

# CONTENTS

3	<b>Editorial</b>	106	<b>The Island of the Lakes and New Horizons</b> Francesca Benedetto
10	<b>New Apples</b> Irénée Scalbert	110	<b>The Berlin Green Band: The Interrupted History of the First Urban Parkway</b> Emma Letizia Jones
17	<b>Tranquillity in Disorder: Notes on Ecology, Planning and Laissez-Faire</b> Ido Avissar	120	<b>“Super-scenic” Parks, Peace and Landscape Architecture’s New Deal</b> Caitlin Blanchfield
28	<b>The Chicago Stump</b> Wonne Ickx	127	<b>Desert Island Manifesto: Sir Charles Belgrave’s (Fake) Proposals to the Bahraini Government</b> Ali Karimi
32	<b>Urban-Nature: The Ecology of Planetary Artifice</b> Harry Gugger and Bárbara Mações Costa	133	<b>If We Heat It, They Will Come</b> Tuomas Toivonen
41	<b>Excerpt from a Discussion between Stefano Graziani and Rene Gabri in Venice, 2007</b>	138	<b>Berserk Ecology</b> Dominic Broadhurst
48	<b>Some Geographical Notes on Territory</b> Giovanni Piovene	146	<b>Airpocalypse: A Short Geostory</b> Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy
53	<b>Shift Happens: A Prologue to <i>Gestaltungsgesellschaften</i></b> Robert Alexander Gorny	151	<b>Sewers</b> Maria Chiara Pastore
61	<b>Managing Natural Selection</b> Rui Aristides and Campomarzio	156	<b>Hong Kong Is Land</b> MAP Office
72	<b>The Pressure of Conservation: How the Imaginary of “Wild” Nature Was Formed and How to Rid Ourselves of It</b> Sabine Schulz Blank	166	<b>Int. Air Ventilation Duct</b> Davide Rapp
83	<b>Niagara</b> Ludovico Centis	174	<b>Compost</b> Paolo Carpi
92	<b>Ecology and Emancipation</b> Fabien Giraud and Max Turnheim	179	<b>Oil</b> Bas Princen
		185	<b>Happy Birthday, Bramante!</b> Call for Papers

# AIRPOCALYPSE: A SHORT GEOSTORY

Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy

In January 2014, Beijing had twenty-six smoggy days with record-high densities of particulate matter in the atmosphere. The air took on a pungently acid odour. The smog became so thick that residents donned air masks and left their homes to observe the only place where the sun would be visible above the horizon that morning. The city's natural-light-starved masses flocked to watch the sunrise televised on a giant screen in the middle of Tiananmen Square. International newspapers ran the event with the headline "The sunrise will be televised!" The story turned out to be hazier than reports about the terribly unsound environmental practices in the Orient. The associated image, however, remains emblematic of a humanity that could no longer take the possibility of breathing for granted. Rather, the city's air had ceased to offer the promise of "making one free" and had begun to inspire an interiorized and compartmentalized sense of contamination and fear. Technological advancements of the 20th century, such as the use of airborne terrorism and interior ventilation, have revealed previously unexplored strata: atmosphere, environment and ecology. In his book *Terror from the Air*, German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk argues that the use of chlorine gas in World War I inaugurated an era in which human beings became capable of "atmo-terrorism": an

assault not on the body of the enemy, but on his or her environment. The living organism's immersion in a breathable milieu reaches the level of formal representation, notes Sloterdijk, thereby subjecting the climatic and atmospheric conditions required by human life to a new level of explication. Our life-in-an-environment has lost its innocence; we are now "atmosphere guardians and climate guardians".<sup>1</sup> Rather than fixating on apocalyptic scenarios, Sloterdijk commits himself to a more radical position that opens up the possibilities for both poesis and praxis.

How can we respond to Sloterdijk's demand that we make air conditions explicit? Is it possible to see the future as dark, and darkening further, thus rejecting the false hope offered by positivist science and desperate economic fixes but without collapsing into despair? Is there a poetics that might help articulate the state of consciousness appropriate to the age of ecology? And how might we engage with the earth as an ethico-aesthetic paradigm?

In response, I would offer the reader a micro-fiction and two images which one might think of as a sort of "postcard fiction" followed by some provisional notes on the values, politics and aesthetics of the age of ecology. None of these elements provide any definitive answers. My reference to the text and images as absurd postcard fiction alludes to the fact that they are "pinned to" the scenery of Beijing; however, differently from the synoptical comprehensive "scenario", the collage of actions and events I present below draws upon mythology and dark humour to explore the aesthetics of how we "narrate" the Earth. At best, the material I present here explores an interweaving of references and world views that brings a sense of surrealism to a discussion that is usually dominated by a positivistic and prescriptive tone. Lacking a single, cohesive plot, my micro-fiction refutes the existence of universal truth or value; it merely aims to shine a spotlight on a

matter of concern and leaves the task of figuring out the “moral” of the story to the reader.

Entitled “The Atmosphere Is Dead, Long Live the Atmosphere!”, this geo-fiction imagines the city’s atmospheric conditions in the wake of an assault by heavy smog, or what in Beijing has been dubbed the “airpocalypse”. What would the infrastructure of life be on an Earth without the sun and without its atmosphere? In Chinese cosmology, there were originally thirteen sun-brothers in the sky. Once they all went into the sky to play together, making the world too hot for anything to grow. To save the people of the earth, a hero named Hou Yi shot down twelve of them with a bow and arrow, piercing ten holes in the stratosphere at the level of the equator. Let there be light penetrating through the smog! The ten sun-wells powered a series of geographic capsules, scaled-up versions of Haus-Rucker-Co’s *Flyhead Helmet*. In this tale we are faced with not only the greenhouse effect of global warming but also the incarceration of the world’s population of urbanites within the more limited confines of climate-controlled environments. The megacity is the liveable “interior” – an atmospheric habitat, a greenhouse, a biosphere, a floating spaceship. A series of snow-globe cities sit on the dashboard of a space module. Each encloses a miniaturized urban scene, often together with a patch of renewable landscape. One globe has a built-in music box that plays the tune “Un air de Marcel Duchamp”: “Oh, I’m a breather, a *respirateur*. I enjoy it tremendously. Isn’t that enough?”

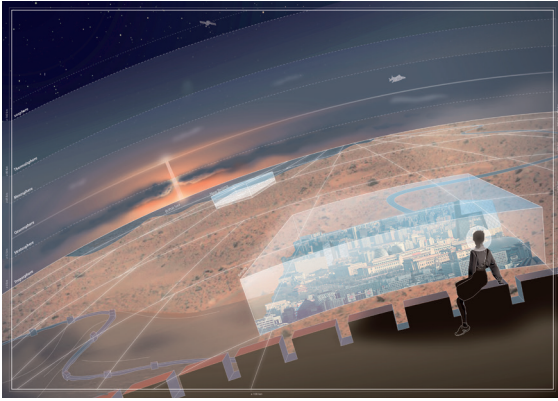
1.

*A mental ecology demands . . . that we re-evaluate the ultimate goal of work and human activities in terms of criteria other than those of profit and productivity.*

Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*

Whereas the word ecology evokes associations with environmentalism and green politics, it is also tightly entangled in a capitalist imaginary of Earth, or what we refer to as natural resources. Dating back to German zoologist Ernst Haeckel’s 19th-century conception of an “economy of nature”, the etymology of the term ecology reaches back to the Greek word *oikos*, meaning house or home, which also forms the root of the word economy, with the two terms translating respectively as the study and the management of the household.<sup>2</sup> As far as the process of resource extraction is concerned, economy and ecology are two sides of the same coin. The transformation of the earth into a resource brings about a differentiation between the (economic) private value attributed to the desired goods extracted and the resulting (environmental) costs the extraction process generates, such as pollution, the damaging of public health and the degradation of shared resources. Economists commonly employ the term “externalities” to refer to such unpaid costs – unpaid in so far as a substantial portion of the actual costs of production remains unaccounted for in entrepreneurial outlays. Instead, the costs are shifted to, and ultimately borne by, third parties or by the community as a whole.

The notion of the environment, Bruno Latour argues, began to emerge in public consciousness precisely when we realized that there is no reserve outside which the unwanted consequences of our collective actions could be allowed to linger and disappear from view, or that there was “no zone of reality in which we could casually rid ourselves of the consequence of human political, industrial, and economic life”. In his book *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Latour asks whether the eco movement is a new form of politics or a new branch of politics. He concludes that it should be the former, but in practice it is merely the latter. The historical importance of ecological crises, Latour



**Above and facing page:**  
**"The Atmosphere Is Dead,  
 Long Live the Atmosphere!",**  
 project by El Hadi Jazairy  
 with Jia Fang, Chen Lu and  
 Ya Suo (Design Earth), 2014

adds, "stems from the impossibility of continuing to imagine politics on the one side and, on the other, a nature that would serve politics simultaneously as a standard, a foil, a reserve, a resource, and a public dumping ground".<sup>3</sup>

## 2.

*Ecology, I argued, should never be taken as an all-wise, always trustworthy guide. We must be willing to challenge this authority, and indeed challenge the authority of science in general; not to be quick to scorn or vilify or behead, but simply, now and then, to question.*

Donald Worster, *Wealth of Nations*

Strongly tied to roots in the natural sciences, ecological knowledge has favoured a problem–solution policy that claims to possess both a global reach and a universal authority. Ecological concepts, such as the management of resources and sustainable development, have proposed reconciling the intensification of extraction with a broader managerial ethics for future generations.

In an age when the environment is increasingly under the threat of various crises, a wide range of calculation techniques – including data mining, impact assessment, trend analysis and complexity modelling of various forms – aspire to exert control over uncertain futures by shaping urban policy and infrastructure development.

The resulting aesthetics of "matters of fact" relies on an image of objectivity – of tables, charts and graphs – to present ecology uncritically as "problems of the environment" in the sense of a naturalized world that lies outside of us, one we ought preserve or "sustain" – something called the natural environment. So what is the antidote to such depoliticizing constructions of the earth? Latour uses the contrast between "matters of fact" and "matters of concern" to propose changes in the nature of evidence and its operative role. A political ecology, Latour argues, endeavours to shift actors away from seeking a consensus about matters of fact toward an exploration of the controversies about matters of concern. "A matter of concern", Latour explains, "is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the whole machinery of a theatre."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to list the attributes of matters of fact that "begin to render a different sound", for "they start to move in all directions, they overflow their boundaries, they include a complete set of new actors, they reveal the fragile envelopes in which they are housed". Matters of concern are "populated" and disputable – they carry us away. They demystify a picture-perfect image of progress toward the perpetual construction of contested multiplicity. They accept contingency; in fact, they are political precisely because they involve a heterogeneous set of groups and are open to multiple and contradictory interests in a shared field. A possible political strategy focusing on actualizing these unacknowledged shifts aspires to destabilize a taken-for-granted space of "reality", of "economy"

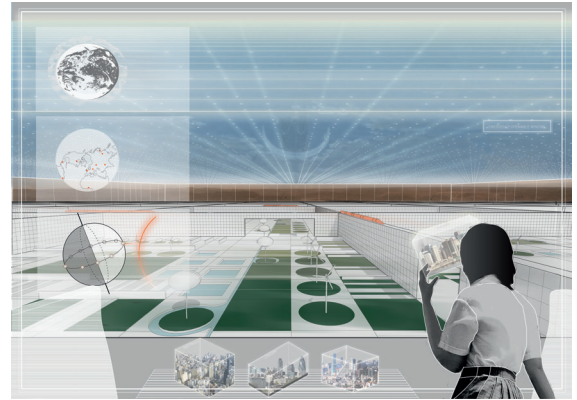
and of the “community of common destiny” that ecology has come to articulate. In the words of Latour, the earth has become once again what he has proposed calling “our common geostory”:

The Earth is neither nature, nor a machine. It is not that we should try to puff some spiritual dimension into its stern and solid stuff – as so many romantic thinkers and Nature-philosophers had tried to do – but rather that we should abstain from de-animating the agencies that we encounter at each step. Geo-physiology as well as geomorphology, geo-physics, geo-graphy, geo-politics should not eliminate any of the sources of agency – including those generated by former humans, those I call Earthbound – if they want to converge toward a common geostory.<sup>5</sup>

3.

*What does an aesthetics of matters of concern look like?*  
Bruno Latour, *What Is the Style of Matters of Concern?*

The representational project of political ecology requires a reformation of the Earth to challenge the aesthetics of totalizing rationalizations, scientific totalitarianism and crippling guilt. It invites a world view that is not ridden with heavy, doomed accounts of the end of the world. In *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, Lewis Carroll shows how pity for the living world is an aspect of the sadistic relish for devouring it: the walrus weeps for the oysters as he greedily pours them down his throat. The banishing of guilt does not, however, dismiss terror as a genre of narrative. Rather, it channels it to perform the limits of our environmental imagination with the aim of engaging controversies. Much like the expression “The king is dead, long live the king!”, which permits no gap in the monarchy’s sovereignty when a king dies, the postcard geo-fiction “The Atmosphere Is Dead, Long Live the Atmosphere!” continues to engage with the environmental



imagination in the face of dooming accounts of the death of the atmosphere and other imminent apocalypses.

Given that the death of the atmosphere is now as ordinary as breathing, we need to engage a poetics that destabilizes the taken-for-granted space of “reality”. Nauseated by the environmentalists’ shade of “bright green”, Timothy Morton proposes moving away from a singular (mythical) ideology in favour of the feverish construction of simultaneous alternate realities. In his *Ecology without Nature*, he explores the possibilities of an ecological aesthetics that builds on surrealism as the procedure for using violence not against persons or against things, but against inexplicit cultural relations. What he calls “Dark Ecology puts hesitation, uncertainty, irony, and thoughtfulness back into ecological thinking.”<sup>6</sup> Dark Ecology sets about transforming environmental politics by reassembling aberrations erased in economic valuation systems of Nature. This radical form of ecological criticism opens up a space for and an aesthetics of the shadowy nature of Earth, or what David Gissen has termed its “subnature”. In his book *Architecture’s Other Environment*, Gissen proposes re-instrumentalizing erased natures by transforming them into architectural, urban and territorial scenarios through the development of uncomfortable



yet oddly productive relationships with ecology's marginalized monstrosities, such as dust, insects, pollution, infection and particulate matter in the atmosphere. A similar aesthetics and political sensibility can be traced back to the environmental imaginaries of 1960s counterculture which sought to replace capitalism's reality with alternative models of representing and living space. The "acid" Western, for example, emerged as a film sub-genre as a means of subverting representations of the frontier in traditional Westerns. Rather than being presented as the celebration of a manifest destiny pushing toward liberation and improvement, westward expansion was re-cast as a journey toward death, a road to the place where society becomes nightmarish. Radical architectural practices from the same period also took on the subject by expanding the definition of "site" to include latent ecological conditions. Projects like Archigram's pneumatic urbanisms, Yves Klein and Claude Parent's Air-Conditioned City and Buckminster Fuller's Cloud 9 show a propensity toward the systemization and control of air as a matter of concern for speculative design projects.<sup>7</sup> Beyond techno-scientific solutions and economic fixes, aesthetic practices like these bring the production of nature-space into the public debate. This geostory, too, is a call to perceive ecology as a form of paradoxical elegy.

1. Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 29.
2. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
3. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 58.
4. Bruno Latour, *What Is the Style of Matters of Concern? Two Lectures in Empirical Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2008), 39; downloaded from <http://bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/97-SPINOZA-CB.pdf>.
5. Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene", *New Literary History* 45 (2014), 1–18.
6. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
7. Amy Kulper and Diana Periton, "Introduction: Explicating City Air", *The Journal of Architecture* 19, no. 2 (2014), 161–67.