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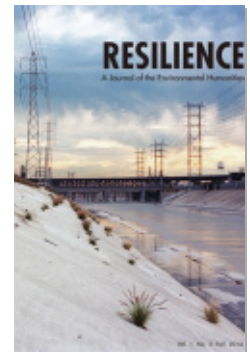
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## Ursula Heise and Her Work: Toward a Rhizomatic Review

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# Ursula Heise and Her Work

Toward a Rhizomatic Review

*Editor's Introduction by Anthony Lioi*

With a desire to move beyond the opposition between appreciation and critique, the editors of *Resilience* asked a group of ecocritics to write about the influence of Ursula Heise's work on their own work. Though *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* and its idea of ecocosmopolitanism receive a good deal of attention, Heise's influence extends well beyond one book, spreading now across oceans and disciplines through a network these reviewers embody and illumine.

## A New Agenda for Ecocriticism

All my best ideas turn out, on reflection, to be arguments of Ursula Heise's that I've internalized to the point I mistake them for my own thoughts. To take her most sustained contribution first, I consider her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* the most wide-ranging and persuasive contribution to the global turn in the environmental humanities to date. In this landmark work, Heise's extraordinary breadth of knowledge of globalization theory and the sociology of risk enriches her vision of an ecocosmopolitan alternative to the localism typically enjoined by bio-regionalists and environmental pedagogues. Heise's European perspective reveals that the valorization of place is a contingent phenomenon in American environmental thought and by no means necessary to it, yet she also abjures facile dismissal of the aesthetic appeal, pedagogical value, and political potential of lococentrism. Combining literary criticism with illuminating analyses of Google Earth and the BBC's *Blue Planet*, Heise's book sets a new agenda for ecocriticism: delineating a

novel cultural genre that promotes a sense of planet. Already, at conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in Europe, I have seen with what alacrity scholars and students are adopting her critical framework and taking up her challenge.

Heise's thought promises to transform environmentalist thinking about history as well as place. Ecocriticism has derived emotional sustenance as well as some of its vocabulary from romantic texts, even as it has subjected them to strenuous critique. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of romanticism is the declensionist historiography to which it is prone, which posits a fatal, irreconcilable conflict between nature and modernity. Heise's inestimable value to the environmental humanities lies in her combination (reminiscent, for me, of Raymond Williams) of resistance to that myth and sensitivity to the genuine losses, human and ecological, it simultaneously commemorates and oversimplifies. In her recent project on biodiversity, she proposes a model of dynamic interaction that would capture the historical complexity of human impacts and register the truth of extinction, while making it conceptually and culturally available beyond the existing constituencies of the elegiac mode.

At the level of cultural theory, Heise's distinctive approach involves a revaluation and respecification of genre that takes it well beyond the confines of literary classification and hermeneutics. In *Sense of Place* she introduced the idea of allegories of global citizenship that, while they would never be found together in any existing typology, could be seen as preliminary, halting efforts to imagine ecocosmopolitanism. More-recent research extends her reassessment of environmental genres through a brilliantly original contrast of the new epic forms of Internet biodiversity databases with the elegiac and tragic representations of extinction familiar from poetry, nature writing, and TV documentary. Heise understands well the necessity for ecocriticism to extend to media other than the printed text and, occasionally, Hollywood cinema: in addition to Google Earth, she has analyzed with equal zest and insight German and American conservation law, avant-garde installations, Japanese animations, biodiversity policy documents, cryptozoological narratives, and the IUCN Red List. As such, her work is the best example of ecocriticism as reflexive critique, both inspired by and reconfiguring environmentalism. Moreover, she is, somewhat amazingly, the first ecocritic to engage seriously with online cultures as well as traditional pre-digital-convergence artifacts.

The most remarkable aspect of Heise's work, though, is not its contribution to literary criticism. Rather, it is the prospectus she offers, in *Sense of Place* and her research on extinction, for constructive engagement of ecocritical analysis with environmental policy making. The political ambitions of environmental criticism motivate many of its practitioners, but (pedagogy aside) few of us have set out concrete, achievable plans to realize our hopes for impact. By demonstrating the specific relevance and value of cultural artifacts and analysis to assessments of environmental risk, Heise has shown that ecocriticism can directly inform environmental governance—a rather better bet than hoping to effect social change by nudging the ethics and aesthetics of undergraduates. Her work is among the most astute, informed, and inspiring in the environmental humanities today. If she would just stop writing for a year or two, I might have some original insights of my own.

**Greg Garrard** is a sustainability professor at the University of British Columbia and a National Teaching Fellow of the British Higher Education Academy. He is a founding member and former chair of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (UK and Ireland). He is the author of *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004; 2nd ed., 2011) as well as numerous essays on ecopedagogy, animal studies, and environmental criticism. He has recently edited *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave, 2011) and *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and become coeditor of *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*.

## Thinking with Ursula Heise

In the e-mail Anthony Lioi sent asking whether I would address the question “How has Ursula Heise’s work influenced mine?” his description of this roundtable as an attempt to sketch Heise’s rhizomatic presence in ecocritical and environmental humanities practice struck me as apt. Any environmental humanities scholar who examines how literary and cultural texts address questions of biodiversity, extinction, overpopulation, risk, toxicity, or entanglements of local and global scales works in Heise’s debt. So do those who focus on global travel narratives, ecological science fiction, comparative ecocriticisms, internationalizing the practice of ecocriticism, or forging interdisciplinary encounters with allied disciplines. Although the audience for this roundtable is likely familiar with the above list, which only partially maps Heise’s interventions, I use this quick overview to signal one thing I find laudable

about her work: its wide range. And while sometimes this generates in me a mild professional irritation (yes, scooped again by Ursula K. Heise), I return to her work repeatedly because its balance of theoretical rigor, contextualization, close reading, accessible prose, attention to a broad array of texts, and reflexivity regarding the methods and blind spots of ecocritical practice represents a model I strive to emulate. To put it more succinctly, I have found Heise's work good to think with, both in terms of my teaching practice and its benefits for my students and in terms of my scholarship.

My students appreciate many of the qualities of Heise's work noted above, and I have used different arguments or articles of hers to generate discussion in undergraduate and graduate courses on biodiversity, on climate change, on Don DeLillo, and on theories of natureculture. I have found that students' encounters with Heise's ideas and arguments help them reframe, in more compelling and sophisticated ways, their initial questions about and responses to our primary texts. For instance, in courses on climate change and biodiversity I ask students to read Heise's article "Lost Dogs, Last Birds, and Listed Species: Cultures of Extinction" (2010) to help them understand various narrative approaches to extinction. Because my students are artists and designers, Heise's arguments also help them elaborate the role that makers and their works might play in forging new modes for narrating how biodiversity gets valued. In other words, we use Heise's "Lost Dogs" both as a taxonomy of elegiac, tragic, and comic extinction narratives and as a prompt for imagining the new kinds of biodiversity and extinction stories they might create. The notion of the database aesthetic, a concept that Heise borrows from media theorist Lev Manovich and to which I was introduced by reading Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, has also been extremely useful for my students in their dual role as consumers and producers of visual and material cultures. To reframe how, and perhaps which, texts we encounter is one role I think all criticism should perform. The way Heise approaches literary and cultural criticism has both enabled my students to gain confidence as readers of ecocritical scholarship and invited and challenged them to position themselves as participants in lively scholarly and cultural conversations about the role of the environmental humanities.

I now turn to the essay "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel" to highlight an element of

Heise's work that has informed my recent scholarship. "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems" explores how Don DeLillo, in *White Noise* (1985), and Richard Powers, in *Gain* (1998), "use chemical substances as a trope for the blurring of boundaries between body and environment, public and domestic space, and harmful and beneficial technologies" (748). Also central to the essay are Heise's examination of how risk theory, risk analysis, and literary studies approaches might inflect each other and her interrogation of how particular narrative strategies either advance or constrain DeLillo's and Powers's considerations of the literary theme of risk (747). Heise argues that—while Powers presents a compelling portrait and critique of the "complex technoeconomic systems" that dispense chemical products to individual consumers (766), maps the global reach of these systems, and sketches how "the individual is shaped by, dependent on, and intermittently threatened by networks of global capitalism but has few resources to recognize and comprehend, let alone resist them" (772)—his strategy of using an omniscient narrator is fundamentally problematic, because it is in tension with his arguments about the powerlessness of the individual (773). On the other hand, she posits *White Noise*, though delimited in temporal and geographical scale by a concern for the individual and the local, as the more aesthetically and conceptually inventive novel (772–73). Heise contends that DeLillo's novel uses satire to destabilize the reader's sense of certainty in ways that are analogous to the uncertainty that risk scenarios inherently pose (772). Satire enables DeLillo, she suggests, to approach "the problematics of risk in both its themes and narrative form" (757). Heise's assessments of *White Noise* and *Gain* are compelling, but what has been even more productive for me than her evaluations of the novels is her insistence that ecocritics should be more attentive to the relationship between form and content.

Heise makes this point through explicit directive and by virtue of the way she reads. And she makes this point not just in "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems" but also in "Journeys through the Offset World: Global Travel Narratives and Environmental Crisis," "Lost Dogs, Last Birds, and Listed Species," and *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*. In conjunction with the conversations about form and material privileged by the art and design context in which I am institutionally embedded, Heise's work has challenged me to recognize when I scant form in favor of focusing on a text's topical, political, or ideological concerns. That is, her work reminds me to

attend to the representational challenges, limits, and promises of particular media, not just to their arguments and the material consequences of those arguments. The reminder that form matters seems especially salient, as ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars discuss the conceptual and material stakes of the idea of the Anthropocene. As a notion that challenges both humanist and posthumanist epistemologies and ontologies, the Anthropocene also pressures us to rethink the commensurability of our present cultural forms with the radically changed socioecological circumstances that await us.

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## Local Vision and Planetary Vision: A Noble and Enduring Paradox

Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* is a daring academic challenge because it deals with controversial topics as well as their ecological entanglements, such as localism and cosmopolitanism, homogeneity and heterogeneity, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and the ethic of proximity and land ethic. These pairs of terms are highly malleable according to different cultural standpoints. When reading this work, I am stimulated to reconsider these familiar topics and also confused when faced with so many complicated theories relevant to the ecological dilemma. Though many ecocritics, including me, deeply believe that environmental imagination is the core cultural strategy to cope with environmental problems, the dazzling diversity of human cultures determines the complexity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity of environmental imagination, producing different cultural keys and practical solutions. In certain cases, even if people are talking about the same environmental problem, their solutions are often different, even opposed to each other. Why? Because their environmental imaginations originate from different historical and cultural contexts, including environmental experiences and practical considerations. People are divided by their gender, class, and race or ethnicity. Therefore, when we talk about environment on a global scale, we should not empty this category of human context, nor should we homogenize human beings. Otherwise, any strategy, no matter how noble and persuasive it sounds, would become tangled in environmental prejudice to some extent. When environmental protection is applied to practical life on national or global scales, it may result in environmental racism or colonialism. Thus, any ecocritical exploration of environmental issues should attach importance to a dimension of environmental justice with a racial or ethnic perspective at its core.

Now I will focus on sense of place and sense of planet so as to illustrate the importance of the standpoint or perspective an ecocritic takes.

As forms of environmental imagination, both sense of place and sense of planet are malleable terms. On the surface, they are closely related to each other and complementary to each other. However, they can be interpreted in different ways to serve ecological concerns or the interests of political ideals that are judged desirable by individuals or ethnic groups. On the one hand, if we want to cope with the deteriorat-



ing planet-scale ecological crises, such as global warming and oceanic ecocide, we have to embrace a planetary vision. On the other, we must be alert to the fact there exist big differences of living conditions between people living in the first world and those in the third world. Their views of nature and their interpretations of the roots of ecological crisis are different, so their solutions will also differ. The so-called planetary sense is not always as pure as its advocates claim in the context of international power politics. It often conceals ulterior motives, even pretexts for ecological exploitation, environmental racism, and colonialism in the eyes of the disempowered peoples or countries. From a rhetorical standpoint, the planetary vision is often used as a strategy to win the moral high ground, thereby defeating weaker countries. The planetary vision represents more the voice of the first world. On the contrary, sense of place, or local vision, is often used by the disempowered peoples as a cultural tool to protect local ecological concerns from foreign exploitation of globalization launched by the big powers. However, this does not mean that the third world or indigenous peoples do not care about ecological concerns, only that these peoples have a more urgent concern—survival. Basic necessities—such as food, housing, and clean water and air—are their more immediate worry.

In brief, any talk of environmental imagination should involve environmental justice, or it is merely senseless and empty talk.

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## Placing Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Ecocosmopolitanism

Heise's readings of recent speculative and experimental fiction help me think about the long history of indigenous literatures and their records of imagining "planetary forms of belonging." Indigenous people are often construed as "sitting in places," to borrow from Keith Basso's influential title, and have often claimed for themselves that power. At the same time, they have always cultivated active affinities with remote places, times, and collectivities.<sup>1</sup> Inupiat poet dg nanouk opik, for in-

stance, creates speaking subjects that conjoin human and other-than-human, past, present, and future, as she ponders new rituals for her arctic homeland in the era of climate change:

She/I	flint-spark/s	the stone
Pumice burns, the song rises.	She/I memorize/s the puzzling words.	
<i>OPEC, Yellow Sea China,</i>	<i>Chukchi,</i>	
<i>Gulf of Mexico, Beaufort Sea,</i>		<i>Niger, Delta,</i>
<i>Valdez,</i>		
she/I call/s upon	the coldest moon to react to the equinox	
the age of earth already intact	she/I throw/s the <i>Anatkuq's</i> ivory dice. <sup>2</sup>	

For the writers Heise reads (e.g., Daniel Brin, Karen Tei Yamashita), deterritorialization happens under essentially modern processes of globalization: immigration, transnational capitalism, toxic pollution. But indigenous literatures describe histories of dynamism and change that far antedate (and will outlast) contemporary national borders and indeed even the arrival of humans. In many traditional emergence and creation stories, humans crawl up through the earth to its surface, or they fall from the sky. In both scenarios, the assistance of animals and the elements is crucial to their survival. Historically, a good deal of indigenous writing, art, and activism have tried to honor these “original instructions”—ethics and knowledge passed from generation to generation. Scholars like Melissa Nelson (Ojibwe) have framed the concept of original instructions in terms that seem to anticipate ecocosmopolitanism: these indigenous ethics are thoroughly deromanticized and acutely aware of larger political and economic forces that keep interrupting them.

For example, in 1739 the Wabanaki leader Polin protested the damming of the Presumpcot River in what is now Maine, declaring, “I have to say something concerning the river I belong to.” As parsed by two contemporary Abenaki scholars, Lisa and Cassandra Brooks, Polin’s sense of belonging was both ecological and cultural, and it traversed infinitely extensible networks of waterways and kin. Polin didn’t just root his people to one particular ecosystem a la bioregionalism; he called for Europeans, having arrived from across an ocean, to *join* and contribute to these networks of relations. His early dam protest is, as the Brooks

describe it, a call for “reciprocal and responsible relationships between and amongst communities and our environments” (2010, 11). It was a place-based environmental action that was nevertheless highly attuned to the interactions among differentially empowered groups and their *environments*, in the plural.

Heise contends that the task of ecocosmopolitanism “would not so much be to preserve pristine, authentic ecosystems as to ensure their continued ability to change and evolve” (2008, 114). Heise’s argument echoes precisely what Polin was requesting: that settlers recognize (not attempt to dominate) river systems’ cycles of scarcity and abundance, while recognizing the centuries-old indigenous practices and ceremonies that had long sustained these places. Heise expresses some concern, though, over “how an endorsement of constant transformation and change would allow one to discriminate between the inherently dynamic evolution of ecosystems and the kinds of disruptive change that might ultimately lead to serious ecosystemic problems and failures” (2008, 114).

In making such distinctions, indigenous people might reasonably point to settler colonialism and anthropocentrism as two important signs that something is amiss. Mainstream media, and some mainstream environmentalists, still act as though indigenous people exist somewhere in the primordial and mystical past, to be ransacked for knowledge that might save modern citizens from themselves, while being resolutely excluded from any future. This is why global indigenous activists now demand “free prior and informed consent” for “any plan, project or activity affecting [their] lands, territories and other resources” (“Kari-Oca 2 Declaration”) and why the recent Idle No More movement has argued that indigenous sovereignty must be central to global sustainable decision making. Colonization is not a thing of the past but an ongoing, extractive enterprise doomed to leave everybody—Native and non-Native, human and other-than-human—without any livable land or water.

In the words of Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi/Muscogee), traditional ecological knowledge is not essentialist, New Agey, or stereotypical but eminently practical; it is “indigenous realism, a living system of knowledge, one that is not frozen in time, but a deep experiential knowledge that is capable of change and innovation, the ability to figure out what works in a particular place for the people of that place” (2010, 70). Heise would appreciate that this knowledge is also fundamentally planetary, as indigenous people have been among the first to experience the most

devastating effects of climate change. Their local-while-global knowledge is therefore also fundamentally political: as Wildcat puts it, “We are not canaries in your service, but peoples carrying messages from relatives . . . in the complex web of life” (53).

Like some of the experimental novels that Heise admires, Judy Dow (Abenaki) crafted two baskets that formally materialize this sense of place and sense of planet. One is made of ash splint and sweetgrass; the other is crafted from used pantyhose.

Black ash does not grow in large swaths, but only in smaller patches among other trees in swampy areas. Environmental biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) has found that, historically, the tree has flourished near communities of basket makers, because their strategic harvesting ensures that the ash seedlings get access to the necessary sunlight (2013, 149). But black ash is now under siege from the invasive emerald ash borer, introduced from China and rapidly making its way from the Great Lakes through northern New England. Native communities are partnering with conservation scientists to study this insect, but the fate of the tree is uncertain.

Dow’s baskets ask, on the one hand, what we will have left when all the trees are gone. At the same time, they show that indigenous skills will adapt and survive, that they have *always* adapted and survived. In nonalphabetic texts (petroglyphs, wampum belts, baskets), rocks, shells, and trees converse with ancestors, distant treaty partners, and human families. In English-language political petitions, tribal intellectuals call out settlers’ destructive practices and invite them into new formations. They speak to the longstanding and symbiotic relations between Wabanaki people and trees; they gesture to the distant past as well as to the uncertain future. In this, Dow’s baskets achieve what Heise calls a “narrative architecture . . . able to accommodate a view of global systems along with local stories” (2008, 208).

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#### NOTES

1. An idea pursued, in varying forms, by indigenous studies scholars, including Allen (2012), Huhndorf (2009), and Ramirez (2007).

2. From the poem “Palmed Hands Foist Dice” (opik 2012). Anatuq is “a shaman; person endowed with the power to do much good or bad.”

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## On Ecocosmopolitanism and the Role of Culture in Ecocritical Thinking

Ursula Heise’s formulation of an ecocosmopolitan sensibility in her groundbreaking work *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* challenges the impressions of authenticity attributed to localism in environmentalist philosophy. Heise’s work provides an important advance in cultural ecocriticism as it facilitates an alternative analytical approach that, certainly, acknowledges the tangibility of local concerns as part of an interconnected planetary ecosystem but also addresses the pervasive need to consider the global dimensions of most environmental problems. Cri-

tiquing a pervasive tendency of ecocriticism to see causes and solutions to environmental problems as either local or global issues, she suggests that “environmentalist advocacies of place assume that individuals’ existential encounters with nature and engagements with intimately known local places can be recuperated intact from the distortions of modernization” (2008, 11). Modernization, globalization, the network society, an increasingly neoliberal world order—all of these are buzzwords used to evoke the local as an environmental sanctuary. But simultaneously, the global is too ambiguous and wide ranging in its contextual and concrete applications:

Most networks of information open the local out into a network of ecological links that span a region, a continent, or the world [and which] allow individuals to think beyond the boundaries of their own cultures, ethnicities or nations to a range of other sociocultural frameworks [providing] an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary “imagined communities” of human and non-human kinds. (Heise 2008, 11)

Adopting a perspective that emphasizes reciprocal dialogue between the global and the local, and blurs the practical differences between the two, is essential to understanding the role of culture in engaging contemporary ecological problems. Heise’s suggestions are important as a rhetorical redirection for environmental communications and connect integrally with my focus on the transnational scale of ecological problems, an approach I have been cultivating in my work on ecocinema (more on this below). By insisting on continuous dialogue between the global and the local, a more pervasive oscillation between the tangibility of local space and borderless belonging, as part of the planetary ecology, expands the parameters of what Ivakhiv (2013) has called ecocinecriticism, or the study of filmmaking practice from an ecophilosophical perspective. The mobilization of an ecocosmopolitan approach to ecocinema necessitates both taking into account the constitutive role of culture and also focusing attention on the ecosystemic connections that facilitate cultural expression.

While there is much to commend in Heise’s approach, it is not entirely without its problems. To explain how an ecocosmopolitan perspective would work in practice, she uses the example of Google Earth, an application that allows users access to a global scale of spaces, all

from the comfort of their own local user position. While such applications are vital for visualizing the planetary interconnectivity of local concerns and the ways their causes and effects operate beyond spatial specificity, the application is appropriately and ironically symbolic of the wider problems ingrained in the DNA of such globalized perspectives. In addition to the obvious problem of supporting data harvesting by a singular corporate entity, other issues, including the inequality of access to networked computers and their material discarding under unprotected industrial conditions, often have harmful effects on deprived local communities in “developing” countries—presumably aiming to develop toward the level of technological utopia heralded by Google’s propaganda. While it is entirely necessary to complicate the simplistic binary of the global and the local, as this application clearly does, the planetary comes with its own set of associated problems, namely the lack of sufficient consideration of the tangibility of environmental problems, of both human and nonhuman kinds.

The point in raising this criticism is not to invalidate ecocosmopolitan argumentation but rather to incorporate a more critical vernacular to explaining its implications. Adopting some of the critical perspectives inherent to transnational studies—especially its focus on global inequality and exploitation—provides us with a critical take on ecocosmopolitanism. Ecocosmopolitanism shares similarities with transnationalism in its emphasis on operating above and beyond borders and in its awareness of the complexities of global imbalances of power. Regardless, the fallacies of the cosmopolitan outlook need to be reconsidered when it comes to adopting a planetary perspective, as this may not be the most incisive way to pay due attention to material scarcity and the inability of marginalized individuals to attain the transcendent perspective of the cosmopolitan. This is made clearer when we consider Will Higbee and Song-Hwee Lim’s proposal of a critical transnationalism that encourages us to “interpret more productively the interface between global and local, national and transnational, as well as move away” (2010, 10) from the Eurocentric tendencies that may prevail in cinema. Conceptual ambiguities, of course, permeate this definition as well, but to me, its emphasis on complex interfaces structured by both conceptual and intellectual imbalances of power seems more productive than the explicitly expansive ecocosmopolitan perspective.

Much of my research has, to date, focused on formulating a transnational approach to studying the environmental dimensions of global media cultures. In the books *Transnational Ecocinema* and *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinema*, I (along with Tommy Gustafsson in the former) attempt to come to terms with the regional dimensions of ecological issues and their resonance in a wider planetary scope. To capture such a dialogic framework, I adopt some of the central concerns of the ecocosmopolitan approach to exploring the operations of environmentalist rhetoric and sustainable ideologies in the Nordic countries and their national and regional film cultures. The complex dynamics of the local, the regional, the transnational, and the planetary set the stage for my interrogation of ecological rhetoric in this context, especially the ways the geographic form and layout of nations work as specifically human-made “inventions” and impositions, not as a set of natural phenomena. These two works arise from the realization that any ecocritical or ecophilosophical attempt must be grounded in the very real cultural contexts—including those of nations—that still influence and shape the global ecopolitical map. But simultaneously, we must find a balance between these anthropogenic structures and ecosystemic complexity. It is in negotiating for this balance that ecocosmopolitanism has much to offer ecocritical studies.

**Pietari Kääpä** is a lecturer in media and communications at University of Stirling. His research work synergizes transnational film and media studies with ecocriticism. Kääpä has published widely on transnational Nordic cinema and issues relating to ecocinema, including collections and articles exploring ecocritical concerns in relation to audiences, documentary politics, minority film production, and management of the media industries' resources. With Tommy Gustafsson, he recently published the edited collection *Transnational Ecocinemas*, and his latest book is *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas*. He currently works on projects related to environmental management of the media industries.

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## On Bridges, Birds, and Cosmopolitan Ecocriticism: Conversations with Ursula Heise

It was in the elevator at the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts conference where I first met Ursula Heise; our conversation began with birds and the bridges of Pittsburgh and led us to the Andy Warhol museum. Ursula, I soon realized, is a most excellent guide to birds and art, but also to must-see conference speakers. With her, I attended some particularly noteworthy interdisciplinary panels, including, it turned out, several on ecocriticism. And so my experience with ecocriticism began in the elevator, on the bright-yellow bridges of Pittsburgh that gave the former industrial landscape a strangely sunny flavor, and was inspired by the art of Andy Warhol. Fittingly, considering Ursula's thesis of ecocosmopolitanism and deterritorialization that bridges the local and the global, our conversations began with birds (whose migrations across the planet boggle the mind, of course), neon Goethes, and the bridges over the three rivers that merge in Pittsburgh as the Ohio before flowing into the Mississippi and onward to the Gulf of Mexico. For my work in German and comparative literature, Ursula's writing and our conversations provided much-needed models for connecting German, comparative, and American literature, as well as for linking the older forms of literature I usually discuss (Goethe's works) to science fiction and for linking interdisciplinary studies and ecocriticism. Deterritorialization is, in these terms, not a breakdown of the local but rather a productive process whereby one learns to see and follow interconnections and exchanges among various ecologies, literary communities, and disciplines. As one of the few Germanists and comparativists attending the earlier ecocritical conferences, I found this tremendously encouraging, as I assume others did, too, since it is now commonplace to have international scholars attend all the recent meetings. Ecocosmopolitanism is now commonplace, and much credit is due to Ursula for her contributions to this expanded view and engagement.

As Ursula writes in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*, acknowledging deterritorialization is beneficial for environmental understanding be-

cause it unites local knowledge and experience with broader, international, and global issues in which we are fully imbricated—like it or not—climatically (through climate change and anthropogenic alterations to the earth's surface), economically, and culturally.

In a context of rapidly increasing connections around the globe, what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet—a sense of how political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and ecological networks shape daily routines. If the concept of deterritorialization foregrounds how cultural practices become detached from place, it also points to how these practices are now imbricated in such larger networks. (Heise 2008, 55)

Visualizing the planet itself, the earth as a place, is not just a science-fiction trope or part of the history of technology and the space industry: it is environmental thinking in an unprecedented yet extremely relevant form for today, in the Anthropocene, when human activity has made its mark across the entire surface of the globe.

My conversations with Ursula included such issues as the imbrications of local and international ecologies and cultures in planetary thinking, but they also always returned to birds, too. While attending an inspiring conference panel with Ursula at the Oregon ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment), Ursula and I misheard the speaker's reference to Gaia as the German word for vulture, *Geier*, (which sound very similar). This conflation of terms was momentarily quite confusing but nevertheless continues to inspire. Indeed, the idea of a vast interwoven system of self-regulating vultures whose activities impact other species across the planet has remained an influence in my thinking ever since, one that I credit to Ursula—one must always think birds, after all. This conflation as a merging also represents, however, something both more personal and more relevant to the field of ecocriticism broadly: Ursula's work provides a significant confluence of ideas and traditions from many disciplines and different continents and is itself both truly cosmopolitan and delightfully grounded—or, rather, feathered and flying—as well.

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cism, the “dark pastoral,” Goethe’s science and literature, the German romantics, and eco-science fiction. She is the guest coeditor with Caroline Schaumann of “Dirty Nature,” a special issue of *Colloquia Germanica* 44, no.2 (2012); guest coeditor with Dana Phillips for *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* (ISLE) 19, no.3 (2012), with essays on material ecocriticism; and guest coeditor with Bernhard Malkmus of “The Challenge of Ecology to the Humanities: Post-Humanism or New Humanism?” a special issue of *New German Critique* (forthcoming). Her essays have appeared in *Ecozon@*, *Colloquia Germanica*, *Goethe Yearbook*, *Monatshefte*, *ISLE*, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, *European Romantic Review*, and *Literatur für Leser*. She is author of *The Intercontextuality of Self and Nature in Ludwig Tieck’s Early Works* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 1997) and a contributor to volumes on material ecocriticism, *European ecocritical theory*, *mountains in the German imagination*, and *comparative romanticisms*. Her current project is editing a collection of ecocritical essays on German literature, together with Caroline Schaumann.

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### The Plurality of Risk

It seems unnecessary to say that *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* was a landmark work, but I’ll say it anyway. The book isn’t just beautifully written; it was beautifully timed, issuing a reminder just when it was needed of the global and, indeed, the planetary scope of ecocriticism and offering a salutary view of ecocosmopolitanism in light of the fact that the “average daily life, in the context of globality, is shaped by structures, processes, and products that originate elsewhere” (Heise 2008, 54). Heise’s is a spirited defense of ecocosmopolitanism as “an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary ‘imagined communities’ of both human and non-human kinds” (Heise 2008, 61). As an opening up of cosmopolitan perspectives to the more-than-human world, *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* has been unrivalled, though I think it might have benefited from a closer dialogue with other understandings of planetarity, notably Gayatri Spivak’s, which clinically posits an *other*-than-human planet that is indifferent to difference and wholly oblivious to human needs, interests, and concerns (see, for example, Spivak 2003). “Sense of planet,” it seems to me, goes beyond “a cognitive understanding [of] and affective attachment to the global” (Heise 2008,

59), though I certainly agree with Heise that ecocriticism, perhaps particularly in the United States, has not been alert as it might have been to the cultural and economic effects of globalization; nor has globalization been seen—or at least seen sufficiently—in ecological terms.

Whether things have changed since *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* came out is a moot point, though it's clear that there's been something of a postcolonial turn in ecocriticism and that the sometimes heated debate between the postcolonial and the global—by no means a mutually exclusive pairing—has helped fashion a politically oriented ecocriticism, which, informed by the insights of political ecology, has restaked its activist credentials for our neoliberal times. Heise's work has been integral to this shift, even though she herself seems ambivalent about postcolonialism; and it's interesting (and, to me, more than a little irritating) that she begins *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* by distancing herself from the postcolonial paradigm, which she sees as having been “replaced” by globalization as the “central term around which theories of current politics, society, and culture in the humanities and social sciences are organized” in our times (Heise 2008, 4).

It's probably worth flagging up humanities here. Heise's work has been influential in the development of the environmental humanities, which I had read following Libby Robin as a collective attempt to counteract technocratic approaches to environmental management by emphasizing the historical depth and cultural specificity of current environmental problems and by paying close attention to the moral and ethical relations that obtain between humans and nonhumans in an ecologically threatened world (see Robin 2008). The environmental humanities are best seen in terms of a constellation of disciplines in which literature and history play a significant but not necessarily defining or decisive role. That said, I think Heise is right to place emphasis on the literary and to stress the importance of narratives and narrative genres as “cultural tools for organizing information about risks into intelligible and meaningful stories” (Heise 2008, 138) that address the routines of daily social interaction as well as contemplating the larger ecological “fate of the world” (141).

There is perhaps an overemphasis on risk and crisis in ecocriticism today, though it's understandable where the anxiety is coming from. The great value of Heise's work lies in her insistence on the *plurality* of risk without either folding it into the catchall category of the apocalyp-

tic or, still worse, using it to spell an end to ecocriticism-as-we-know-it in the light of such planetary megaphenomena as global warming (see here the equally influential work of Clark 2010 and Morton 2013). Heise's work is not as fashionable as theirs, but it is built to last. And her call for a "cosmopolitan re-imagination of the natural environment" (92) is accompanied by a range and attention to detail that neither Clark nor Morton seem able to match. Heise, in short, is part of the future of ecocriticism, all the more so when that future--when *our* future--is placed in serious doubt.

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