

Abstracts

Ackerman:

“Energy” and “Economy” in Henry Adams’s “Dynamic Theory of History”

Historian Henry Adams is a crucial progenitor of the “Energy Humanities.” Provoked by the release of “mechanical energies” that transformed the world from his birth in 1838 to roughly 1910, he claimed that “the historian’s business was to follow the track of energy.” As he wrote *The Education of Henry Adams*, “The young man himself, the subject of education, is a certain form of energy; the object to be gained is economy of his force.” In diverse works, Adams investigated the impact of forms of energy on himself as a historical subject and on his own historical writing. His “Dynamic Theory of History,” a late chapter in *The Education*, insists on regarding history as a two-way street between cosmic-geological forces and human consciousness. His key terms, “energy” and “economy,” function in a tenuous balance, more often a dangerous imbalance. This paper focuses on Adams’s “Dynamic Theory” and his account of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 to explain his reading of human history in terms of energy crises on global and personal levels, to undo the opposition between humanist and scientific knowledge, and to recognize, in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words, that humans are “geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth.”

Akiyama:

When the bird talks maybe we’ll get some answers

The 2016 murder trial of Glenna Duram had the potential to become the most inhuman legal proceedings in recent memory. Shortly after the killing, the couple’s African grey parrot, Bud, began to utter a disturbing phrase: “Don’t f**ing shoot!” The question was, if the parrot witnessed the murder, was his outburst relevant or admissible for the prosecution? Might Bud’s “words” be considered as testimony? Although Bud was ultimately excluded from the trial, the language with which his fitness to either proverbially take the stand or serve as documentary evidence speaks volumes about our shifting understanding of animal intelligence. Simply put, Bud either had to be called on to testify as a witness—which would imply that he was a rational actor capable of observing, remembering, and speaking for himself—or, he would have to be considered as little more than a surface upon which the sounds of his environment were inscribed—a sound recording device, as it were. In the end, he was apparently not considered reliable enough in either capacity. And bird, or no bird, Duram was convicted.

The case of Bud the parrot speaks to an important fault line between the human and the animal, one that is starting to rumble and grind at the longstanding assumption we and we alone possess language, and therefore intelligence. Bud’s potential inclusion in the trial as evidence, as a feathered storage device, reminds us that the Cartesian dismissal of animals as mere automata endures. However, the mass speculation in the media as to the parrot’s fitness to testify shows that something is changing, that while an animal capable of mimicking human speech is certainly inscrutable, it might not be dumb.

Barndt:

Show Time. Museums, Memory and the Poetics of Deindustrialization in Contemporary Germany

As deindustrialization has transformed entire industries and landscapes, the industrial past has become an object of contemplation. As such, it has entered museum and exhibition culture, which in turn has begun to shape Germany's sense of (post)industrial time. The exhibitions and museums of postindustrial transformation offer glimpses into layers of time and history that undermine the idea of progress – a master trope of nineteenth century museum narratives – and replace it with a new sense of being in time as an affective and environmentally conscious relation to the multiplicity of history and memory. In keeping with this paradigm, exhibitions such as the International Building Exhibitions (IBA) Emscher Park and Fürst-Pückler-Land as well as the new Ruhr Museum in Essen are bound up with a temporal aesthetic that relies on archeological depth and the unearthing of ever more layers of sedimented time. With the help of Koselleck's metahistorical paradigm of *Zeitschichten*, I argue that Marxist notions of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* have given way to post-dialectical representations of time and history: nature, culture, and industrial history encircle each other in the Ruhr Museum's industrial *Wunderkammer*, the old coal washing plant of the colliery (Zeche Zollverein). Natural history provides the most extensive time frame for the exhibitions in this particular industrial ruin, bridging from the geological time of coal formation to the regeneration of post-industrial landscapes. The Ruhr Museum's permanent exhibition culminates in a discourse of future sustainability, imagining utopian equilibrium between societal and natural temporalities and thus presents a particular museal encounter with the legacy of the anthropocene.

Groves:

Stranded Futures: On Literature and Maladaptation

In a time marked by climate change and the various space-time compressions known as globalization, there is a growing awareness that things and beings are increasingly unadapted to each other and their surroundings, particularly along literal shorelines and figurative conflict shorelines. Combined with its ambiguous exaltation of ecological and biological imbalance, W.G. Sebald's extravagant re-imagination of his predecessors in *The Rings of Saturn* suggests that maladaptation extends into the very form of this text. Taken as a performance of maladaptation, *The Rings of Saturn* contends with the difficulty of writing and surviving functional changes in the Earth system and in ecosystems alike. Although the melancholic disposition of Sebald's narrators can threaten to engulf the narrative in a temporal stasis, his fictions are open to a futurity that should be of interest to critical ecological thought. This talk will read sites of disturbance in Sebald's writing as novel environments rather than merely the ongoing devastation of a traumatic past. The vulnerable shorelines and reduced ecologies that comprise the environmental imagination of *The Rings of Saturn* subtly and reluctantly celebrate the regenerative capacities of anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic ecological disturbances (storms, volcanoes, fires, and floods), they nourish a more-than-human future beyond the legacy of anthropogenic destruction, and they also yield an ecopoetics not predicated on an unpolluted atmosphere or unalienated life.

Holmes:

Lebendige Bildungen: Goethe's Plant Thinking

Goethe's morphology is a theory of plant forms that has aspects in common with what it describes: coming about in a gradual process, developing over a lifetime of observation and contemplation, and in cross-pollination with other ideas present in the intellectual environment around 1800. "Plant thinking" (from Michael Marder's 2013 book of the same name) refers to a philosophy of plant life that does not dominate, and thus distort, the target of its investigations, but affirms the potential of the "vegetal heritage of human thought" to resist the logic of totalization and instrumentality. While it was not Goethe's aim to decenter the human subject, in the search for a new methodological approach to plant life that does not kill off its object but rather responds to its dynamism and changeability, morphology is a way of thinking about plants that allows plants themselves to shape thinking and the subject. This talk will examine passages from Goethe's morphological notebooks, essays, diaries and letters to outline the development of morphology and its implications as a form of plant thinking, and point to a few ways it formed Goethe's own life and work.

Jacobs:

Give a Dog a Voice: Isolation, Language Skepticism, and Violence across the Modernist Canine Canon

In the decades around 1900, the Western literary canon boasts a dense accumulation of stories that specifically make dogs their protagonists, or even their narrators. Authors amongst the most important voices of modernism in their respective traditions, such as Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, Franz Kafka, O. Henry, Miguel de Unamuno, Vladimir Bulgakov, and Italo Svevo, all turned to canine perspectives to discuss the human condition in the rapidly changing modern world. Modernism entailed, among other characteristics, fundamental skepticism of the human self-conception, including the epistemological insecurity of how one might fully know oneself or others and doubt about the ability of language to communicate meaning. With the help of some of these modernist texts, I argue that the turn to animals in the literary production of this time parses out three interconnected anxieties of modernism: 1) the growing isolation of the individual subject (which a companion animal can and cannot solve); 2) the *Sprachkrise*, a crisis of language and meaning (in which the limitations of language are addressed via depictions of canine thoughts or words); and 3) concerns about physiognomy and race theory (encoded by dog breeds), which lead to the violent subduing of Others – be they animal, female, or non-white – thus prompting questions about the "humanity" of humankind. The turn to dogs as one of, if not, *the* animal species sharing human everyday life in the literary engagement with these questions both illustrates and suggests ways of overcoming this isolation and its violence.

Kuzniar:

Creaturely Kinship in Marion Poschmann's *Hundenovelle*

At the beginning of Marion Poschmann's *Hundenovelle* (2008) we recognize in the first-person narrator all the signs of Dürer's "Melancholia II." She glowers, has a darkened face, and supports her head on a tightened fist; a bat hovers in the air above her; at her feet lie a saw, joiner's plane, and nails; her

attempts at flying (i.e., fleeing) are futile. It is not long, too, before a dog appears in sight. In this WIG paper, I would like to take up the topic of intimacy between women and their canine companions, as well as of the common bond through shame, that I first discussed in *Melancholia's Dog: Reflections on our Animal Kinship* (U of Chicago P, 2006)-but this time in respect to Poschmann's novella. In taking a stray dog into her home and with him on her daily meanderings through the outskirts of town, Poschmann's narrator explores her own creaturely self, which is to say, a sense of alienation, silence, depression, material existence, and delayed, sluggish, animalistic rhythms. The narrator identifies with this canine, creaturely being; she feels as if she were crawling; like Dürer's dog, she wants constantly to sleep. The dog is everywhere-both inside and outside of her. The encounter that Poschmann depicts is both a destabilization of the human and a recognition of the strangeness of other, animal life-and hence marks an important contribution to recent discussions of the intersections between feminism, post-humanism, and animal studies.

Poland:

Beyond Dominant Sustainability Frames: Insights from Critical, Land-Based, Animistic, Indigenous, Global South and other Perspectives

This presentation addresses gaps and opportunities for innovation in the engagement of citizens in visioning and planning for healthier environments into the future, addressing emerging (ecological, social) threats in a way that brings in fresh perspectives from critical, Indigenous, Global South, and other marginalized non-dominant ways of thinking, knowing and being. These typically emphasize relationality over instrumental relations, are closely tied to the land, and embody animistic and other ways of knowing that are outside of the typical Western paradigm (and indeed have been actively marginalized by it). It is argued these ways of knowing are needed at this time to go beyond "trying to solve the world's problems with the same level of thinking that created them". We see that no matter how sophisticated our methods, they rarely escape the considerable cultural baggage of Western thinking (that instrumentalizes relationship, that is based on scarcity, separation, competition, meritocracy, etc), and that these cultural and cosmological roots of current societal challenges must also be made visible and transcended. We issue a call for convening spaces that bring non-dominant and dominant paradigms into respectful dialogue and seed the imagination of participants with possibilities for co-creating a more hopeful future for healthy cities.

Robinson:

Sustainability in an Imaginary World

Geologically speaking, the Anthropocene marks the end of the Holocene period, a time of great planetary stability. Conceptually speaking, the Anthropocene marks the end of the Modernist period, a time of great epistemic stability. As scientific framings of sustainability strain under anthropocenic realities, reconceptualising sustainability may be necessary. By positioning human/nature relations beyond Modernist dichotomies underpinning scientific discourse, the implications of the Anthropocene shift from methodological to ontological, dislodging sustainability from its traditional scientific foundations. To this, we propose new stability through four interlinked approaches to sustainability's complex challenges, offering a framework for thought and action beyond Modernist framings of sustainability and opening essential roles to often-marginalized interpretive social sciences and humanities. An attempt to instantiate these ideas in an interactive art and scenario analysis installation will be described.

Ruiz:

Iceberg Futures and Surplus Value

How can ice be made profitable in the Anthro/Capitalocene? This talk will explore how the cryosphere figures in the production of a novel form of surplus value tailored to the phase states, material properties, and geographic locations of sea ice, icebergs and glaciers. It will examine how the emergence of climate change's "grey resources," equally emergent in political economic as ethical terms, are reshaping the relationships human societies are establishing with cryogenic phenomena. Extending Jason Moore's recent work on world ecology and his insights around the formation of a "capitalism-in-nature," the talk will offer the figure of an "iceberg future" wherein ices are environmental phenomena defining the commodification of cold experiences on a warming planet.

Wolff

Along Toronto's Shores

From Queens Quay, with tall buildings to one side and the low waves of Lake Ontario to the other, Toronto's shoreline looks fixed, immutable, unambiguous. But it isn't. The shore has changed over eras, centuries and decades, sometimes according to people's plans and sometimes because of forces far beyond people's control: it's changing still. Traces of the shoreline's history are woven into the everyday fabric of the city, hidden in plain sight. Evidence that the landscape's past carries into its present, they're worth remarking as we—the we who are experts and the we who are citizens—ask ourselves how the present might carry into the future.

Zalik:

Oil Regionalisms: Memorialization and Contestation in North American Hydrocarbons

Critics of `Cartesian` understandings of human-nature binaries argue that conceptualizing nature as external to social relations, and human labour as a category distinguishable from nature has presented a major epistemological challenge to critical approaches to the socio-economy, and is a constitutive element of major techno-scientific disasters currently faced. Yet in socio-environmental history, the depiction of varying forms of human control over land-nature has been central to shaping radical collectivities opposed to the concentrated power of capital. Through an examination of the relationship between the memorialization of embodied organized labour and produced nature-as-rent in 20th century struggles over national/state oil resources (including their historiographies and debated political economies), this presentation explores the contested meaning of resource, that is land and labour, sovereignties under the distinctive modernities associated with Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonial projects.