ECOLOGIES OF GENDER
CONTEMPORARY NATURE RELATIONS AND THE NONHUMAN TURN

Edited by
Susanne Lettow and Sabine Nessel
Ecologies of Gender

Ecologies of Gender: Contemporary Nature Relations and the Nonhuman Turn examines the role of gender in recent debates about the nonhuman turn in the humanities, and critically explores the implications for a contemporary theory of gender and nature relations.

The interdisciplinary contributions in this volume each provides theoretical reflections based on an analysis of specific naturecultural processes. They reveal how “ecologies of gender” are constructed through aesthetic, epistemological, political, technological and economic practices that shape multispecies and material interrelations as well as spatial and temporal orderings. The volume includes contributions from cultural anthropology, cultural studies, film studies, literary studies, media studies, philosophy and theatre studies. The essays are organized around four key dimensions of an “ecological” understanding of gender: “creatures”, “materials”, “spaces” and “temporalities”.

The overall aim of the volume Ecologies of Gender: Contemporary Nature Relations and the Nonhuman Turn is to explore the potentialities and limitations of the nonhuman turn for a critical analysis and theory of ecologies of gender, and thereby make an original contribution to both the environmental humanities and gender studies.

This book will be of great interest to scholars and students from the interdisciplinary field of the environmental humanities and environmental studies more broadly, as well as from gender studies and cultural theory.

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Contributors


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Introduction

Ecologies of Gender and the Nonhuman Turn

Susanne Lettow and Sabine Nessel

Contemporary nature relations are contested and crisis-afflicted in a paradoxical manner: marked by the effects of climate change, pandemics and extinctions, yet at the same time characterized by a search for new materials and processes that will allow economic growth even after we stop using fossil fuels. While critical discourses and social movements point forcefully to the fragility of terrestrial conditions of existence, the conquest of new micro- and macro-worlds continues apace, from bioeconomic commodification of living beings to exploring the possibilities of space tourism. The causes and effects of ecological devastation and sociopolitical modes of shaping social nature relations are structured by a host of intersecting power relations and differences. Ecofeminist theories and analyses in the field of gender and environment studies have shed light on many facets of the intersectional constellations, in which gender and class relations, geopolitical and regional hierarchies rooted in a long colonial history and practices and cultural constructs of human exceptionalism are interwoven. They have also, in various ways, drawn attention to how horizons of thought and imagination produced by theoretical and aesthetic practices play a constitutive role in the formation of gender and nature relations. Historically evolved relations of power and domination, and the conflicts associated with them, are congealed within social images and narratives of human and nonhuman nature, gender, sexuality and generativity. At the same time, images and narratives are crucial points of disembarkation for developing new modes of thought and existence.

Proceeding from this insight, the present volume aims to investigate theoretical and aesthetic depictions and narratives of gender and nature relations in literature, film, art, theatre, philosophy and science and technology studies, and thereby contribute to a critical theory of ecologies of gender. As the essays collected in this volume show, concepts and ideas of gender, nature, human, animal, plant and life that are historically embedded in long traditions of anthropocentric-extractivist and patriarchal ways of seeing and thinking need to be reconceptualized and reimagined in the light of crisis-afflicted nature relations.
Crucial input and inspiration for this project can be drawn from the non-human turn in cultural studies and the humanities (see, e.g. Braidotti 2013, Grusin 2017), which fundamentally questions human exceptionalism and has prompted an engagement with nonhuman phenomena. Anthropocentric understandings of history and Western theories of metaphysics, as well as the systems that produce them, have been subjected to intense scrutiny and reformulation, especially in the transdisciplinary fields of human and cultural animal studies, critical plant studies and new materialism. But the theoretical implications of the nonhuman turn have also increasingly been a topic of critical discussion. For instance, Catriona Sandilands observes that “some recent work under the broad (and polyvocal) heading of ‘material’ feminism has tended to downplay […] ethical and political concerns as part of a turn to an ontologically driven inquiry” (2017, 446). Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen similarly speak of the “politically limiting effects” (2015, 194) of the nonhuman turn, and several authors have suggested that the departure from the epistemological paradigm of “situated knowledge” (Deubermankowsky 2019) is problematic. This volume builds on these critical analyses, which – like the nonhuman turn in general – provide key theoretical underpinnings for the emerging field of the environmental humanities.

Central to this interdisciplinary field, which has flourished over the past decade, is “an effort to enrich environmental research with a more extensive conceptual vocabulary, whilst at the same time vitalising the humanities by rethinking the ontological exceptionality of the human” (Rose et al. 2012, 2). In this context, ecofeminist, queer and intersectional approaches have played a crucial role from the very start, or to put it another way: interdisciplinary scholarship, which since the late 1980s has been carried out under headings such as ecofeminism, queer ecology or gender and environment studies, is a central foundation on which the environmental humanities build. However, feminist authors have also raised questions about the way in which critical perspectives on gender relations have hitherto been incorporated into the field. Jennifer Hamilton and Astrid Neimanis, for example, have observed a problematic trend “whereby key feminist scholars or concepts may be mentioned, but their feminist investments are not incorporated as such” (2018, 501). As a consequence, these concepts and theoretical insights are often “neutralized” in ways that “undermin[e] the potential for environmental humanities to build alternative worlds” (ibid.). Certainly, feminist and queer approaches have blind spots too, and, as Sharlene Mollett has argued, “the mutual entanglements of gender and race” (Mollett 2017, 155) remain understudied in environmental studies. The essays in this volume therefore adopt intersectional perspectives that highlight the interrelations between multiple forms of difference, power and domination in order to develop a critical and contextualized understanding of gender and nature relations. Accordingly, the authors do not advocate a unitary, coherent understanding of gender and nature relations but write from different angles and perspectives. The essays should thus be understood as situated analyses.
that are, each in their own way, shaped by the power relations in which they are embedded and with which they engage. Nevertheless, despite dealing with textual and aesthetic materials from various historical and geographical contexts, they converge in opening up a new horizon in which notions of gender, the human and the nonhuman world can be reconceptualized.

Although gender is certainly not the only notion that has been scrutinized in the context of the environmental humanities and the nonhuman turn, we think that the theoretical challenges this concept poses are particularly complex and multilayered. First, the notion is imbued with the problem of false universalism and, in this respect, it is epistemologically similar to the concept of the human. Second, both the sex/gender distinction and its deconstruction through the concept of gender have epistemologically downplayed the “natural” or “organic” aspects of human bodies as well as their interrelations with nonhuman creatures and materials. However, as Stacy Alaimo puts it, these theories “are haunted by the pernicious notions of nature that propel them. Thrust aside, completely removed from culture, this nature – the repository of essentialism and stasis – nonetheless remains dangerously intact” (2010, 5). A reconceptualization of gender in light of the nonhuman turn thus has to actively engage with and rearticulate traditional understandings of nature and the nonhuman world. In order to avoid a vitalist position, in which an all-encompassing concept of “life” masks the historicity and complexity of social relations of power and inequality and the specific conditions and possibilities of human agency, we use the phrase “ecologies of gender”. We interpret this expression to mean attending to the systematic interactions and interrelations between human bodies, artefacts and other species, that is, the myriad nonhuman environments and milieus shaped by gender relations. Accordingly, the concept of ecology expands our understanding of situatedness by focussing attention on the dynamic structures of social nature relations. The idea of ecologies in the plural – that is, of different, intersecting relational levels – is important; we understand ecologies as complex, multilayered meshes of relations that are constituted by diverse dynamics, activities and practices and hence are also alterable. “An ecology of practices”, writes Isabelle Stengers, “does not have any ambition to describe practices ‘as they are’ […] but as they may become” (2005, 186). Consequently, gender relations can be understood as multi-relational orders in which self-relations, relations to the body and intersubjective and social relations always also constitute and are co-constituted by relations to the non-human world of substances, artefacts and other organisms. On this understanding, gender relations are always at the same time nature relations, and nature relations must conversely be conceived as mediated by gender relations. To move past a one-dimensional concept of the environment that posits a clear boundary between an individual and their surroundings – the idea of “organisms plus environment” (Haraway 2016, 30) – Donna Haraway introduced the notions of sympoiesis and tentacularity, which are likewise based on the recognition that relations to self, world and environment need
to be constantly reproduced in new, different forms, and always involve a plurality of humans, non-human organisms, substances and artefacts.

The essays collected in this volume are organized around four key dimensions of an “ecological” understanding of gender as described above: “creatures”, “materials”, “spaces” and “temporalities”. The volume includes contributions from literary studies, media studies, film and theatre studies, science and technology studies and philosophy that each reveal central aspects of these four dimensions.

The first section, *Creatures: The Biopolitics of Making Kin*, explores how the interrelations between human bodies and the nonhuman world of living beings can be reconceptualized. The essays in this section build on insights offered by multispecies perspectives and the plant turn in the humanities, which have revealed that human bodies are always already entangled with and co-constituted through a wide range of other creatures. “To be one is always to become with many” (Haraway 2008, 4) remarks Haraway, while emphasizing that it is crucial to take into account the situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes joined, sometimes separate heritages both before and lateral to this encounter.

(Haraway, 25)

Practices and ideas of connectedness and of the transgression of boundaries between human and nonhuman creatures thus need to be understood in the context of the historically specific relations of power, domination and extractivism in which they emerge. Accordingly, calls to “make kin” with other creatures also need to actively address the biopolitical and patriarchal legacies and contexts to which these calls relate. As Katharine Dow and Janelle Lamoreaux argue, it is crucial to acknowledge “kinship’s darker side” and to make clear “that kin relations are not always strategic engagements or willful encounters. […] Situated kinmaking is not only about strategic alliances but also about the destructive elements of relations” (Dow and Lamoreaux 2020, 483–484). For a critical understanding of ecologies of gender it is thus crucial to do both: to scrutinize existing practices and narratives through which the entanglements between human and nonhuman creatures have been constituted, conceptualized and imagined, and to envision non-extractivist and emancipatory multispecies correlations. It is with respect to this task that the three chapters in the first section converge.

In her chapter *Mulberry Intimacies and the Sweetness of Kinship*, Catriona Sandilands scrutinizes the “biopolitics of mulberry–human relations” in southern Ontario by focussing on two mulberry stories through which they are shaped. The first story is one about species identity and the policing of “purity”, and deals with “the ‘invasion’ drama involving *M. alba* and *M. rubra*”. The second story deals with the attempts to systematically regulate
the sexual expression of mulberries. Sandilands shows that both stories are shaped through contemporary and historical power relations, in particular colonialism, capitalist accumulation and obsessions with purity, utility and excess. While these mulberry intimacies “are not always sites of pleasure” – to say the least – taking seriously the “mulberry logic”, which, among other things, undermines a binary understanding of sex, might open up possibilities “for more mutually enriching tendings”. Natania Meeker discusses the “importance of the plant as a key figure for gender under biopolitics”. Her chapter Vegetal Subjects of Feminist Speculative Fiction focusses on the writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in particular her feminist utopia Herland. By scrutinizing the white supremacist and eugenic implications of Gilman’s speculative fiction, Meeker shows that “the turn to the plant does not necessarily mean a turn away from human modes of harm – on the contrary”. Meeker argues that Gilman’s texts rearticulate earlier biopolitical phantasms and strategies of breeding and cultivating humans, which Meeker discusses with reference to Zygmunt Bauman’s critique of modern “gardening culture”, that is, a culture fuelled by attempts to forcefully manage and “improve” human and nonhuman nature. With regard to the present plant turn within the humanities, Meeker argues that the “racist biopolitical legacy” of the figure of the plant must not be forgotten but rather critically reworked. While this particularly holds for conceptualizations and ideas of the figure of the plant in modern European cultural and intellectual history, the chapter The Arboreal Feminine: An Analysis of Affect and Activism in Two Ecofeminist Re-Enchantment Narratives from India by Swarnalatha Rangarajan makes clear that the figure of the (female) plant is not confined to this specific historical and geographic context. Rangarajan analyses two Indian ecofeminist narratives which explore both the critical potential and the violent aspects of this figure. In her readings of Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu and Sumana Roy’s How I Became a Tree, Rangarajan explores the ways in which these narratives articulate references to Indian “forest culture”, in which the forest is regarded as a “maternal earth body which provides sustenance”, to literary traditions “that equate women with flowers and with prakriti, the dynamic force of nature” and to political struggles over land and postcolonial development projects. Again, ideas of becoming-plant and of kinship between humans and nonhuman nature appear as complex and ambivalent. However, by discussing these various aspects and legacies of the “arboreal feminine”, Rangarajan shows how these texts “challenge narratives of disenchantment” and contribute to a re-enchantment of nature which is crucial for both creative activity and environmental justice activism.

The second section, Materials: Agency in/of Transcorporeal Assemblages, investigates how materials are articulated politically, economically, affectively and aesthetically, and what role they play in processes of gendering. The essays in this section build on the idea – formulated in the context of new materialism, which we understand as part of the broader non-human
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turn – that human bodies are co-constituted by interrelations and interweavements with substances and artefacts, and that the boundaries of bodies are “porous” (Tuana 2008). Recognizing this porous nature of material objects is of key epistemic importance to an understanding of “ecologies of gender”; for instance, if we wish to understand the circulation of toxic substances or of materials such as oil and plastic that form the fundamental building blocks of an industrialized way of life. These substances, alongside pharmaceuticals and other chemicals that are added to human, animal and plant bodies, modify these bodies in specific ways, often to the detriment of their health and the environment. In this context, Michelle Murphy coined the term “chemical regimes of living”, remarking that “not only are we experiencing new forms of chemical embodiment that molecularly tie us to local and transnational economies, but so too processed food, hormonally altered meat, and pesticide dependent crops become the material sustenance of humanity’s molecular recomposition” (Murphy 2008, 696). Another key insight underpinning the chapters in this section is that substances and materials are not simply given, but always mediated by practices and processes of meaning production. They therefore focus on “material–semiotic” (Haraway) and “transcorporeal” (Alaimo) assemblages, in which agency is configured in a variety of ways. Specific issues that are addressed include the representations of the invisible and unthinkable workings and entanglements of the carbon economy, the cultural and affective significance of materials such as glitter and synthetic testosterone, and the concept of matter itself.

In her chapter Plastic Ambivalence, Nicole Seymour shows how plastic art, more than simply raising awareness about plastic pollution, serves to articulate our emotional and material embeddedness in this substance. Further, she argues, aestheticizing plastic is a way of living both against and with it. Seymour thus identifies ambivalence as a central affect of this present era, which some now call “the Plasticene”. She traces the appearance of this affect through queer ecological thought as well as the contemporary art world – in which found and recycled-plastic artworks have recently proliferated. The chapter concludes with a close look at the plastic-based works of two feminist artists, Ifeoma U. Anyaeji (Nigeria/USA) and Ruth Peché (Spain). While these artists have received less attention than their male counterparts such as Mark Dion, Seymour argues that their use of feminized aesthetic practices offers a crucial commentary on the unevenly distributed violence of plastic pollution. Kathrin Peters, in her chapter Political Drugs: Materiality in Testo Junkie, discusses Paul B. Preciado’s autofiction Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era (2008/2013), which is a document of a self-experiment with testosterone, a discourse history of hormones and a postporno. Against the background of Judith Butler’s gender theory, Peters asks whether Preciado conceptualizes “sex” as a material substance of the sexual body, which can be voluntarily manipulated. She concludes that Testo Junkie, by exploring processes of subjectivation as male or trans, reveals how somatic
events – whether induced by pharmaceuticals or not – always take place within texts, spatial apparatuses and visual artefacts. Based on Preciado’s notion of gender ecology the chapter argues that this ecology needs to be understood as an interdependence of technology, gender politics, somato-physical materiality and cultural imagination – and thus as constitutively unstable. In her chapter *Unthinkable Ecologies in Theatres of the Anthropocene*, Ramona Mosse discusses the radical dramaturgical shift that the non-human turn in the humanities has brought to theatre and the development of recent dramatic writing on the environment. Focussing on Ella Hickson’s *Oil* (2016) and Duncan Macmillan’s *2071* (2014), two plays that share a common concern with playing with temporal and spatial scales to represent the invisible and unthinkable workings and entanglements of the carbon economy, the chapter explores the concept of the “unthinkable” that has shaped the recent environmental theories of Amitav Ghosh, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Donna Haraway. Mosse discusses the question of how the “unthinkable” lends itself to developing new aesthetic forms and narratives that affect how we relate to gender, political community and cultural production.

The third section, *Spaces: Landscapes and Architectures of Power and Imagination*, explores the spatial dimension of ecologies of gender. Gender and nature relations are essentially spatial relations inasmuch as they are always situated in specific geographical and geopolitical arrangements. Moreover, contemporary nature relations and the ecological devastation they are bound up with make abundantly clear that the conditions and effects of the modes of existence through which gender and nature relations are constituted transcend local circumstances and are thus translocal, with a planetary dimension. Like the other dimensions of ecologies, spaces too should be conceived as constituted through material–semiotic practices. Landscapes such as Lusatia – formerly a key coal mining region in eastern Germany and today an area where ecological and socio-economic conflicts merge – or the Sundarbans – an Indian region of mangrove forests – are not only shaped through political histories of extractivism and intersectional power relations but are currently being politically and culturally reappropriated and reshaped, including through literature and film. Such aesthetic practices rework established modes of problematization and open up new ways of thinking. This also holds for aesthetic articulations of built environments, such as “non-places” (Marc Augé) like airports or architecture and interior design. These built environments need to be understood as elements of nature relations through which subjectivities, affects and modes of behaviour are regulated, and which – as in the case of airports – are constitutive of specific modes of acceleration and control over planetary space, and closely correlate with the temporal aspects of extractivism. The essays in this section explore semantic and aesthetic processes of territorialization enacted through film, literature and media. They focus on arrangements in film and literature of space, including processes of extractivism and regionalization.
In her chapter *Gender, Nature, Nonhuman Animal: Bird People (2014) and the Proliferation of Difference in Cinema*, Sabine Nessel shows how Donna Haraway’s “figures” and Jacques Derrida’s “animots” – two key concepts in feminist discourse and cultural animal studies respectively – can be connected to studies of the proliferation of difference in arts and media. Her case study of the film *Bird People*, in which questions of anthropological difference figure prominently, focusses on the interweaving between anthropological, gender and class difference, and proposes a perspective shift on nature relations that opens up an alternative reading of the film. From this perspective, the airport is revealed as a space where differences such as nature/culture and nature/technology become intertwined. In *Bird People*, this ecological perspective on the airport is initiated by a transition from individual gender, anthropological and class differences to a proliferation of difference, in which we can discern the historicity of the idea of individual difference. Andrea Seier, meanwhile, explores how the German film *Wild* (2016), directed by Nicolette Krebitz, interweaves the notion of “becoming-wild” with questions of social impositions and expectations and issues of subjectivation, in particular with regard to gender. In her chapter *Wildlife Among Us. Post-Natural Worlds and Interspecies Encounters in Nicolette Krebitz’s Wild*, Seier analyses how *Wild* centres around a young woman, Ania, who is “drawn to nature” in a wayward fashion. One day, walking home from work, Ania runs into a full-grown wolf and, after further encounters, starts a kind of relationship with the animal in her apartment, and increasingly rejects the contracts of civilization. The chapter discusses how the film aesthetically articulates the human–animal relationship. Seier’s close reading of the film concentrates on the urban environments in which Ania and the wolf interact. The film analysis is framed by an exploration of new materialism and governmentality studies; thus, two distinct approaches from gender studies are brought into a productive dialogue that aids understanding of both the spatial and aesthetic dimensions of ecologies of gender. In her chapter *Creating Emotion with Space in Nanouk Leopold’s Brownian Movement*, Angelica Fenner investigates the irrepresentability of trauma in visual culture, arguing that the spatialization of affect through film can nonetheless allow trauma’s effects to be apprehended indirectly, for example, by creating tensions between trauma’s interiority, conceived as psychically and corporeally embedded, and the exteriority of memory, understood as trauma’s secondary narrative reworking through artistic work, interpersonal relations or engagement with immediate surroundings. By studying the Belgian arthouse film *Brownian Movement* (dir. Nanouk Leopold, 2010), Fenner explores how a highly haptic mode of eliciting sensory and affective engagement engenders a language for conveying trauma’s aftermath. The analysis draws on Derrida’s concept of invagination to explicate the spatialization of the female protagonist’s implicit trauma as well as the film’s textual infolding of notable women characters from literary and film texts authored by the Brothers Grimm, Lewis Carroll, Luis
Buñuel and Alfred Hitchcock. Karen Barad’s materialist rethinking of the phenomenological terms of intra-relation provides further scaffolding for unsettling traditional channels of identification with film characters and, by extension, any speculation about causal links between their present actions and potentially unnarrativized or unnarrativizable pasts. In their chapter *Theorizing Ecofeminism through a Spatial Analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide*, Sangita Patil and N. S. Gundur explore the representation of gender and environment through a close examination of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2008). Based on an analysis of this novel, the authors re-think the interrelationship between the human and the non-human in a way that blurs the boundaries between these categories and helps to envision an ecohumanist perspective. The chapter discusses the extent to which the environmental humanities need to engage with questions of space, and hence the geopolitics and sociocultural arrangements of particular places. The chapter contributes to ongoing debates on ecofeminism and the non-human turn by deconstructing binary constructions of gender, and by arguing that there is a need for a humanism that transcends narrow views of ecofeminism that focus solely on women. The authors offer a new universalist perspective which they call “ecohumanism”.

The fourth section is titled *Temporalities: Histories, Presents and Futures to Change*. The essays in this section deal with temporal aspects of ecologies of gender. Relations to self and body, social relations and relations to nonhuman nature are constituted by relations that are fundamentally temporal in nature. However, the temporal dynamics that shape these different relational levels differ, so that a theory of gender ecologies must attempt to understand the interplay of different temporalities. As Barbara Adam has shown, the dominant focus on linear “industrial time” fundamentally neglects the “proper times” (*Eigenzeiten*), the specific rhythms and dynamics, of the non-human world and interactions between human practices, the activities of other living beings and material processes. “The complex temporalities of the majority of environmental degradations and hazards”, writes Adam, “are located outside the reach of this particular conception. That is, a large proportion of the processes associated with the most difficult environmental problems tend to be inaccessible to the senses, invisible until they materialize as symptoms” (Adams 1998, 11). In contemporary debates, the difficulty of perceiving and conceptualizing long-term changes in nature relations and the terrestrial conditions of human, animal and plant life is addressed through the concept of the Anthropocene, which draws a connection between “human” and “geological” time and through the concept of “slow violence”. These two concepts are deployed in an attempt to render past and present ecological change intelligible and so allow nature relations to be configured in less destructive ways in future. While the concept of the Anthropocene places the long-problematic figure of the human back at the centre of a grand narrative, the concept of “slow violence” appears to give us a theoretical grasp of the transformations of naturecultural constellations,
as well as the intersectional relations of power and violence that structure them. The essays in this section therefore critically interrogate these concepts and explore the ambivalence of present-day visions of the future that are articulated in theories of plant intelligence and works of science fiction.

In her chapter *The Figure of the Human: Philosophical Narratives on Sex, Race and Organic Kinship in the “White (M)anthropocene*, Susanne Lettow scrutinizes “the human” through the lens of history of philosophy. Through a critical evaluation of the emergence of this figure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the context of philosophical anthropology, and rearticulations of this tradition in the first decades of the twentieth century, she shows that the figure of the human has since its inception been shaped by (proto-)biological ideas of organic kinship linked to constructions of sex, race and human exceptionalism. She argues that it is not the universalist aspirations of humanism which are problematic but the fact that these aspirations have been constantly subverted through these constructions. Based on this analysis she argues that Bruno Latour’s and Rosi Braidotti’s attempts to relegate “the human” back to relations to the earth or to life as such do not seem a critical enough departure from the troubling history of philosophical anthropology. A reconceptualization of the narrative of the Anthropocene should, in contrast, rearticulate the universalist perspective in the sense of Haraway’s notion of “non-generic” or “critical” humanity, and at the same time needs to engage in the unfinished process of deconstructing the figure of the human. Sven Bergmann explores the concept of slow violence with respect to two cases of environmental problems. His chapter *Speculative Ecologies: Salmon Farming and Marine Microplastics as Slow Disasters* focuses first on toxic algal blooms in southern Chile and second on the accumulation of plastics in the oceans, in this case the ocean around the Polynesian island of Rapa Nui. Based on his own socio-anthropological research on these two cases, Bergmann shows that the slowness of ecological transformations produces a systematic epistemic uncertainty that makes it hard to understand and attribute causes to phenomena of ecological devastation. For political movements that seek to politicize slow violence and the colonial histories it involves, this presents a serious problem. By adopting Heather Davis’ notion of queer temporalities, Bergmann argues that uncertainty and ambiguity can also, however, be regarded as epistemically and politically productive. While attempts to reframe phenomena of slow violence in terms of straight time or the “traditional environmental rhetoric” of the doomsday clock, which evoke ideas of purity being destroyed, Bergmann argues for adopting feminist, queer and postcolonial perspectives from science and technology studies that overcome “strict dichotomies between nature and culture, between purity and toxicity”. Caring for newly emerging “biological-synthetic entanglements”, he concludes, is a more promising strategy for a critical politics of gender ecologies than bemoaning the loss of pristine nature. Antónia Szabari explores the ambiguity of future scenarios
as they are currently presented in scientific studies on plant intelligence and in speculative fiction. In her chapter *Futures of Plant–Human Mutualism: Science, Technology and Speculative Fiction*, she discusses how futures of a “plant-based bioeconomy”, in which the capacities of plants come to serve scientific and biotechnological ends, are imagined and what the role of humans in such a bioeconomy would be. She turns to Sue Burke’s *Semiosis* Duology, comprising the sci-fi novels *Semiosis* and *Interference*, and brings them into conversation with critical plant studies. Szabari shows how these novels construct a fictional world shaped by plant technologies that leave open the question of “whether the result is another story of colonizing […] or a posthuman mutualism”. This ambiguity, Szabari argues, can best be understood in terms of Haraway’s phrase “staying with the trouble”. While Burke certainly does not portray a positive utopia that we should strive for, she does “hel[p] us come face to face” with distant or not so distant possibilities for new nature relations.

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