



Center for Creative Ecologies <tdemos@ucsc.edu>

Winter 2017 Newsletter

1 message

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the center for creative ecologies



With the shock of Trump's recent election and inauguration we feel our work could not be more urgent. Indeed, against the will of the majority of US voters, a rogue presidential administration confronts us that is filled with anthropogenic climate change deniers and offensive bigots of all stripes, intent on privatizing public education, rolling back the progressive gains of the Obama era, attacking migrants, and eliminating funding to climate science, offending so many along the way. The president has signed executive orders to revive the Keystone XL oil pipeline, open up national parks to drilling, and even privatize Native American lands in order to sell them off to industrial extraction operations like the Dakota Access Pipeline (in which Trump has had a financial stake until recently). The president's nomination of Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt, a fervent ally of the fossil fuel industry and an outspoken climate change denier, to run the Environmental Protection Agency, couldn't be more of a wake-up call to would-be environmental activists everywhere. While Trump has called human-caused global warming a "hoax," and has vowed to "cancel" the 2015 Paris climate accord, Pruitt has sued the EPA multiple times to prevent environmental regulations and has consistently attempted — cynically and opportunistically — to manufacture dissent when it comes to the international scientific consensus around climate science.

Of course our struggle for climate justice is nothing new, that in fact it continues, now in the face of a new formation of extremist illiberal populism, authoritarian plutocracy, and post-humanist capitalism. For Obama—similar in this respect to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau—both resisted many environmental regulations and supported an “[all-of-the-above energy strategy](#),” that led to the major expansion of oil extraction and pipeline infrastructure in the name of national energy security. Indeed, “the greatest oil boom in this nation's history,” notes [an article in CNN Money](#), “has occurred during the tenure of self-proclaimed environmentalist Barack Obama.”

That said, with the inaugural celebrations overshadowed by the counter-inauguration protests taking place throughout the country, by the massive and diverse January 21st Women’s March on DC and occurring simultaneously in dozens of cities in the US and all over the world, and by university-wide activism across the nation, the signs of a mounting and concerted oppositional political movement in the US are strong. If so, then that movement will be intersectionalist or not at all, as Angela Davis urged activists at the DC women’s march:

[T]his women's march represents the promise of feminism as against the pernicious powers of state violence. An inclusive and intersectional feminism that calls upon all of us to join the resistance to racism, to Islamophobia, to anti-Semitism, to misogyny, to capitalist exploitation... The struggle to save the planet, to stop climate change, to guarantee the accessibility of water from the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux, to Flint, Michigan, to the West Bank and Gaza. The struggle to save our flora and fauna, to save the air—this is ground zero of the struggle for social justice... Yes, we salute the fight for 15. We dedicate ourselves to collective resistance. Resistance to the billionaire mortgage profiteers and gentrifiers. Resistance to the health care privateers. Resistance to the attacks on Muslims and on immigrants. Resistance to attacks on disabled people. Resistance to state violence perpetrated by the police and through the prison industrial complex. Resistance to institutional and intimate gender violence, especially against trans women of color.

Let’s build together creative ecologies of resistance—those practices posed against Trumpism and cultivating alternative world-building, supporting both life’s biodiverse ongoingness and social justice alike...



Recent activities of the *Center for Creative Ecologies*

• “*On the Power of the Humusities for a Habitable Multispecies Muddle*”: A Salon Evening With Donna Haraway. On October 5, 2016, the CCE held an informal dinner discussion with Donna Haraway on the occasion of the publication of her new book [Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene](#) (Duke University Press, 2016). In its pages, Donna Haraway writes of the sustained imperative of our new geological epoch: “we must cultivate ‘response-ability’; that is also collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices.” In that spirit, the Center for Creative Ecologies—dedicated to exploring precisely creative practices of response-ability and promoting ecologies of interdisciplinary connection—invited guests to consider the significance of the terminological proposals for our time, such as Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene. The latter is Haraway’s own conceptualization for describing and cultivating a post-anthropocentric era of multi-species mutualities, sympoiesis, and creative kin-ful co-becomings. For these may be our best chance of fending off the incursions of the regressive individualism and human exceptionalism of Anthropocenic hegemony and equally the petrocapiatlist exterminism of the Capitalocene’s financialization and colonization of all remaining natures. The event yielded a fascinating “humusities” discussion with Haraway—akin to a muddy exchange of organisms, a composting of ideas in the pluriversity of humus—of how we might make life habitable amidst this multispecies muddle.



• The CCE co-sponsored the screening of the film *The Land Beneath Our Feet*, 2016, directed by Sarita Siegel and Gregg Mitman, followed by a discussion between Mitmann and Donna Haraway. The project, organized by UCSC's [IHR Research Cluster on Race, Violence, Inequality](#).



[and the Anthropocene](#), introduces audiences to never-before-seen ghostly footage of Liberia's past, through which the filmmakers investigate the history of rubber extraction in West Africa, specifically examining the 1920s cooperation between Harvard research scientists and the Firestone corporation that initiated a consequential land grab. The film considers how that neocolonial history informs and connects to subsequent eroding land rights and precarious

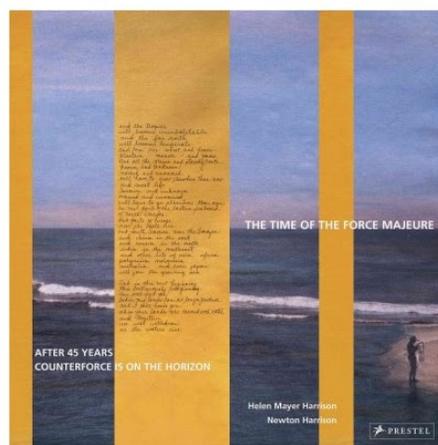
collective memory in post-conflict Liberia, as individuals and communities deprived of stable public institutions are pitted against multinational corporations and the colluding government facing an uncertain and unsustainable future. In preparation for the screening, we also read two chapters by Gregg Mitman and Faye Ginsburg from the recent book [Documenting the World: Film, Photography, and the Scientific Record](#), edited by Gregg Mitman and Kelley Wilder (University of Chicago Press, 2016).



Current and Upcoming Activities:

[EXTRACTION: DECOLONIAL VISUAL CULTURES IN THE AGE OF THE CAPITALOCENE](#)

During Winter and Spring 2017, T.J. Demos of UC Santa Cruz's Center for Creative Ecologies in collaboration with the artist Laurie Palmer of UC Santa Cruz's Art Department will initiate the arts-led research project EXTRACTION, co-sponsored by the Arts Research Institute and the Institute of the Arts and Sciences at UC Santa Cruz, UCSC's College Nine and College Ten, and CDAR (UCSC Center for



Building An Environmental Arts Curriculum:

Here is a selection of recent publications of note (keywords: Environmental Art / Climate Lexicon / Environmental Justice / Latin American Extractivism / Political Ecology / Indigenous Knowledge):

- Newton and Helen Harrison, [The Time of the Force Majeure: After 45](#)

Documentary Arts and Research).

Extraction designates capitalism's fundamental logic of withdrawal—of value, nutrients, energy, labor, time—from people, lands, culture, life-forms, and the elements, without corresponding deposit (except as externalities of non-value in the form of pollution, waste, climate change, illness, and death). It forms hierarchies of power around divisions that are racially, ethnically, sexually, and ecologically inscribed. How can we understand the diverse cultures of extraction in relation to histories of colonialism, green capitalism, the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, and how are these cultures being visualized? Faced with multiple tipping points moving us implacably toward a catastrophic environmentally altered future—and now with a US president hostile to climate science and industrial regulations—how might we create possibilities for living non-extractively in ways singular and plural today?

The project comprises a series of interlinked activities directed toward critically analyzing extraction as an industrial operation of natural resource mining and labor exploitation, investigating its ecological, economic, philosophical, and aesthetic factors and implications. Including a [film series and artist lecture program](#)—with guest presentations by practitioners such as Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Ed Morris and Susannah Saylor of

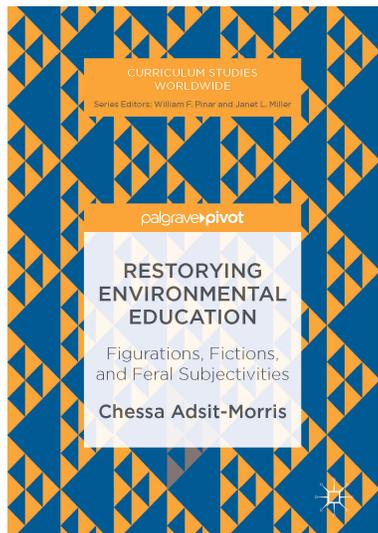
[Years Counterforce is on the Horizon](#). (Prestel Publishing, 2016).

This is the long-awaited definitive survey of four-and-a-half decades of work by these pioneers of environmental art, including recent projects that offer large-scale structural design proposals—at once creative and practical—for effectively addressing diverse climate change challenges. Working with a worldwide network of biologists, ecologists, architects, urban planners, politicians, and diverse community stakeholders, the Harrisons are renowned for their bold and ambitious interventions that address the connections between biodiversity and community wellbeing, policy proposals and social justice. (On March 9, 2017, there will also be a celebration of this accomplishment at UC Santa Cruz, presented by the Institute of the Arts and Sciences—for more info see [here](#)).

- [Climate Change & Art: A Lexicon](#), 2016, an ongoing work assembled and edited by The Distance Plan (a project founded by Abby Cunnane and Amy Howden-Chapman that brings together artists, writers and designers to promote discussion of climate change within the arts. The Distance Plan works through exhibitions, public forums and the Distance Plan Press which produces publications, including an annual journal). To address the challenges of climate change we need to expand the boundaries and challenge the well-worn habits of our language, including such terms as

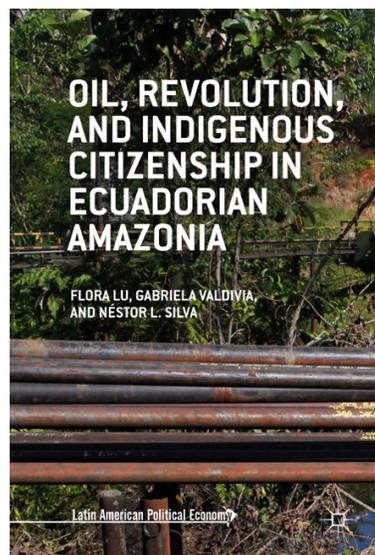
The Canary Project, Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle, Subhankar Banerjee, and Elizabeth Knafo—the project also comprises a number of workshops, a student-faculty [reading group](#), field trips to regional extraction sites, and an international conference on May 12-13 (confirmed speakers include: Angela Anderson and Angela Melitopoulos, Caleb Ben, T.J. Demos, Nick Estes, Brian Holmes and Claire Pentecost, Jason Moore, Laurie Palmer, and Anne Quiryren). EXTRACTION aims to draw together artists and researchers at UCSC, and leading thinkers in the field locally, regionally, and nationally.

Resources:



In a new contribution to the *CCE Journal*, "[Following Lizards: An Interview with Chessa Adsit-Morris](#)," Alex C. Moore interviews CCE member Adsit-Morris about her new book, *Restoring Environmental Education: Figurations, Fictions, Feral Subjectivities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). The book

"Ocean Inflammation," "Social Tipping Points," "Climate Debt," "The Dirty Cloud," "Gendered Climate Impact," "Junkspace," "Insurrectionary Agricultural Milieu," "Citizen Science," "Denihilism," and "Climate Research Solidarity." CCE director T.J. Demos contributed "[ecology-as-intersectionality](#)," designating a mode of intersectionality insisting on thinking, being and becoming at the cross section of multiple fields of social, political, economic, technological, and material determinations. Emerging from radical black feminist legal theory, intersectionality refuses to separate overlapping systems of oppression—including those of race, class, gender, and sexuality—in the figuration of social identity, and thereby prevents the essentialisation of one or other term in isolation.



• Flora Lu (CCE affiliate), Gabriela Valdivia, and Nestor L. Silva, [Oil, Revolution, and Indigenous Citizenship in Ecuadorian Amazonia](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Investigates the political ecology of

employs research methodologies that utilize inventive narrative and textual strategies to foreground the complex and messy processes and practices of doing, thinking and writing academic research, or what David Lewkowich describes as a process of “clandestine labor,” the uneasy struggle of translation, inventiveness and emergence. According to CCE member Chessa Adsit-Morris: “The main challenge that I was trying to get at in thinking about how we teach environmental education, and which is also applicable to teaching about non-Western cultures and epistemologies, was that we are always teaching *about*. I don’t want to teach *about* nature, about non-Western ways of knowing and being. That reifies the nature/culture binary. I want to find space to engage with nature as a living co-evolving relation. I don’t want to teach about ecology as a system that is external to us (i.e. humans) but as something we are collectively a part of. Because that’s how I learned: by following different lizards around; by noticing patterns and learning from everything. It requires getting off our high (humanist) horse and learning with and from the world around us.” ([Read more](#))

the Ecuadorian petro-state since the turn of the century and contextualizes state-civil society relations in contemporary Ecuador to produce an analysis of how oil connects to governance, economy, indigeneity (with a focus on Amazonia and the Waorani), and revolution in twenty-first century Latin America. Ecuador’s recent history is marked by changes in state-citizen relations: the election of political firebrand, Rafael Correa; a new constitution recognizing the value of pluriculturality and nature’s rights; and new rules for distributing state oil revenues. One of the most emblematic projects at this time is the Correa administration’s Revolución Ciudadana, an oil-funded project of social investment and infrastructural development that claims to blaze a responsible and responsive path towards wellbeing for all Ecuadorians. The book examines the key interventions of this recent political revolution—the investment of oil revenues into public works in Amazonia and across Ecuador; an initiative to keep oil underground; and the protection of the country’s most marginalized peoples—to illustrate how new forms of citizenship are required and forged in the context of Latin American extractivism.

- Manjana Milkoreit, Meredith Martinez, and Joey Eschrich, eds., *Everything Change: An Anthology of Climate Fiction* (ASU Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative, 2016). *Everything Change* features

twelve stories from the publishers' 2016 Climate Fiction Short Story Contest along with along with a foreword by science fiction legend and contest judge Kim Stanley Robinson and an interview with renowned climate fiction author Paolo Bacigalupi. (Free to download [here](#))

More Curriculum!

• Amitav Ghosh, [The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable](#) (University Of Chicago Press, 2016). Are we deranged? The acclaimed Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh argues that future generations may well think so. How else to explain our “imaginative failure” in the face of global warming? Ghosh examines our inability (or refusal)—at the level of literature, history, and politics—to grasp the scale and violence of climate change. The extreme nature of today’s climate events, Ghosh asserts, make them peculiarly resistant to contemporary modes of thinking and imagining. This is particularly true of literary fiction: hundred-year storms and freakish tornadoes simply feel too improbable for the novel; they are automatically consigned to other genres. In the writing of history, too, the climate crisis has sometimes led to gross simplifications; Ghosh shows that the history of the carbon economy is a tangled global story with many contradictory and counterintuitive elements. Ghosh ends by suggesting that politics, much like literature, has become a matter of personal ethical reckoning rather than an arena of collective action. But to limit fiction and politics to individual moral struggle comes at a great cost. The climate crisis asks us to imagine other forms of human existence, and to do so within the framework of climate justice, a task which fiction, Ghosh argues—and we would add *art*—cannot afford to refuse and is necessary today more than ever.

• Gene Ray, “Writing the Ecocide-Genocide Knot: Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Theory in the Endgame,” in [South: A State of Mind](#), Issue #8, 2016. Ray writes that “Modernity is our predicament—the urban-industrial knotting of ecocide and genocide. Alarmingly, this is the thing we need to stop, disarm, and leave behind. What would this mean, then, to be opposed to modernity, to locate oneself within it but against it, to be oriented beyond it? Two things are

new about our situation: ecocide has progressed to the point that the whole biosphere has been thrown into meltdown and weirdness, and, second, evidence of modernity's unsustainability is becoming general public knowledge...We have entered the endgame." In addressing these urgent questions, Ray turns to Indigenous knowledge and works through a series of challenges and historical limitations found in Eurocentric critical theory, including anti-emotional expression, problematic progressivism, suspicion of place-based being, and anthropocentrism. The result is a provocative and personal account of how and why, in the current context of destructive environmental transformation, Indigenous wisdom should be an integral part of cultural theory and practice.

- John Foran, "[The Twelve Days \(and Months\) of Climate Justice Day Twelve.](#)" 2017, gathers a series of articles by leading voices in the climate justice movement addressing topics including best climate justice movies of the year, new political forms, science and justice, just climate solutions, and the radical intersectionality of Black Lives Matter, assembled by the co-founder of the [Climate Justice Project](#) and of the [International Institute of Climate Action and Theory](#), and member of System Change Not Climate Change, the Green Party of California, and [350.org](#).

- Bénédicte Ramade, ed., [The Edge of the Earth: Climate Change in Photography and Video](#) (Toronto/London: Ryerson Image Centre/Black Dog Publishing, 2016), With critical texts by Bénédicte Ramade and T.J. Demos, *The Edge of the Earth* questions traditional views and challenges our environmental consciousness, proceeding from the conviction that humans have entered the era of the Anthropocene, dominating the planet in its uppermost layers and outermost edges. Edited by Montréal-based art historian Dr. Bénédicte Ramade, and accompanying an exhibition at the Ryerson Image Centre, this catalogue attempts to foster a reconsideration of climate change, envisioning the present crises and future consequences of humanity's harsh imprint on our planet.

The Center for Creative Ecologies stands with Standing Rock



Image: Gregg Deal, 2016



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