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Scholarly Ecotones in the Information Landscape

Drew Hubbell
Susquehanna University, 4dhubbs@gmail.com

John Ryan
University of Western Australia, jryan63@une.edu.au

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Issue Editorial:

Scholarly Ecotones in the Information Landscape¹

Drew Hubbell (University of Western Australia and Susquehanna University)

John Ryan (Edith Cowan University and University of Western Australia)²

Ecotone: A transitional area between ecosystems (e.g., woodland and savannah), often richer in species than the ecosystems on either side.

-Ian Whyte, *A Dictionary of Environmental History*

'Contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term 'contact', I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters [...] A 'contact' perspective emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other [...] often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.

-Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (7)

Contact zones called ecotones, with their edge effects, are where assemblages of biological species form outside their comfort zones. These interdigitating edges are the richest places to look for ecological, evolutionary and historical diversity.

-Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (217)

Introduction: Zones of Contact, Edges of Creativity

For this issue of *Landscapes*, we invited contributors to reflect on the concept of *ecotone* as a method of interrogating intersections between literature, culture, art and landscapes.

¹ We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of Perth, the Whadjuck Nyoongar people, who sustain the *boodja* (land), *moort* (family) and *katitjin* (knowledge) of their ancestors.

² The content of this issue, including the editorial, does not necessarily reflect the views of the International Centre for Landscape and Language, or Edith Cowan University.

We wanted to encourage the ecocritical and creative arts communities (including poets, writers, photographers, painters and graphic artists) to engage with this term in the hopes that *ecotone* would do for the environmental humanities what Mary Louise Pratt's *contact zone* did for cultural and post-colonialist studies (see, for example, Pickles and Rutherford). Taking our cue from Donna Haraway's provocative study of interspecies contact zones in *When Species Meet*, we proposed the use of *ecotone* to rethink ecocritical assumptions about the natural world as a harmonious, organic, integrated space to which humanity must relearn its connection. In contrast to the organic sublime, where humans either belong to or are alienated from Eden, the ecotone is a place of sustained conflict, of unequal power dynamics and co-shaping through intimate, uncomfortable touch, and other unsettling registers of the proximate senses. Ecotones occur when two or more semi-autonomous systems come into contact and begin sharing information across their borders, which are suddenly discovered to be porous and vulnerable. The need to endure that contact pressures strategic, perhaps creative, responses (Attrill and Rundle 933). These exchanges on the margin are threatening and dangerous, but also thrilling and highly creative, as this issue of *Landscapes* attests. Compared to the relatively monotonous routines within homogeneous ecosystems, "contact zones are where the action is, and current interactions change interactions to follow. Probabilities alter, topologies morph; development is canalised by the fruit of reciprocal induction. Contact zones change the subject—all subjects—in surprising ways" (Haraway 219).

The ecotone also seemed particularly salient as a signifier of broader academic exigencies internationally, as well as the co-editors' current life experiences. One of the pressing contexts scholars face is the "casualisation" of academia, resulting, on the whole, in marginal employment conditions and job-related uncertainty as a baseline at most Australian, Canadian, European and American institutions of higher learning. According to one study, more than half of teaching and research scholars at Australian universities are employed casually, on short-term contracts, with only ten percent of those academics casual by choice (Clohesy). It follows, then, that the preponderance of research in Australia—including the vital, yet often unpaid activities of publishing, refereeing and

editing—is carried out by casually employed, or unpaid (i.e. Honorary or Adjunct), staff deprived of a sense of professional security and existing within transitional zones of various kinds, not excluding financial, psychological and existential ones; stressors requiring, as a matter of survival, creative and strategic responses within radically asymmetrical power dynamics. Indeed, that is not an unfamiliar context for both of us, as editors, inhabiting transitional zones professionally, personally, geographically and intellectually, due in part to this institutional context. Originally from New Jersey, John Ryan is geographically located in Southeast Asia, specifically Chiang Mai, northern Thailand—a transitional zone to a new life and career that could emerge in Thailand, India, New Zealand, Lebanon, Turkey or the United States, depending on the academic climate and politics of the institutions to which he is applying. Having lived in Australia for nearly eight years, Ryan just completed a three-and-a-half-year post-doctoral research fellowship in Perth and a publishing phase that resulted in over one-hundred scholarly and creative outputs, many of them related to the Western Australian landscape.

Likewise, Drew Hubbell, also from the States, came to Perth in June, 2015, on an unpaid leave of absence from his university to experiment with a career transition. After a thrilling and challenging year that has been both renaissance and crucible, he returns to the States with renewed ambitions for his position as associate professor, recharged by his new Australian networks and bearing with him the completed manuscripts of a book on the English poet Lord Byron and several related essays. Hence, we put forward that this editorial and the *Landscapes* journal issue constitute a site of creative exchanges across continents and time zones that could only manifest in the new, virtual information landscape, where borders can be fused, or decoupled, rapidly. However, unlike some “flat earth” theories of the globalised information environment (Garwood; Friedman), we do not experience these differences as collapsing into an edifice of unity. Indeed, as our contrasting-aligning editorial voices attest, and as the broad diversity of other voices in this journal signify, this dynamic and mutable space of information exchange is one of struggle, contest, synergy, resistance and fusion into hybridity that epitomises the ecotone. In the twenty-first century, our collective experiences of travel, transition,

communication and collaboration across rapidly shifting contact zones have become the norm; the information ecotone, in which *Landscapes* sits, typifies life in the academic ecosystem.

JR (*writing from Thailand*) 14 March 2016

Some contact zones are more palpable and omnipresent in Thailand than Australia. The smoke from a grilled meat stand fills my lungs each morning and overpowers my almost-daily walk through the local market. When I first arrived in the country, I wheezed and coughed a lot. Adjusting to life in Thailand is an embodied, sensory process engaging new and, sometimes, repulsive—from a Western perspective—sights, sounds, sensations, smells and tastes. Pale ant egg delicacies writhing with live red ants, fried silk worms, roasted grasshoppers, fermented fish head paste (or *pla ra*), live frogs kept in plastic pools as they are being fattened up for consumption. A local dish, vaguely called *boat noodles*, with its secret ingredient (pig's blood) lending richness and, indeed, body to the broth. A proliferation ceremony at the village temple involving a platter comprising one pig's head, six pig's feet, mandarins, flowers and three plastic bottles of Thai iced tea, each topped with a sippy straw. A cremation for a venerable monk preceded by a one-year-long ceremony culminating in a magnificent and emotionally moving funeral pyre, after which everyone in attendance eats street food, hops on motorbikes and goes home for the night. Acrobatic lizards battling each other inside the traditional style teak house I am renting for one-fifth the equivalent monthly cost in Perth. Biting insects so profuse that I dubbed the outdoor kitchen, with reluctant affection, *Mosquito Cove*. There are cultural contact zones too amidst the abundant nonhuman encounters: greeting an older person with a bow, or *wai*, palms in a prayer position (rather than a brisk handshake). The realisation that I have spent my life becoming (nearly) fluent in the language of colonisation and globalisation, English, and that it is terribly presumptuous to live in another country without *attempting* to know its indigenous tongue. The suburbanisation that lies at the periphery of the village. *Sawadeekrub. Khopkhunkrub.*

Hybridising Ecological and Cultural Ecotones: Resistance, Resilience, Hope

In landscape ecology, the concept of the *ecotone* has become increasingly important in the last thirty years as ecologists have shifted away from a climax ecology model of ecosystemic function, with its central values of equilibrium, harmony and holism. The highly dynamic, unstable stress zones of ecotones, once thought to be deviant patterns in the drive towards harmony, gained greater value when scientists discovered the importance of diversity for ecosystem functioning (Gaines and Denny 662). It no longer appears to be the homogeneous centre that is important for maintaining ecosystem identity, but rather the dynamic interactions between heterogeneous edges that determine energy flows and, thus, ecosystem identity (Bekker 3–4). Likewise, colonial frontiers, as Mary Pratt theorised, have determining effects on metropolitan centers, despite those centres' presumption of controlling power. The interactive, improvisational and contingent work of transculturation and autoethnography at the frontier undermines the colonists' self-assured narrative of domination, but from the perspective of the ecotone, such disruptively-creative work becomes even more crucial since hybridity, the “fruit of reciprocal induction” (Haraway 219), is essential for the future vitality of both cultures.

We know too much of the destructive history of colonialism—all colonialism, no matter where it originated, West or East—to be enchanted by an idealised, perhaps perverted, vision of hybridity in the contact zone. Western Australia, from where Drew Hubbell writes, has a more than fifty-thousand-year Aboriginal history that may differ in time span but not in destructive magnitude from the Native American history that plays out in the country in which he was born. Genocide and cultural fragmentation, however, were not the inevitable outcomes of first contact, and later history can be seen as a betrayal of the reciprocal induction and mutual synergy characteristic of the cultural ecotone.¹

Similarly, for John Ryan observing the context in Thailand, the vestiges of colonialism engulf the northern Lanna Kingdom of Chiang Mai from all sides: Laos, governed by France from 1893 to 1953; and Myanmar by Britain from 1824 to 1948.

Although Thailand remains the only Southeast Asian country to evade colonial European occupation, largely because of a strong monarchy and because it was considered a neutral zone between French and British states, the country has not entirely escaped the homogenising after-effects of colonial invasion. For instance, during the Vietnam War, the U.S. Air Force exploited Thailand as a staging ground for airstrikes over North Vietnam. Even today, many airports in Thailand, some of which were constructed by the U.S. during that era, bear the marks of American military will. In a different sense, permutations of contemporary colonialism manifest in the broad scale of Western tourism in Thailand and, more generally, in Southeast Asia—from twenty-something backpackers reinventing the Hippie Trail in seeking Buddhist-related enlightenment to sixty-something economic immigrants from North America, Europe, Oceania and elsewhere in Asia aiming to maximise their meagre retirement funds in a new place offering inexpensive food, drink, accommodation and services. Indeed, the impacts of colonisation and globalisation on contact zones register in myriad ways.

It is crucial, then, to consider these modes of interrelationship between geographical and social contact zones; to think critically about the intergrading of ecological and cultural ecotones, to think in terms of overlays. Across the world, colonists have interpolated their homogenising cultural systems into intrinsically heterogeneous indigenous systems. Consider, for example, that there were more than 500 different languages spoken in Aboriginal Australia in 1788, when the first British colonists arrived in Sydney, far exceeding the number of European languages. Two-hundred-and-thirty years later, many of those languages have disappeared under the homogenising force of the colonist's language. Colonialist intrusions in Australia and elsewhere have either completely annihilated or severely altered the original cultural and environmental ecotones, and abnegated, in many instances, the possibility of forging new, dynamic and ethically just contact zones. However, in other instances, the reactions to imperial propaganda have spurred new creativities, connections and modes of resistance in the indigenous cultures, demonstrating that victimisation is not an invariable and inevitable outcome. Because ecotones—edge effects—are not static, but constantly morphing,

shifting and being created, they are the world's most fragile material and immaterial areas, and yet these margins are where life's greatest vitality and energy are centered. As Rachel Carson wrote in "The Marginal World,"

Only the most hardy and adaptable can survive in a region so mutable, yet the area between the tide lines is crowded with plants and animals. In this difficult world of the shore, life displays its enormous toughness and vitality by occupying almost every conceivable niche [...at] this place of the meeting of land and water.

(1)

Although fragile and mutable, ecotones are also zones of struggle, defiance, cohesion and reinvention. Novelty and innovation emerge in the ecotone at the edges of ideas, beings, contestations, potentialities; and colonisation imperils its own existence when it attempts to assimilate the Other. Indeed, historical and contemporary threats to Aboriginal cultures in many ways coincide with modern Australian culture's sterilisation: witness Perth (christened "City of the Bland" in Tim Winton's 2014 *Eyrie*) flooding indistinguishable suburbs of tract homes, trophy homes and strip malls across beach, wetland, bushland and outback, unchecked by any shore. Neoliberal economic values have turned Perth's inner harbour, just like every other city's inner harbour, into a playground for tourists and the wealthy. "Affluenza" is blowback from eliminating edges and edginess, contacts and conflicts, options and opportunities. A world that preserves and values its meeting points, its ecotones, "keeps alive the sense of continuing creation and of the relentless drive of life" (Carson 2). Ultimately, as editors, we assert that ecotones as contact zones are spaces of enduring hope, of resilience and insight, of creativity and reinvention.

DH (*writing from Australia*) 18 March 2016

My first conscious encounter with ecotones was hiking the Cape to Cape track in the magnificent south-west of Western Australia, with my co-editor, John Ryan. The track rises and falls from beach to heathland, along limestone cliffs, through paperbark melaleuca and peppermint understory, and into the towering karri forest, often changing from one ecosystem to another in a matter of three or four paces. In those transition zones, every living thing changes, and the mediating hybrids are visibly marked by both sides. Biodiversity is off the charts: in this small corner of Western Australia, there are more plant species than North America. Large mammals, however, are extremely rare—in seven days, we saw only eight other hikers on trail. Signs of the area's dynamic ecotonal history were visible in the calcified stumps of primordial forests formed around one million years ago when the oceans rose, and ancient limestone reefs suspended forty metres above current sea level, forming today's cliffs.

Human culture has formed its own hybrids in this region: who could anticipate authentic Austrian gulasch at the sole restaurant in tiny Gracetown or the combination of Thai décor and superb D.I.Y. craftsmanship in the Augusta youth hostel at the southern end of the track? Or the blend of multinational tourists and Outback kitsch at the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse? Surf culture and world-class wineries, ecotowns and farmers, fishing and tourism, artists, artisans, and indigenous Nyoongar people: communities in this area thrive in niches at the margins of ecosystems, economies and geopolitical boundaries.

I have learned greater humility in my struggle to understand and adapt to this country and its people. So many of my interpretations of the signs have been wrong in this strange place, so vast “that only the traditional owner could read the subtle stories of its contours” (Wright 185–6). To survive here, I need to be a better listener and more flexible in my exchanges. “This country would devour anyone walking in it that did not know it” (Wright 173). Every day I have a palpable sense of my status as outsider. But I have plenty of company. Except for the traditional owner on country, singing the stories that are the Law of the land, we are all outsiders; some have just forgotten.

Exploring Ecotonal Stress Lines

The term *ecotone*, first used by the plant ecologists Burton Edward Livingston in 1903 and Frederic Clements in 1905, combines two Greek words: *oikos*—meaning “home” or “household” and *tonos*—meaning “tension” (Bekker 3). Although he does not specifically employ the term *ecotone*, Livingston identifies a “zone of tension” between biotic communities in his pioneering early twentieth-century writings on plant ecology and physiology (51). Clements (277) further conceptualised an ecotone as “a stress line [...] that connects the points of accumulated or abrupt change” between ecosystems. In his seminal text *Research Methods in Ecology*, Clements goes on to define an ecotone as “the tension line between two zones, formations, consocieties [a natural community with one dominant species], etc.,” underscoring the term’s derivation from the Greek word for *tension* (316). For Clements, a classic example is the demarcation between a topographical elevation and depression, such as a water level line, separating ecological communities (280). Notably, in his view, an ecotone is “never a sharp line, but it is an area of varying width” (281), a transitional zone marking the limits of certain species, a threshold area in which species mix, where interspecies relationships form. It is frequently visible as a “junction zone between two plant communities, where processes of exchange or competition between neighbouring patches might be readily observed” (Lachavanne 8). Hence, an ecotone is both a contact zone between two ecosystems, as well as a self-governing system with its own internal structures and processes; it is both an internalised and externalised (interiorised and exteriorised) phenomenon.

Although *tension* is often assumed to mean *antagonism*, or fundamental opposition, Romand Coles reminds us that the more accurate sense is “agonistic dialogue,” which he elaborates as “the interminglings, conversations, and negotiations that continually must be pursued between diverse beings. These beings, in their radical otherness, are captured neither by the logic of identity nor that of contradiction, but rather require the difficult elaboration of overlappings, tensions, and paradoxes” (Coles 228). The antagonism brought by colonial cultures to Australia, the United States, Canada, South America, Africa, Korea, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and many

other places sought to displace or replace indigenous cultures. With occasional, individual exceptions, colonialism did not nurture productive agonistic dialogue across the transition zones created by its entrance into First Nation communities. What would have happened if the Anglo-European colonists had sought to cultivate respectful agonistic relations in an ecotone? In recent historical reconstructions, Australian novelist Kim Scott, in his 2011 *That Deadman Dance*, and American historian Nathaniel Philbrick, in his 2006 *Mayflower*, both capture the moment of curiosity, creativity and intermingling, misunderstanding, violence, and heroic compromise that characterises the first contact between English and Aboriginal peoples in Albany, Australia (Scott) and English and Algonquins (Philbrick). The opportunity for different histories was lost when colonists declared both continents *terra nullius*, attempting to erase the delicate ecotonal barriers to their totalising logic of self-identity and their epistemologies of progress (Lindqvist).

Nevertheless, dialogism can be given space to emerge amidst ecotonal stress lines—and forging dialogic exchange, rather than monologic flows of information, remains the core challenge for post-colonial societies of the Anthropocene. Coles suggests that “whatever reverence we ourselves deserve emerges from our capacity to dwell dialogically at the ecotone between self and world; it emerges in how we can and how we do inhabit these borders” (245). The rampant globalisation of late capitalism makes it easier to live in the suburbs of comfortable self-identity while waging antagonistic war with otherness, including nonhumans, across hardened lines of opposition. Yet there is another kind of globalisation in the information environment that inherently recognises ecotones of agonistic dialogue. Such a groundwork is a place that both co-editors are privileged to share with our contributors and readers. The scholarly, distributed, digital environment nurtures the commingled, marginal space of *Landscapes*, an interdisciplinary eco-humanities journal that brings together arts, humanities, social sciences and natural science at the intersection of language and landscapes. In fact, the journal is one of the first open access, e-journals in Australia, and one of the first globally in the field of environmental humanities. It was inaugurated by Professors Glen Phillips,

John Kinsella and Andrew Taylor over fifteen years ago as a dialogic space for intellectual exchange (Gross and Ryan). Here, in this ecotonal space, as in most publishing in the globalised information environment, our “agonistic dialogical intermingling of [...] nonidentities [...] is the wellspring of what intelligence, freedom, and fertility we can live and impart to the living earth around us from our bizarre position of potential power” (Coles 246).

The Current Issue of *Landscapes*

“If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism,” Donna Haraway writes, “then we know that becoming is always becoming with—in a contact zone, where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (244). Those joining us in this world of *Landscapes* became with us in the contact zone that we created through our virtual, or in some instances physical, intermingling (see Prefatory Note and Acknowledgments). The contact zone includes the many reviewers and selectors who volunteered their expertise and time to nurture the intellectual work of our contributors. The networks of relations that radiate from this issue did not necessarily exist prior to the work that brought them into being, and that work was defined as agonistic dialogue, collaborative and productive of our identities, and potentially shaping our futures in unexpected ways.

The Summer 2016 issue of *Landscapes* speaks to the “foolishness of exceptionalism” through critical essays, creative non-fiction, poetry, short stories, photography and other visual artworks of a broadly interdisciplinary nature that address the many intersections *in* and *of* landscapes: human and non-human, microscopic and macroscopic, virtual and embodied, ecological and cultural. The theme “ecotones as contact zones” introduces realms of becoming and belonging where species and cultures mix, mingle, and migrate, recombine and hybridise. Indeed, the contributions, explicitly or implicitly, employ ecotonal concepts in terms of contact zones, variously interpreted, as creative or analytical lenses.

The refereed articles featured in this issue attest to how ecotones breed complexity, diversity, and hybridity as the “continual result of evermore intricate and

multidirectional acts of association of and with other life forms” (Haraway 31). In their various praxes of reading landscapes, actual and mediated, through artistic reconstructions, contributors to this issue helped redefine a theory of ecotones for ecocriticism and the broader field of environmental humanities of which it is part. The margin between ocean and land that Rachel Carson celebrated, the shore ecotone, is the focus of several pieces in this issue. Maura Coughlin’s work on the French realist painters of the Impressionist and post-Impressionist period addresses ecotones at several levels: female painters in a male-dominated profession, realism in an aesthetic dominated by modernist technique, and the attempt to render an authentic tribute to marginalised shore labourers in contrast to the metropolitan touristic commodification of rural lives in narratives of holistic nature. In Coughlin’s reading, these paintings of the shore ecotone, created by painters who dwelled in the ecotone, contest the aesthetic appropriation of the shore and its inhabitants by the dominant academic painters, providing cultural historians with a more complicated “agonistic dialogue” of shore and land, painter and subject, metropole and rural outback.

Colin Carman sets Mary Shelley’s understudied children’s story, *Maurice, or the Fisher’s Cot*, in the context of her lifelong interest in ocean-shore margins. Emphasising the many ways that this story’s setting and its characters occupy a diversified niche at the edges of mainstream cultures, economies and ecosystems, Carman concludes his complex and far-ranging essay with the theory that this story provides readers, then and now, with a “green parable” for dwelling in egalitarian relationships of care between human and nonhuman, while resisting the economic forms of exploitation.

Paul Formisano’s essay “The Paradox of Desert Writing” examines contemporary American naturalist and author Craig Childs’ deployment of paradox as a rhetorical structure for depicting Southwest American xeriscapes in his personal narrative *The Secret Knowledge of Water* (2000). The paradoxical tensions between xeriscape and hydroscape, aridity and inundation, abundance and scarcity, earth and water, constitute a dominant historical theme in desert narratives. By the essay’s conclusion, Formisano looks to transdisciplinarity, particularly biologist E.O. Wilson’s theorisation of

consilience, as a way forward—as a mode of bridging epistemological systems and for smudging the ironclad demarcations between humans and nonhumans in desert environments. In its obvious tensions between poetic and scientific discourses, Childs’ narrative ultimately evokes the paradoxical mystery and elusiveness of arid landscapes.

In the final scholarly essay of this section, “Fire Was in the Reptile’s Mouth’: Towards a Transcultural Ecological Poetics,” Stuart Cooke develops a bold, trenchant and imaginative comparison of two creation narratives from indigenous peoples whose homelands are located on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean: the Yanomami of Venezuela and the MakMak of Australia. Through this trans-oceanic analysis of two different cultural groups, Cooke theorises an anti-colonialist, polyvocal and “transcultural” ecopoetics. As Cooke points out, ecological expressions not bound to conventional linguistic structures, such as birdsong, destabilise Western, humanist assumptions regarding the interrelationship between language and environment, principally that human language and associated modes of cognition attest to an ascendancy in the Great Chain of Being.

The artwork, poetry and short stories make visible the “between-ness” of their authors’ experiences as they occupy spaces between different cultures, between nature and culture, and within a culture. The writers and artists teach us to value the uncertainty, risk and alterity of these spaces, claiming in-between as the place where true identity, peace, belonging, creativity, redemption and the future manifest. In revaluing the “transitional zone” of the ecotone, form performs the message; each artist pushes boundaries of genre and traditional art form or reaches for hybrid media; they fuse artistic and scientific voices or integrate ethical care with documentation.

Some work within the littoral ecotones, such as Lawrence Smith’s “case study of a major river,” the *Gunanurang*, or River Ord, which interweaves lyrical voicing of the river’s memories with narration of biologists scrambling to document species before a dam, representative of Australian industrial culture, annihilates the unique ecosystem. Maggie Higman’s personal narrative, by contrast, imagines a more figurative ecotone in her mental transitions from “wide-eyed and clean” dwelling in the High Sierras to visiting

family in the “deranged modernity” of Madison, Wisconsin. And Peter Mitchell’s poem, “Vacant Block,” celebrates the opportunities for urban gardening when the city council overlooks the literal space between buildings.

Pictorial studies by Brent Green, Keith Armstrong, Kevin Ballantine and Natasha Fijn create ecotones in their embrace of mixed media and discourse fusions. Fijn’s personal narrative and photomontage of her pilgrimage to ecofeminist Val Plumwood’s house captures interspecies dwelling in contact zones created by the highways and byways she traverses. Ballantine uses visual and verbal art to suggest that the spaces between the seen and voiced are where the ecotonal action is. Armstrong tries to make visible the multiple contact zones resulting from the distributed ecosystem effects of Australia’s largest pollinating mammal, the flying fox. Green, by interpolating alternative narratives of relationship building into iconic Australian landscape paintings, turns what had been serene statements of nation-building into contact zones of agonistic multiplicity.

The eleven pieces of poetry approach the theme of contact zone in very different ways, from the intercultural dialogics of Bill Yake in the Mongolian outback and John Ryan in the Chinese urban, to the West Australian ecotonal naturescapes of Josephine Clarke, Kevin Gillam and Andrew Burke. Glen Phillips’ sonnet plays out the ecotonal concept of “tension” with “voltas” of age and youth, memory and encounter. And Laurie Smith and Les Wicks turn to apostrophe to voice the subjecthood of nonhuman nature and matter. Perhaps Margaret Mullins “Boundaries” expresses most emphatically a common desire for and fear of the ecotone, “where fire and chaos clash.”

Conclusion

The works in this issue of *Landscapes* do not settle, but embrace the vitality of high mobility, transition and transformation. At the risk of idealising the ecotone, the editors find these places—and pieces—of uncertainty, risk and opportunity to be thrilling as well as alienating, uncomfortable as well as dynamic. It is not surprising that intellectuals and artists would seek out contact zones for their inherent intensity, morphological hybridity

and disestablishmentarianism. Globalised modernity blandishes bland, homogenised comfort and commercial standardization, reinforced by harsh “anti-protest” laws and corporate-protectionist trade treaties.² Freedom of association and expression only exist in contact zones of agonistic dialogue. The revaluation of the ecological contact zone, the ecotone, confirms the fact that these are not marginal spaces that exist on the periphery, but rather, as Rachel Carson perceived, central to the emergence and continuance of life. In “Ecotones as Contact Zones,” we bring you an issue that celebrates dynamism, diversity and evolution at the centre of our virtual and actual worlds.

Notes

¹ From our later perspective in history, we often forget, as many published historians have forgotten, that our history is not destined, but one of many potentials immanent within decisive moments, and could always be altered by different uses of the givens that have been inherited from the past. So Geoffrey Blainey, in *A Shorter History Australia*, writes as though Australia’s Aboriginal people were always already doomed when “a small ship, riding wild seas off South Africa, heralded the beginning of the end of the Aboriginal’s secure world” in 1486 (25). He concludes this section with the historically deterministic statement that the two cultures were “incompatible.” Incompatibility is how historical actors chose to play out their conflicts.

² A wave of “anti-protest” laws are passing, or have passed, state parliaments in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia in the last twenty-four months. In WA, the name of this bill is “Bill 2015, Criminal Code Amendment, Prevention of Lawful Activity: ‘This offence will apply in cases where a person prevents a lawful activity from occurring, via actual or by threat of physical force, the creation or maintenance of a physical barrier or the creation or maintenance of a risk of injury to any person.’”

(<http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/bills.nsf/BillProgressPopup?openForm&ParentUNID=1E00CF48C52EF57848257DF6000AA4DF>). It has been condemned as a violation of human rights by three of the UN’s Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17047&LangID=E>.

These bills are supported by the mining, oil, gas and development industries because they are seen as a way of chilling growing public dissent to their business model. For the same reason, transnational corporations support TPP as a way of circumventing local and national environmental, workers’ rights and regulatory standards. So-called “free-trade” bills and “anti-protest” laws are different sides of the same coin.

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Drew Hubbell is Associate Professor of British Nineteenth Century Literature at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA, USA and Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia. From 2009 to 2015, he was Head of the Department of English and Creative Writing at Susquehanna. His most recent essay, "It Cannot Be a Sin to Seek / To Save and Earth-Born Being": Radical Ecotheology in Byron's *Heaven and Earth*, appeared in *Romantic Ecocriticism: Origins and Legacies*, ed. Dewey Hall (2016). He has just completed a monograph, *Byron's Nature: A New Theory of Romantic Ecology*.

John Ryan is Honorary Research Associate in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Australia. From 2012 to 2015, he was Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University. His most recent books include *Posthuman Plants* (2015) and *The Green Thread* (2015, co-edited with Patricia Vieira and Monica Gagliano).