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by Nuno Marques



Abstract

*I propose that Gary Snyder's bioregional project can contribute to recent ecopoetic thought with its argument for poetry as embodied practice and with its definition of community as place-based, transnational, and multi-species. I start by showing continuities between bioregionalism and ecocriticism with the concept of place. I then turn to Snyder's conceptualization of place as a dialectics between the biotic and sociopolitical dimensions. For Snyder poetry is a situated and embodied practice of investigation and creation of place. It therefore relates with recent discussions on ecopoetics as a critical and poetic practice extended to ecologically oriented forms of community action and activism (Hume and Osborne 2018, 2). As an example of how current ecopoetry practices a poetics of place I briefly discuss Allison Cobb's *Plastic: An Autobiography* (2015).*

Keywords: bioregionalism, ecocriticism, ecopoetics, Gary Snyder, Allison Cobb



About the Author

I research the contribution of ecopoetics and ecopoetry to epistemologies of the environmental humanities through its engagement and entanglement with the atmosphere. I started this research with my PhD thesis "Atmospheric and Geological Entanglements: North American Ecopoetry and the Anthropocene" (2020). I am also a fellow at the ecopoetics center for Gary Snyder Studies, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (SUF), China, and affiliated researcher at ARCUM, Arctic Research Centre, Umeå University. I am also a translator of ecopoetry to Portuguese, and translated an [anthology of Gary Snyder's poetry](#) and am currently translating Evelyn Reilly's poetry collections.

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Community Making and Ecopoetics

The activity of community making is relevant in current ecopoetics in two distinct ways: the first is through the creation of a community of poets, artists, scholars, and activists for whom ecopoetics is a critical and poetic practice; the second is in the very writing of ecopoetry as practice of community making. In the recent volume *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field* (2018), Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne propose that ecopoetics can be thought of as “both poetry and critical practice,” influencing contemporary poetry and theory and also environmentally-oriented practices, including forms of community action and activism. The authors give the example of the 2013 Conference on Ecopoetics at UC Berkeley in which participants demonstrated that “ecopoetics can encompass experiments in community making, ranging from poetry and visual art, literary criticism, and performance to walking, foraging, farming, cooking, and being alongside each other, whether human or other than human, in space and place” (Hume and Osborne 2018, 2).

A number of the papers and other publications that came out of this conference have significantly influenced discussions on ecopoetics, demonstrating the convergence of many of the activities mentioned above in ecopoetics’ operative definition as a field of multidisciplinary practice. Among these are the *((eco(lang)(uage(reader)))* (Iijima 2010), with essays from ecopoets on form, language, and ideas of community; the *Ecopoetics* of Hume and Osborne mentioned above, which extends ecopoetics to marginalized voices, environmental activism and justice issues; Lynn Keller’s *Recomposing Ecopoetics* (2018), which focuses specifically on experimental poetry; Sarah Nolan’s *Unnatural Ecopoetics: Unlikely Spaces in Contemporary Poetry* (2017), which discusses in detail Susan Howe’s and Lyn Hejinian’s experimental poetry; and David Farrier’s *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction* (2019), which concerns ways in which ecopoetry conveys the

multiple temporalities of the Anthropocene. These works show how ecopoetics as critical practice addresses not only distinct (in some ways overlapping) conceptions of community but also various practices of community making. Looking to poetry in particular, these works expand the concept of ecopoetry to a multiplicity of non-canonical voices because, as Hume and Osborne argue, “experimental work by women and queer poets, poets of color, and poets with disabilities . . . continues to be underrepresented not only in ecocriticism but in literature studies more broadly” (Hume and Osborne 2018, 5).¹ All these works also expand previous criticism of nature poetry to include experimentation with form and method in poetry as practices of community making with the multifarious organisms and inorganic agents that coinhabit the planet. Recent poetry anthologies such as *The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral* (Corey and Waldrep 2012) and *Big Energy Poets: Ecopoetry Thinks Climate Change* (Staples and King 2017) exemplify these practices of community making.

Poet Evelyn Reilly, author of the ecopoetry collections *Styrofoam* (2009), *Apocalypso* (2012) and *Echolocation* (2018), frames the ecopoetics of community making in ecopoetry in the following terms:

What might happen if the multitudinous, utopian-democratic, polymorphically-erotic Whitman poetic “Self” were re-constituted within the context of our post-colonial, post-humanist, globally inter-tangled and genderly profusional era? Could there be a new “song of ourselves” that expands to include many more kinds of permeable relationality, including cross-species relationality? And what kind of language critique, experimentation and innovation would that require? (2017, 178)

Here Reilly emphasizes three important aspects of the ecopoetics she envisions: the development of previous ideas of community, exemplified by Walt Whitman’s democratic community, toward ideas of symbiosis; the concept of permeable relationality questioning the ontological distinctions between humans, nonhumans, and non-organic elements; and experimentation and innovation in poetry aimed at expressing and practicing ideas of symbiosis and permeable relationality. In short, the ecopoetics envisioned aspires to build a “post-colonial, post-humanist, globally inter-tangled and genderly profusional” community by composing a “song of ourselves.” Aiming “to bring closer just a little bit closer the true the truth of that body,” as John Taggart writes in “Slash” (*Arcadia Project*, 11), ecopoets recognize that this body of another can be part flesh, part plastic, part industrial chemicals, and that it can also be one’s own body.

For the purpose of this paper, I want to focus on the importance of community building as ecopoetic practice. In particular, how ecopoets conceive of community by starting from the materiality and situatedness of their own bodies to recognize the existence of other organisms, in whose bodies the environmental, cultural, and political complexities of the globalized world also become visible. There are many examples of how ecopoets work with the material aspects of communication as a way of bringing the presence of others' bodies into the composition of their poems, creating the perception of a shared materiality: Eleni Sikelianos includes collages, memorabilia and scientific reports in *The California Poem* (2004); Evelyn Reilly breaks and aggregates words with Styrofoam dots in *Styrofoam* (2009); Cecilia Vicuña uses visual poetry in "Death of the Pollinators" (2017) in which the spatial arrangement of words on the page mimic pollen floating; and Jonathan Skinner uses spectrograms of birds' vocalizations in "Blackbird Stanzas" (2017) to bring the animal into the composition. Brenda Hillman works with fragment and onomatopoeia in the collections *Cascadia* (2001) and *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005) as ways of interrelating the geological and the atmospheric within the poems, thus creating a poetry of shared ecologies. Equally important is the presence of the poets' own bodies in the poems as sites where the materiality of the global imposes itself, for instance, through the evidence of the presence of plastic in human and nonhuman bodies, in the atmosphere, in the oceans and in the geology of the planet.²

Community making and relation to place are, therefore, important ideas in current ecopoetics and the presence of both in ecocriticism can be related with bioregional thought. Gary Snyder in particular has contributed to bioregionalism, and indirectly to ecocriticism, with the definition of community as place-based and multi-species, and with the argument for poetry as an embodied practice of community making. Snyder is a well-known nature poet, ecocritic, and environmentalist. His poetry synthesizes various dimensions of bioregionalism and poetic practice. Collections such as *Turtle Island* (1974b) and *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996) are instructive about the flora, fauna, and history of a region. They are lyric and domestic, highlighting the poet's relation with a place in his personal life. They also participate in the community-making practice of creating new narratives and images for the events, plants, and animals endemic to particular regions. Snyder's work has been criticized for its use of First Nations' symbols, terms, and images (Silko 1979), for the "overdetermined distinction between gender roles" (Gray 2006, 183), and for the problematic association between women and nature. Of particular significance to the present paper are both Ursula Heise's and Rob Nixon's critical discussions of Snyder's bioregional project and bioregional thought as a whole. Both these authors' critiques point out how ecocriticism needs to supplement its focus on place and literatures of place with the importance of the global, a focus they see

missing both in bioregionalist thought and in literatures and poetries of place such as Snyder's. Building from this critique, I seek to show that ecopoetics exemplifies how environmentally-oriented forms of art can be at one and the same time situated in a body and a place and materially entangled in the current, global bio-historical moment by virtue of the poet's own artistic exercise. In this sense, Snyder's poetics of place is productive of a critical exercise with global implications. My discussion briefly carries out an overview of the relation between bioregionalism and ecocriticism to show how current ecopoetics rereads the bioregional concepts of community and place, relating Snyder's poetics in due course with current ecopoetics.

Bioregionalism

Bioregionalism contributed to the environmental movements of the 1970s, grounding environmental policies in the specificities of the local, rather than submitting them to homogenous and centralized state or nationwide policies. Promoting decentralized forms of governance, community based environmental policies, and local adapted action, its main thinkers were Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Gary Snyder, and Stephanie Mills. These authors' proposal was to address environmental problems from a proactive stance to overcome the limitations of environmentalism which, they argued, could exhaust itself in protest. As Peter Berg stated,

[b]ioregionalism is proactive. It is carrying the concept of a life-place into the activities and goals of human society, as opposed to protest. Environmentalism has been a protest-oriented activity based on attempting to deal with a destructive industrial society. On the one hand, it tries to preserve pristine wilderness areas for their own sake and, on the other, to keep water and air clean for the sake of humans. Bioregionalism goes beyond both of these. In a bioregion there are different zones of human interface with natural systems: urban, suburban, rural, and wilderness. And each of these has a different appropriate reinhabitory approach. (quoted in Evanoff 1998)

The bioregion, or life-place, structures bioregional thought, and is defined by the complementarity between particular "biota, watershed, landforms and elevations" (Snyder 2000, 192) and cultural specificities of regions. The delimitations of bioregions are, therefore, not the same as those of political borders, which they can cross according to the specifics of geography, flora, fauna, and cultural identity.³ The initial focus on the bioregion answered an express need to find practical ways of engaging with environmental problems from a proactive point of view. This sort of hands-on approach

characterizes bioregionalism more generally, which at its core is based on the practical questions of *where do we live?* and *how do we live?* with the aim of finding a balance between human action and planetary or biospheric requirements. Thus, two main arguments were put forward by the early champions of bioregionalism for redirecting environmental action toward local and daily life, and for adapting it to local specificities and circumstances. The first was an internal critique of environmentalism as a reactive force “forever rallying around the next disaster or impending crisis” (Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster 2012, 3). Although major crises such as the acceleration of the greenhouse effect throughout the earth system have to be dealt with globally, bioregionalists propose that the creation of human communities living in ecological balance in specific places can tackle those crises and avert further ones. The second argument put forward by early champions of bioregionalism was tied to a larger systemic critique of homogeneity and alienation from one’s body and from one’s place of living, which were believed to be promoted by centralized forms of government.

As a solution to homogeneity and alienation, bioregionalism proposed deep awareness of one’s body and place, through engagement with the local cultural and biotic specificities endemic to one’s place of living. This engagement was largely envisioned as a form of stewardship, of taking care of one’s place, born from a deep connection to the region. As Gary Snyder writes in “Four Changes” (1974a),

[s]tewardship means, for most of us, find your place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there—the tiresome but tangible work of school boards, county supervisors, local foresters, local politics, even while holding in mind the largest scale of potential change. [...] New schools, new classes, walking in the woods and cleaning up the streets. Find psychological techniques for creating an awareness of “self” that includes social and natural environment. (100)

This way of living deeply interconnected with one’s home region is also defined in bioregionalism as reinhabitation, i.e., learning to live-in-place and in areas that have been disrupted by past exploitation. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster also succinctly explain how this concept translates into action in the introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* (2012):

Reinhabitory practices might involve restoring native plant communities, redesigning landscaping with an eye to indigenous plants and habitats, restructuring transportation facilities to have as little negative social and ecological effect as possible, founding remanufacturing businesses to make new

products from byproducts and discarded materials, retrofitting homes to conserve energy or, better yet, to produce energy, converting brownfields to gardens, working for social justice and valuing cultural diversity, and even reimagining what a bioregionally inspired local literary tradition might consist of. (6)

All of these examples show the concrete type of actions promoted by bioregionalism in order to deal with and avert global environmental crises through anchoring and deepening one's relation with the local. One can easily map the long-term influence of bioregional ideas both in grassroots and mainstream environmental groups, as well as in the popular discourse on environmentalism, by the use and presence of such terms and practices as “community, sustainability, local culture, local food systems, ‘green’ cities, renewable energy, habitat restoration, ecological awareness, grassroots activism” (Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster 2012, 4). In the same way, bioregionalism has continued to inform a variety of other expressions of emergent new localisms, including community-supported agriculture, the slow-food movement, antiglobalization efforts, and postcolonial reconceptualizations of place and identity” (Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster 2012, 4) because of their focus on the local, and on the importance of the situated body in a place, in a region, and in a culture.

Bioregionalism and Ecocriticism

Bioregionalism conceptualizes of place as a dialectic relation between the biotic and the cultural. As bioregionalists argue, the knowledge of a bioregion and the practice of incorporating its particular characteristics in our daily lives creates a sense of place, which in turn, is seen as a motive for engaging with environmentally-oriented types of action, and ways of living. As Snyder writes:

With this kind of consciousness people turn up at hearings and in front of trucks and bulldozers to defend the land or trees. Showing solidarity with a region! What an odd idea at first. Bioregionalism is the entry of place into the dialectic of history. Also we might say that there are “classes” that so far have been overlooked—the animals, rivers, rocks, and grasses—now entering history. (2000, 194)

In the same way, concerns with place mapped themselves in the formative years of ecocriticism, showing the importance of place for environmentally oriented ways of

reading and writing. Cheryll Glotfelty's seminal question—"should place become a new critical category?" (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xix) was a challenge put forward when the groundbreaking volume *The Ecocriticism Reader* was published in 1996, and it is still a question that inspires debate. The uses and importance of the concept of place are debated now that current ecocriticism addresses the transnational implications of the environmental crisis, shifting from the focus on regional literatures and interrogating the rhetoric of place in the field's first wave from the early 1990s through the mid-2000s. This shift is illustrated by three main ecocritical works: Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008); Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); and Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster's *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology and Place* (2012). The first two works open the field to postcolonial and globalization studies through a necessary rethinking of the metaphors and implications of the concept of place in a time in which deterritorialization, rather than construction of place, governs the experience of the world. Either by reframing the identification with the world in a transnational context (Heise), or by advocating a transnational ethics of place (Nixon), fundamental discussions regarding methodology and positioning are voiced in these landmark studies. Ecocriticism, as both authors claim, must address the ways in which contemporary environmental narratives and discourses are connected with questions of power, gender, colonial history, and globalization, because place both reflects and is dependent on those questions. In the third landmark publication, the editors argue that a sense of the global is "incomplete without an awareness that the globe is an amalgamation of infinitely complex connections among variously scaled and nested places." Accordingly, "many of those places are most usefully considered as bioregions," and literature has an important role in that definition (Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster 2012, 9).

In Heise and Nixon's proposals we can find continuities between bioregionalism and ecocriticism. One good example of these continuities is Heise's concept of eco-cosmopolitanism "or environmental world citizenship, building on recuperations of the cosmopolitan project in other areas of cultural theory" (2008, 56); as "an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (62). The author points out that eco-cosmopolitanism follows from new forms of "transnational cultural identity" (6) happening because the contemporary globalized world invalidates cultural identity arising from place. This concept echoes Peter Berg's concept of the planetarian:

there should be a planetarian feel to [bioregionalism]: that we will become reinhabitory people and we will begin redefining our locations in planetary terms

for ourselves. The goal of reinhabitation in a bioregion would be to succeed at living in place, a future primitive planetarian mode. (1983)

Berg's concept of the planetarian takes a proactive stance regarding the effects of the loss of a sense of place as pointed out by Heise.⁴ However, Berg argues that a commitment with places is a practice profoundly aware of the planetary scale of environmental problems, and aimed at counterbalancing its destructive effects. The concept of planetarian also includes the idea of global citizenship by reflecting Lovelock and Margulis' Gaia Hypothesis, the principle of the planet as a living organism, fundamental to bioregionalism and reread by Heise as the global biosphere. It also establishes communication between reinhabitory communities distributed in bioregions across the globe as a necessary condition for the global bioregional project. In this sense, it permeates the idea of networks of influence (Heise 2008) to which it adds the positive contribution of each of those communities within bioregions to fight globalized monoculture, by promoting an environmental ethic from a sense of place.

Although the focus on place as way of promoting an environmental ethic was useful in early ecocriticism, it has also has been problematized. As Heise states, ecocriticism must

go beyond the aforementioned "ethic of proximity" so as to investigate by what means individuals and groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere, or by what means they might be enabled to do so; at the same time, as the work of Vandana Shiva, among others, highlights, such a perspective needs to be attentive to the political frameworks in which communities begin to see themselves as part of a planetary community, and what power struggles such visions might be designed to hide or legitimate. (2008, 62)

This sense of belonging to the global biosphere, includes "both animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange" (Heise 2008, 61), the visible and invisible results of pollution; chemicals that cross the globe in water streams, the political networks they correspond to, and the unequal distribution of effects of the environmental crisis. Looking at these networks, and the sense of global they promote, Nixon proposes that ecocriticism engages with a "transnational ethics of place" (2011, 245) to address questions of the unequal distribution of the environmental problems across the planet and in different communities, as well as access of communities to a global forms of representability. Heise concurs that "the focus on the local can also block an understanding of larger salient connections" (2008, 62) and, therefore, there is a balance

to be found in an ecocritical practice, both in recognizing the creative and critical potential of a sense of place and in relating it with larger global networks, something bioregionalism tries to do with the concept of the planetarian. Furthermore, Heise also argues that the forms of this relation must be questioned by asking “under what conditions and by what means a reattachment to the natural can take place in a general context of globalizing processes?” (2004, 132) that weaken the ties between culture and place. Heise and Nixon also point out the questions of migration are especially important because they tie into the question of how the relation to place is differently understood and enacted in view of cultural differences. To address these questions, Nixon argues for a transnational ethics of place that would allow ecocriticism to “recuperate, imaginatively and politically, experiences of hybridity, displacement, and transnational memory for any viable spatial ethic” (2011, 200). The conversation between Heise, Nixon, and Berg show some continuities between bioregional thought and recent ecocriticism, complementing the focus on the local with the reality of the global in the context of a planetary environmental crisis: they each inform one another.

Looking now at Snyder’s bioregional proposal as an example of specific contributions of literature to the bioregional project, we see that his poetics explores the creative potential of a relation to/with place as an exercise of negotiation and resistance to the global environmental crisis. As Snyder stated in his 1976 essay “The Politics of Ethnopoetics,” “[w]e’re just starting, in the last ten years here, to begin to make songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children. . . . Such poetries will be created by us as we reinhabit this land. . . .” (21). Snyder’s poetry “does not articulate any sense of how differences between one’s region and culture of origin [and of residence] might transform one’s mode of inhabitation,” Heise points out, because these are assumed to transpire from the dialectical relation with the region (2008, 44). For Snyder, affiliation with place is not the result of a passive relation to place, or of a spontaneous and “natural” relation; rather, it is a cultural and site-specific process of identity and community creation as mediated by poetry and other communal activities.

Gary Snyder’s Poetics of Place

We might well ask in what concrete ways poetry for Snyder provides information about places, celebrates them, or gives models for living in place? One answer to this question lies in Snyder’s place-grounded poetics as articulated in “Some Points for a ‘New Nature Poetics’,” which is part of the essay “Unnatural Writing” (2000). Consider, for example, the first two of his nine points:

- That it be literate—that is, nature literate. Know who's who and what's what in the ecosystem, even if this aspect is barely visible in the writing.
- That it be grounded in a place—thus, place literate: informed about local specificities on both ecological-biotic and sociopolitical levels. And informed about history (social history and environmental history), even if this is not obvious in the poem. (262)

Each of the nine points of the poetics succinctly states Snyder's religious, political, and poetic thought. The seven points that follow argue for the use of myths, of models, and systems from ecology, biology, and other sciences, as well as for the study of mind and language. The final point provides practical advice for the writer scratching his/her head over how to do all of this, emphasizing that the writing should "be crafty and get the work *done*" (262). Following the points from first to last, a specific method for writing is proposed: start where you are, investigate and use all types of knowledge and language about where you are, both particular to it or influencing it, and move on to write and finish the work. I have chosen to highlight the first two points because they bring place to the fore of the poetics in two ways. First, they do so by situating writing in an ecosystem, as for instance that of the bioregion. Second, they do so by placing writing within specific "ecological-biotic and sociopolitical levels" (Snyder 2000, 262). These points correspond to the three dimensions that constitute place in bioregionalism: the geographic, the biotic, and the cultural. In brief, writing is presented here as a proactive relation with/to place that interconnects both place and work of art: they co-constitute each other. The material and cultural dimensions of place influence the work of art, in terms of form and/or content; these then become another element of the place. Snyder's own strategies of embodiment and relation to place include walking, working, and sitting in meditation, which are shown in the form and structure of his poems. Concrete references to plants, animals, and topographic incidents in the poems are also ways of placing them. Writing poetry is also presented here as a method of research, a study of identity and place.

Plastic: An Autobiography and Place

Current ecopoets follow the intrinsic relation between poetry and place, echoing Snyder's poetics to show the material interconnections between place and body and the global networks with which they are entangled. As I have stated, bioregionalism also includes the idea of globalism, which in turn informs local policies: many bioregionally-adapted communities distributed on the planet constitute a global bioregional network. In current ecopoetry there are similar processes: a deep awareness of one's own body and

situatedness; writing as a research process to develop a sense of place, and as a process of place-creation. Nonetheless, ecopoetics gives precedence to the evidences of global entanglement, which in fact create the contemporary ontological reality. Allison Cobb, author of *Green-Wood* (2010), *Plastic: An Autobiography* (2015), and *After We All Died* (2016), uses this method in her works, which cross forms and genres, including essay, poetry, and investigative history texts. In *Plastic: An Autobiography* in particular, Cobb expresses how her sense of entanglement between plastic and her own body and biography drove her to produce the poem:⁵

It started with an irritant, like a splinter, or an itch.
 In my work for an environmental group, I kept
 encountering snippets of news about the extent of
 plastic contamination around the planet. Each one
 stuck into me, a little hook.

 I'm going to write about plastic, an autobiography."
 I didn't really know what this meant. But I had some
 sense (because plastic is so ubiquitous, everywhere
 out there and also inside me) that I could probably
 uncover a direct link between my body and the
 plastic inside a dead albatross chick some three
 thousand miles across the ocean. If I could that,
 maybe I could also draw the net wider. I could see
 how wide, how far, how long I could stretch this net
 connecting my own body to this substance: plastic,
 which barely existed one hundred years ago and
 which now is so amorphous, so omnipresent, it
 seems to disappear if one tries to look directly at it. (2015, v-vi)

As an image for the recognition of this entanglement, Cobb uses the terms "irritant," "splinter," and "itch" (Cobb 2015, v) to describe the presence of plastic in her life, and the process of becoming aware of that presence. The poet's work method closely resembles the first point of Snyder's poetics of becoming literate and getting to know "who's who and what's what in the ecosystem." Cobb personally interviews and has contact with relatives of Stanislaw Ulam, who created the fission mechanism for the first

thermonuclear device with Edward Teller; the personnel at the local Honda dealer, after a car bumper was discarded in her backyard; Susan Middleton, who took the widely circulated photo of the albatross chick dead with the plastic contents of her stomach by her side in Kure island; as well as others. These persons and events are metaphorically used by the poet to show the entanglement between her own life and body and plastic: Ulam worked in Los Alamos, where Cobb was born and met with Teller; and the thermonuclear device they invented used polyethylene to help the plutonium bomb ignite the thermonuclear fuel, a plastic that would become the most common in the planet, and present also in Cobb's daily life since childhood. The car part leads Cobb to the local Honda dealer, forcing her to study the area map via Google maps, zooming in on the photo of a warehouse just to end up wondering if the company is still really there. This mapping exercise dramatically enacts the problem of focus—of what to look at—when the object of (poetic) research is “so amorphous, so omnipresent, it / seems to disappear if one tries to look directly at it” (vi). In a way, this mapping exercise is also a comment on the poetry of place: zooming in, focusing, looking for the detail, getting to know who's who are all permeated by the tangible presence of the car part, the plastic thing that makes evident the entanglement between the poet and it, through distant networks.

During the poem, Cobb attempts to trace the history of one of the pieces found in the stomach of the albatross chick also to show the ways in which plastic creates connections between distant parts of the planet. In its history, this piece—“This persistent little bit of death in life”—interacted with living beings and artificial materials, its agency in the planet. More than connecting distant places and beings, plastics enmesh with biological structures and bodies, invalidating the boundaries between the natural and the artificial. More importantly, acting in the world, plastics create suffering. Recalling the interview that she made with the photographer Susan Middleton, Cobb writes: “The albatross filled with plastic suffered. Susan wants to make sure I understand this” (2015, 23). In the same painful way in which this little piece erupted from the stomach of the bird, micro particles of plastic penetrate the blood system of other beings, human and nonhuman. *Plastic: An Autobiography* is an example of how the entangled materiality of the global environmental crisis is imposed over an exploration of the connections between the poet's body and her place, permeating all the relations between place and body. At the same time, it is from the awareness and the knowledge of that entanglement that community is created in the poem. *Plastic* is also an example of how writing about the porosity of bodies and matter in our contemporary time forces poets to look at their own body, which is itself contaminated, evidence of the presence of plastic, a visible node of a perceived net that connects distant bodies, persons, animals,

and places, in the shared materiality we all live in, with the albatross chick, with plastic. The poem also shows how ecopoetry departs from the focus on place, although using methods of writing on place, as those of Snyder's poetics, to also build community from the knowledge of living in a shared, multispecies materiality.

As Heise points out, ecocriticism is faced with the crucial challenge of creating "a vision of the global that integrates allegory . . . into a more complex formal framework able to accommodate social and cultural multiplicity" (2008, 21). It follows that to do so ecocriticism must leave behind the focus on exclusionary tropes of place and consider the pressures of the global world. As I have argued, ecopoetics shows this effort both critically, by discussing experimental poetry and alternative experiences of relation with the world, and poetically, with poets foregrounding the material entanglement between humans, other organisms, and inorganic agents in our contemporary environmental reality. Community making therefore guides ecopoetic practice, not only critically, because it aims to bring the voices of others to the community of ecopoets, but in poetic practice because it is situated within a "post-colonial, post-humanist, globally inter-tangled and genderly profusional era" (Reilly 2017, 178). In the same way, the writing of ecopoetry develops Snyder's ecopoetics of place as a critical exercise, foregrounding the ways in which the "globally inter-tangled" is visible in the places and bodies of each member of this community.

Notes

¹ As an example, Camille T. Dungy's introduction to the anthology *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009), argues that "we don't see much African American poetry in nature-related anthologies because, regardless of their presence, blacks have not been recognized in their poetic attempts to affix themselves to the landscape" (xxvii). At stake here is the definition of literature about nature or the environment that must be questioned and tested by the inclusion of poetry from marginalized authors. Can the pastoral, the canonical form of nature poetry, still hold its place if there is a parallel tradition of writing nature (probably singing) from in the field, with your hands dirty and your body tired, instead of sitting comfortably in the shade composing bucolic stanzas? Experiences of nature from historically marginalized and oppressed communities force ecocritics to reconsider the canonical ways of representing nature, by asking from which perspective and from what situated bodies those experiences are written. Current ecopoetics therefore asks where this relation is situated: in what bodies, in what histories, in what experiences? In short, who is part of this community, and how do those members work with the cultural and literary paradigms of nature representation? Relation to place is an important dimension of this critical and poetic exercise.

² For the presence of plastics in the oceans, see Seltenrich (2015). As Zalasiewicz et al. (2014) argue, plastics can be considered as technofossils, "a biological innovation that may be exploited to provide ultra-high resolution geological dating and correlation in technostratigraphy, after the concept of the technosphere proposed by Haff" (36).

³ As an example of a bioregion, Cascadia stretches from Oregon to northern California, the northwestern corner of Utah, southeastern Alaska, and the southwest corner of the Yukon Territory (Baretich 2014).

⁴ Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster concur with this point, writing that “[a]lthough she does not cite Peter Berg in this regard, Heise’s notion of an eco-cosmopolitan is strikingly similar to Berg’s notion of a ‘planetarian,’ articulated as early as 1983 in his essay “Bioregion and Human Location,” evidence that from its very inception bioregionalism has always included a sense of planet. As we read it, the shift from place-based bioregionalism to eco-cosmopolitanism is not an either / or proposition, but a matter of emphasis” (Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armbruster 2012, 9).

⁵ The reading of Allison Cobb’s poem is a partially rewritten version of an extended discussion of the author’s work in my PhD thesis: *Atmospheric and Geological Entanglements: North American Ecopoetry and the Anthropocene*. Umeå Studies in Language and Literature 43. Department of Language Studies, Umeå University, November 2020.

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