

“to speak a true word is to transform the world”
Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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trans/formations editorial essay

How to write about trans/formations and not mention September 11th and the events that apparently ‘changed the world’? How to write about/in the aftermath of 9-11 given the media deluge, given the tendency towards sentimentalism, to ideological grandstanding, to the banal repetition of hollow words?

Back when the *UnderCurrents* Editorial Collective first sat down to decide a theme for its 11th issue—on the cusp of a new millennium—the idea of exploring the word ‘transformations’ seemed only too suitable for a journal of creative and critical environmental studies. It still does, suggesting transitions, transience, transgenders, trance, trends, new forms (or military formations?)... But the word ‘transformation’ has taken on a new significance and weight—or vacuity, depending upon one’s perspective.

Many of us find that the ‘new world order’ is all too familiar. National powers—super or otherwise—still commit atrocities against neighbours near and far, and repress internal dissent using brutal means. Poverty, injustice, and inequity still hold the vast majority of the world’s population in an unyielding grip. The various leaders of the ‘free world’ continue to prostrate themselves before the gods of the marketplace. Neo-liberal economic and political agendas are still simply ‘common-sense’ and capitalism is still the choice of champions (or so we are told).

Is trans/formation but a word game, busywork for activists and artists and all of us dreamers who won’t make a difference in the world?

We argue that there is a need for such dreaming and art and criticism and creativity—now, especially, as the possibility for dialogue is increasingly reduced, not only because of the legislative threats to civil liberties, but also due to the disturbing consensus on security. When space is not open to public debate, when minds are not open to argument, art can often find a way in. And that is why *UnderCurrents*, since its inception in 1988, has uniquely pursued a mandate of environmental thought which encompasses multiple forms of writing and art, bringing together the creative and the critical. Environmentalists have been particularly guilty of relying on a few stock—and problematic—narratives to make our arguments: the terror of environmental apocalypse being one of the most common. This is a good time to reconsider that strategy.

The writers and artists in this issue not only discuss, present and reflect environmental and social transformations through prose, poetry, artwork, photography and critical essays, they demonstrate a transformation of the discourse of environmentalism. They intervene in environmentalist approaches, they intervene in the world—some in quite material ways, such as the therapeutic touch intimately photographed by Pariss Garramone. These brief reflections on and moments of transformation that fill the following pages remind us of why we do continue to engage in the clumsy, beautiful, never-ending attempt to trans/form the world we live in.

Trans-composition

