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# Rethinking the Anthropocene: Contemporary Ecopoetics and Epochal Imaginings

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“I love you where waves shatter sea walls,/where pipelines burst into liquid fire” (Perez 2017). So begins one of a recent series of interlinked sonnets by Craig Santos Perez, “Love Poems in the Time of Climate Change.” A Chamorro poet now living in Hawai’i whose work investigates the lifeways of Islander communities and ecosystems, Perez revises several of Pablo Neruda’s most well-known love poems from *One Hundred Love Sonnets* to explore the impacts of the cataclysmic transformations of climate change on places and populations facing existential threat. Across these poems, Perez deploys the love language of lyric in terms both ironic and urgent to depict the ecological violence and displacements wrought by fossil capitalism. In so doing, he rescales lyric address to consider shared and uneven vulnerability in a time of planetary danger, where an assertion of love becomes inextricably bound to questions of communal survival.

In his “Love Poems,” Perez redeploys the performative excess of Neruda’s metaphors, through which Neruda conveys the voracious abundance of private erotic desire, to depict the strange realities of climate change and their outsized effects. Perez transfigures Neruda’s images of natural fertility and erotic renewal into scenes of devastation: forced climate migrations, disrupted migratory patterns, severe storms, extraction’s effects on intricate ecosystems. In Perez’s version of “Sonnet XII” (one of Neruda’s most explicit poems about sexual intimacy), the conditions of “loving” are tied not to singular erotic experience but to desperate communal conditions: “a migration with butterflies and refugees,/with overcrowded boats and no milkweed.” Perez



reframes Neruda's idealized comparisons of the beloved to natural images, a comparative technique central to the Western love sonnet tradition, often evoking the "you" as the natural world itself rather than as a figure for the human. "Sonnet XII" rewrites Neruda's carnal portrait of the "full woman, fleshly apple, hot moon" into Gaian images of "global woman." Revising Neruda's erotically charged line, "What ancient night does a man touch with his senses?" Perez offers an ironizing ecofeminist turn: "What fossil fuels does a man tap with his drill?"

Perez's mode of address calls forth the urgent desire for proximity that characterizes many romantic lyrics, transforming this address into a broader communal claim about the need to protect "vulnerable things" in their precarious existences. "I love you as one loves most vulnerable things, /urgently, between the habitat and its loss," he writes in "Sonnet XVII." Rather than an intimate expression of private longings, love emerges as a communal assertion of presence and survival technique amidst ongoing loss. Other poems address the intimate "you" as precarious earth: scarred soil, seed, heating ocean. This need to protect the vulnerable is tied, as well, to the interconnections of human and nonhuman existences that make survival possible:

I love you like this because we won't survive any other way,  
except in this form in which humans and nature are kin,  
so close that your emissions of carbon are mine,  
so close that your sea rises with my heat.

The repeated emphasis on "so close" underscores the mutual dependency between human and nonhuman surround, even as Perez's portrayal also underscores the calamitous effects of this entanglement (carbon emissions, sea level rise). Perez's images evoke paradoxical qualities of proximity and distance, intimacy and alienation, damage and survival—contradictory realities that are shaping dimensions of the epochal everyday.

Perez's engagements with Neruda's love poetry and the tropes and ideologies of the romantic sonnet tradition open up a series of questions about the reimagination of literary modes in response to the fraught ecological present. This poetry asks: how might the subject and situation of a love poem be reimagined in a time of calamitous biospheric transformation? Can the intimacy and urgency of a sonnet be a vehicle for exploring affective recognitions that develop in response to these conditions? How far can poetic address extend, and how might poetry explore forms of culpability or enact modes of imaginative solidarity in turbulent times? How might contemporary works reflect on the ecological occlusions or violences that develop in earlier literary texts and genre conventions, engendering a revisionary backward glance? Most broadly, how must a contemporary poem find new figures and proportions to confront the challenging realities of climate change and other dimensions of planetary alteration?

Such questions about revitalized methods of genre and representation in a time of climate change echo those that Amitov Ghosh has recently raised in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Ghosh argues that the dominant literary genre of the realist novel, with its emphasis on regularity and predictability, has failed to account for the improbable fact of climate change and the epochal transformations it heralds. The Anthropocene era, Ghosh argues, must be approached as fundamentally unpredictable, defined by cataclysmic events and ecological turbulence. For Ghosh, the realist novel's failure to portray such dynamics is tied to its constitutive conventions and representational modes, which themselves reflect broader social norms within capitalist modernity that make climate change's causes and effects difficult to perceive. Ghosh raises key broader points about the need for new and reimagined forms of

literary and cultural practice in response to intensifying biospheric change. He writes, “we are confronted suddenly with a new task: of finding other ways in which to imagine the unimaginable beings and events of our era” (Ghosh 2016, p. 33).

Ghosh asserts that few realist fiction writers have offered accounts of these dynamics, but gestures to poetry as a site where such reflections might in fact be discoverable. If, as Ghosh argues, the realist novel, with its emphasis on plausibility and routine, has evaded certain imaginative confrontations with the complex meanings of planetary ecological crisis, poetry’s representational capacities—its modes of parataxis, scale-shift, address, compression and expansion, and temporal play—are particularly equipped for such explorations. Perez’s rescaled love sonnets offer one example of the ways contemporary poetry attends to the unpredictable eco-historical dynamics Ghosh argues the realist novel overlooks. They draw on the resources of the sonnet tradition to convey the new dimensions of scale and relationality associated with global environmental alteration, and to develop responses to these often unfathomable realities.

This chapter turns to contemporary ecologically oriented American poetry as a site where this task of “imagining the unimaginable” is well underway. The emergent recognition of anthropogenic transformation of the Earth’s systems has spurred a sea-change in contemporary poetry, generating creative recalibrations and opening up new imaginative prospects. I explore how a series of contemporary American poets reimagine the task and meaning of poetry in response to the epochal transformations most broadly organized under the term “Anthropocene.” As Lynn Keller has argued in her study, *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene*, the widespread recognition of the Anthropocene concept has fostered imaginative shifts from the terrain of “nature poetry” toward more experimental practices. Poets of the contemporary period, Keller argues, “try to contribute to the development of new ways of thinking, of new paradigms alternative to those that brought us to current stalemates” through innovative explorations of language and form (Keller 2017, p. 26). At the same time, current poets turn to longstanding poetic forms and modes, considering how lyric compression, documentary composition, rhetorical address, epic expansiveness, and speculative worlding might be repurposed to reflect on biospheric change. Across these formally diverse poetic works, we see investigations of the various scales—temporal, spatial, systemic—at which the dynamics and effects of planetary change appear. Contemporary poems emerge as a key literary means of thinking across these multiple scales, conveying forms of coexistence, uneven effects, and contradictions.

### Epochal Thinking, Poetic Practice

The geohistorical framework of the Anthropocene has become a key means of connecting the intensifying transformations in the Earth system associated with climate change to the long arc of planetary history. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer proposed this term in 2000 to argue that human activities, at the level of the species, have come to constitute a new geological epoch. Anthropocene science draws attention to the various collective impacts of humans on the earth system, from biodiversity loss to ocean acidification, carbon emissions to microplastics, nitrogen cycle changes to deforestation. Subsequent discussions among climate scientists and geologists have focused on whether the Anthropocene should be formally recognized on the Geological Time Scale, as the planetary effects of these anthropogenic activities can be read as stratigraphic marks in the geological record. In turn, this scientific concept has been widely disseminated in

and explored by scholars in the environmental humanities, as well as by artists, poets, and other cultural practitioners.

Considering the ways this concept raises new concerns for literary scholars, Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor write in their introduction to *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, “The Anthropocene provides an opportunity for literary studies to test and transform its methods by examining how the symbolic domain might, or might not, index a historicity that exceeds the human social relation and encompasses planetary flows of energy and matter” (Menely and Taylor 2017, p. 8). The turn to Anthropocene concepts offers a means of attending to planetary time and systems, reframing the paradigms of humanistic disciplines to account for these planetary dynamics in a more central way. The Anthropocene concept affords new artistic and critical emphasis on deep or inhuman time, or on forms of nonhuman matter and life in their intricate workings and complex interconnections. And at the same time, it draws attention to the entangled histories and co-existence of human and natural systems. Anthropocene thinking opens new questions of scale and species-being, and forces new reckonings with the planetary effects of anthropogenic activity. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes in his influential essay, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”: “To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our ideas of the human” (Chakrabarty 2009, p. 206).

The Anthropocene concept is also notably contested in the environmental humanities. The term has come under sustained critique for its universalist orientation (as reflected in the very term *anthropos*). As ecocritic Rob Nixon writes, “An epic Anthropocene vantage point risks concealing—historically and in the present—unequal human impacts, unequal human agency, and unequal human vulnerabilities” (Nixon 2018, p. 8). In turn, environmental humanities theorists have offered a variety of conceptual alternatives to the Anthropocene idea. For geographers Jason Moore and Andreas Malm, the Anthropocene framework indicates a species-wide agency that shifts responsibility from the genuine culprit of global warming and ecological transformation: the global system of capitalism. Malm and Moore identify the term Capitalocene as a means of identifying the epochal changes associated with capitalism’s transformations of the earth system. Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway have proposed the Plantationocene as a conceptual term that connects the histories and ongoing effects of slavery and colonialism to global ecological transformation. Such propositions highlight the need for multiple perspectives on global environmental transformation, pointing to the complex systems and entangled histories that evade a singular narrative or that defy univocal representation. Nixon argues for the importance of holding together seemingly contradictory versions of contemporary epochal thinking that can “negotiate the complex dynamic between a shared geomorphic narrative and increasingly unshared resources. We may all be in the Anthropocene but we’re not all in it in the same way” (Nixon 2018, p. 8).

Contemporary North American ecopoetics practitioners are reflecting on these complex eco-historical questions of position, history, and uneven effects as they are mediated in poetic form. While few of their poems directly reference the conceptual framing of the Anthropocene, they explore dimensions of the planetary, considering ways to formalize our urgent need to “think everything at once,” as ecocritic Timothy Clark puts it (Clark 2015, p. 203). And at the same time, the forms and figures of contemporary ecopoetry evoke the divergent histories and incommensurate experiences that these Anthropocene debates highlight. In so doing, they offer considerations of the insights and oversights of Anthropocene cultural discourse, thinking with and putting imaginative pressure on this dominant paradigm through their multiscale portrayals of planetary life.

## Speed and Slowness

One of the most pronounced and disturbing features of the global biospheric transformations characterized by the Anthropocene concept is intensifying speed. Climate scientists invoke terms like *tipping points* and *feedback loops* to describe ecological cataclysms underway and on the near horizon. Rapid global temperature rise, melting glaciers, biodiversity loss, extreme weather and natural disasters (hurricane, wildfire, flood, pandemic), resource scarcity, and new migration patterns: all these elements signify the intensifying tempos of planetary alteration. A wide range of contemporary ecopoetry explores the ways that the speed of systemic change becomes perceptible in everyday life and across ecological forms and processes. Jorie Graham, Sesshu Foster, and Brenda Hillman, among others, reflect on these paces of change in their recent work. These poets draw on modes of lyric compression and epic expansion to convey the convergent planetary accelerations and their divergent effects.

Jorie Graham's recent works, *Sea Change* and *Fast*, chronicle the tempo of extractive capitalism and its effects on marine ecosystems, examining deep water trawling, ghostfishing, species die-off, coral reef depletion, among other phenomena. As the titles indicate, these works register the conditions and felt textures of accelerating ecological transformation, particularly as it transforms the life-forms and systems of the world's oceans. In *Fast*, Graham employs arrows and long dashes between phrases in long poetic lines and dense, crowded prose blocks to impress sensations of claustrophobia, accelerating time, and impending finitude into linguistic form. "I wrote you but what I couldn't say → we are in systemic →," she writes in "Shroud" (Graham 2017, p. 10). The arrows propel the lines forward with a sense of intensifying urgency, as the poems depict the diminishment of ocean life and the omnipresence of anthropogenic action. She turns particular representational attention to the oceans as a longstanding site of natural externality, otherness, and mystery as a means of reflecting on these almost unfathomable alterations. In "Self Portrait at Three Degrees" (where "three degrees" refers to current predictions of global temperature rise by the year 2100), Graham reflects on the planet's systemic dependency on one plant, plankton, which is dying off at a terrifyingly rapid pace:

within 50 years if we are lucky—I am writing this in 2015—like  
spraying weedkiller over all the world's vegetation—that's our raw  
material, our inventory, right now, we are going through the forms of worship,  
we call it news, we will make ourselves customers, we won't wait, how fast can we be  
delivered—will get that information to you—requires further study—look  
that's where the river used to be

(Graham 2017, p. 8)

Graham sets portrayals of the hastening depletion of plankton due to oceanic temperature rise alongside the churning speed of news cycles and consumer demands, highlighting the misalignment between access to "information" and a collective ability to process and respond to these conditions of finitude.

As Graham reflects on impending and ongoing marine damage, she highlights the ways these transformations ineluctably alter subjective conditions and narratives of selfhood. Graham draws on the interiorized perspective and heightened present tense characteristic of lyric to explore an individual consciousness grappling with and working through these unfathomable changes. Following the divigations of a mind in action, querying, interrogating, turning in on itself,

Graham composes internal monologs that reverse and negate, repeat and intensify, in response to this pressured present. Graham repeatedly highlights abbreviated time frames and the feeling of finitude: “All other exits have been sealed,” she writes (Graham 2017, p. 10). Articulating fears of survival, personal and planetary, and meditating on questions of human culpability, Graham portrays a subjectivity undergoing its own defamiliarization and distortion. Her poems query the speaker’s capacities for love, its ability to hold such unfathomable facts in the mind, to comprehend and adapt. Often they turn away from a full fathoming, mirroring the repressions and denials that so often characterize responses to climate change and ecological destruction. The pressured intensities of Graham’s poem reflect on larger incapacities and limits—what can and cannot be borne, by one consciousness, by broader ecosystems, by the planet itself. Graham’s work reimagines the affordances of the lyric as an imaginative site for representing the populistic tempos and subjective reckonings of our ecological present.

While Graham’s work reconfigures modes of lyric compression to explore the external and psychic consequences of planetary crisis, Sesshu Foster’s recent volume, *City of the Future*, turns to the terrain of epic. Epic traditionally emphasizes shared forms of order, action, historical event, and experience, developing portrayals of social simultaneity. Here, Foster turns attention to the drive for simultaneity across varied locales and lifeworlds that characterizes globalized capitalist relations and their ecological implications. A Los Angeles-based poet and activist, Foster has written several works of poetry and speculative fiction that explore L.A. geographies and cultures as they exemplify diverse community lifeways and sites of political struggle. His poetry has often attended, in particular, to the dynamics of uneven development and gentrification as they transform local neighborhoods and their cultures. *City of the Future* reconfigures these considerations in ecosystemic and planetary terms. Drawing together geographically disparate sites of production and vast infrastructural networks, bodily interiors and metabolic cycles, through patterns of repetition and serial form, Foster portrays the ever-intensifying velocity of planetary development and depletion at various scales.

The long title poem of the volume deploys serialized stanzas that depict varied locales—the underworld densities of the ocean, landscapes of agricultural labor, industrial food production, state violence at the borders, biospheric “dead zones,” and desert ecosystems—as a coordinated world-system. Using anaphoric phrases and the parallel structure of catalog, Foster portrays this system—what Jason Moore would call the “world-ecology”—as governed by a ceaseless growth imperative (Moore 2015, p. 1010). Several of these catalogs are structured by the repeated word *más*. Foster offers figures of the ceaseless accelerations and exponential expansion of global development: more highways, cellphone towers, prisons, pesticides, heavy metals in water, more illness, more work, more wageless life, more violence, “más y más y más” (Foster 2019, p. 36). His lists eschew punctuation and run words and phrases together, conveying headlong, ceaseless speed. As Foster graphs the coordination of life-forms and ecosystems, he takes note of its characteristic effects: toxified landscapes, disease, violent unrest. Alongside these accumulating descriptions, Foster turns to images of individual figures, shifting down from the poem’s systemic scale to reveal how these effects bear out in everyday experience. He describes bodies laboring, growing ill, falling victim to violence, including images of his own life as a manual worker, his father’s illness and death, a co-worker with lung cancer. These individuated images serve as counterpoint to the frenzied world-ecological development the poem catalogs, revealing in an embodied and personal register its destructive impacts.

Across her various works of ecopoetry, Brenda Hillman meditates on the speeds, energies, and relations of ecological life. Her recent books consider the elements (earth, air, water, fire) in their

multiform presences, developing a poetry of epic expansiveness that centers on earthly processes and nonhuman presences. In *Extra Hidden Life, among the Days*, Hillman turns to an investigation of creaturely life and its slow, resistant tempos. This volume offers sustained imaginative figurations of the often hidden biotic existences and processes that subtend, adapt to, are reshaped or undone by accelerating tempos of planetary change. Through a series of long, connected poems that jump scales and leap across the page, Hillman considers the slow workings of very small entities—lichen, microbes, bacteria—that make and unmake, decomposing and “changing/not-life into lives” (Hillman 2019, p. 22). These beings serve as living models of how small processes communicate, remake, and “break things down” in time, over time (Hillman 2019, p. 45). She describes bacteria dialoguing via color, owls signaling distress and comfort, ants and trees, the inscriptions of lichen and jeweled beetles, the decompositional work of microbes and fungi.

Evoking these intricate networks of synchronized exchange among species and the profound intelligences of plants and animal life, at once “radical and ordinary,” Hillman asks, what is their fate within this time of accelerated destruction? (Hillman 2019, p. 56). This question prompts and guides Hillman’s poems, aware as they are of the intractable fact that, as she puts it, “The changes are immeasurable” (Hillman 2019, p. 4). Drawing images of these activities into colloquy with scenes of recent protest against anti-Black police violence, the Keystone pipeline, prisons and refineries, Hillman’s scale-shifting work develops an extended claim: that the time of “scarce time”—of accelerations and unfolding catastrophe—is also, irreducibly, the time of hidden workings and small resistances across a variety of scales (Hillman 2019, p. 4). The poems work to excavate this slow time of resistance and renewal as it subtends the depletive acceleration of fossil capital. In its interest in these other times and presences, the text also points to life beyond present horizons, to the planet’s long future in the wake of the destructive dynamics of anthropogenic existence. Hillman muses on “the color time/will be when we are gone—” (Hillman 2019, p. 3).

### Location and Dislocation

Anna Tsing writes, “Anthropocene matters because liveability is threatened by the repercussions of human activities. And we experience liveability through places. Anthropocene is enacted in places even as it is global circulation” (Tsing 2016, p. 3). Tsing argues that grappling with Anthropocene realities means turning attention to the local, to the lived situations through which the uneven (or what she calls “patchy”) dynamics of the global Anthropocene can be glimpsed (Tsing 2016, p. 3). Contemporary poets, including Julia Kasdorf and Harryette Mullen, consider how particular places and regions connect the lived to the abstract, the immediacy of local conditions to earth-systemic scenarios. In some works of place, poets explore the effects of what eco-psychologists have described as *solastalgia*, the negative and distressed responses to environmental change, particularly in relationship to changing local surroundings (Albrecht et al. 2007). Other texts draw attention to the ways displacement is a fundamental feature of ecological experience for certain human and nonhuman populations.

“My horse’s eyes swelled shut,/and one eye went blind. They’ve had the nosebleeds. There’s a big gum tree near the well/that loses its leaves in the middle of summer” (Kasdorf and Rubin 2018, p. 18). These are lines from Julia Spicher Kasdorf and Steven Rubin’s documentary text, *Shale Play*, a portrait of the social and environmental effects of fracking in Pennsylvania in 2012–2017 with the development of the Marcellus Shale, a massive discovery of natural gas.

Accompanied by Rubin's photographs of fracking infrastructure and images of workers and families, Kasdorf's poems track the compounding seasonal and ecosystemic imbalances that accompany the development of fracking in rural Pennsylvania. A funny-looking fog, water that tastes of rust; dug-up fields, fiery flares; rashes, cancerous lumps; familiar trees and plants gone or out of seasonal rhythm: the lived effects of this extractive industry find figuration across these poems.

Kasdorf foregrounds the voices of residents who chronicle the strange changes they witness in their everyday surroundings, weaving their testimonies into the collection's poems. In one piece, a student from Tunkhannock asserts: "Everyone knows what the gas trucks look like now,/what happens when they stop and spread out like stones" (Kasdorf and Rubin 2018, p. 80). Another poem centers on a grandmother on Hope Hollow Road whose family is sickened by toxic fog around their home: "The doctor said it's been too long for us. We won't ever get well" (Kasdorf and Rubin 2018, p. 52). *Shale Play* situates these urgent testimonies within the longer history of economic development and dispossession that characterizes the land history of Pennsylvania, from settler colonial displacement of the Lenape to the development of fossil capital infrastructure—railroads, coal mines, steel mills, pipelines—to the building of prisons. Kasdorf and Rubin follow in a long lineage of documentary poetic practices that open representational space for under-recognized accounts of injustice and suffering. Often incorporating varied kinds of empirical and imaginative material—photographs, official records, letters, testimony—documentary works offer examples of ways that "poetry can extend the document" (in Muriel Rukeyser's memorable phrase) by attending to duress and harm at the local scale as they reflect broader structural conditions (Rukeyser 2005, p. 604). Here, the immediate forms of toxicity experienced in these small towns reveals what "this picture can't tell you," as Kasdorf puts it: the sedimented histories of extractivism, ecological simplification, and dispossession that scale up to broader global transformations (Kasdorf and Rubin 2018, p. 90).

Harryette Mullen's *Urban Tumbleweed: Notes from a Tanka Diary* draws on the Japanese form of tanka (linked three-line stanzas) to convey the web of relations and the deep-seated disparities that comprise L.A. ecology. Unfolding as a series of interconnected poems, the volume develops a textual constellation of moments and scenes from Mullen's daily walks across the varied terrains of the city. *Urban Tumbleweed* explores the everyday entanglements of urban ecology, from two seagulls fighting in an In-N-Out parking lot over a hamburger bun to hummingbirds among landscaped flowers, helicopters and freeways, smog and recycled water, a snail casting a tiny shadow. Mullen draws on the tanka's traditional juxtapositions to bring together divergent vantages on an image and develop unexpected connections between seemingly disparate scenes. Mullen has a particular eye for humorous and paradoxical aspects of L.A.'s environments: trees are cultivated for show while their fruit is left to rot; an urban rooster crosses a road during rush hour; at a market stocked with imported vegetables, no California produce can be found. Her poems detail intricate moments of beauty and pleasure that connect human and nonhuman realms: "Hummingbird alters its course, zooming/closer to check out the giant hibiscus flower—/only me in my red summer dress" (Mullen 2013, p. 17).

Mullen's meditations on urban L.A. ecology offer poetic insight into Tsing's claim about livability as a fundamental question of Anthropocene life. At the most fundamental level, these interlinked pieces meditate on shared elements of shelter and habitat, food and sustaining resources, emphasizing the mutual dependency among species. But Mullen also draws sustained attention to questions of belonging and exclusion, as pieces across the volume portray scenes of homelessness, racial violence, and forced migration. Across one series of stanzas, Mullen describes



a “tidy-clean, green park” that is locked at night to keep out “rough sleepers”; the next stanza describes a visiting friend who “went out for a sunny walk” and “returned/with wrists bound, misapprehended by cops” (Mullen 2013, p. 94). Elsewhere, Mullen points to homeowners patrolling their neighborhood boundary and a bird crossing the border, “suspected/of being an alien” (Mullen 2013, p. 100). These images of displacement and violence extend to signs of ecological diminishment and species loss: nearly extinct wolves and bee colony collapse, local drought and wildfire, and farther disasters—tsunami, oil spill, the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe, melting glaciers. Her meditations on ecological interconnection highlight the precarious nature of everyday city dwelling for some of its human and nonhuman inhabitants. These poems of place, like many other works of place-based and documentary ecopoetics by writers including Mark Nowak, Juliana Spahr, Ed Roberson, and Jennifer Scappettone, draw attention to the ways the immediacies of the local afford vantages on intricate ecological dependencies and uneven risks.

### Addressing Environments

As Perez’s reimagining of Neruda’s love poems indicate, contemporary ecopoetry turns renewed attention to poetic dimensions of voice, address, and apostrophe to explore the complex realities of planetary biospheric transformations. Across a variety of contemporary poems, we can glimpse new dimensions of public and private, communal and planetary address. While Perez’s revision of the love sonnet rescales the intimacy of lyric apostrophe to explore collective expressions of islander survival amidst climate change, other poets turn to epideictic and persona modes to narrate unheard accounts and give voice to environmental perspectives, human and nonhuman. They highlight poetry as a key means of storytelling and public speech to address the new proportions and longer histories of the present planetary conjuncture.

“i do declare,” Evie Shockley asserts in a poem from her volume *semiautomatic* (Shockley 2017, p. 53). Drawing together formally wide-ranging pieces (sonnets, Oulipo experiments, blues poems, abecedarian, to name a few) and engagements with Black literary and musical traditions, Shockley’s book weighs the connections between anti-Black violence and global environmental cataclysm, between histories of subjugation and alienated ecologies in the present. Threading through these poems is Shockley’s unique declarative and rhetorical register. Shockley’s rhetorics develop a public address that depicts and deplores racial and ecological violence. One poem that involves a powerful rhetorical argument, “keep your eye on,” turns to the police killing of Mike Brown. Shockley describes this killing as a “hole” through which the speaker can see a long history and ongoing present of racial, economic, and ecological violence: “the fucking fracking chemicals bleeding into the groundwater/the oilfields of northern africa and the lithium mines of afghanistan/the flood of black and brown people seeping between prison bars” (Shockley 2017, p. 46). The poem unfolds through these catalogs that convey an argument through diagnosis and outraged witness. Shockley elaborates a public poetic voice that widens the range of what the violent state act of Mike Brown’s killing allows us to “see” to include global extractivism and carceral systems and their constitutive harm on racial ecologies—defining features of what theorist Kathryn Yusoff has called “Black Anthropocenes” (Yusoff 2018, p. 2).

Other poems involve deceptively playful and wryly humorous speech that develops sharp analyses on what she calls the “new error” of the climate present. In one prose poem, “weather or not,” Shockley writes: “we acted as if the planet was a stone-cold player, but it turns out the earth

has a heart and it was melting, pacific islanders first into the hotter water” (Shockley 2017, p. 5). Playing with inversions and layered meanings, Shockley offers a sober diagnosis of the state of the American present: “it was winter all summer in America.” In one of several “one-act play” poems in the volume, Shockley offers a humorous imperative to the reader to undertake the building of a world: “create a livable world. you’ll need water. trees and air, a food supply.” She goes on: “go ahead—take as many days as you like. it’s just a play. when you’re done, you undo it. be creative. go wild! it should be a hard act to follow” (Shockley 2017, p. 82). Ironizing the encouraging rhetoric of the creative prompt, Shockley exhorts the reader to imagine a world made and then rendered unlivable. By poem’s end, the seemingly light, humorous register of the voice has shifted, reflecting the bleak planetary reality that underwrites this imagined play. Across these poems, Shockley addresses the reader directly through language that denounces, claims, sings, and declares, creating subtle ironies that ask the reader to look again, to rethink and reimagine current racial and ecological realities.

While Shockley’s ecopoetics works through rhetorical address and linguistic experiments, Allison Adelle Hedge Coke’s *Blood Run* develops an Indigenous poetry of plural voices conveying human and nonhuman perspectives in their complex interrelation. The volume, which Hedge Coke calls a “Free Verse Play,” tells the long history of Blood Run, an Oneota mound site in South Dakota that was an important Indigenous settlement and trade site dating back over 8,500 years. Through storytelling, chant, and persona, Hedge Coke conveys the collective story of Blood Run over the deep time that precedes human presences, through the interconnections of native cultures and ecosystems, into what she calls the “natural life interruption” of settler colonial expansion and development that continues into the present (Hedge Coke 2006, p. 8). This collective story develops through the voiced perspectives of various components of the local ecosystem: River, Corn, The Mounds, Redwing Blackbird, Sunflower, Fox, Beaver, Deer. Each speaks of the life-world they inhabit and their own mode of being; each conveys something essential of their character through pacing and rhythm, from the steady tone of the corn to the quick, darting words of the fox. The sunflower describes the “warm embrace” of the sun, its “yellow shawl fringe,” its nourishing of a bee; the redwing blackbird sings “ok-a-li, ok-a-li” and gathers with “grackles, blackbirds, cowbirds, starlings” in the sky “like distant smoke clouds, rising” (Hedge Coke 2006, p. 25). These entities share not only a common locale but a shared sense of relational being, which extends to the People who cohabit in this place.

As *Blood Run* progresses, we hear the story of the “Looters” who remake this geography. Various poems tell of changes to the land and its beings, from species loss, genetic modification of crops, toxic pesticides that poison birds, and transplanted species, to the building of dams and the clearing of land for development. “There has been no peace in these lands,” Deer says (Hedge Coke 2006, p. 36). Over the book’s course, the speaking species diminish, and “Ghosts” and “Skeletons” become more prominent narrators. In the closing poem, Hedge Coke portrays a coming storm prophesized by the “old ones”: “This power is beyond the strength of man./The river will return with its greatest force” (Hedge Coke 2006, p. 90). This storm, which according to the ancestors will come “when the animals leave,” evokes the torrential storms of climate change that have come to be recurrent features of contemporary life. In this way, Hedge Coke evokes the Anthropocene present and its storms as the culmination of settler colonialism and its ecological transformations. Yet *Blood Run* also forecasts a time of ecological renewal and ancestral return. This hope for renewal recurs across the collection in chants and invocations for place and planet: “May she breathe again./May she breathe” (Hedge Coke 2006, p. 10). For these writers, poetry serves as a means of developing rhetorical

arguments and exploring the nature of address in the service of expressions of environmental injustice and communal survival.

## Planetarity

Anthropocene debates have elicited new creative and interpretive ways of imagining the planet itself as an entity. Jennifer Wenzel points to new critical and creative emphases on “reading for the planet,” arguing that such practices need not involve a “universalist reading from nowhere,” but can instead favor approaches that lead “from near to there: between specific sites, across multiple divides, at more than one scale” (Wenzel 2020, p. 2). Opening vantages that counter dominant ideas of a singular agential *Anthropos* or unitary process, such perspectives can attend to what anthropologists Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser call “a world of many worlds” that contrasts with the “one-world world” of extraction, development, and growth (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018, p. 15). We might look to poetry, as well, as means of conveying images of world and planet that evoke the whole by drawing attention to the myriad life-worlds that compose planetary existence.

Arthur Sze’s *Sight Lines* explores planetary simultaneity through juxtapositional form. Line by line, Sze shifts between disparate scenes, creating kaleidoscopic glimpses into the infinite varieties of co-existence occurring within a single moment of time. Often these simultaneous instants highlight unexpected symmetries of movement, color, image, or memory. Other moments draw together violent and beautiful images in startling ways, as in the poem “Light Echoes”: “In the parking lot, we look up at the Milky Way:/a poacher aims a rifle at a black rhinoceros:/a marble boat disappears in smog” (Sze 2019, p. 32). In Sze’s poetry, everything is in motion, acting and being acted upon, undergoing change. These changes at once reflect the essential dynamism of earthly processes and index the more intensive, destabilizing transformations that characterize Anthropocene dynamics: radioactive water, population density, wildfires, species die-off.

Connecting lived moments by way of their shared vitality and activity, Sze’s lines painstakingly build apprehensions of the whole from these myriad parts. Across *Sight Lines*, Sze returns to figurations of the globe itself. In one poem, “Cloud Hands,” Sze turns to an image of a woman doing a Tai Chi position, “holding and rotating/an invisible globe” (Sze 2019, p. 15). The sense of wholeness in motion conveyed in this image takes on new forms, a bird calling, men fishing for salmon at a river’s mouth. In the woman’s englobing hands, Sze conveys a felt perception of the planet itself in all its unsettled motion, being made and remade anew. Another poem, “Unpacking a Globe,” meditates on the globe as an object, eliciting images real and imagined. Sze closes by pointing to a coyote who ambled past the speaker’s headlights, turning but not stopping. Sze writes: “that’s how/I want to live on this planet: alive to a rabbit at a glass door— / and flower where there is no flower” (Sze 2019, p. 17). The figure of the globe draws imaginative attention to ecological absences and presences, barriers and openings, the apprehensible and the reality beyond immediate perception. Across these poems, Sze highlights shared dependencies and unequal burdens, violences seen and unacknowledged. His poems draw together acts of making and destruction, emergence and extinction, as they co-exist in any given moment on the planet.

Contemporary works of ecopoetics share a commitment to portraying the complex scales and the multiple and sometimes incommensurable forces that comprise Anthropocene life. In their forms, modes, and rhetorics, they confront what Ghosh calls the “centrality of the improbable”

as the shaping conditions of ecological dynamics in this tumultuous time (Ghosh 2016, p. 23). They draw on poetry's capacities for shifting scales, conveying particularities and more totalizing visions in order to convey the varied facets of planetary existence in an era of transformation. Rethinking the histories and ongoing legacies of this socioecological conjuncture, these works grapple with distressing truths of loss and violence. Yet they also draw attention to various scales of existence from the intricate to the vast, and open imaginative space for hope, resilience, renewal, and surprise. "Where are we headed, you wonder, as you pick a lychee and start to peel it": as this line from Sze's *Sight Lines* demonstrates, contemporary ecopoetry raises essential questions about the prospects of survival and the possibility of flourishing on this turbulent planet (Sze 2019, p. 5).

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