

Alessandra Boller, Angela Krewani, Martin Kuester (eds.)

Canadian Ecologies Beyond Environmentalism

Culture, Media, Art, Ethnicities

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Canadian Ecologies Beyond Environmentalism. Culture, Media, Art, Ethnicities has its roots in an interdisciplinary project realised by the Marburg Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Marburg from 2016 to 2019. This book in particular originates from an international lecture series titled *Canadian Ecologies* (2016) to which scholars from the diverse fields of media, cultural, literary, and art historical studies contributed. Some of these lectures are now part of this book, while other articles were contributed by further national and international researchers. Regardless of their origins, all articles collected here offer diverse perspectives on the highly topical idea of Canadian Ecologies and the publication of this book would not have been possible without the readiness of both young and established scholars from different fields to contribute their ideas and findings to this unusual volume. We are thus thankful to all researchers who contributed to our lecture series and to the volume you hold in hands, and to all other scholars, students, and teachers who took part in the larger project that has by now culminated not only in an international conference (*Echoing Ecologies*, in 2019) but also in various publications (*Teaching Canadian Ecologies*, in 2018, and *Enseigner le Québec et les écologies canadiennes*, in 2019).

Since this book has been in the making for a long time and now collects articles that originate from different stages of the project, thanking all people involved in the overall process is a task that is almost impossible to fulfil. In addition to all contributors, proof-readers, and helpers, among them Walaa' Said and Klaus-Peter Profus, we would especially like to thank Natascha Vonderschmitt, who helped to organise the lecture series and coordinated the affiliated school project, Isabelle Wientzek, who designed the cover image of this book, and Johannes Altmann, whose help in preparing this publication was invaluable.

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the term 'ecology' has been applied in a variety of contexts. While it originated from the field of biology, it has more recently been aimed at the interaction of systems, whether they be technological or organic, and, in a further step, at systemic exchanges in culture, literature, and media. Contrary to systems of linear genealogies, ecology thus refers to the structural interactions between systems of different kinds concerning humans, other organisms, cultures, or technologies.

Additionally, the idea of ecology has gained prominence in the context of environmentalism. This may be due to increasingly foreboding knowledge regarding climate change and its consequences as well as heightened activism by both locally and globally organised groups, such as Fridays for Future or the more radical Extinction Rebellion. On the other side of the scale, the USA announced to resign from the 2016 Paris Climate agreement while global reports, such as the annual "Brown to Green Report" by Climate Transparency, forecast a global temperature increase of 3 °C instead of the targeted limit of 1.5°C. In addition to these already startling facts, 'Earth Overshoot Day' for 2019 was on July 29th and thus earlier than ever before. This is the day in any year when the resources the earth can regenerate in a year are exhausted and humankind starts depleting the planet's natural resources.

Facing humankind's destruction of the planet's ecological system, the term 'Anthropocene,' introduced to a wider public by Crutzen and Stoermer in the year 2000, has been created in an "attempt to name this situation" (Ivakhiv 15) and to understand the probable limits of the human species' existence on this planet. The Anthropocene is commonly understood as the current geological epoch during which humankind has had a shaping, i.e. devastating, impact on the earth and the atmosphere. Although it has been met with criticism because it seems to suggest that the actions and lifestyle of all human beings across the globe affect the climate – and the human and non-human beings living on earth who will now have to face all the consequences of these environmental changes – in equal fashion, the term Anthropocene can be regarded as a helpful concept. It is closely related to the idea of an ecology of human and non-human life, of objects and technology that are in a constant process of interaction. For this reason, Ivakhiv proposes a form of relational thinking in which objects, animals, and humans interact and develop a new form of ethics: "The effects of our actions, on the other hand, are systemic and relational, and we won't understand them unless we come to a better appreciation of how sys-

tems and relational ecologies work and of how we are thoroughly enmeshed within them” (23).

In its concern for the equality of humans and animals, and for environmental issues, his thinking comes close to the ecological approach of the philosopher Isabelle Stengers, who promotes an ‘ecology of practices’ as a “tool for thinking through what is happening” (qtd. in Rothe 53). Here, ecology appears as a practical tool to understand the connection between material objects and human beings.

According to the media philosopher Erich Hörl, ecological thinking introduces a new semantics which has branched out into different fields. He states that “there are thousands of ecologies today: ecologies of sensation, perception, cognition, desire, attention, power, values, information, participation, media, the mind, relations, practices, behaviour, belonging, the social, the political – to name only a selection of possible examples” (Hörl 1).

In an attempt to maintain the term’s multidimensionality (Hörl 33), this collection of essays intends to chart its manifold meanings as well as various newly emerging patterns of thought that go beyond the now common understanding of ecology as environmentalism. *Canadian Ecologies Beyond Environmentalism* arranges essays by international scholars according to aspects of ‘Literature And/As Cultural Ecology,’ ‘Media Ecologies,’ and ‘First Nations Ecologies.’ This division reflects the Canadian situation with its strong linkage to (discourses of) nature and wilderness and the resulting environmental concerns which are negotiated in Canadian culture and literature, the impact of ecological thinking on media theory in the tradition of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, and the growing impact of the First Nations’ thinking within ecological and (not only) environmental discourses. Despite these sub-divisions, all essays share a critical reflection of the term ecology/ies in a Canadian, and partially global, context and scope.

(Human) Ecology and the Potential of Literature as Cultural Ecology

The need for a re-evaluation of what ecology means for human beings and their position in the world becomes increasingly pressing today, with new breakthroughs in biotechnology – such as the creation of pig-human chimeras in early 2017 or, more generally speaking, the discovery and further development of CRISPR-Cas9 – and the threat of imminent failure in the fight against global warming, for example. Literature has much to offer with regard to new ecological discourses, especially in relation to ecocriticism, which Gersdorf and Mayer define as a concept that challenges “established cultural, political