pollution and anthropocentric subjectivities. Treating these poems as attempts to ‘re-story’ relationships to the nonhuman world, I will argue that they dramatise and formally enact shifting sensibilities and discourses as each poet attempts to negotiate a multivalent relationship between poetic subjectivities and the environment they are a response to.

'Making and Remaking the Pré'

Clara Van Zanten, Luther College, Iowa

This paper concerns poetry that quotes, borrows, lifts or, perhaps, composts existing material, as well as poetry that Jonathan Skinner labels *entropological*, "engaged at the level of materials and processes." In particular, it concerns Tina Darragh and Marcella Durand's collaborative project *Deep Eco Pré* (2009), which derives from Francis Ponge's *The Making of the Pré* (as well as Michael Zimmerman's *Contesting Earth's Future*). This is an entropological reading, focused on process, or in this particular case, a series of processes: first, Ponge's process of making, his *poesis*, the subject of *The Making of the Pré*; and second, Darragh and Durand's process, which follows Ponge's at first, but is complicated by collaboration and by its own process-ing. Ponge's "essay" is a series of drafts (according to the author, "the preparation of the preparation of the *pré*"), a working and reworking of existing material, not only *The Pré* (the poem), *le pré* (the meadow), and the word (the sound and syllable) *pré*, but existing writing, from Virgil to Rimbaud. This paper asks if the worked and reworked material of *The Making of the Pré* and *Deep Eco Pré* should, in fact, be understood as a kind of compost (after Jed Rasula), but it is not content to equate poetic and organic processes. Instead, in a reading informed by both ecology and deconstruction, it addresses "continuous differentiation" (Darragh and Durand) and proposes a species of ecopoem, the *pré*, as its expression.

'Nurturing the "Right Nature"?'

Isabel Gallegymore, University of St Andrews

Poetry has long been employed as a vehicle for protest, and with environmental concerns developing on a daily basis "environmentally-conscious" nature writing guides, and nature writing courses, are becoming increasingly popular. Yet do these exercises proposed by educators raise responsibility, or merely recognition, to contemporary environmental issues?

With this question, my paper will conduct an interrogation of nature writing pedagogies. Focusing on the ethical and philosophical arguments behind the guides, and the intended effect these guides hope to produce, I will make a comparative study of the different literary modes prescribed: protest, mimesis, metaphor and myth.

With an innovative use of ecocriticism (to critique the theoretical intentions of the educational guides) and close readings of contemporary poets such as Gary Snyder and A.R Ammons (to illustrate the potential outcomes of these guides), I will define the theoretical backdrop, and the potential future, of nature writing education. These comparisons will invite further study into the role of poetry today, inviting discussion upon whether educators balance their pedagogies so that poetry and policy avoid making 'an awkward half-rhyme'.

18. Bodies

'George Eliot and Nature's Hunger'

Hayley Rudkin, University of Sydney

George Eliot's conscious engagement with the field of natural science, have made her works frequent and rewarding subjects of ecocritical analysis. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot represents humanity as part of an ever-changing natural environment through references to the act of consumption. Karen Mann's excellent study of consumption in this text focuses its analysis on allusions to the act of consumption itself. While consumption blurs the point at which humanity

ends and the landscape begins, the experience of hunger driving consumption is allowed to remain purely internal. A reasonably clear division between inner sensation and the outer world remains. My paper argues that *The Mill on the Floss* refutes such absolute division between internal psychology the natural world:

It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love, - this hunger of the heart, - as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world.(68)

Here, figurative and literal hunger are instruments of Nature. Not only the act of consumption, but the experience of hunger itself marks a point where the natural world intersects with the human. My paper examines the often paradoxical significance of Maggie Tulliver's hunger, which simultaneously represents a drive to consume and a desire to be subsumed. I argue that the complexity of hunger in *The Mill on the Floss* can be productively drawn out using an ecocritical reading, and that this reading in turn allows ecocriticism of Eliot to move beyond representations of landscape and into psychological drives.

'Shit changes: politics of excrement'

Ingemar Haag

Controlling human excrement and establishing processes that convert human waste into a harmless material, has indirectly paved the way for modern subjectivity. Restrictions concerning the handling of human excrement deal with the containment of the self and with the delimitation of the body, turning it into a well-defined entity, a private, enclosed vessel. The processes of certain systems and institutions contribute to this enclosure of a subject that threatens to expand beyond the limits accepted by society.

The recycling, transformation and containment of human waste in art is the subject of this paper. The decentralization of the subject in postmodern theory since the 1960s, the questioning of the supremacy of the human mind in favor of a recognition of the human body, and the blurring of the borderline between human and non-human, are explored through art by highlighting specific bodily functions and the products of these functions.

In this paper, I will focus on the one hand on the Spanish artist Santiago Serra's installation "21 anthropocentric modules made from human faeces by the people of Sulabh International, India", a work invested with strong ideological and aesthetic issues; on the other hand on the British artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen and his film about the imprisoned Bobby Sands and his hunger strike in *The Maze*, 1981. Serra, as well as McQueen, stages and recycles human waste in order to illustrate its political power and aesthetic radicalism.

'The queer sublime: volcanoes, guts, and sloppy sounds in Shelley's *Frankenstein*'

Eric Robertson, University of Utah

This paper addresses the disfiguring anxiety produced from the insistence of the procreative desire. If one resists this desire or attempts to create outside hetero-normativity, one faces the rupture of personal homogeneity, the debasement and dissolution of death expressed in the individual's attraction to self and non-procreativity.

We compare the sublime as Emmanuel Kant constructs it, coherent, divine, procreative, to Arthur Schopenhauer's expanded view of the sublime, destructive, self-dissolving, non-procreative, and profoundly queer.

Between the texts of Anne Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, *The Italian* and *Frankenstein*, exists George Bataille's concept of the *Jesuve*, the liminal manifestation of spatial instability that provokes destruction and, in turn, seeds creation. This sublime revels in its own disfigurement and demise.

George Haggerty helps us examine the queer gothic, what I posit is one's own attraction to self, a non-procreative compulsion that forces the individual to confront the inevitable decay and dissolution of one's mind and body. This self-attracted, self-centered state is an individual's abject nature, the sublime queer self, seeking, meditating upon, and coming to terms with self-annihilation.

George Bataille helps us understand the eruptive power of the earth, the volcano as anus, as well as what eruptions lie in wait just below the surface of our skin, and within our psychic conceptual membranes. The *Jesuve* is the communion of the within and the without, the unifying sound of wet lips and slippery entrails, of volcanoes and the eruptions of the mind in opposition to the powers of creation. The *Jesuve* is the rumbling of a monstrous, queer sublime.

19. Dirt, dereliction, debris

'1970s pastoral and rural dereliction'

Rupert Hildyard, University of Lincoln

Dereliction, loss and abandonment have long been a feature of the construction of pastoral. This paper looks at three 1970s texts that contemplate dereliction and interrogate our attitude to worlds we have lost: the photography of Fay Godwin (*Remains of Elmet* 1979) and James Ravilious (*The Heart of the Country* 1980) and *Pig Earth* by John Berger (1979). All these texts represent situations of rural dereliction and abandonment, they ask what we are to make of the rural past in a culture of getting and spending, and they present an occasion for revisiting the politics of pastoral. This paper notes the post-1960s belief in rurality of which these texts are instances and asks whether they offer any reasons to argue that that belief can survive as a motivating factor for green politics, given that in England at least the countryside has been almost wholly occupied by the middle classes and recent invocations of the rural idyll come almost exclusively from the right.

'Remember (too) the Garbage: Pete Doherty and the Debris of Albion'

John Parham, University of Worcester

This paper engages with the predominance of pastoral in what constitutes, thus far, the ecocritical study of popular music. That dominance can be inferred from two broadly parallel studies, David Ingram's *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music* and Rob Young's *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music*. Yet ecocritical studies, more broadly, have recognised pastoral's often exclusionary nature – especially on class and race-based terms – a recognition implicit too in the American anti-pastoral analysed by Ingram and in a counter-tradition in British pop and rock epitomised, for example, by The Kinks' album *The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society*.

This paper will explore, in the context of British popular music, the themes and one aesthetic form of the anti- or counter-pastoral. Theoretically, it will engage with arguments (from Tim Morton, Noël

Sturgeon and Cate Sandilands) that pastoral representations are too easily commodifiable, while ecological crisis or anxiety also requires 'darker', more challenging forms. Specifically, I will draw upon Sandilands' utilisation of Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*). Benjamin loosely assembled fragments – the garbage or detritus of consumer capitalism – in montages that 'create constellations of things that speak animatedly to one another outside their intended, bourgeois uses and identities' and from which the nature of our society might be more clearly gleaned. I will connect this, in the bulk of this paper, to Pete Doherty's writing and music: namely, his published journal, likewise formed of fragments, which specifically addresses the concept of 'Albion' (and Arcadia) in relation to both British literary and pop traditions; and the track 'Albion', which subverts the paradigm to articulate musically a distorted, damaged, and socially exclusionary sense of British place.

'Reusing tradition': Ecocriticism and traditional English folk music'

David Ingram, Brunel University

Popular music is perhaps the cultural field in which notions of 'recycling' are most visible. Simon Reynolds' *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past* (2011) successfully maps the retrospective state of popular music in the digital era, but passes swiftly over the contemporary reuse of the oldest musical material in English culture: traditional folk song. In an essay broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in March 2011, Jon Boden celebrated folk production – local, communal, low-tech, amateur – as the music-making best suited to the post-oil, post-apocalyptic future he believes we may be facing. On Midsummer's Day 2010, he began his 'Folk Song a Day' project, in which he posted his version of a traditional song every day for a year onto a website, in order, he wrote, 'to promote the art of 'social' (or communal) singing'. The project, he added, was 'social singing made possible by contemporary technology'. My paper contrasts this to Belbury Poly's 'Caermaen', on the 2005 album *The Willows*, which used a sample from a recording of 'Bold William Taylor' by traditional Lincolnshire singer Joseph Taylor, originally recorded on a wax cylinder by Percy Grainger in 1908. Jim Jupp changed the speed and pitch of the sample to the point where it is barely recognisable, and in doing so, Simon Reynolds comments that he 'made a dead man sing a brand-new song'. Boden and Jupp represent two ways of reusing traditional song in contemporary English culture that raise questions ripe for ecocritical or ecomusicological analysis: how digital technology reshapes notions of space and time (especially nostalgia and history, and the relationship between past, present and future), as well as debates over aesthetic novelty and recycling.

20. Translation

'Visions of nature and mysticism in the poems of William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez'

María Antonia Mezquita Fernández, University of Valladolid, Spain

The works of Spanish poet Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999) share some elements with the poetry of William Wordsworth (1770-1850). No doubt the principal of them is the love of nature. This paper will provide a comparative study on the works of these two poets whose understanding of nature is almost the same. In spite of being distant in both space and time, they consider the natural world as a totality where all the elements are relevant and necessary for the cycle of life to continue. As a result, we can talk about a holistic conception of the universe. Besides, their poetry is that of participation and detailed description. James C. McKusick points out that Wordsworth's works "evoke a dynamic world through the vivid sensory imagery of its beholding by an engaged participant." (McKusick, *Green Writing. Romanticism and Ecology*, 2010: 56) And yet, participation deals with mysticism in the sense that nature has mystic connotations due to a "transcendent power

which may or may not be God" (Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, 2004: 31). *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), Rodríguez's first book of poems, is closely related to Wordsworth's visions of nature. Basically, these authors believe that our senses do not allow us to see the real meaning of the objects of nature and that we need a special power or gift to unravel the hidden truth. In poetic creation, this power is called imagination.

'New nature Writing: The Manifesto of Italian Ecopoesia'

M. Ivana Trevisani Bach

In the article I would like to bring to your attention, I point out the meaning of "new Nature writing" for the Italian poets who signed the *Manifesto of Italian Ecopoesia* (2003). They have taken on the task of writing "for" Nature, not "on" Nature, in order to give voice to those living beings who have no voice (animals, plants) and to Earth itself as a whole. Our focus on the topic starts from the new bio-centric approach on the human figure that has determined it, and from the environmental crisis that has accelerated its affirmation generating new perspectives about ethics. The article explores these themes underlining the differences with respect to the historical Nature writing and pointing out the type of language by which the eco-poets want to communicate. The report is also an opportunity to learn about those lesser-known poetic movements that have developed outside the Anglophone eco-criticism. Some examples of Italian eco-poems (in translation) conclude the report.

21. Futures of ecocriticism

'Decolonizing endangered species: postcolonial ecocriticism, biodiversity and the conservation travel narrative'

John Miller, University of Northern British Columbia

The prolific work of the Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva has played a significant role in drawing attention to the involvement of accelerating biodiversity loss with issues of social justice. Her aspiration towards a move from bio-imperialism (in which western corporations continue to plunder the genetic resources of postcolonial nations) to bio-democracy (in which the rights of source communities are recognised) evokes a key question of our ecological moment: how to decouple trans-national conservation efforts from the neo-colonial attitudes they often disclose? The recent proliferation of critical studies under the heading postcolonial ecocriticism has initiated a careful analysis of, among other things, the vested interests of sustainable development, but, as yet, has provided little direct engagement with the specific question of biodiversity. Accordingly, this paper turns to an increasingly prominent literary subgenre, the conservation travel narrative, in order to locate the ideological traces of the imperial past in the representations of our current extinction crisis. Routinely structured around a journey from the metropolitan west to the postcolonial outpost, works like Douglas Adams and Mark Cawardine's 1990 *Last Chance to See*, fixate on bringing endangered animals into western view, often culminating with a poetics of encounter in which the discovery of rare and exotic animals bears many of the signatures of colonial nature writing. Consequently, notwithstanding the form's explicit environmentalist agenda (also notably apparent in Redmond O'Hanlon's 1996 *Congo Journey* and Ruth Padel's 2005 *Tigers in Red Weather*, for example), there remains an uncomfortable relationship of the literary aesthetics of such texts to a problematic global politics.

'Ecoliteracy, Enchantment and Consilience: "The raw materials for a new kind of nature literature"'

Adrian Rainbow, University of Zurich

In the coming decades, the survival of humanity will depend on our ecological literacy – our ability to understand the basic principles of ecology and to live accordingly.

- Fritjof Capra

In this paper I focus on ecopedagogy, ecoliteracy, and the role of literary texts in the field of practical ecocriticism. Expanding on the theories of consilience, I argue that the author as an ecopedagogue and "nature endorser" (Love) has been understated and undervalued in ecocritical discourse, especially in terms of their potential role in the synthesis between science and the humanities. Although many cultural mediums are politically and pedagogically useful in terms of ecocritical discourse, such as the environmental documentary (Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*), the non-fiction ecological text (Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), or the mainstream blockbuster film (Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow*), I posit that the fictional literary text is a more effective and engaging medium as a result of its form, content, and affect. I argue that the effects of "ecoliterary texts" such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000) are multifaceted but ultimately they function to facilitate the Freirean notions of *conscientization* and *praxis*: to instil knowledge, transform consciousness, and create dialogue in order to challenge the normalised ideological and ontological conceptions of "the natural order of things". Ultimately, I argue that the integration of aesthetic texts, "narratives of enchantment" (Bennett), which represent didactic tools based on values, morality, emotion, ethics, metaphor, and politics, with the objectified, impersonal world of scientific fact, leads to an optimal aesthetic methodology to comprehend nature, and understand humanity's current antagonistic relationship with it. This amalgamation, I argue, represents "a new kind of nature literature" (Huxley) which ultimately leads to scientific and ecological literacy, to biocentrism, and a new paradigm of holistic thinking and interconnectedness with the ecosystem.

'Ecocriticism and nature writing'

Lana El Fauri

Witnessed aspects nowadays reflect the rapid growth of ecological literary criticism and environmental studies in the United States and around the world in recent years, which in turn reflects the explicit increase in the production of environmental literature over the past several decades and the increased visibility of such nature writing by critics.

Moore (1996) argues that nature writings bring the lives of non-human beings into language and become primal part in literary texts. Al Faouri (2009) displays nature writers who engaged in literary ecology can create an image of nature writing if have a relation with the natural world and the ability to convert imagery written scripts. As well as, they use language of imagery which is enough to stimulate readers' imagination, engage them in the memories of writers and thereby spark their imagination to live the writers' experience.

Although the reader can't literally see, hear, smell, taste or feel what the nature writer describes, but through the use of remarkable, efficient language, he/she hopes readers have the ability to imagine.

Ecocritics choose words in their literary texts which they hope will resonate with their readers on an emotional level and stir their feelings toward wildlife which encourages a fresh connectivity between "language and landscape" which helps to stop the degradation of environment and earth.

The researcher chooses Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* to talk about effective policies in handling environmental problems. Also how using media and public speeches that will reach voices to politics

22. Struggling with novelty in science fiction

'Upcycling the American pastoral: a new perspective on hollow Earth utopias'

Michelle Yost, University of Liverpool

With the disappearance of *terra incognita* from maps in the Nineteenth Century, writers of speculative fiction had to reach beyond lost continents and darkest Africa to find a new setting. The hollow Earth, or *tarra cava*, became one of the new destinations for socio-political fiction writers in the wake of John Symmes's 1820 theory of polar openings. More than just recycling traditional utopian tropes, these novels embraced a 'technotopia' approach, applying technology to the pastoral in an age of rapid urbanisation. The quest to reclaim America's lost frontiers is combined with the perceived promises of technology to ease life.

This paper aims to explore the tropes being 'upcycled' by early science fiction authors looking to explore the possibilities of socio-political improvement through the use of technology and a return to the open frontier. As opposed to the 'low-tech' lost-world/race novels that attempt to reclaim the ancient Garden, these fin de siècle hollow Earth narratives attempt to balance the benefits of urban technology with the desire to live in clean, open spaces, what Leo Marx called 'The Machine in the Garden'. From power to food to goods production, these works articulate a western desire to create the new within a familiar environment.

"'All Energy is Borrowed'"—Terraforming: A Master Motif for Physical and Cultural Re(Up)cycling'

Chris Pak, University of Liverpool

The creation of habitable planetary environments depends upon the ability to construct closed systems in which biogeochemical cycles conducive to life can be generated and maintained. These self-sustaining systems recycle elements within the contained environment in an attempt to mirror the "natural" cycles on Earth. Drawing on the insights of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis since the 1980s, this process, known as terraforming, has become a master motif for environmental and ecological enquiry in science-fictional discourse. Terraforming narratives are preoccupied with the problem of creating a new human history that can escape, resolve or transcend the failures of the past. They engage in dialogue with other science-fiction texts dealing with the same theme and often re-use narrative elements and tropes developed by earlier terraforming stories to do so. *Avatar*, a recent example of this tradition, exhibits this tendency toward the recycling of tropes, what sf critic Gary Westfahl* calls an 'enormous exercise in borrowing-and-giving-it-back'. Do terraforming narratives simply recycle aspects of earlier texts and, if so, does the tradition move toward a productive upcycling in which the concerns expressed by prior works are transformed into something new? This paper explores the fusion between the physical adaptation of the environment and the transformation of social practices and institutions explored by works of terraforming such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy (1993-1996).

'Change we can't believe in: *The Windup Girl* on the ethics of global warming'
Katherine Buse, University of Liverpool

Recent work in ecological criticism has made much of the natural world's dynamism, complexity, and heterogeneity. The fiction and criticism of global warming uses this idea to promote the possibility of new and unpredicted forms of life and social organization. This is appealing to those who wish to argue that the hierarchy and domination enforced by the global capitalist system is neither "natural" nor adaptive. One such narrative is Paolo Bacigalupi's 2009 SF novel *The Windup Girl*, which limns a world of oppression in which corporate interests exploit workers and natural resources with impunity, until revolutionary change following a climate catastrophe allows new relations between human beings and with the natural world. Within this and similar stories, the language of evolution is mobilized to argue that, as our environment changes, humanity must adapt to cohere with the interconnectedness and diversity—qualities equated with social justice—that "natural" ecological systems demonstrate.

This paper investigates a possible flaw in this progressive, evolutionary narrative of climate change. While its proponents embrace change, dynamism, and diversity as "natural," they also imply that this "evolutionary" change will by necessity be consistent with a centuries-old tradition of liberal, humanist, and enlightenment values. In *Windup Girl*, however, the revolutionary change seems to get out of hand, and the emergence of a new version of humanity sweeps away not only the undesirable trappings of contemporary society but also the intellectual tradition that has critiqued them for centuries. Bacigalupi registers the uncomfortable fact that nature is ethically neutral, and therefore the danger of forgetting that, while the violent, hierarchical relations of capitalism are not natural, humanist values and egalitarian ethical codes are equally human inventions.

Field Trips

Meshworking St Clement's Gate

The process of solving a 'wicked problem' is identical to the process of understanding its nature.

- Rittel and Webber, 1973

A current 'free field' creative study of Worcester has identified a perfect 'wicked problem' at St Clement's Gate: an intrinsic rural/urban problem with water and drainage for which there is no immediate or simple solution. The current need to improve highways, riparian habitat, user experience, as well as create a sense of place on this active floodplain compounds this problem into a 'wicked' one. Especially as flooding is part of the 'natural' character of the city.

The opportunity to create a controlled one-in-a-hundred-year view of Worcester in flood, connects the international agenda for water sensitive urban design to how artists have worked, built and shaped the city in the past. The parameters for this are set by a clash of poetics and pragmatics between an 18th century cabbage field (in an older artichoke field), a World War I temporary slaughter house, sculptor William Forsyth's architectural sunflowers to be found on numerous buildings throughout the city centre, the use of other hyper accumulators for cleansing the soil of contaminants from Minnesota to Pakistan, and artist Walter Ritchie's collective allotment shed proposal in the 1940s civic survey of Worcester.

The invitation is to join three artists on a 'walk and talk' through the city and ending at St Clement's Gate, that encourages others into this open-ended conversation.

Castlemorton Common and the Malvern Hills

The Malvern Hills have been described as forming a natural borderland between the low-lying Severn Vale to the east and the uplands of Wales to the west. This trip will explore some of the diverse landscapes of the Hills, including one of the largest areas of common land in England; a medieval rabbit warren; an Iron Age hillfort and a post-medieval hermits cave. Although the focus will be on the archaeology of the hills, the wider influence of the landscape on literature and music, as well as the ways in which both the "cultural" and "natural" heritage have been conserved, will be explored as we walk.