

Editorial Essay

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“I don’t believe it. Those stories couldn’t happen now,” I said. He shook his head and said softly, “But someday they will talk about us, and they will say, ‘Those two lived long ago when things like that happened.’” (Silko 55)

The future has no more powerful anchor than the past because the past is the only certifiable future we have; the past is the only proof we now have that the future did, in effect, once exist. (Fuentes 338)

The dual themes of volume 21 of *UnderCurrents*, *Memories and Futurities*, were born from conversations between Sarah Iannicello and me back in 2016. Inspired by then-recent protests—notably, the tent city created by Black Lives Matter – Toronto in March and April of 2016—I was contemplating the praxis of prefiguration: the theory and action of bringing to life more ethical, equitable, and just spaces and worlds—the futures we seek to create—even if only for limited periods of time. Sarah was feeling called to look at memories—personal, collective, and intergenerational—the histories and experiences that reside deep within people, from their own lives and the lives of those who came before, and how those histories and experiences impact people in the present. We thought it would be fruitful and intriguing to bring these two concerns, both working with time, into conversation. How might memories and histories prefigure futures that we seek to create? How might ideas, expectations, and hopes for the future re-shape understandings of the past? What does it mean and look like to, in Carlos Fuentes’ words, “[r]emember the future; imagine the past” (338)?

The works in this volume, on their own and in dialogue with each other,

respond to these questions and further interrogate these themes, reflecting on the past, the future, the present, and interactions between these temporalities. As a “journal of critical environmental studies,” many of the pieces relate to environmental and more-than-human¹ memories and futurities, and all, in varying ways, pursue ethics, equity, and justice.

Our volume opens with two poems by Madeleine Lavin, “written for a former lover but never shared with the intended before they died.” As described by Lavin, “[t]hese love poems are informed by a posthuman perspective that looks at relationships between human beings and the more-than-human world, drawing on assemblage theory, environmental temporalities, and a metaphorical new materialism.”

The focus on more-than-human remembering continues in Naomi Norquay’s essay, “Rumination on a ‘fisherman’s path.’” By treating land—specifically, a “fisherman’s path”—as a palimpsest, “a piece of writing material . . . on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for other writing” (Barber 1047), Norquay unearths beaver, Indigenous, Black settler, and White settler histories of her family property in Artemesia Township, Grey

County, Ontario. Kelly King similarly re-thinks the past by unearthing hidden histories of settler family property in “Unsettling the Homestead,” an account of an art exhibit with the same title. Working from personal genealogy and Mi’kmaq histories of the Stewiacke Valley, and utilizing artforms that are common in Nova Scotian settler homes, King “interrogate[s] what it means to be a settler on Indigenous land” (17, this volume) by affirming Mi’kmaq and more-than-human presences on the land where her family resides, in what is now known as Nova Scotia. An image from “Unsettling the Homestead” adorns the cover of our volume.

Artist Angie Lea Tupper “mirrors the physicality of body memory” (8, this volume) in “Afterglow.” She has arranged a series of frames taken from a home video of her and her cousins playing at a beach into a lenticular print; the images shift as the viewer moves around the piece, calling forth questions regarding the interactions between bodily experiences, recordings, and memory. Tupper notes how “[e]ach retouched frame can only be viewed in a fugitive moment. The sequence provokes the viewer to waltz around the scene, back and forth, through impressions of time” (8, this volume).

The role of the body in memory is also a focal theme in the poems “Requiem to window sealant” by Sophia Jaworski and “Water Memory” by Jaz Papadopoulos. “ ‘Requiem to window sealant’ is an autobiographical exploration of chemical sensitivity. Rather than fram-

ing her experiences within illness or suffering, [Jaworski] gestures towards a sensory capacity, one that can produce important knowledge about the relational and disabling consequences of petrochemical worlds” (Jaworski). Following Silvia Federici, Papadopoulos works to “create a more holistic vision of what it means to be a human being” (Federici 15). “[W]riting from a place of queerness, of transness, as a first-generation Greek/Turk/Uke Canadian with chronic pain and a mood disorder,” Papadopoulos interrogates “the traumas that continue to live in [their] body—ancestral and current,” all the while insisting that “my body is not the enemy” (35, this volume).

In perhaps the most direct response to our inquiries around memories and futurities, Fernando Silva e Silva’s essay, “Chronotopographies,” builds on Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on chronotopes—objects in literature and the lived world that manifest certain combinations of time, space, and subjectivity. Through his analysis, Silva e Silva reveals how certain combinations of time, space, and subjectivity are hegemonic, and explores how “play[ing], mess[ing], and invent[ing] with . . . chronotopes” (11, this volume) through fiction can challenge these dominant chronotopes in order to create new worlds.

Oonagh Butterfield emphasizes our recurring motif of more-than-human memories and futurities in “Vascular Memory.” Attuning to the size and tempo of the *Catalpa* plant through a series of macro photographs, Butterfield contemplates what memories are held in human, plant, and multispecies bodies,

and what these bodies might carry into composing futures. My own essay, “Storying Futures of the Always-Already Extinct,” also envisions more-than-human futures. Inspired by Indigenous scholars celebrating and promoting Indigenous futurities—challenging “widespread discourse that Indigenous peoples are [always and inevitably] on the verge of extinction” (27, this volume)—I extend Gerald Vizenor’s concept of “survivance”—active and agential survival—to other-than-human animals. My aim is to utilize “survivance” to challenge similar discourses that animals are inevitably going extinct, instead encouraging the celebration and promotion of more-than-human animal futurities.

Our editorial collective is excited that our volume also includes transcripts of talks given at “Critical Theory for the Anthropocene Future,” a conference hosted by Dayna Scott and Sonia Lawrence—faculty members at Osgoode Hall Law School—in June, 2018. The organizers describe the conference as “bring[ing] together a diverse set of critical theorists . . . to tackle the pressing questions related to thriving in the Anthropocene” (Scott). Angela P. Harris calls on scholars to take indeterminacy and the unknown seriously in movements for different facets of justice—what she calls, “[x] justice movements.” Harris outlines how taking the unknown seriously meaningfully “incorporate[s] uncertainty, futurity, and humility into critical theory” (41, this volume). Usha Natarajan examines ways that “environmental change provokes a rethinking of what law is”—including for critical legal theorists—“given the significant

role of law in creating the difficulties that we face today” (44, this volume). As Natarajan writes, “the concepts that law is built on are wedded to environmental destruction” (44, this volume). And Michelle Murphy, working with the Technoscience Research Unit, provokes a similar rethinking of chemicals, rebuking gaslighting in corporate and state reporting of chemical pollution, and making explicit the relationships between chemicals, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism.

The volume closes with “Dragonfly,” Wes Brunson’s poetic “attempt to answer a question [Elizabeth] Povinelli asks in *Geontologies*—What does life desire?” Moving through moments from his life, Brunson describes how the poem blurs memory and futurity: “[t]he affective resonance between my childhood bug collection, my ethnographic fieldwork as part of my Ph.D. program in anthropology, and Povinelli’s 2016 book disrupts linear notions of time and argues that desire for difference itself produces the distinction between life and non-life.”

Disrupting linear notions of time is key to this volume of *UnderCurrents*. Remembering is not just about the past; imagining is not just about the future. Memories, futurities, and the present interweave in constructing worlds that were, worlds that are, and worlds that can be.

Notes

¹ This term comes from David Abram.

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