Foreword

By Nora Westgeest and Seda Bahar Pancaroglu

How can literature bring the planet to the page, and page the planet in return? This core question animates the theme of this issue as well as the cover design. The visual composition features a delicate botanical imprint showcasing Queen Anne's lace alongside wispy leaves, and seed pods depicted in glowing white against a Prussian blue background. The contrast creates a spectral effect, reminiscent of an X-ray image. The artistic technique employed here is the cyanotype, a process that dates back to the nineteenth century and is renowned as one of the earliest and most accessible forms of photographic printing.

Cyanotype as a medium physically brings the planet onto the page, merging art and the environment in a tactile, analogue form. One of the most notable early practitioners of this technique was Anna Atkins, who utilized cyanotype to document British seaweeds in her 1843 work: *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. In her introductory note, she writes, "The difficulty of making accurate drawings of objects as minute as many of the Algae and Confervae has induced me to avail myself of Sir John Herschel's beautiful process of cyanotype, to obtain impressions of the plants themselves, which I have much pleasure in offering to my botanical friends" (qtd in. Ware 138). Atkins' application of cyanotype can be seen as a way to transcend the limitations of conventional representation. This technique served as an

instrument that, rather than attempting to dominate or reduce nature, allowed the subject to reveal itself. This suggests a significant shift from the pursuit of an accurate depiction to *collaboration* with nature.

Just as cyanotype engages with the tangible reality of the natural environment, literary forms such as ecopoetry, climate fiction (cli-fi), and speculative fiction explore ecological entanglements. These literary works, much like Atkins' visual art, strive to document, engage with, and challenge human understandings of the natural world. In this issue of *FRAME*, we attempted to explore the relationship between literature and the non-human world and understand how literary forms *work with* nature, not only as subject matter but also as a collaborator, co-author, and material condition.

Literature has long maintained a profound, evolving relationship with nature. From the pastoral idylls of antiquity to the sublime landscapes of Romantic poetry, the natural world has served not only as a backdrop but as a muse, a moral guide, and sometimes, a force of terror. Writers have long turned to rivers, forests, and storms to reflect on the human condition. Yet, it has never been as urgent to enmesh literature and nature. Environmental crises, climate change, and the disconnection between humanity and the natural world have prompted a call to action that demands a more intimate relationship with nature. With the mounting pressure of intensifying ecological crises, American environmentalist Bill McKibben urges us to do more than merely observe and take on a proactive stance in our engagement with nature:

> The world is never going to be, in human time, more intact than it is at this moment. Therefore it falls to those of us alive now to watch and record its flora, its fauna, its rains, its snow, its ice, its peoples. To document the buzzing, glorious, cruel, mysterious planet we were born onto, before in our carelessness we leave it far less sweet. (McKibben)

This raises critical questions: what forms can literature take in the Anthropocene? How can writing respond to the overwhelming scale of climate change, extinction, and planetary precarity? And, as Timothy

Clark puts it in *The Value of Ecocriticism* (38), "how to present a complex global issue in an effective and coherent literary work?"

Recent theories have taken up these questions from different angles. Clark argues that traditional realist aesthetics are inadequate for representing the complexities of this epoch, as actions and events often exceed human understanding ("Nature, Post Nature" 81). He warns against "intellectual miniaturisation," which oversimplifies or domesticates the crises at hand (*Ecocriticism on the Edge* 78). Adam Trexler, a scholar in the environmental humanities specializing in cli-fi and environmental activism, however underlines the need for imaginative approaches such as metaphor and formal experimentation when addressing climate change for deeper emotional resonance and speculative thinking in the face of uncertainty (5).

Literary attempts to represent nature often wrestle with the limitations of language and genre. This complexity is particularly evident in the works of Erin James, a pivotal figure who seeks to forge a connection between ecocriticism and narrative theory. With her *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (2015) and *Narrative in the Anthropocene* (2022), James aims to develop a narrative theory that addresses how literature engages with the Anthropocene and climate crisis through storytelling. She builds on the narratological theories of Gerard Genette and Gerald Prince, introducing Anthropocene Narrative Theory (ANT), which posits a reciprocal influence between the Anthropocene—our current geological epoch—and the narratives that emerge from or respond to it. In this issue, Jessica Lentz uses James' ANT to explore the ambiguous narrative construction in *Grizzly Man* (2005), a documentary by Werner Herzog about the life and death of Timothy Treadwell, a "bear enthusiast" ultimately killed in a bear attack. At the heart of Lentz's argument lies the claim that Herzog, through his editing choices and voiceovers, constructs an ambiguous concept of nature. This ambiguity is meticulously examined through the lens of ANT, with Lentz interpreting the film as a site of "mutual flourishing" between often disparate perspectives on nature and its relationship with humanity; an interplay that can lead to productive narrative openness. In her concluding remarks, Lentz

critically interrogates the concept of "connectivity thinking," a theoretical framework that underscores the significance of meaningful interactions between human and non-human entities. She argues for a paradigm shift towards the notion of "respect," as advocated by Indigenous scholar Sven Haakanson. This alternative perspective, Lentz argues, offers a more grounded and sustainable framework for envisioning future interactions between humans and the natural world.

This attention to narrative form, however, gains further complexity when situated within traditions that interrogate who gets to tell environmental stories and from what positionality. Black Ecologies and Black Geographies challenge dominant ecological imaginaries and assert the interconnected legacies of race, space, environment, and power, emphasising that ecological crises cannot be disentangled from the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racial capitalism. The conversation around Black Ecology was notably advanced by Nathan Hare in his seminal paper "Black Ecology," where he critiqued the mainstream ecology movement for its failure to adequately address the environmental challenges confronting Black communities. The field seeks to document and amplify the historical experiences of environmental racism, oppression, and disproportionate environmental dispossession. Building upon the foundational ideas of Black Ecology, Scarlett Croft's article, "'swallowing / the unfathomable still': The Precarious Lyric in June Jordan's Eco Poetry," explores June Jordan's eco-poetry. Croft demonstrates how Jordan's work challenges the dominant pastoral and Romantic representations of nature, instead foregrounding the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social justice, race, and colonial history. Through both thematic content and stylistic choices that disrupt the conventional pursuit of the sublime, Jordan dismantles the formal expectations of lyrical eco-poetry. It is claimed that the poet's focus on the environmental legacies of settler colonialism and the vulnerability of Black and Indigenous lives redefines eco-poetry and calls for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to environmental justice.

Talking about climate change means dealing with a vast, overwhelming network of factors—social, historical, economic, and biological—that collectively contribute to its complexity. It is this very

aspect of climate change that makes it beyond our sensory and cognitive capacities. We find ourselves unable to apprehend the entirety of its implications and ramifications. Timothy Morton's groundbreaking concept of the 'hyperobject,' as articulated in his influential work *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) builds on this inability. They are not just large in a physical sense but are also complex and interconnected, influencing and being influenced by a myriad of factors in ways that can often feel overwhelming:

> A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are "hyper" in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not. (Morton 1)

In the face of the dreary complexities surrounding climate change, can literature serve as a bridge to make the unfathomable implications of this global crisis more relatable and accessible to the reader? Hendrikje Dorussen's article "*Eqqumiitsuliorneq*: Haptic Reading, Climate Representation and the Book-Objects of Nancy Campbell" takes this question as a starting point. Drawing upon Morton's concept of hyperobject, Dorussen further explores how the distinctive nature of the works (one poem is a deck of cards and the other is accompanied by a series of objects) work to both bring the unimaginable losses of climate change to a graspable scale and further offer a way for the reader to remain actively engaged with the crisis. Dorussen presents a close reading on two works by Scottish poet and artist Nancy Campbell, "How to say 'I love you' in Greenlandic" and "The Night Hunter." The article also raises an important counterpoint: while these forms offer a compelling

antidote to ecological detachment, their physical and conceptual inaccessibility may also limit their broader impact. This tension between innovation and inclusivity opens up further questions about how ecological poetics can remain both formally inventive and democratically available.

Despite the complexities of accessibility and attachment in tackling the environmental crisis, climate engagement is not wholly impossible. The articles in this issue of *FRAME* show that literature is a powerful tool in combating climate change—not merely a reactive but also a transformative force. Indeed, the quest for a sustainable future cannot be achieved without imagining literature's transformative potential, as Trexler outlines. According to Trexler, literature is uniquely positioned to render perceptible the imperceptible, making what could appear to be an abstract and far-from-our-bedside-table depiction of our crisis, more immediate and personal (5).

In order to understand how witnessing the environmental and generational effects of Anthropogenic practices through literature is not merely a passive observation, we can turn to Michal Richardson's notion of "affective witnessing," a framework that emphasises witnessing as an inherently relational and embodied experience (166). This approach acknowledges the individual as affected by and simultaneously affecting the events they observe. In a literary context, it enables authors and readers to engage with narratives that convey the more personal and emotional truths of experiences to shape our understanding of the world around us.

In the vein of moving beyond a Western environmental apathy into a chapter of compassion, two articles in this issue deal with the consequences of the mining industry on the human body and mind. Through a deft and powerfully haunting combination of scholarly work and personal memoir, isabel wang pontoppidan's "& Ghost Stories" explores the environmental and intergenerational effects of rare earth mineral mining in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), demonstrating how these histories and systems of mineral extraction leave scars not only upon the land, but upon the bodies and souls of those who live around the rare earth mines. pontoppidan presents an

analysis of the history of the IMAR and China's mining of rare earth minerals through the framework of 'Sacrifice Zones' as articulated by Jullie Michelle Klinger, and synergizes this examination with a deeply personal narrative about attending her grandfather's funeral in the city of Baotou. Baotou is located in the IMAR near the Bayan Obo mining district, which produces almost fifty percent of global rare earth supply. While recounting this touching and personal family moment, pontoppidan draws connections between her family's history and the brutal processes implemented to render the region a supplier of rare metals, the ecological damage these systems of extraction have wrought, and the negative health impacts experienced on mass within the region. pontoppidan explicates how these endemic health problems, which have occurred within her family, serve as examples of harm that have devastating effects despite occurring at a gradual pace. This piece weaves together the stories of a place and family to illustrate the interwoven skein of social, ecological, economic, and historical forces that inform all of our lives.

The mining industry's mental and physical effects take center stage in Luka Hattuma's article as well, where breath takes a central role in imagining possibilities for change. Hattuma looks at the linguistic representations of breathing rhythms in Uhuru Portia Phalafala's epic *Mine Mine Mine* (2023) and how they relate to the semantics of working and living in an inhumane, contaminated and racialised space (i.e., a society dominated by the mine-industry). By focussing specifically on two tropes, the lung and the womb, Hattuma shows how Phalafala connects the body to the earth in a "poetics of possibility," which intervenes in the dominant production system (i.e., racial capitalism) that continues to foster environmental and social injustices in the current South African political landscape. By simultaneously individualising the collective and collectivising the individual, the lyric subject invites the reader to join the rhythm of a shared and combat breathing.

The mining industry, as exemplified from different borders in these articles, serves as a potent metaphor for the broader patterns of exploitation surrounding the environmental crisis. Both articles demonstrate a hopeful movement against the hegemonic grip that capitalist structures and

their consequential exploitative measures uphold. They bring to attention questions of environmental responsibility, climate justice, and the power dynamics that underpin global industrial practices.

Could we then find reason to hope for an alternative future and envision what a just and sustainable future looks like? This question brings us to the imaginative terrain of solarpunk, a literary and artistic movement that insists on the possibility of ecological repair, community resilience, and technological harmony. Unlike dystopian or apocalyptic climate fiction, solarpunk refuses to center despair. Instead, it presents futures where renewable energy, social justice, and interspecies cooperation are not utopian dreams, but daily realities. In "A Solarpunk Manifesto: Turning Imaginary into Reality," William Joseph Gillam asserts solarpunk "as a social imaginary" that "can provide guiding principles to direct activism and governance towards building a better future for humanity and the Earth" (3). Such optimistic creativity counters the paralysis often associated with climate discourse, offering instead imaginative blueprints for collective action and mutual care. This spirit of creative praxis lies at the heart of Sarah Richardson's article "Solarpunk Strategies: Robots as Ecologists in Becky Chambers' *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*." Focusing on the "Robot Ecologists" and their role in the utopian narrative, Richardson situates the text within broader solarpunk debates. Through her examination of the novella's deuteragonists—the robot ecologist Mosscap and the human tea monk Dex—Richardson elucidates the novella's capacity to inspire a sense of optimism for an ecologically sustainable future in the face of mounting anxieties concerning both environmental degradation and artificial intelligence. She discusses how Chambers presents a utopian future reliant on humanity, framing it as solarpunk's "call to action." Richardson concludes that Chambers encourages readers to pursue creative practices aimed at realizing the utopian vision depicted in *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*.

One could object that we fall into a trap of wishful thinking when we bring up things like utopia and hope, but scholars like Catriona McKinnon persist that, especially in facing things like geoengineering dystopias and climate apartheid, moral and political imagination must persist and

could, in fact, lead to change. McKinnon argues for a precautionary approach to climate policy and recommends a form of "radical hope" even when the conditions for justice are threatened or eroded (McKinnon qtd. in Lenzi 354).

In light of exploring climate justice practices and culpability through forms of radical hope, Flora Lehmann and Mohana Zwaga's article "Staging Climate Justice: Tribunal Theatre, Customs, and the Politics of Ecocide" examines the potential of tribunal theatre to advance legal and cultural understandings of ecocide. The authors utilise contextual variances of a 'custom' to explicate the difficulty of defining and criminalising ecocide. As they elaborate, ecocide occurs on a temporal and spatial scale that defies common legal understandings of violence. Using the case study of the *THIS IS NOT A TRIAL* theatre project, where an ecocide tribunal is staged dramaturgically, Lehmann and Zwaga showcase the importance of cultural intervention to create a new custom that can allow for the inclusion of nonhuman entities and timescales. The article includes conversations with three core members of the research and creative team behind *THIS IS NOT A TRIAL*: literary and cultural memory studies scholar Dr. Susanne Knittel, legal scholar and StopEcocide NL representative Shirleen Chin, and the project's script writer Reinier Noordzij.

From constructing different narrative forms that encompass the ecological imaginary, to immediate and personal effects of environmental and ecological damage that challenge us to consider our own roles and responsibilities, these articles illustrate that storytelling—whether in the form of memoir, poetic resistance, or speculative reflection—emerges as a vital medium that underscores the role of literature to cultivate awareness. Returning here to the title of our issue once more, literature not only allows the planet to be put onto the page, but can also provoke an active page for action, which we hope is something our issue propels.

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