

ERASURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

conference



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Keynote speaker: Prof. David Herd
(University of Kent)

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Erasure and the Environment Conference, Loughborough University: Panels and Abstracts

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Andrew Cospér, 'Erasure, Andean rurality and metaphorical borderlands: A comparative analysis of the films *La sirga* and *Wiñaypacha*'

The proposed essay that I wish to present at Loughborough University analyzes erasure of Andean culture and rurality, and the concept of metaphorical borderlands in two recent Latin American films, *La sirga* (William Vega, 2012) and *Wiñaypacha* (Óscar Catacora, 2017). Each taking place in the High Andes – the former in Colombia and the latter in Peru –, they tell the story of individuals who face difficult moments of identity crises brought on by the ever more globalized world and neo-liberal ideology. Though both films contrast with respect to their plots, they are comparable regarding the underpinning theme of marginalization and abandonment that serves as a main focal point in this investigation. Borrowing border theory from Thomas Nail, I demonstrate that borders cannot be perceived as only encompassing a narrow definition which would describe them as being only physical, geopolitical boundaries, but rather they must also be perceived as existing in the metaphorical sense. To shed light on this conceptualization of metaphorical borders, one point of reference that I examine are the readings of Gloria E. Anzaldúa and her book *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*. I argue that the borderland experiences that Anzaldúa shares are similar compared to the experiences of the protagonists in both films. Lastly, I interlace within this discussion the cultural analysis of the dichotomy of rural and urban spaces in order to show how rurality is often viewed as the periphery and urban environments are perceived as the center of hegemonic culture and ideology, which, like in the films, causes migration from and abandonment of rural space. The purpose of this essay is to reveal that through these two films we can perceive the drastic changes and new challenges that rural Andean groups are facing more and more due to neo-liberal globalization as it pushes them farther from urbanized society and creates an erasure of their cultural identity and sustainable ways of living.

My name is Andrew Cospér and I am a current PhD candidate from the Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX. My focus is in Spanish Cultural Studies with a specialization in rural spatiality studies. The proposed topic for my dissertation is on New Ruralism in the Iberian Peninsula, in which I analyze a number of contemporary cultural forms including literature, film, art and journalism that explore new imaginaries on perceiving rural space. I have also been a Spanish instructor for the last six years, teaching from basic level to advanced level courses in the university setting. My goal is graduate with a PhD in August, 2022. Other academic goals include: attending and presenting in conferences and publishing research related to ruralism and ecocriticism. My hope is to expand my research beyond the Iberian Peninsula to analyze the ecological crisis in other communities, such as in Andean communities like the Aymara.

Stefania Staniscia, 'Gary Hollow, West Virginia, U.S. The vanishing of a landscape of extraction'

Authors'

The coalfield landscape of Gary Hollow in McDowell County, southern West Virginia (USA) is stratified with layers that reflect the technological evolution of the coal mining industry and its boom and bust economic cycles. The industrial complex constructed by US Coal and Coke Corporation starting in 1902, consisted of 12 mines and related facilities for coal processing and transportation, and of company towns to accommodate the resident workers. The towns were also provided with buildings of worship, stores, recreational facilities, schools, and everything was needed to grant a decent quality of life to the residents. Once the largest mining operation in the world (Schust, 2005, p. vi) the area underwent a rapid decline after the cessation of the major mining activities in 1986 and the shift towards higher mechanization of coal mining requiring less employment – e.g. strip mining and mountaintop removal. Nowadays, the landscape

that, for almost 120 years, epitomized the spatial practice of raw material extraction is vanishing because of neglect and active destruction caused by surface mining. This is happening despite its inclusion «as a treasure of national importance» in the United States National Park Service's National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA). The designation as a heritage area, in fact, doesn't imply any form of active protection or preservation since the initiative relies «on partnerships and private ownership rather than the traditional methods of Federally owned parklands.» (NCHA website). It is difficult to quantify the loss of material culture that the area has already endured, and it is impossible to halt additional loss that, after also the thinnest seams of coal will be harvested, will continue to be caused by further abandonment and the action of atmospheric agents and natural processes. We are confronted with an inheritance of significant material culture whose fate is to vanish because of what seems to be an oxymoron: neglect and overexploitation. We are, then, forced to explore alternative ways of dealing with the afterlife of this landscape of extraction and a thought-provoking perspective on heritage and loss has been offered by Caitlin DeSilvey. In the book *Curated decay* (2017) DeSilvey develops the idea of heritage as curatorial and interpretive practice. The book is an invitation «[t]o understand change not as loss but as a release into other states, unpredictable and open» (p. 3) and «to uncouple memory work from material stability» (p. 15). The paper will give an account of the current landscape conditions exploring the consequences of unintended processes of decay and erasure.

Stefania Staniscia is a registered architect and landscape architect. She holds an International Ph.D. in Architecture and she is now Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at West Virginia University. Since she moved in West Virginia in 2015, her main research interest has been the coalfield landscape of southern West Virginia. She has been exploring the manifestations of the mining activities on the landscape and in particular of mountaintop removal. She is currently studying the landscape of former surface mining envisioning their future after the reclamation process.

Kerry Featherstone, 'A Short Walk in the "Melting Mountains"'

Since the earliest accounts in English of the geography and culture of Afghanistan, the 'snowy ridge' of the Hindu Kush been seen as a key – and emblematic – feature of the country. Its peaks and water-courses are discussed in Mountstuart Elphinstone's *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815); since that publication, other widely-read examples of fiction and travel writing have included descriptions of the Hindu Kush and made it a key element of how anglophone readers perceive Afghanistan. As well as describing them as dangerous and inaccessible, these texts have also contributed to a perception of the mountains as being a reflection of the Afghan character: uncompromising; hard to penetrate; unsuited to Western interference. More recently, however, writing about the Hindu Kush has focussed on the impact of climate change. Work by Mayewski, Perry, Matthews and Birkel, for example, has shown how the erasure of glaciers by global warming has had an impact on the area. The watersheds of the Hindu Kush provide water to one fifth of the world's population, but the range is now being referred to as the 'melting mountains', due to the extent to which the integrity of its water-courses and the ecosystems which depend upon them. As climate change undermines the depictions made by two centuries of anglophone writers, the area itself is suffering from the release of human pollutants, vulnerable resources for agriculture, and potentially catastrophic mud slides, rock falls and flooding. This paper will juxtapose literary depictions taken from Anglophone descriptions of the Hindu Kush with current assessments of the state of its glaciers, watersheds and related features. Drawing on the work of writers such as Kipling, Levi, Newby and Hodson, the paper will show how an emblematic feature of Afghanistan, once imagined to be permanent and nearly unassailable by travellers, is vulnerable to the phenomenon of climate change, in which human activity at a great distance from the Hindu Kush is having a greater impact than earlier travelling writers could have imagined.

I studied English and European Literature at the University of Essex before moving to Nottingham Trent University to complete my PhD thesis on Bruce Chatwin. As well as teaching at those institutions, I have taught at the University of Lincoln, the Open University and the Université de technologie Belfort-Montbéliard. Having spent considerable time in France, I write

poetry in French as well as English, and have given research papers in French at international conferences. I have presented my research at conferences in the UK as well as Paris, Rennes and Versailles in France, Derry in Northern Ireland and Georgetown in the USA. I am currently a Lecturer in English and Creative Writing at Loughborough University.

Conversations in Ecocide

Douglas Basford, “After Unimaginable Catastrophes”: Teju Cole’s *Open City* and Anthropocene Neurofictions’

“It was Lise-Anne who saved me from myself by changing the subject.” With three friends in the park, Julius had been on a tear, an ardent monologue departing from the quartet’s discussion of bee colony collapse disorder. It was an uncharacteristic moment for the narrator of Teju Cole’s novel *Open City* (2011), who values his solitude, wanting to keep others from laying any claim on him and perambulating incessantly about the streets of New York, an act he compares to the migrations of birds he sees from his apartment window. Here, however, Julius careened into an extended soliloquy designed to impress Moji, whom he hadn’t seen in years, not since he had left Nigeria for medical school in the U.S. Lise-Anne pulls him out of it, asking him to entertain the group with stories about patients from his psychiatry residency, which he eagerly and all the more uncontrollably does. Some time later, Moji confronts him about an act of violence against her he cannot recall. Initially brushing it off, he resumes his life, lands contentedly in private practice, and muses assured that the migrating birds will come again at their appointed time of year. But thrust unexpectedly into a crisis he suddenly imagines “other configurations of our world, *after unimaginable catastrophes* had altered it beyond recognition,” and concludes his narrative by recounting the extensive birdkill at the Statue of Liberty when it was still serving as a lighthouse. Taking Cole’s novel as a signature text, this paper explores how often contemporary Anglophone fiction explicitly about human psychology and neurodiversity—enduringly labeled “neuronovels” by Marco Roth—depict the natural world’s erasure. The revaluation of neurodiverse experience in light of mainstream liberal environmental thought in these novels recasts characters with an array of neurological disabilities and differences, as well as those who care for them professionally, as sources of hope that the great mass of neurotypical individuals might become subjects resistant to the neoliberal persuasions of ecocidal capitalism.

Douglas Basford is Assistant Director of the Academic and Professional Writing Program at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. His critical prose has appeared in *Artis Natura*, *Elizabeth Bishop and the Literary Archive*, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Italo Calvino*, *Metamorphoses*, *Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States*, and elsewhere. He has received awards and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and other organizations. He is completing his doctoral dissertation in the environmental humanities.

Natalie Joelle, ‘gLeans’

Since the term ‘Lean’ was coined to disseminate the efficiency innovations of the Toyota Production System to an Anglophone audience, the oppressive strategies of ‘Lean Thinking’ have spread across the world. How can considering practices of gleaning help to understand Lean culture’s acceleration and help halt its hidden endemic ecocide and domination? Gleaning, or gathering after the harvest, has long been a right of multiply-marginalised people. Gleaners have been taking careful, insightful and often socially unacceptable

action over millennia, for subsistence, joy, and the commons. From the earliest extant gleaning narrative, to contemporary global gleaning cultures and representations, what some have recently argued to be a particularly Autist constellation of qualities, including non-conformity, attention, and object-orientation, are at the heart of the practice. Drawing on critical animal studies, critical management studies, work on the commons, crip theory and research as practice, this transdisciplinary paper's method of gleanologies performs resistance to the rhetoric of lean culture by exploring the relationships between the practice of gathering after the harvest and gathering knowledge known as gleaning, the gesture of leaning in gleaning, and the genealogy of global lean management technologies, and in turn, lean culture, in devastating and violent techniques of animal agriculture. Using erasure techniques from the earliest narratives of gleaning to modern agrotechnologies, my project *gLeans* claims gleaning rights to commons of subsistence under the lean conditions of contemporary culture, which are characterised by Lean Thinking's constant demand to do more with less. The work both considers the impacts of Lean-managed scarcities on gleaners, and gleaning as opening to a more-than-Lean world. Acoustically, the material is split between the sonorous, clipped lyric, and the aseptic; its Autistic author, alternately captivated by sound stims, chance songles, and being non-speaking. Experimenting with assistive technology, adapted processes, accessible research methods and forms of manipulation, *gLeans* offers a way of undercommoning environments dominated by Lean managerial terms from one multiply-marginalised perspective they seek to erase. *gLeans* was longlisted for the Ivan Juritz Prize for Creative Experiment 2021.

Natalie Joelle is completing a transdisciplinary environmental humanities doctoral study of gleaning at Birkbeck, University of London, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Fund for Women Graduates. Her critical and creative work can be found as part of *ISLE*, *The Goose*, Routledge Environmental Humanities, Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature, and *Plumwood Mountain*. Her most recent article is 'radical gleaning' (*Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 2021). Natalie is a contributor to the International Political Ecology of Pandemics summit and a recent Fellow of the Kluge Center, Library of Congress. www.gleaning.info.

Rachel Hill, 'A Space for Worldbuilding: Contemporary Imaginaries of Spaceflight and Planetary Exhaustion'

Russian rocket engineer Konstantin Tsiolkovsky famously contended that "the Earth is the cradle of humanity, but mankind cannot stay in the cradle forever." This prophecy positions Earth's seemingly inevitable exhaustion as leading to humankind's evolution into a post-Earth, spacefaring species. The allegedly glorious flight of rockets thus becomes associated with escape trajectory from a weary and disappearing world. Such a correlation continues to have traction on the contemporary imaginaries of outer space, as emblematised by the emergence of NewSpace Industries. NewSpace industries is an nascent economy, encompassing earth-based, sub-orbital and in-space infrastructure, which aims to commercialise the outer space environment. Dubbed 'the New Space Age,' NewSpace leverages the pre-established utopian valences of space exploration accompanying NASA and Soviet missions, in order to justify the territorialisation and monetisation of interplanetary terrains. Characterised by technoutopianism, NewSpace thus positions future in-space manufacture as leading to the mass amelioration of humankind. Anticipations of space-based post-scarcity abundance are catalysed by, and operate in stark contrast to, an increasing awareness of planetary depletion and exhaustion. And yet, a turn to science fiction, from Octavia Butler to Deji Bryce Olukotun, demonstrates that outer space has long served as a site for the propagation of countervailing, emancipatory futures. This paper will therefore outline how NewSpace futurity is a response to impending resource exhaustion and an attempt to ensure neoliberal capitals continued viability. I will then turn to science fiction which strives to build counterimaginaries founded upon alternative forms of planetarity.

Rachel Hill recently completed her MA in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she wrote her dissertation on the contemporary imaginaries of outer space within the

commercial space sector. She is currently an associate research fellow at Strelka: Institute for Media, Architecture and Design and co-director of the London Science Fiction Research Community. She regularly speaks in various conferences and workshops on the intersection of astronomy, spaceflight, more-than-human worlds and ethics. Rachel explores the radical potential of science fiction as a member of the research collective Beyond Gender. She also regularly writes for publications such as *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*, *The Quietus*, *Strange Horizons* and *The Women's Review of Books*.

Petrofictions

Sam McNeilly, 'The Aesthetics of Energetic Erasure: Fossil Fuels and American Literary Naturalism'

America's transition to fossil fuels – which ignited many of our global environmental crises – established a socioeconomic order built on the erasure of "unproductive" groups. The nation's nineteenth-century energy transition gave rise to American "fossil capital" (Malm), a distinct form of capitalism that expands through the extraction and consumption of coal, oil, and gas. Fossil capital reorganised America's population around social applications of the thermodynamic principles of energy conservation and entropy, the latter of which identifies wasted energy in productive practices (such as heat that radiates out of a steam engine when it burns coal). In its drive to increase productivity, American fossil capital sought to erase "entropic" – or unproductive – social elements that obstructed the national project of work. This paper considers American literary naturalism as an aesthetic response to the rise of American fossil capital. Fredric Jameson understands naturalism as a narrative form that expresses class anxieties through 'a [...] narrative paradigm, which could be described as the trajectory of decline and failure, of something like *an entropy on the level of the individual destiny*' (2015, p. 149). I will extend this interpretation of naturalism to examine how the entropic trajectories that structure its American variation register the erasures of fossil capital. Through readings of early twentieth-century American naturalist texts, this paper argues that naturalism's dramatisation of entropy plays an ideological role in America's productive mania by naturalising fossil capital's class-based erasures of groups deemed unproductive. In doing so, I will highlight the ways in which our contemporary environmental crises are intrinsically linked to the subjectivities, socioeconomic relations, and cultural practices that arose from America's energy transition.

Sam McNeilly is a PhD student at the University of Surrey. His thesis – "Transitions in the American Novel: Fossil Fuels and Literary Naturalism" – examines the relationship between America's transition to fossil fuels and the emergence of American literary naturalism.

Bushra Mahzabeen, 'Eco-terrorism in the Face of Petro-capitalism in *Petroplague*'

As awareness about the anthropocentric effects on climate becomes widespread in the first quarter of the 21st century, so does radical efforts to mitigate the consequences of capitalist exploitative practices on state-corporation level. These efforts include both peaceful protests and eco-terrorism. Although still rare, acts of eco-terrorism is increasingly turning into a cause for concern in the capitalist world-system because "Environmental extremists are invariably shaped by some blend of anarchistic, apocalyptic, and millenarian thinking, striving to hasten the downfall of modern civilization so as to realize a better world where man will live in harmony with the natural world" (Liddik 3). As oil is the primary catalyst of the modern world-economy, it can easily turn into a target of eco-terrorism in the activists' search for ways to create a more

sustainable future. Novelist Amy Rogers blends reality and fictionalised science with urgent environmental issues in her novel *Petroplague* (2011) where the protagonist develops a genetically modified bacteria that can extract energy from the heavy crude fields without extracting the oil itself, in order to reduce American dependence on the Middle Eastern oil. An act of eco-terrorism sees the bacteria released into the fuel supply, contaminating the oil of a heavily automobile-centric city Los Angeles which quickly turns into a dystopian landscape. The aim of this paper is to analyse issues of over-reliance on fossil fuel and the uninhibited nature of the capitalist consumer culture while addressing the consequence of violent environmental activism portrayed in *Petroplague*. Drawing on the scholarly works of Imre Szeman and Stephanie LeMenager among others, this paper will discuss the two opposing sides of the climate crisis as shown in the text – the deceptive nature of petro-capitalism which is embedded in the everyday lives of people and the way green activists challenge it.

Bushra Mahzabeen is a first year PhD student in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and is currently on study leave to pursue her doctoral research at Warwick. Her doctoral research is broadly focused on the geopolitical implications of oil as a commodity and the petro-capitalist exploitation of labour.

Theodore Grudin, ‘The Petrolocene and The Erasure of Humanity’

In some vital way, we are all made of sunshine. But, in the last couple hundred years, human beings have been increasingly derived from certain types of ancient sunshine that have changed form over the course of millions of years: fossil fuels. It is difficult to see just how pervasive fossil fuels have become in everyday human life. Virtually every major global change perpetrated by human beings has been powered by fossil fuels. The climate crisis, industrial agriculture, deforestation, transportation, ocean acidification, and even the development of nuclear technology have all been driven, sometimes literally, by fossil fuels. Most human bodies are fed, kept warm, clothed and housed by fossil fuels in one way or another. And this leads to around 100,000,000 barrels of oil consumed *every day* on Planet Earth. This feasting on fossil fuels is both ultimately unsustainable and precipitously catastrophic – and it’s what defines our current geological era – the age of fossil fuels: The Petrolocene. The Petrolocene is the geological era marked by the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels. It is an era that developed and materialized in the context, and with the help, of specific human cultures and values: the Petrolocene is intimately linked with specific kinds of human erasure. On the one hand, the unbridled consumption of fossil fuels puts the human species at risk of *existential erasure* – that is, the end of the species. On the other hand, the centuries-old narratives of humanity as somehow beyond, or in control of, an external “nature” – the *conceptual erasure* of humanity from nature – was crucial in allowing for the sort of relationships and behaviors towards “nature” that led the world into the Petrolocene. In 1989, Bill McKibben argued that because humanity had altered nearly everything on the planet, nature had in some important sense ceased to exist. This work flips that narrative on its head to ask whether it’s the other way around: *humanity as we know it may soon be over*. Nowadays the planet has become altered to the extent that humanity is imminently threatened; it is also conceptually threatened. As the climate crisis and its myriad intertwined effects march on, the lines drawn between what is human and what is nature will be systematically blurred. In other words, human beings will be, more and more, at the mercy of complex natural, climatological and ecological systems. Humanity is, more than ever before, absorbed into, and at the mercy of, natural systems.

Theodore Grudin holds a Ph.D. in environmental science, policy, and management from the University of California, Berkeley. He is a lecturer in the Department of Environmental Studies & Sciences at Santa Clara University and has also taught at the University of California, Berkeley, Saint Mary's College, and San Jose State University.

Shivani Jha ‘Towards Ecojustice in the Anthropocene: An Ecocritical Reading of Ambikasutan Mangad’s Swarga: A Posthuman Tale’

But what most seems to distinguish contemporary ecopopulism is the activism of nonelites, the emphasis on community, and the reconception of environmentalism as an instrument of social justice. - Lawrence Buell.

In the latest geological age, that of the Anthropocene, the environment is severely compromised, turning toxic in many cases and impacting both humans as well as nonhumans. The victimization of the voiceless, the poor and the weak by the politically and financially strong forces is the central concern of Ambikasutan Mangad’s novel *Swarga- A Posthuman Tale*, originally written in Malayalam as *Enmakaje* in 2009 and translated in English in 2017. The novel highlights how the nonhumans unable to register their protest simply go extinct from the regions where they were known to thrive previously. *Swarga* unfolds like an ecogothic novel which first introduces the central protagonists, their life till the point that they come to the beautiful and edenic region of Kasaragod where they stumble upon people bearing the brunt of an unknown blight, falling prey to debilitating diseases and congenital disabilities, the condition not limited to humans but affecting the wildlife and livestock in the area as well. The erasure of flora and fauna species is highlighted by their absence in this region due to the careless use of endosulfan, a pesticide. The biodiversity of the area is completely destroyed as large tracts are cleared to promote cashew farming. My paper aims to address- *vis a vis Swarga* - the ecocritical concern of the human impact on environment in the twenty first century emphasizing the need for ecojustice as a necessary component of health and environment, with a caveat similar to Bertolt Brecht’s in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bharati College, University of Delhi and author of *Ecocritical Readings: Rethinking Nature and Environment* (2015), Shivani Jha has specialized in the field of Ecocriticism. She has presented papers in several national and international seminars including Trinity College, Dublin, University of Warwick, Jahangir University, Dhaka, and American Comparative Literary Association’s Conference held at Brown University, Providence, USA. She has published many papers and developed lessons for the Virtual Learning Environment, Institute of Life Long Learning, University of Delhi. Her recent publications include an edited *volume Ecocriticism and Environmental Praxis* (2017).

Rahul V, ‘Cashews over Casualties: Endosulfan Tragedy in Kerala’

The 20th century witnessed a surge in environmental movements that addressed chemical contamination issues along with climate change and several others. Kerala, a southern state in India, has been experiencing a series of ecological disasters lately due to climate change and an alarming encroachment on the sensitive Western Ghats. Kerala had also been the victim to unscientific and reckless use of harmful pesticides over large expanses of Cashew Plantations. The pesticide, Endosulfan, had been the agent of erasure of the rich wildlife of Kasargod, the cultural identity and ancient traditions of the people living in close association with the environment. The Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK) had been spraying Endosulfan aerially for decades and has caused persistent damages to both the ecosystem and the people living in it. The children born in spraying areas and areas adjacent to it developed disabilities, growth irregularities, and immature deaths. The writings of Ambikasutan Mangad, especially his Malayalam novel *Enmakaje*, had been fundamental in the fight for the ban of the chemical. My presentation would argue how Endosulfan became

the agent of erasure in Kasargod, rendering the people invisible and ‘voiceless’? I would also try to explain the narrative techniques employed, especially myths and metaphors, in portraying violence that is slow and invisible. I would also argue how writing becomes activism in itself, exploiting the scope of creative imagination and reality together. The Eco-Crip theory would form the premise of the presentation enabling the intersection of Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities in discussing a chemical disaster.

Rahul V is a Research Scholar in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee. He completed his Masters in English Literature from St. Thomas’ College, Thrissur, Kerala. His research interests include Environmental Humanities, Disaster Narratives, Disability Studies and Postcolonial Studies. He has published a paper titled “Disability, Disease and the Deceased: Reading Health and Justice in *Animal’s People*” in the Special Issue for Health Humanities, Mediawatch Journal. He is currently working on a chapter which will explore the scope of magic realism in discussing toxicity in select Malayalam novels.

Nobonita Rakshit and Rashmi Gaur, ‘Testimonies of Toxic Encounter: Industrial Disaster, Spatial Violence, and Narratives of Erasure in Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People*’

Over the last two decades, the interaction between toxic discourse and ecocriticism has attracted increasing scholarly responses, with growing interest in the ecofictions as archives for representing and recreating the embodied toxic experiences of the individuals and communities inhabiting the toxic geographies. Written in the background of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy and published after twenty-three years of the event in twenty-three recorder tapes of the protagonist, Animal, Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* draws a narrative map of “that night” when the poisonous chemical toxifies the air, contaminating the exposed, damaging fetuses, diseasing the environment, and disabling the survived. The diseased environment and the disabled bodies play crucial roles both as spatio-disabled memories of the toxic territory and as an expression of the survivors’ resistance, negotiation, and anxieties in the post-apocalyptic fictional city Khaufpur, India. Situating the literary narrative as a powerful repository of the undocumented and almost erased records of toxic encounters, the present paper investigates how *Animal’s People* represents the alternate story of spatial violence through the memories of the survivors and forges a voice of dissent against the uneven, attritional, and necropolitical violence of the government and multinational companies. The paper argues that the toxic territory and toxic narratives documented in the present text are kept alive through the lived experiences of toxicity and toxified memories of people living within the contaminated place. To that end, the paper newly proposes the narrative mode of disaster realism that reads the brutalities of toxic imperialism on human and more-than-human-world and offers a powerful means of resisting the eco-social injustices.

Nobonita Rakshit is currently pursuing her Ph.D. from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, India in South Asian Ecocriticism. Her areas of research interests include postcolonial studies, environmental humanities, disaster narratives, and South Asian literature.

Rashmi Gaur is a Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, India. She has written extensively on gender studies and towards the development of professional communication. Currently, she is working on ecocriticism, toxic masculinity, graphic novels and on the literature of North-East India.

Jaxon Waterhouse and Chantelle Mitchell, ‘Resonance in Absence: attuning to the thylacine’

There is a great absencing taking place around us, across all manner of scales and intensities. This backdrop of increasing temperatures, sprawling populations, industrial disasters, upticking CO2 levels and ecological destruction that heralds our current climate context signifies to us that we are living in an age of disappearance. We posit that these absences resonate, and draw from the vibrancy ascribed to matter by Jane Bennett and Deborah Bird Rose’s shimmer in our conceptualisation of resonance. While notions of vibrancy and the shimmer operate as a sign of life, we present that resonance is instead a sign of where life was. In doing so, we suggest that just as these concepts can aid us in attuning to the more-than-human, resonance does also. Drawing from our ongoing research into absence, we present for Erasure and the Environment a theoretical framework from which we seek attunement to absence, tracing spectres of absence across physical and affective realms. We mobilise this within an Australian context as we apprehend the reverberations of the extinct thylacine as continuing through the landscape in the form of a ‘present absence.’ Tracing the thylacine across the landscape of the past and into the present, we seek to attune to the shifts in ecosystems, alongside the cultural presence of the thylacine within Tasmania and more generally, what this means amidst a growing national landscape of extinction and absence.

Chantelle Mitchell and Jaxon Waterhouse are researchers and writers from so-called Australia, working across academic and contemporary arts settings. Their work has appeared in *e-flux*, *art+Australia*, *On_Culture* and *Unlikely Journal*, with other publication outcomes currently under peer review. They have presented their work at conferences nationally and internationally, recently they have presented their work at Macquarie University, the international Temporal Belongings conference, and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. They have recently shown their work at Sawtooth ARI, Launceston (deluge, Jan – Feb 2020) and taught their writing and practice focused curriculum ‘Abyss Lessons’ through Bus Projects in 2020. 2021 sees exhibitions at Spectrum Gallery (W.A.) The University of Melbourne (VIC), Sawtooth ARI (Tas) and FELTspace ARI (S.A.).

Ankit Raj, ‘And Pastures New: Ecology, Cosmogony and Post-Anthropocene Utopia in Kurt Vonnegut’s Galápagos’

Kurt Vonnegut’s corpus boasts of numerous works deriding humanity’s ethical infirmity, questionable eco-standards and the incorrigible human hand in the effacement of planet earth into an ecological wasteland. His most vocal appeal against ecological erasure appears in *Galápagos* (1985)—his novel written amidst elevated tensions of the Cold War when the impending threat of a Third World War made the author anxious about the possible extinction of a good many species. Serving as the spiritual culmination of a series of novels charged with his trademark morbid satire at the socio-political and ecological ramifications of the biggest human-made twentieth-century debacles (the Second World War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War), Vonnegut’s *Galápagos* disses the human brain as the singular source of all evil—reminiscent of the Kantian idea of the radical or innate evil in human nature—and imagines a Third World War followed by a global human apocalypse by a virus outbreak and the subsequent rebirth of an evolved brain-less post-human species aligned with a balanced sustenance of the planet in a post-Anthropocene future a million years ahead. This paper attempts a close reading of *Galápagos* in tandem with the cosmogonic cycle of creation and destruction of worlds as chronicled in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) by Joseph

Campbell. It unravels in the postmodern novel the mythological creation myth motif which Vonnegut, an anthropologist by training, seems to have adapted to serve his eco-centric ends. The paper also assesses the various drivers—divine, human, nature and chance—involved in effecting the fictional cosmogony in the novel, studies Vonnegut’s fictional and non-fictional takes on the human-nature equation, and goes on to locate Galápagos as Vonnegut’s greatest treatise on the place of our species in the grander ecological scheme of things.

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Sonakshi Srivastava, ‘*In(ter)ventions: Technologies of Preserving Nonhuman Life in the Anthropocene*’

“There’d been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it. It made you feel like God.” (*Oryx and Crake*)

When Paul Crutzen ushered the “homo sapiens” into the postmodern world, declaring, “We are now in the, the Anthropocene”, a transition was marked by signposting time, where the human species mutated from Homo Sapiens into Homo Dominatus, influencing, and dictating the present as well as the future of the planet by bio/technoscripting their presence on the various life forms. This paper reads such influence that humans have on their nonhuman counterparts by taking into consideration two key texts – R.K Narayan’s “The Man-Eater of Malgudi”, and Philip K. Dick’s “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep”. A re-animation of animal species is enacted in the aforementioned texts – taxidermy in the former, and electric cloning in the other. While taxidermy hinges on the past (dead animals are preserved), and electric cloning on the future, the two find common ground in the attempt to re-represent, to “restore to origin” (Haraway) what is gone, or feared to be extinct – they serve as means of preservation. In Narayan’s novel, Nataraj develops a kinship with the temple elephant, and attempts to save it from the clutches of the poacher-cum-taxidermist, Vasu, and in Dick’s novel, Iran, the wife of the hunter Deckard grieves the loss of intimacy with “real” animals, ready to look after an electric toad by the end of the novel, my project is to consider these ties of kinship, and the associated fear of loss as the launchpad of my enquiry. The paper attempts to navigate through the ties of kinship, and how it informs the technologies (taxidermy, and electric cloning) that serve as a means of repossessing what is feared lost – an animal, or the entire species in the mentioned texts. Taking from Haraway and Aloi, I aim to understand the implications of such interventions as means to counter anthropocenic mass-extinctions, and erasures, and the possibilities that such interventions open up to imagine “cultured” zootopias.

Sonakshi Srivastava graduated from the University of Delhi, in 2020, and is an MPhil candidate at Indraprastha University, Delhi, where she researches on the Anthropocene, Discard Studies, and Speculative Futures. She was also an Oceanvale Scholar for the Spring-Autumn session at Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, where she researched on the representation of dis/abilities in the face of unnatural disasters. Her works have previously published in the eSharp Journal, and as chapters in two edited volumes, and a recent piece for “The Modernist Review”, and Folger Research Centre’s blog. She is also the recipient of the Tempus Public Foundation scholarship, Hungary, and has presented papers for ASLE-UKI, etc. Her areas of interests include aesthetics

and critical theory, memory and trauma studies, animal studies and ethics, food studies, and Indian Writing in English among others.

Anthropocenic Imaginaries

Joanna Wilson-Scott, 'Environmentally Induced Distress: Solastalgia and the Perforated Landscape'

Since its inception, the term 'solastalgia' has gained traction due to its ability to convey the impact of anthropogenic environmental damage on human wellbeing. Defined as a form of 'environmentally induced distress' and a longing for the solace of home, solastalgia is not limited to reflection after the fact by those already displaced, as 'people who are still in their home environs can also experience place-based distress in the face of the lived experience of profound environmental change' (Albrecht et al. 2007, 96). This paper explores solastalgic responses to the gradual or sudden loss of the home due to anthropogenic factors in twenty-first-century literature. In so doing, it shifts focus onto the domestic effects and lived experiences of climate change, positioning the home as a site of ecological significance. As a particular form of loss and a recipe for solastalgia, this study looks at erasure made manifest through the presence of holes in Shaun Prescott's Australian novel *The Town* (2017). Speaking to both the gradual erosion of rural Australian locales as well as the eradication of futures, the novel is also an example of current Australian literary preoccupations with climate change and the effects of the Anthropocene. In the novel, the first of many holes to appear in an unnamed town in the Central West of New South Wales is described as "a blankness in the turf [...] more of an absence than a hole", into which "a part of the world had apparently just vanished" (86). Alongside the mysterious voids that appear without warning and consume the town, teenagers spend their days digging holes in an empty plot of land between a petrol station and an abandoned nightclub, nascently aware as they do so that "the future would be horror" (94). The perforated landscape of the town signals not only the incremental loss of the home but also mirrors the "growing hole in the sky" (115), the ozone depletion, bringing with it a sense of dread and signposting a far greater, planetary threat. Solastalgia goes concomitantly with the slow violence identified by Rob Nixon (2012), and awareness of the former as a type of distress can further our understandings of climate change as both a lived experience and as a form of violence, to humanity and the world around us. It is the dread and distress associated with solastalgia that speaks so profoundly to issues of environmental erasure.

Joanna Wilson-Scott obtained her PhD from the University of Leicester, writing her thesis on violent-eye literature and contemporary American narratives of causality. She has lectured at the University of Leicester, the University of Gloucestershire, and currently at Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln. In 2019, she was a Postdoctoral Visiting Research Fellow at the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford, working on the domestic effects and lived experiences of climate change in Anthropocene fictions.

Nadine Böhm-Schmitker, 'Trails of Erasure: Imagining the Reality of Co-Migrations in Contemporary Climate Fiction'

"The animals are dying. Soon we will be alone here. [...] Once, when the animals were going, really and truly and not just in warnings of dark futures but now, right now, in mass extinctions we could see and feel, I decided to follow a bird over an ocean" (McConaghy 2020: 3). Charlotte McConaghy's 2020 climate novel *Migrations* makes its protagonist Franny Stone follow the migratory paths of the Arctic tern, a soon-to-be-extinct species in the near future of the novel's diegetic world, from Greenland to Antarctica and back

again. Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Flight Behaviour* (2012) aligns the migrations of monarch butterflies from Mexico to the US with the migration of people due to climate change: "The monarchs are from Michoacán, and we are from Michoacán" (Kingsolver 2012: 135), a Mexican woman explains to the main character Dellarobia Turnbow. What I propose to analyse is, first, a tendency in current climate fiction to envision temporalities that render climate threats more imminent and, second, its capacity to imagine spatialities that align human and non-human forms of migration; the two novels under closer consideration indicate a wider trend to challenge epistemologies ossified during the Anthropocene. By aligning the transnational migratory paths of the Arctic terns with those of the novel's protagonist, *Migrations* puts the birds and the character on a similar trajectory for survival. The novel reveals, in a first step, Franny's trans-corporeality (Stacy Alaimo) in order to question the distinction between the 'human' and the 'environment' and, in a second step, it reveals new ways in which we 'make kin' (Donna J. Haraway) by way of shared migrations. Similarly, *Flight Behaviour* reveals the ways in which the routes that humans need to take in their flight from climate catastrophes run parallel to the routes taken by animals such as the monarch butterflies. The loss of roots due to climate change is somewhat attenuated by comigrations, by allowing for new forms of kinship between humans and non-humans. The novels thus present a timely intervention in current discourses on biodiversity, climate change and migration: they offer chronotopes that reveal the close enmeshments between 'character', 'environment' and time in co-migrations transferring stories of loss into stories of shared life paths as a form of deep adaptation (Bendell).

Nadine Boehm-Schnitker (PD Dr.) works as a stand-in professor of American Studies with a special emphasis on Gender Studies at Bielefeld University and serves as a 'Privatdozentin' for English Literary and Cultural Studies at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. She specializes in neo-Victorian and Victorian Studies and is interested in the cultural history of perception in nineteenth-century texts as well as the re-evaluation of aesthetics in terms of aesthetics within Cultural Studies. Recently, she hosted the international and interdisciplinary conference "Opium Wars – Opium Cultures", a project related to other endeavours situated in the fields of ecocriticism and biopolitics.

Emma Devlin, 'Unimagining Erasure in Weird Fiction'

The Lovecraftian definition of weird writing is one inflected by cosmic horror, where human beings become aware of their insignificance within the vastness of the cosmos. The concept lends itself well as a metaphor for and even creative tool to explore ecological crisis, and has indeed been studied in this way by scholars such as Gry Ulstein and Patricia MacCormack. Cosmic horror, as envisaged by Lovecraft, is heavily racialised. While the explicitly racist views of Lovecraft the man have largely been acknowledged, his definitions of the weird and cosmic horror as elaborated in "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1927) remain a kind of first principle of weird writing. The racist inflections of "Supernatural Horror in Literature" have been well established by Sean Moreland and others, but relatively little work has been done to challenge cosmic horror as an imaginative concept. This paper argues that the concept of cosmic horror, particularly as defined by Lovecraft, represents what Jennifer Wenzel refers to as a "quarantine of the imagination" (2020). Cosmic horror becomes a paralysing force for the agents in Lovecraft's work, largely white males with scholarly interest. The nonhuman entities and objects of the stories have meaning only so far as they relate to (white, Western, Euro-centric) humans, and the only meaning derived from them is of humanity's insignificance. Thus, cosmic horror signifies the self-erasure of the white male and, in turn, the erasure of those that are outside his sphere of influence. In this way, the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene – that mankind is equally affected by crisis, that action is pointless – is replicated via the metaphor of cosmic horror. This paper considers cosmic horror as a failure of imagination and a paralysing force, and suggests ways to imagine alternative futures.

Emma Devlin is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at Queen's University Belfast. Her research focuses on the fictions of the Anthropocene, with particular interest in Weird fiction, representations of the nonhuman, and envisaging post-Anthropocene futures.

Lily Brown, “A huge green eye, darkly bright with hidden secrets”: Surveillance, technology, and Edenic spaces in young adult literature’

In the past two decades there has been a noticeable trend in young adult literature for fantasy and science fiction novels speculating on how our planet and lives will be altered. There is a particular trend for texts set in the near future which deal with the introduction of technology, both in the form of food technology and artificial intelligence which attempt to aid humanity in trying to survive on a planet ravaged by environmental degradation. I will focus on three young adult fantasy and science fiction texts, Julie Bertagna’s *Exodus*, published in 2002; Joey Graceffa’s *Children of Eden*, published in 2016 and Tom and Giovanna Fletcher’s *Eve of Man*, published in 2018. In each of these novels new spaces have been created for humans to live in. While the technology invented to maintain these spaces is impressive there is a distinct feeling of loss and mourning in these narratives for the past which relied less heavily on artificial means of connection. In *Exodus* there are communities unwilling to engage with the new way of life, believing that it corrupts those in charge and isolates those under this leadership. In first showing us a glimpse of Mara’s life on her small island, surrounded with generations of families who have been working the same land for decades there is an acute sense of loss when they are driven from their home with the promise of a more secure and but largely uncertain existence. In some cases the female protagonists have no knowledge of the natural world and only have the stories they are told by their parents or guardians to connect them with how life used to be. Drawing on the work already done by scholars in the field of ecocriticism, including Kenneth Kidd, Sidney Dobrin and Anthony Pavlik, I will explore the way in which anthropocentric values are challenged and critiqued in these narratives. I will analyse these novels and find evidence to suggest that there will be losses not only to our connection to nature but to our connection with one another as more and more functions are replaced by robots, computers and artificial life forms. These narratives serve as warnings for what our society might be facing if current issues with our treatment of the environment are not addressed. Their popularity and the announcement of further books in the *Eve of Man* series highlights the importance of books inspiring discussions of our relationship with the planet.

Lily Brown is a PhD student at Anglia Ruskin University researching religion and its influence on young adult fantasy fiction. She holds a BA and an MA in English Literature from the University of Reading and she has recently taught on the Children’s Literature MA at Anglia Ruskin. Her research interests include children’s literature, young adult literature, fantasy fiction, Christianity in literature and ecocriticism.

Pamela Carralero, ‘Against Cultural Erasure: Linking Climate Models and Poetry in Climate Migration Discourse’

This presentation combats the loss of cultural roots to climate migratory routes by forging a relation between climate models and Pacific Island poetry. Low-lying Pacific Island nations acutely threatened by rising sea levels cannot undergo migration within Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia without international support and financial aid. Yet internal migration strategies offered by green financing organizations are often proffered within a broader discourse of labor mobility and job creation—e.g. where can an uprooted nation economically thrive and build social stability? Such rhetoric raises climate justice questions. By associating survival, adaptation, and climate knowledge with economic prosperity, the connection between life, space, and culture becomes erased in migration discourse. If climate migration internal to the Pacific Islands is to be the continuation of more than just bare life, geopolitical discussions of adaptation must include efforts to sustain cultural practices and sovereignties. Poised at the center of climate geopolitics, climate models are the primary means by which international decision-makers visualize

projected climate impacts and anticipate climate migration movements. Climate models are consequently crucial to thinking about how we conceive of populations' movements in climate-changing spaces. Analyzing climate models as artifacts of twenty-first-century visual culture, I argue that climate models offer geopolitics a radical spatial context that counters the possibility of cultural loss resulting from migration. My analysis results in what I call spatial perspectivism, an ethnocultural acknowledgement of a multiplicity of world spaces (each which result from unique cultural dynamics) that combats economic erasure of cultural life. I thus theorize climate models as suggestive of a worldview that reinforces the intimacy of lifeways, traditions, spaces, and materialities as constituents of successful adaptation. Employing spatial perspectivism in a climate migration context means that international support of climate migration would occur in cognizance of communities' culturally specific relations to roots and migratory routes. In fact, case studies of internal migration within the Pacific Islands suggest that relocation is most feasible when it occurs amidst familiar spatial existential arrangements (person-oyster-rock-wind-tide) that retain connections to pre-migratory lifeways. Pacific Island poetry becomes key, here, as a vehicle to communicate to non-natives the cultural importance of these spatial arrangements. Examining the specificity of these arrangements in the in the poetry of Kathy Jetnil-Kijner (Marshall Islands), Francis Tekonnang (Kiribati), and Teresia K. Teaiwa (Fiji), I highlight the importance of humanistic inquiry and creativity as a partner to climate migration politics. As I bring climate models and migration poetry together to combat the possibility of cultural erasure, I build a multi-scalar poetics that emphasizes the importance of roots and routes to climate migration discourse. In this way, I consider the question: what is climate science to climate justice-oriented thought and practice?

Dr. Pamela Carralero is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Humanities at Kettering University. Her research is located at the intersections of climate knowledge technology and justice studies. She specializes in bridging the politics and science of climate models and the theories and methodologies of the environmental humanities. Dr. Carralero has published articles in journals such as *Feminist Studies* and *Telos* and is working on a book project titled *Emergent Epistemology: Making Climate Knowledge Just*.

Trang Dang, “‘Being Forced to Move’: Displacement and Identity Loss in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne* Series’

This paper investigates the recently-published series, *Borne* (2020) by Jeff VanderMeer. It examines the sense of identity loss and temporospatial displacement caused by forces that symbolise today's neocolonialism and neoliberalism and experienced by humans and nonhumans in the series. Set in a postapocalyptic world swarmed by biotechnology, these novels give multiple accounts of humans and nonhumans' attempts to carve out life in the ruined City while being constantly threatened by other powerful forces called the Company and the Magician. In this scenario, these humans and nonhumans are refugees without refuge, driven away from their home due to environmental disasters and gradually losing their identity as a result. Meanwhile, the powerful forces serve as an emblem of today's neocolonialist and neoliberal practices of capturing land and exploiting natural resources, which in turn heighten the intensity of ecological catastrophes. By interrogating VanderMeer's timely novels, this paper not only brings out the silent voices and suffering bodies of climate refugees both in fiction and reality but also critiques and condemns the power structures and ongoing violent practices of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. While using close textual analysis as its main methodological approach, this paper employs postcolonial theory formulated by critics such as Rob Nixon and Dipesh Chakrabarty as a model for discussing the ideologies of the Company and the Magician, how they mirror those in the contemporary era, and their serious effects upon the livelihood and survival of both humans and nonhumans in the ruined City. In addition, a collection of work examining the idea of haunted landscapes by anthropologists and biologists such as Anna Tsing, Jens-Christian Svenning, and Andrew Mathews provides an invaluable critical framework for exploring the extent to and scale on which the Company and the Magician damage Earth's ecosystem and for illuminating what humans and nonhumans have lost in the face of environmental collapse. This paper concludes that,

for the sake of capital and power accumulation, neocolonialism and neoliberalism represented by the Magician and the Company have altered drastically the places which humans and nonhumans once inhabited. Forced to migrate and move out of their home and suffering from amnesia as the geographical traces of their home become irretrievable, these humans and nonhumans bear witness to the devastation of their own lives and struggle to maintain a sense of identity.

Trang Dang is currently a doctoral student at Nottingham Trent University and previously graduated from Oxford Brookes University with a BA and an MA in English Literature. Her PhD project is funded by the NTU PhD Studentship scheme and her postgraduate work has been published in the interdisciplinary journal, *Exclamation*. She specialises in contemporary literature, science fiction, and contemporary cultural theories. Trang is currently working on Jeff VanderMeer's weird fiction, exploring narratives of future co-existence between humans and nonhumans and the role of New Weird novels in portraying the climate crisis.

Indigeneity and Ecological Breakdown

Paula Wiczorek, 'Rethinking the Apocalypse: Indigenous communities, the environment and extractive industries in Rebecca Roanhorse's speculative fiction'

Growing environmental and social injustices aggravated by the Anthropocene have sparked many popular movies and science fiction novels about the future of the Earth. While literary scholars have focused on the ecocritical analyses of speculative fiction written by mainstream writers, scant critical attention has been given to the genre of speculative fiction created by contemporary Indigenous female writers. Mainstream fiction presents dystopian or post-apocalyptic visions of climate crises that often erase certain populations, such as Indigenous peoples, who approach climate change having already been through transformations of their societies induced by colonial violence. The main intention of the following paper is to examine the way an Indigenous writer Rebecca Roanhorse responds to the challenges posed by the Anthropocene epoch through her 2018 speculative fiction novel *Trail of Lightning*. Referring to Dipesh Chakrabarty's works, the paper discusses the impact of extractive industries on the lives of Indigenous communities and non-humans alike. In Roanhorse's novel, the ecological crisis is represented as a continuation of the era of colonialism which extends through advanced capitalism. The paper gives insights into the ways *Trail of Lightning* reflects on current political conditions that impede action on climate change. Applying the theories of Stacy Alaimo and Serenella Iovino, the paper explores the relationship between human bodies and the environment. Special attention will be paid to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and its relevance to sustainable development. The paper addresses Roanhorse's novel primarily from ecocritical perspectives. Following Amitav Ghosh, Lawrence Buell and Ursula K. Heise, the environmental crisis will be discussed as a crisis of culture and imagination. I intend to prove that speculative fiction serves as an innovative alternative for communicating climate change. I would also like to argue that Rebecca Roanhorse's fiction can be seen as environmental justice work and a form of resistance against extractive industries.

Paula Wiczorek (M.A.) is a PhD candidate and an academic teacher at the University of Rzeszów, Poland. Her particular fields of interest include posthumanism, ecocriticism, material feminism and contemporary North American literature. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation on speculative fiction of selected North American Indigenous writers. In her research, she examines the relationship between human and non-human as illustrated in contemporary American fiction. She is a member of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE).

Demi Wilton, “‘To Lose Country?’ Environmental Displacement in Contemporary Australian First Nations’ Fiction’

Media coverage of climate-related loss and displacement was extensive during the 2019-20 bushfire crisis in Australia. However, though over 5000 sacred First Nations sites were at risk from the blaze, little attention was paid to the damages and dislocation experienced by First Nations communities compared to Australia’s non-Indigenous population. Scholars and activists have since condemned this underrepresentation, emphasizing that climate change is extremely likely to disproportionately affect Indigenous communities because of existing social and economic disadvantages and their dependence on the land for sustenance, culture, and livelihood (Sangha and others, 2020). Responding to these issues of environmental injustice and its insufficient representation in Australia today, this paper will examine two works of contemporary Australian First Nations fiction concerned with themes of climate-related displacement, loss, and damage: namely, Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013) and Ellen Van Neerven’s ‘Water’, from their short story collection *Heat and Light* (2014). By comparing the climate-stricken futurescapes of each work, this paper will highlight how each author portends that climate change offers the nation state a tool for the assimilation of Indigenous communities into neoliberal society. Alongside these readings, this paper will accordingly draw upon recent developments in Australian politics designed to remove welfare support from First Nations communities even as climate change compounds their hardship. I argue that Wright and Van Neerven offer a critique of the efficacy of climate change-abetted First Nations acculturation through literary registrations of the ancient and adaptive epistemologies underpinning contemporary First Nations existence. Climate injustice and First Nations environmental resilience, they suggest, meet in underrepresented, problematic, but also potentially generative ways.

Demi Wilton is a PhD student at the School of English at Loughborough University, UK. Her research examines contemporary depictions of environmental displacement in world literature.

She is particularly interested in climate-fiction by authors from nations vulnerable to climate change, and the ways in which these works of literature respond to the notion of ‘climate-refugeehood’. Demi is the Early Career Officer for the Association of Studies of Literature and Environment, UK and Ireland.

Abbey Ballard, “‘The Whole Earth Feels It’: Trial and Judgement within Linda Hogan’s *Power*’

When the Wilderness Act was signed into law on September 3rd 1964, the legal definition of ‘Wilderness’ within the United States of America was formed, and a troubling discourse of colonial oppression remained unbroken. Within the Act, wilderness is defined as ‘an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.’ However, there is a clear distinction made between the imprint of Western society and that of the Indigenous peoples for whom this environment is their ancestral home. The tribal people of this land are not visitors, but share a deep and complex relationship with the diverse bioregional systems of this continent. A relationship which the United States Supreme Court itself has stated as being no less necessary to the existence of Native Americans than ‘the atmosphere they breathed.’ It is these disparate perspectives found within the United States judicial system, both towards Indigenous peoples and to the North American environment, which forms the crux of Linda Hogan’s highly political novel *Power* (1998). Told from the perspective of Omishto, a young girl of the fictional Taiga tribe, we follow the repercussions of the ritualistic killing of an endangered Florida panther, a creature sacred to the Taiga people and protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Omishto accompanies Ama, a maternal figure within her life and a fellow member of the Taiga tribe, on Ama’s hunt for the sacred panther ‘Sisa.’ Following her actions, Ama faces two trials, one in a federal courtroom and the other by the tribal council, with each ending in an entirely different verdict. Exploring

the environmental impacts of colonisation shown through the damaged and altered ecological spaces represented within the novel, this paper will focus on adopting a decolonised critical perspective of social and environmental justice. By unsettling prototypical Western perspectives of the nonhuman world, the critical methodology adopted within this paper will emphasise Indigenous modes of ecological entanglement present within the text. By doing so, it will establish a more inclusive critique of witnessing as a form of Indigenous resistance. Illustrating how colonisation is not only the history of the human beings who are displaced from the land, but is an inter-mutual experience shared by both human and nonhuman alike, this paper will explore the forms of witnessing found within the text. Once all the witnesses have been heard, the concluding question will be whether it is truly Ama on trial within the novel, or whether it is the judicial systems and cultural discourses of Western society which are ultimately judged.

Abbey Ballard recently completed her Masters at Bath Spa University in Literature, Landscape and the Environment. She currently acts as Editorial Assistant for the academic journal *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, the official journal for ASLE-UKI. Abbey is predominantly interested in environmental justice and the process of decolonisation through activism within academia.

Masculinity, Reproduction, and Environment

David M. Bell, *Out of the Woods, 'The Future is Kids' Stuff: Children, The Child, and the Future'*

This paper charts the co-constituting erasures enacted by mainstream environmentalism in the name of The Child and the promise of The Future. Drawing on Lee Edelman's queer anti-futurism and critiquing the romantic white supremacism lurking within environmentalist 'common sense', it argues that invocations to 'think of the children' all-too-often function to secure the future as a site for the reproduction of a normative, and ecologically destructive, white heteronormativity. Further, they overlook the fact that ecological crisis is not simply an event-to-come; but a process that has happened and is happening, including to many children. However, the antisocial and anti-natalist aspects of Edelman's thought also erases the uneven distribution of 'childhood' through ecocidal colonialism. Accordingly, the paper centres queer-of-colour utopianism, Indigenous futurism, child liberationism and decolonial scholarship to argue for the ecological struggle of actually-existing-children against the symbolic 'Child'. In this, it also argues for the future as a space of unknowable (im)possibility and ecological flourishing against The Future as the crisis of enviro-nationalism.

David Bell is interested in utopianism as it operates within, against and beyond this (and any) world. His monograph *Rethinking Utopia* was published by Routledge in 2017. He's also member of *Out of the Woods*, a transnational writing collective exploring how we might organise outside the state in response to ecological crisis. An anthology of their work was published by *Common Notions* in 2020. He works part time for LU Arts at Loughborough University.

James Peacock, *'Man in Landscape: Masculinity, Gentrification and the Environment in Jonathan Lethem's The Feral Detective and The Arrest'*

In *The Feral Detective* (2018), which opens six days before his inauguration, the narrator makes numerous dysphemistic references to the forty-fifth U.S. president – “the Beast-Elect,” “the deal-whore” (20, 211). This is a novel expressly concerned with atavistic masculinity, warring tribes, and the erosion of progressive liberal, dissenting voices, and Trump looms large. Though it is tempting to locate fictional Trumps in the malevolent figures of Keith Stolarsky and Peter Todbaum, the chief antagonists of *A Gambler’s Anatomy* (2016) and *The Arrest* (2020) respectively, to do so would be to fall into a trap, ignoring the fact that they are agents produced by “a dimension of totalitarianism which cannot be understood on the model of despotic command” (Mark Fisher 50). They are symptoms of underlying structural inequities, and their despotic tendencies and Trumpian aggressions metaphors for a broader logic of power enacted through violence, division, erasure and, to use Saskia Sassen’s term, “expulsion” in the global political economy (Sassen 1). Focusing on *The Feral Detective* and *The Arrest* – whose title derives from an unspecified event in which technology stops working and the population is forced into localized, agrarian communities – I argue that these novels contribute to an ecocritical agenda evident in earlier Lethem works including *Girl in Landscape* (1998) and *Chronic City* (2009) but which is revealed in these texts through the “hegemonic and destructive forms of masculinity” (Pease 114) they depict. Across different landscapes – the California desert in *The Feral Detective* and the Maine coast in *The Arrest* – Lethem offers an ecomasculinist critique of a very particular form of erasure, one referred to in *The Feral Detective* as “Gentrification. The flood before the flood” (Lethem 322): the colonization of desert and rural hinterlands and the appropriation of the very notion of apocalyptic and dystopian thinking by dominant groups.

James Peacock is Senior Lecturer in English and American Literatures at Keele University. He specialises in contemporary American fiction and is the author of *Brooklyn Fictions: The Contemporary Urban Community in a Global Age* (Bloomsbury, 2015). He is currently working on a monograph about contemporary novels that engage with urban gentrification.

Suzanne Manizza Roszak, “The Last Time It Snows on Earth”: Ecological Violence, Pregnancy, and Multivalent Loss in Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*

When Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* was published in 2017, it met with both acclaim and bursts of rather hyperbolic resistance, including pronouncements that Erdrich had made a “rare stumble” or even produced a “well-intentioned disaster.” Reviews that did recognize the genius in Erdrich’s speculative rendering were often couched in caveats, including less than favorable comparisons to both Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler. They also tended to acknowledge Erdrich’s indigeneity and that of her protagonist in superficial terms that did not quite seem to grasp the mutually constitutive influence of race, nation, gender, and environmental crisis in the life of the novel. A more fully intersectional reading of *Future Home*, however, reveals its significant place within the world of contemporary climate fiction as a novel that mercilessly imagines and vivifies the losses of a nightmarish environmental future. Erdrich’s novel grapples with legacies of white saviorism and settler colonialism more broadly as well as their very particular impacts on women’s experiences of pregnancy, child-bearing, and motherhood, all set against a backdrop of ecological violence. The result is a painful constellation of erasures, from “the last time it snows on earth” to the denial of pregnant women’s agency in a dystopian national context that bears more than enough resemblance to the American present. Yet Erdrich also interweaves notes of humor and optimism into the narrative, in this way giving readers something to hold onto: something that, though it may have puzzled the novel’s detractors, adds essential dimensionality to its portrait of loss and the prospect of surviving it. Thinking intersectionally through questions of erasure and the environment in Erdrich’s novel opens a door to more perceptive ways of understanding her work and its importance to the environmental humanities.

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Aesthetics of Erasure

Oliver Haslam, 'Blank Spaces: Paul Auster's Environments of Erasure'

Abstract: Through pursuing Paul Auster's frequent deployment of the 'blank' in language, environment, and memory, this paper will demonstrate how his early fiction depends upon erasure. Spatial blanks abound within a dystopian disappearance of the physical world in *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), whilst temporal blanks of memory and affect negatively form characters in *The New York Trilogy* (1987). The origins of this aesthetics of erasure will be traced back to Auster's early poetry, specifically the prose poem, *White Spaces* (1979), to further my suggestion that these blanks are charged responses to perceived effacements within the politics of 1980s American culture. Both *The New York Trilogy* and *In the Country of Last Things* present a movement through time towards nothingness, described in the latter as the 'slow but ineluctable process of erasure'. This is always a 'process', conceptualised here to account for an incomplete effacement detectable in Auster's writing. Through a framework of affect and the everyday, and through close readings of *White Spaces*, *The New York Trilogy* and *In the Country of Last Things*, this paper reveals how representations of blanks, erasure, and the contradictory meanings they both entail, affirms their importance as formal devices deployed throughout Auster's literary career. Here blanks produce a nothingness repeatedly charged with something.

Oliver Haslam is a PhD student at Loughborough University supervised by Dr Brian Jarvis and Dr Jennifer Cooke. He was awarded a Doctoral College studentship in 2017. His research explores the persistence of minimalism within American literature from the twentieth century into the twenty-first century, with the intention of furthering its aesthetic understanding. Oliver currently teaches British Literature at the University of Evansville's UK campus.

Aaron Eames, "'Our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place": Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying' in 2020'

In this paper I consider Wilde's essay 'The Decay of Lying', and several other relevant texts, in relation to the contemporary moment. In 'The Decay of Lying' Wilde argues through his character Vivian that life and nature reflect art rather than vice versa. Thinking about Wilde's arguments, which were perhaps tongue-in-cheek when they first appeared in 1889, I reflect on how they might be applied to the twenty-first century context. I suggest that Wilde presents an aesthetic basis for environmentalism in that, for him, nature's chief purpose is the illustration of the poets and is dependent on human intellectual activity. Wilde has been read through almost every possible critical lens. Notwithstanding Wilde's malleability in this regard, at present ecocritical readings are few. In explanation of this present paucity I contend that Wilde's views do not lend themselves to this kind of interpretation; despite his status as a queer author, for example, his ideas do not present much ground for linking his work to concepts like queer ecology. However 'queer' Wilde's strategies, his notion of 'Nature' remains gendered and attached to binary formulations between itself and art, and between itself and the 'indoors' since 'The Decay of Lying' is set in a Nottinghamshire library. In regards to erasure I argue that Wilde's general approach is an aesthetic and decadent refusal of "less"-ness to the extent that his depictions of nature and the natural environment are decidedly unreal. They generate what I refer to as list-scapes rather than landscapes, and reflect both capitalist commodity culture and its acquisitive, proprietary relationship with the environment. These appear most prominently in Wilde's early

poetry and his short story 'The Young King'. I examine how, in 'The Decay of Lying', Wilde argues that the natural world is, in a sense, effaced until art teaches us to 'see' particular effects within it.

Aaron Eames is a PhD student at Loughborough University supervised by Dr Nick Freeman and Dr Sarah Parker. His thesis investigates the development and transmission of ideas concerning Oscar Wilde's sexuality in biographical literature from 1900 to 1967. Aaron is also a committee member of the Oscar Wilde Society UK for which he edits a regular electronic newsletter and acts as editors' assistant on *Intentions*, the Society journal.

Erin Finley, Practiced-based performance of erasure: Title TBC

Live drawing performance where a charcoal landscape is created and then erased, symbolic of reduction/negation of natural spaces. In short: a drawing created by way of erasure, not addition.

Erin Finley is an artist and scholar who teaches at OCAD University (Toronto, Canada). My studio research explores intersections between drawing, feminism, and mark-making as a form of metaphorically charged additive and subtractive processes.