

Surrealism and Ecology

Edited by

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Series in Curating and Interpreting Culture



VERNON PRESS

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www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:

Vernon Press

1000 N West Street, Suite 1200,

Wilmington, Delaware 19801

United States

In the rest of the world:

Vernon Press

C/Sancti Espiritu 17,

Malaga, 29006

Spain

Series in Curating and Interpreting Culture

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025945086

ISBN: 979-8-8819-0377-0

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Introduction

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At the heart of Surrealism, from its inception, is a critical enquiry into the category of nature and the human place within it. Nature itself is explored in many ways, not only in the richness of surrealist visual culture but also through different philosophical, political, economic, and poetic perspectives. Even the urban environment of surrealist Paris was seen to erupt with natural forces, whether for André Breton in the lyrical solar energies of the flower market, for Salvador Dalí in the morphology of insect-forms in the design of the metro entrances, or for Louis Aragon in the eroticism brimming in the natural-cultural landscape of the city's parks.

Founded in 1924 in Paris, Surrealism is known as one of the most influential and far-reaching literary and artistic movements of the twentieth century. In his "Surrealist Manifesto" of the same year, André Breton illustrated core principles that resonated with numerous creators from different fields all over the world. The Parisian core of the movement gave way to an incredible mass of artworks, publications, and events pollinated by crossings and encounters, thus triggering dynamic developments and interpretations (D'Alessandro and Gale 2021, 9-20; Strom 2022, 162-315). In October 1969, shortly after Breton's death, the demise of Surrealism in France was announced by Jean Schuster in the newspaper *Le Monde* (Schuster 1969). Yet the survival and creation of surrealist groups after this date in France and beyond, such as the Arab Surrealist Movement in Paris and the groups in Prague and Chicago, illustrate a deep mark left by Surrealism that has led to a reconsideration of the movement's

historiography, thereby decentring dominant narratives and opening new perspectives such as the ecological thread explored in this volume.¹

Surrealist nature: life, creativity, politics

The influences of the twentieth-century Surrealist movement were diverse, ranging from psychoanalysis and contemporary developments of political theory to a re-thinking of romantic poetics and natural history. The philosophical, ethical, and political positioning of Surrealism is strikingly progressive and diverse. The movement engaged with plural identities and the de-hierarchisation of cultures, narratives, and knowledge, and fought colonial order and the modern dictate of rationality. Although from the 1990s onwards the psychoanalytic dimension of the surrealist concept of the marvellous became strongly identified with the uncanny (Foster 1995), there has been less scholarly exploration of how encounters with natural phenomena are central to the Surrealists' concept of the marvellous. The Surrealists experienced the natural world as an objectively lyrical domain that constantly transgresses the apparent laws with which humans attempt to circumscribe it. As a concept key to Surrealism, the marvellous draws its very logic from a historical discourse on the uncertainty of the boundaries between nature and human culture (Endt-Jones 2016, 68; Roberts 2016b, 288).

In historical terms, the influence of the Romantics' receptivity to the lyrical experience of natural phenomena offers insights into the ecological dimension of Surrealism. The Surrealists shared with the Romantics a drive to align nature both inside and outside the human subject (as exemplified in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) and understood art and poetics as the means to expressing the "latent and occluded force of nature as redemptive resource" (Soper 2015, 274). In this sense, the Surrealists' technical innovation of automatism, for example, can be understood as emerging from this Romantic legacy, according to which nature speaks most fluently and reveals itself most purely through the poetic mind.

According to Roger Caillois, who wrote evocatively on the relations between the human and the more-than-human worlds of insects and stones, human creativity is not simply analogous with natural processes but is in fact a continuation of them: "the imagination," Caillois asserted, "is nothing more than an extension of matter" (Caillois 2008, 1155). Through their explorations

¹ The transdisciplinary, transnational, and decentring scope of Surrealism historiography and studies today is encompassed by the programme of the 2024 ISSS (International Society for the Study of Surrealism) conference in Paris, which celebrated the centennial of the movement's birth: <https://surrealismstudies.org/2024/10/18/iss-surrealismes-paris-2024-program/>

of the unconscious, desire, and the instinctual, the Surrealists understood that the creative energies of human life cannot be seen in distinction to some externalised notion of nature, as the common anthropomorphism featured in Surrealist works might suggest (Strom 2017, 18-19). Much of the experimental practice of Surrealism can thus be seen in terms of *natura naturans* – nature as self-creating – a notion associated with the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza and captured by Hans Arp in his famous statement: “Art is a fruit growing out of man like a fruit out of a plant” (Motherwell 1975, 222).

Surrealism often employs nature as a subversive or disruptive force capable of destabilising normative assumptions about that which distinguishes and determines human life, notably reason and utilitarianism (Roberts 2019, 261). Taking an anti-Malthusian view of the primary condition of life as defined by exuberance rather than scarcity, Georges Bataille developed a particular critique of utilitarianism and its specious justifications for defining all of nature, human included, by its use value. According to Lucio Privitello, Bataille argued that “the exuberance of living matter, real life or animal experience, is not reducible to its utility, nor can it be neatly conceptualized within an ontological machination from human aspirations or anguish” (Privitello 2007, 168). For Bataille, along with Breton and Caillois, a critical view of reductive assumptions about nature revealed all manner of historical fallacies and ideologies, most notably relating to desire, utilitarianism, individualism, nationalism, colonialism, political economy, and anthropocentrism.

In tune with Breton’s statement in the “Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto” (1942) that man should accept that “he is not necessarily the *king* of creation that he prides himself on being” (Breton 1969, 291), the Surrealists undertook a critical revision of the notions of “human essence” and “self,” shattering the monolithic, rationalised, teleological definitions that have long dominated Western culture. Beyond art for art’s sake, the Surrealists were far more concerned with addressing the fact that Western humanism as a historical construction of science, epistemology, ethics, economics, politics – and a prevailing conception of *life* itself – was broken and mired in fallacy; a fallacy revealed by the First World War and confirmed by the Second (Slavkova 2022, 11-38).

Background and aims of this volume

This volume seeks to build a bridge between studies of Surrealism and the fields of eco-criticism and environmental humanities, and to demonstrate the significant role of surrealist artists and writers within the history of critical thinking about nature and environment over the last hundred years. The book began as a conference session titled “Earth as a Desert: The Ecology of Surrealism in the Face of the Climate Crisis” held at the annual conference of

the College Art Association (CAA) in February 2021, which took place amidst one of the most harrowing recent crises, the COVID-19 pandemic. The critical mass emerging from this discussion was rich and innovative enough to prompt Vernon Press to invite a book on this topic. The ideas were further elucidated and refined at a round table at the International Society for the Study of Surrealism (ISSS) virtual conference in November 2021. During these online sessions, the editors and several of the contributors herein discussed the richness and breadth of surrealist understanding and representations of nature. We spoke of the deep engagement in environmental concerns of specific surrealist artists and poets, and the prescience of the Surrealists' critique of Western dualistic rationalism and anthropocentrism within the development of general ecological thinking.

We conceived the volume with two major ideas in mind. Firstly, to present a diverse selection of analyses of the ways in which Surrealists have thought about and represented nature and the human place within it. Secondly, to emphasise how the epistemological innovations of Surrealism, in connecting supposedly distinct domains of thought and phenomena, can be understood as prescient to more recent developments in the practice of ecological thought within the context of multiple climate tipping points in the 2020s.

The prescience of Surrealism within the history of ecological thought

The discussion of Surrealism and ecology relates to a fundamental crisis in Western thought; a crisis whose ecological complexity has been identified by many critical thinkers over the past fifty years or so. The anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson, for example, argued in 1972 that ecological catastrophe has “grown out of the Occidental errors of epistemology” (Bateson 1972, 487). As Kristoffer Noheden (2022) has observed, Val Plumwood's criticisms of dominant modes of Western thought strongly resonate with Breton's anti-dualist stance and conjoin with the voices of numerous other theorists over the last twenty years or so in declaring that the ecological crisis is rooted in an epistemological crisis: “In its fullest meaning, developing environmental culture involves a systematic resolution of the nature/culture and reason/nature dualisms that split mind from body, reason from emotion, across their many domains of cultural influence” (Plumwood, 2002, 4).

One hundred years ago, Breton directed Surrealism towards such key ecocritical interrogations. The Surrealists specifically critiqued dualistic thinking, the over-privileging of rationalism, and the misconception that humans are separate from nature. They drew upon and developed their critique in parallel with philosophical debates developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, John Dewey, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead. Following developments in modern physics and

evolutionary theory (Parkinson 2008, 2009; Roberts 2016, 2019), such philosophers had identified the shift in thinking required to pull Western epistemology out of a paradigm stuck in a seventeenth-century model developed out of Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanism, but also rooted in the Platonic concept of unchanging essence. Although Darwin is largely absent from surrealist writings, Parkinson (2009), Roberts (2016), and Strom (2017) have shown that his robust influence is attested by surrealist approaches to the complexity of the animal/human divide. Moreover, certain surrealist thinkers looked to evolutionary theories beyond the Darwinian model in closing the gap between human and nonhuman. As Roberts has discussed, in his articles in the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure* in the 1930s, Caillois drew on Bergson's theories – his “picture of Life as characterised by inter-species continuities rooted in shared origins” – as the evolutionary basis for his startling comparisons of insect behaviour and the myth-making function in humans (Roberts 2024, 159).

Bridging Surrealism and contemporary ecocritical discourse

Surrealist thought is often restricted to the cultural and political vicissitudes of the historical avant-gardes and modernism. However, if we place Surrealism within a more general critique of the ecological crises, it appears as a historical pivot to some of the major concerns within numerous strands of contemporary debate. The blurring of human-nature boundaries, for example, in the work of Donna Haraway; feminist critiques of human-nature divisions and rationalist fundamentalism in the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Val Plumwood; anti-anthropocentric perspectives on human and more-than-human relations in the posthumanist work of Rosi Braidotti; Phillipe Descola's examination of animism and non-Western epistemologies; David W. Kidner's environmentalist re-integration of nature and psyche; renegotiating the socio-political grounds of ecological relations in the work of Félix Guattari, Michel Serres and Bruno Latour; or Gilles Deleuze's and Jane Bennett's dismantling of ontological distinctions between animate and inanimate, matter and life. With this volume, we initiate a perspective on how the Surrealists' critique of Western thinking offers a historical bridge between current ecocritical discourse and its development through the many trajectories that emerged from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophy and science, prefiguring recent developments in the concept of ecology.

Ecology, as the concept of a life science, was introduced by the German evolutionary naturalist Ernst Haeckel in his 1866 *General Morphology of Organisms*. Haeckel defined ecology as “the entire science of the relationship of the organism to its surrounding external world, wherein we understand all ‘existence-relationships’ in the wider sense” (Richards 2008, 9). As implied by

Haeckel's view, throughout the twentieth century and into our current era, ecological thought has developed outside of the life sciences into a broadly relational network of human and nonhuman actors. Many ecological thinkers could be cited in the historiography of ecology beyond the science of nature. We will name just a few. In 1969, Paul Shepard emphasised the evolutionary dimension of ecological thinking within the environmentalist context, stating how interconnectedness “emerges from biological reality and grows from the fact of interconnection as a general principle of life” (Shepard 2015, 62). In an emphatic integration of relational (and, implicitly, poetic) thinking into the domain of knowledge, Shepard argued that the “relationships of things are as real as the things” (Shepard 2015, 64). Similarly, in 1989, Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who conceptualised “deep ecology,” carried the implication of ecology further beyond the sphere of the life sciences, writing:

The study of ecology indicates an approach, a methodology which can be suggested by the simple maxim “all things hang together”. This has application to and overlaps with the problems in philosophy: the placement of humanity in nature, and the search for new kinds of explanation of this through the use of systems and relational perspectives. (Naess 1989, 36)

Naess points to the trajectories of the ecological method as developed into the fields of systems thinking and relational theory, which have permeated cultural thinking in manifold ways from management theory to anthropology. This broad reach of ecology is what cultural theorist Erich Hörl has defined as a mode of thinking which has for some decades been pushing towards “a new ecological paradigm” (Hörl 2017, 33). According to Hörl, ecology is now “something like the cipher of a new thinking of togetherness and of a great cooperation of entities and forces [which] drives a radically relational onto-epistemological renewal” (Hörl 2017, 3). In our view, and as the chapters of this book underscore, the Surrealists began advances with such a renewal one hundred years ago. As we have been experiencing through the critical mass of art and popular culture that has emerged in this first quarter of the twenty-first century, ecological thinking is transforming the imaginary of our era. Timothy Morton is one contemporary thinker amongst many to have identified the imagination as the laboratory for developing an understanding of our humanness in relation to the nonhuman, suggesting that “one’s ‘inner-space’ is a test tube for imagining a being-with that our metaphysical rigidity refuses to imagine” (Morton 2017, 318). In the contemporary moment of climate crisis, the rethinking of these relationships becomes more significant than ever. Arguably, the Surrealists were pioneers in this front of the imagination in

challenging fixed ideas around human-nature boundaries and in seeking a more expansively relational sense of being, living, and creating.

The Surrealists, then, seem to have precipitated these broad developments in ecological consciousness. More specifically, as Roberts has analysed, surrealist thought aligns with Bateson's concept of an "ecology of mind," in terms of its epistemological implications (Roberts 2016, 218). With this concept, the anthropologist described a new model of relatedness in thinking about the profoundly connected nature of life, urgently needed to recognise and redress what he called "pathologies of epistemology" (Bateson 1972, 478). "I believe," Bateson stated, "that this massive aggregation of threats to man and his ecological systems arises out of errors in our habits of thought at deep and partly unconscious levels" (Bateson 1972, 487). Arguably, Bateson's recognition of the significance of unconscious processes and his subsequent influence on Guattari's eco-philosophical triad of subject-society-environment (Heroux, 2022) finds historical precedent in the attempts by the Surrealists (notably Breton, Bataille, and Caillois) to build critical links between domains of life that have been separated by epistemological atomisation.

Ecological intersections: feminism, decolonialism, and nondualistic thought

This volume addresses ecocritical thinking as a determinant in representations of nature *and* as an epistemological and ontological shift in thinking about everything in terms of manifold *relations*. The contributions attest to the historical significance of Surrealism within the development of such ecocritical thinking on a number of key points: 1) a rejection of the dualistic separation of humans and the natural world at large as well as the bifurcation of mind and matter inherent within Western rationalism; 2) a non-hierarchical and relational ontology developed from a combination of poetic thinking; and 3) the assimilation of esoteric, animistic, or panpsychic world views, including pre-modern European and non-Western, into an alternative epistemology which rejects the authority of science as the only means to truth or knowledge.

Several contributions here articulate the timely themes of gender and decolonial thought within the larger reflection on Surrealism and ecology. Ecofeminism, which various surrealist artists and writers use in their approaches to ecological inquiry, is an undercurrent in the texts from Terri Geis, Tor Scott, and Brianna Mullin. In *Surrealist Women*, Penelope Rosemont indicates that ecology was a concern for many women of the Surrealist movement, such as Suzanne Césaire and Nora Mitrani, for example (Rosemont 1998, 122; 204). Although one section of this volume could have been dedicated to the consideration of women Surrealists and feminist themes, we chose not to silo this material and instead

to include it under other themes so that these discussions remain interconnected to larger conversations, such as difference.

Texts by Andrea Gremels on the Césaires and Adam Jolles on Édouard Glissant point to affinities that the Surrealists and Caribbean activists perceived between relational and nondualistic modes of thinking on the one hand and non-European, pre-colonial world views on the other. This conjunction entails a rejection of both the nature-human fracture and the system of hierarchies imposed by colonial oppression. Malcom Ferdinand has described this condition as “modernity’s colonial and environmental double fracture” (Ferdinand 2022, 3), a paradigm that perpetuates the dualisms inherent within Western thinking and establishes the ontological bases for both the racial and natural hierarchical structures.

In this sense, Surrealist writings and artworks prefigure Bruno Latour’s reflection on the “disjunction” of human/nature as inseparable from a certain form of coloniality intrinsic to a self-mystifying modernism, one which is permeated by the idea of “universal” modernisation and acceleration that keeps mistreating the terrestrial on which it relies (Maniglier 2023, 356-357). Bypassing the disjunction, i.e., reinventing the *socium* as a whole, implies rethinking the “circulation” between Nature, Society and Subjectivity (Latour 1999, 19) and accepting that subjectivity is not exclusively anthropological nor human: “Subjectivity, corporeality, is no more a property of humans, of individuals, of intentional subjects, than being an outside reality is a property of nature” (Latour 1999, 23). The Surrealists were aware of and attentive to modes of thinking both outside and within the West (esotericism and nondualistic philosophies), which were not based upon fundamental ontological fractures. This factor within surrealist critique presents another historical bridge to current ecocritical thinking.

Surrealism towards posthumanism

Another pillar of this bridge is the Surrealists’ critical interrogation of humanism, which was explicitly formulated in Breton’s above-cited *Prolegomena*. This criticism is also present in earlier publications, such as the third issue of the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* titled “End of the Christian Era,” edited by Antonin Artaud in April 1925 (Slavkova 2009, 195-201). The journal *Documents*, notably Bataille’s texts “The Big Toe” and “Human Face,” is exemplary of a radical deconstruction of humanist ideals and the dualist body/mind fracture: our feet are planted on the *terra firma*, dissolving any illusions of our ability to soar through the heavens (Bataille 1985, 21-23). According to Roberts, an aggressive anthropocentrism is “reflected in the derision shown towards the human head in *Documents* – from Picasso’s savage constructions to shrunken heads, to ludicrous masks, to the critical scorn poured upon the *figure humaine*

– by which Bataille and his team humiliate the old grounds for human distinction” (Roberts 2016a, 225). With a surprising lucidity, the Surrealists’ critique of anthropocentric humanism prefigures what Francesca Ferrando has described as contemporary posthumanism’s refusal of the ontological primacy of human existence (Ferrando 2012, 9). The Surrealists’ critique of human exceptionalism can thus be read as a historical bridge to contemporary critical views like those of Braidotti, who has argued for the urgency to conceive a new theory of the subject. This approach, she argues, would be one that takes into consideration humanism’s “unfulfilled promises and unacknowledged brutality” rooted in imperialist-capitalist hegemony, rationalist subjectivity, exclusively Eurocentrist methodology, and violent rejection of the other (Braidotti 2013, 51-53).

In our view, the Surrealists initiated such a theory by deconstructing the linear, integral, rational humanist subject and by promoting the multiplicity of the self, fusing with the universe, permeable to otherness (Slavkova 2009, 189; Rentzou 2022, 221). Tristan Tzara’s poetic description of the “approximative man” (Tzara 1929, 18) and Antonin Artaud’s ironic evocation of the desegregation of the pretentious human “aggregate” (Artaud 1925, 23), both published in *La Révolution surréaliste*, emphasise the impossibility of fixing the human once and for all and of separating it from the rest of the world. Surrealist visual production echoes this instability, full of becomings: liable to entropy but also regeneration, in constant transformation, the human figure is a signifier of multiplicity (Rentzou 2022, 247). Further, these demultiplied and disarticulated humans interact with their environment in a non-hierarchical way; they absorb it and are being absorbed by it, a reciprocity heralding the first principle of ecology later established by biologist Barry Commoner in the simple terms that everything is connected to everything else (Commoner 1971, 37). In their refusal to separate nature/culture, the Surrealists converge with the posthumanist refusal to attribute the source of all change to culture, acknowledging nature’s sovereign agency and historicity (Patrizio 2019, 147).

In their contributions, Christina Heflin, Samantha Kavky, Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, and Anna Reid demonstrate how, as Effie Rentzou notes, Surrealism has reshuffled the human as an epistemological and cognitive category (Rentzou 2022, 271), thereby anticipating a keystone of ecological thought. It seems, therefore, urgent to reconsider the role of the historical avant-garde, Surrealism in particular, in the enactment of a new theory of the subject based on the radical deconstruction of the ‘human’ which occurred before the epistemological upheavals of post-structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s (Ferrando 2012, 12; Patrizio 2019, 146; Wark 2015, 122).

The turn to the Americas

Recognising the inadequacy of Eurocentric Western humanism, many Surrealists looked to the Americas for alternative epistemologies and correctives to colonial views. In this volume, Victoria Ferentinou and Julia Drost explore how surrealist engagement with Indigenous views of nature in the Americas gave rise to a particular development in surrealist eco-poetics. They match a critical position within postcolonial eco-criticism which, as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have argued, perceives “the very ideology of colonisation [as] one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable” (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 181). For Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney, the affinities between posthumanism and Indigenous views can be recognised in terms of philosophies which, they write:

include a refusal of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism; a genealogical and constructivist account of identity, and an acknowledgement of species interdependence and consubstantial intersubjectivity in interactive ecologies shared by human and non-human beings. (Signall and Rigney 2019, 159)

The readings of Surrealism here shed light on such affinities, highlighting its relationship with Indigenous non-Western worldviews and how, from a very early point in the history of the movement, Surrealism recognised the limitations and gross reductiveness of the Eurocentric/anthropocentric hierarchical view of human and human-nature relations.

Although anti-colonial ideals and support for decolonial movements were a Surrealist credo, most Euro-American Surrealists could not avoid fetishising Indigenous cultures and objects, and stereotyped Indigenous peoples as “closer to nature.” While many Indigenous peoples have long acted as land stewards and have often cared for lands with more ecological awareness and conviction than settlers, the trope of Indigenous proximity to nature strays too close to Enlightenment-era racism.

Martine Antle and Katherine Conley’s 2015 *South Central Review* special issue takes up part of this discussion in the context of Surrealism, exploring the tensions between decolonial ideals and appropriation through collection practices such as Breton’s (Antle and Conley 2015, 4-5). Antle and Conley also outline the transnational exchanges that Surrealism engendered, engaging Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in decolonial surrealist practices of thinking, writing, and making (Antle and Conley 2015, 2-4). Jonathan Eburne has stressed the contributions of Glissant, Wifredo Lam, and Aimé and Suzanne Césaire to Surrealism’s decolonial thought and action (Eburne 2021, 344). T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has chronicled, from a feminist perspective, the

crucial contributions of the Nardal sisters, whose theorising on Black humanism was influential in the Négritude movement (Sharpley-Whiting 2002, 17); and Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley have demonstrated the profoundness of surrealist writers of colour in their essential volume *Black, Brown, & Beige* (Rosemont and Kelley 2009). Thoughtful attention to framing is imperative within such histories of erasure and appropriation. Many contributions in this volume that discuss myth, mysticism, and non-Western thinking within the context of nature and ecology negotiate a careful balance between contextualising surrealist ideas, artistic and literary practices, and larger questions of appropriation and fetishisation.

Surrealism prefiguring the “three ecologies”: mind, society, environment

The experience of the Americas shifted Breton's critique of the crisis in Western thinking, which, in the 1940s, took a turn towards a greater emphasis on human-nature relations. As Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Kristoffer Noheden argue in this volume, after the Second World War, while travelling or in exile in North America and the Caribbean region, Breton came to address more directly and broadly the historical schism between humans and the natural world. His and other Surrealists' experiences of the vast continent and the diversity of its natural environment had a significant impact on their work. According to Fijalkowski and Noheden, the initial imperative of Surrealism, to seek collective experimental methods of thinking and creating that could serve to overcome the crisis in Western rationalism, took a pronounced turn during and after the 1939-1945 World War towards the themes of nature and myth. At this time, Breton asserted that any efforts to “change life” in any radical sense, “must act simultaneously on the external world (its economic and social structure) and the internal world (human understanding)” (Breton 1993, 240).

The recognition that genuine change required a transversal approach that connected subjectivity (with the strong emphasis on the unconscious) with the external world can be related to Guattari's ecosophical theory of “three ecologies.” Sharing with the Surrealists a critique rooted in Marxist and psychoanalytical thinking, Guattari argued for the political imperative of connecting what he called “three types of eco-logical praxis” in order to challenge “Integrated World Capitalism” and its omnipresent, deterritorialised infiltration of “the most unconscious subjective strata” of human life (Guattari 1989, 50). Guattari defined his ecosophy as an expansive ethico-political agenda that addresses the complexity of eco-social crisis by transversing three “ecological registers,” namely, “the environment, social relations and human subjectivity” (Guattari 1989, 28). Arguably, in no less a coherently critical manner, Breton developed a surrealist critique along a similarly transversal logic some decades before, arguing for interconnections between the psychological, the social, and

the economic as part of a broad reimagining of humanity. Like Guattari, as well as members of the Frankfurt School, Breton identified the need for a critical vigilance towards an Enlightenment-inspired understanding of nature as the object of instrumental rationalism – rather than a well-spring of regeneration of society and consciousness – that has led to the ideological legitimisation of human exceptionalism, social, economic, and colonial inequalities and oppressions.

Deploying his ecosophy, Guattari suggested that the solution to the ecological crisis must go beyond environmental and climate change awareness, which governments tend to treat in a technocratic way (Guattari 1989, 28). Not only does ecological catastrophe compromise the climate and essential life resources, but it also affects the relationship of subjectivity to exteriority (social, animal, vegetal, cosmic). To thwart the catastrophe, we must start paying attention to the everyday little things, to our immediate material and emotional surroundings and not so much to the great discourses (Guattari 1989, 28-29). Thus, Guattari seems to prolong a sense of ecology initiated, according to J. B. Foster, by Karl Marx: an ecological community is a dialectical whole with its environment, allowing for different ontologically significant levels of existence and sensing with no overall guiding purpose, especially none that is profit-related (Foster 2000, 16).

Likewise, the Surrealists were aware that a society regulated by profit and the teleology of progress was doomed. The ecology of Surrealism, as defined in this introduction, intends to counter destruction through a restored reciprocity – circulation between exterior and interior, body and mind, human and nature, living and inanimate, and multiple identities. In this sense, Bataille's notion of general economy, with its cosmic scale, has been interpreted as an ecological vision (Stoekl 2007). Allan Stoekl proposes that Bataille's attention to energetics makes him "rare – in fact, unique – among twentieth-century thinkers in that he put energy at the forefront of his thinking of society" (Stoekl, 2007, xiii). With his insistence on the troublesome fact of heterogeneity, Bataille's thinking on general economy presented an anti-utilitarian model of energy, characterised, according to Stoekl, "by its insubordination to human purposes, its defiance of the very human tendency to refine its easy use" (Stoekl 2007, xiv). Bataille questioned the very basis of economic thinking that, deprived of a sacred dimension, privileges selfishness over generosity, growth over expenditure, and use-value over life.

As Commoner put it in *The Closing Circle*, according to the "informal laws" of ecology, "nothing comes from nothing" and "everything must go somewhere" (Commoner 1971, 37-41). Everything in nature, living or non-living, is transitory but bound to endless transformations and changing arrangements. Everything matters, all of material existence is interdependent, organised in unending patterns to produce new realities. As such, for the Surrealists, nature

is the creative site of paradox, transformation, trans-subjectivity, inter-relationality, and interconnectedness; it levels or subverts hierarchies and assumed structures of domination, fostering poetical thinking, imagination, non-utility, and non-instrumentalisation.

The texts in this volume approach the Surrealists' exploration of nature along these lines, anticipating Guattari's ecosophical conviction that a total revolution – one that reshapes the objectives of material and immaterial production – must not scorn sensibility and desire (Guattari 1989, 28). They demonstrate how the Surrealists reached beyond scientific and philosophical circumscriptions into the meaning and experience of *life* itself, by liberating the concept of nature from what Bataille called the "mathematical frockcoat" of rationalism (Bataille 1985, 31). The contributors here explore the ways in which surrealist art and writing reflect a collective re-imagining of human-nature relations considered vital for the reconstruction of Western thought. They show how the Surrealists moved away from schisms and dualisms, towards new metaphors of human-nature hybridity, poetic ontologies of unexpected relations, transformations, and assemblages that vividly challenge old assumptions about human exceptionalism and linear progress and history, as well as mastery over nature.

Thematic organisation of the book

This volume is organised into three complementary sections: "Nature and the Poetic Imagination," "Unsettling Boundaries," and "Beyond Humanism." The organisation of the texts into these three sections prioritises major themes in surrealist ecological thought, but avoids the siloing of women and gender, people of colour, Indigeneity, and decolonial approaches as distinct conversations. Instead, these critical discussions appear throughout the volume as integral to surrealist ecology.

The first section, "Nature and the Poetic Imagination," brings into constellation four texts that explore the particular significance of poetic thinking within surrealist attempts to reconnect human-nature relations. Olivier Penot-Lacassagne presents an ecocritical reading of Antonin Artaud's experience of Mexico as the locus for the development of Artaud's *cosmopoetic* vision of a humanity revitalised by intensified relations with its earthly roots. Penot-Lacassagne emphasises the tragic dimension of Artaud's critique, how the poet's search for traditional interspecies knowledge, for a ritualistic and mystical union of humans and nature amongst the Tarahumara (Rarámuri) peoples of Mexico, brought bitter awareness of the extent of Europeanisation in post-Revolutionary Mexico. Andrea Gremels analyses the work of Suzanne and Aimé Césaire as an ecopoetic mediation of trauma surrounding the Middle Passage. With reference to Guattari's "three ecologies," Gremels reads Césaire's

poetic and critical writing as a means of addressing colonialism and enslavement in Martinique while exploring reconciliation through an ecological reharmonising of the nature-human relations that had been so violently disturbed by colonialism. Julia Drost demonstrates how Benjamin Péret's poetic text *Histoire naturelle*, illustrated by Toyen, describes the natural world as a site of vivid metamorphoses and unstable identities. She explores the epistemological current within Surrealism that considers natural history as a richly syncretic modality against classificatory boundaries. In Péret's work, natural history combines with myth, alchemy, pre-Socratic philosophy and poetic correspondences to construct an ecological vision of the surrealist marvellous. Closing this section, Victoria Ferentinou offers a reading of the creative partnership between Greek poet Nanos Valaoritis and the American painter Marie Wilson, both of whom pursued an interest in developing alternative epistemologies to examine the interconnective logic of ecology. Influenced by Indigenous American cosmologies, comparative mythology, animistic, and nondualistic modes of thought, Ferentinou presents Valaoritis' and Wilson's work as exemplary of the importance of the poetic imagination in navigating the shifting terrains of identity within the immanent condition of nature.

The next section, "Unsettling Boundaries," groups texts that consider the breakdown of distinctions between human and animal, interior and exterior, and conscious and subconscious. These texts also signal surrealist thinking about the deconstruction of boundaries between environments, such as the separation of ocean and jungle, for example, that belies their interconnectedness, and the problematising of knowledge constructs such as hierarchy in the animal kingdom. In her chapter on Jean Painlevé's early films, Christina Heflin considers how Painlevé dehierarchises species classifications through the meticulous exploration of the submarine ecosystem. Her argument revolves around Painlevé's interrogation of human superiority in the context of post-World War I trauma and how blurring the boundaries between humans and animals challenges anthropocentrism as well as the modes of ocular and rational perception privileged by Western humanism. Writing on Bona de Mandiargues, Brianna Mullin uses queer and trans methodologies to examine the snail, an intersex being, as an ecological theme in Bona's artworks. She reads gender and identity in these works as a repositioning of the human within a post-anthropocentric subjectivity. Meanwhile, Tor Scott draws on Edith Rimmington's beliefs that the mind is soluble and fluid, and that, unstable like the ocean, it negotiates unconscious thoughts and desires through dreams. Scott outlines how the works emphasise meaning in the interrelatedness of objects and themes rather than their individual significations, illustrating the phenomenological connection between the body, the mind, and water that occurs in Rimmington's works. Finally, Adam Jolles takes up Édouard Glissant's relationship with and writing about Wifredo Lam, contending that Glissant's

writing engenders new understandings of Lam's work as situated neither within global modernism nor the Négritude movement, as has been previously proposed. Instead, Jolles reads Glissant as locating Lam within a productive creolisation of decentralisation and heterogeneity, situating Lam's pictorial cultural ecology through Glissant's poetics of relation.

The final grouping, "Beyond Humanism", approaches ecology through the Surrealists' redefinition of the human on Earth and on a cosmic level. Here, Surrealism is seen as a collective attempt to seek salvation through a new ecological thinking for an endangered planet and humanity after the Second World War (1939-1945), which, shortly following the Great War (1914-1918), confirmed the destructiveness of Eurocentric Western humanism. Samantha Kavky argues that Max Ernst's and Dorothea Tanning's landscapes in Sedona, Arizona, show an increased ecological understanding, which decentres subjectivity and considers humankind from a paradoxical post-anthropocentric perspective: the cosmic insignificance of humans (in the wake of the Romantic sublime) is thwarted by the visible damage made by them on the landscape/earth. Terri Geis explores the critique of human destructiveness, so often legitimised by the mantras of linear progress and materialist well-being, in the work of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Maria Izquierdo in post-World-War-II Mexico. Marked by Mesoamerican cultures and cosmogonies, these artists sought to enact the marvellous in nature as a radical state of mind, a possibility to redefine subjectivity as a crossing/flowing between the geographical and the internal worlds; an ecological equilibrium based on multidirectional circulation. Similarly, Kristoffer Noheden and Krzysztof Fijalkowski address Breton's and other Surrealists' turn to nature and myth after the Second World War. They look at how the Surrealists viewed the environment as simultaneously poetic and imaginative as well as material and concrete. In so doing, they show how Surrealism attempts to revitalise moribund Western thinking, to conflate opposites, redefine identity and subjectivity, transform the socio-political realm and build a new ecology that echoes a complex, multilayered, more-than-human experience of the world. In the closing chapter, Anna Reid opens up a reflection on more recent implications of these topics and surrealist ecology. Through the lens of the Anthropocene, she analyses the work of contemporary artist Lucy Skaer, who revisits the use of natural materials in the work of Leonora Carrington in conjunction with Paul Nash and Herbert Read's interest in mid-twentieth-century developments in geo-sciences. Skaer reanimates fixed notions of the relationship between human and environment through a distinctly surrealist modality, exceeding a rational reading of the Anthropocene as catastrophe, and delving into the sensibilities, materialities and ecological possibilities implied by Surrealism.

Through their interrogation of the blurred boundaries between natural and cultural, the Surrealists were alerted to the sometimes marvellous, sometimes surprising, sometimes alarming realisation of continuities between human life and nature at large. Concentrating these ideas in one volume for the first time, we situate Surrealism as integral to the development of ecological thought in its eco-poetic impetus, its problematisation of Eurocentric thought, and its posthumanist inquiry. The texts published here include a range of creative practices – poetry, painting, film, mixed-media – as well as philosophy and theory, although we acknowledge the coverage of mediums, thinkers, artists, and works is not exhaustive of the Surrealists' attention to ecology and nature. We hope this collective reflection will generate many new conversations in a coalescing field that calls for expanded theorisation and scholarship, and we eagerly anticipate the discussions this volume will engender.

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Terri Geis is an art historian and independent curator. She is Visiting Associate Professor in Art and Art History at the University of New York, Abu Dhabi. Geis studies international modernisms, most specifically surrealism and its

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which has both drawn on and opposed various discourses on nature that emerged out of the European Enlightenment, and which fed into political theory, evolutionary theories, and the contested domain of the human.

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