

## EDITORIAL ESSAY

by Jennifer Cypher and Catherine Phillips

As we put this issue together the last days of 2003 swirled around us, with all the artifice and artifacts that this time of year seems to generate. The steamy-windowed café where we planned the final week of tasks was full of holiday greenery, all artificial. Part of our conversation revolved around the artifacts still to be purchased or made for friends and family. The reality of our intimate connections with artifacts and artifice seems heightened at this time of year. We buy and bake and celebrate, undeniably caught up in webs of things and crafts and greenery (artificial or otherwise).

How did we get here? The texts and artworks within this volume present external and internal collisions of nature and non-nature and question them in various ways. When are artifacts ‘natural’ elements for humans or non-humans? How does language designate gendered bodies and human-created landscapes as natural? How do artificial landscapes reflect human ideals? Is the cultural construction of a nature unsullied by the human hand an ideological, or even practical, artifact? These are some of the questions considered from a variety of perspectives and in several different formats; they reflect the diversity and malleability of the meanings of all these terms.

Artifice means feigning (‘faking it’), and several of the pieces discuss and/or demonstrate this aspect of the term. The ability to be false is not presented in an entirely negative light; even when faced with an onslaught of fake nature or feigned identities there are many ways in which the artificial is seen as something useful, meaningful, even natural. The ability to camouflage can be a survival technique for non-humans as well as human beings, as is pointed out in Lenore Newman’s article on gender transformation. The meaning of artifice that addresses to human crafts and skills is also shown, but with a twist that acknowledges the crafts and skills of the non-human as well; again artifice is not presented as a strictly human attribute. In Aileen Penner’s ‘Cancer at Sims Creek’, a man’s ability to track bears in the midst of clear cuts is contrasted with the skill of cancer to kill him, a stark reminder that humans and nature are both skilled in destruction.

The term artifact refers to human handiwork of all kinds. A particular use of the word indicates what we humans create and leave behind, ‘historical artifacts’. Can artifacts become ‘re-natured’? Rusted cars return to their basic elements and olive oil tins nurture new plants. Matthew Cowley explains how a particular greenhouse can connect, and reconnect, us with nature and human nature in a built environment. Do artifacts have multiple lives? Bert Oldershaw changes objects found while experiencing and exploring a beach through his art, their close proximity and precise arrangement constituting a new meaning for them as found and placed objects. Even language may be understood as both an artifice and as a set of artifacts used to define and construct environments in literal and figurative ways, as is suggested in the piece by Jennifer Foster.

The articles, prose, poetry and artworks in this issue point to existing and possible intersections of artifice and artifact, the places in which these two concepts work in tandem to create meaning. We are all situated at these intersections, positioned to receive and create meanings of our own from them, with them, in spite of them. There is meaning in artificial greenery and in our exchange of various artifacts, meaning about nature and non-nature and the relationships between them. The question of what meanings can be made through living with artifice and artifacts is one posed throughout this volume, and one we invite you to pose for yourself.

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