



ART & /IN ECOLOGY

Human-Non Human Interconnections in Art, Visual Culture & Everyday Life

Site specific theory in practice in Vuosaari two-period module

Jan-April 2021

Week 3 Some Housekeeping & Questions for Feral Atlas

Schedule for Today

- 9am First thing: Division into 3 groups for field trip (based upon proximity to Vuosaari)
- 9.10-10am Group discussions of Feral Atlas
- 10.15-11.30 Guest lecture by Anthropologist and researcher of ecological policy, Eeva Berglund
- From 13.00 groups arrive at Vuosaari metro Columbus mall exit.
- Meet in Columbus mall café directly in front of the metro entrance to the mall for 15 min briefing/chat with Eeva
- 13-16.00 field trip to Vuosaari Landfill



Photo by Cindy Kohtala
<https://people.aalto.fi/eeva.berglund>

No reading homework tonight*.

Instead spend time individually or with group members collating thoughts, mind maps, sketches, soundings so far about the course, responses to Vuosaari and possible themes/questions for a project and/or methods of inquiry

* **However** if you want to read more here are two supplementary texts if you are interested in the politics of dumps and toxic waste (alongside Feral Atlas!). I have PDF's of both. Both are available in PDF online

“The Sacred and the Superfund” on the non-human restoration processes of Onondaga Lake, part of the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by first nations botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer

“A Garden or a Grave? The Canyonic Landscape of the Tijuana–San Diego Region” by Lesley Stern part of Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt *The Arts of Living on A Damaged Planet*

Change of schedule for next week

Next week:

Morning:

Lucy's overdue lecture on ecological thinking and interspecies interconnectivity

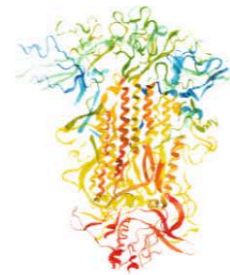
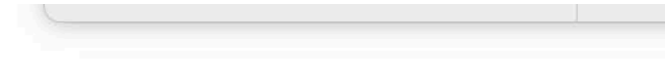
Afternoon:

Informal, in person chats with groups brainstorming and thinking through where you are at.

Next week reading:

Donna Haraway "Sympoiesis, Symbiogenesis and the Lively Arts of Staying with the Trouble" from *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Cthulucene*

Breakout group discussions of Feral Atlas



Breakout group discussions of (the remarkable!) Feral Atlas

What kinds of experiences do you have of navigating Feral Atlas as a user?

“How to repurpose a medium so often blamed for corroding our collective attention spans for new forms of academic work and public outreach? How to establish a research framework that should inspire scholarship for the next 20 years on an ephemeral platform?”

How do you understand the “Feral”

“Earlier generations of enthusiasts thought of the transformation projects of modernization as magical, that is, as acting at a remove from ordinary life. As an analytic lens, Feral Qualities turn attention to the agilities and activities of nonhumans”.

And How do you understand the “Atlas” How did you experience these experimental forms of cartography?

“From the first, we refused the common mapping genre that appears on digital sites: a GIS map that locates cases in global space. Such maps appear to hold answers when they do not”

How did you experience the experimental analytical parameters?

Detonators: Invasion, Empire, Capital, and Acceleration

Feral Atlas deploys a list of Tipper verbs to convey the work of infrastructures as they produce such rifts: besides TAKE, we use BURN, PIPE, CROWD, GRID, DUMP, and SMOOTH/SPEED. Please read these words as verbs; even GRID here means “to make a grid.”

How did you respond to the aesthetics?

In creating watercolor images of the feral entities, Anthropocene Detonator landscapes, Tipper audio and video poems, field report flow maps, and the poetry and commentary of Feral Qualities, we worked hard to hold open worlds of intertwined beauty and terror.

Breakout group discussions of (the remarkable!) Feral Atlas

What do you think of the tone and mood of the site

“Rather than a singular logic of destruction or hope with a predetermined future, the *Atlas* argues for attention to the many possibilities that coil within seeds of time. Contingencies are radical crossroads revealing alternatives.”

What did you think of the example (in the introduction to Feral Atlas text) made of Moby Dick, whales snow and whiteness?

Perhaps then, poetry and fiction can offer common ground from which to make our case for the humanistic work of words. The pleasure of reading in these genres comes from the ways words grab readers’ sensibilities and twist them in unexpected ways. Humanists, like scientists, are committed to research-based knowledge, but we often use words, like poets, to simultaneously open up and drill down into meanings rather than cordoning them off as fixed and decided. Here’s one example: Herman Melville’s exploration of the strange horror of the color white in his novel *Moby Dick*. Melville’s chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” explores an appalling, emotive whiteness, through a poetic meditation on the ineffable nature of white:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color; and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? ³¹

Galaxies, snows, atheism: in the rest of the chapter Melville swims through many more referents for whiteness, seeking some resonance to explain the effects of the whale’s lack of color on his sensibilities. The reason to open up whiteness, rather than to restrain its referents, should be clear here: it is in the ever-extended play of referents that whiteness matters. Indeed, 140 years later, Nobel Prize–winning writer Toni Morrison returned to Melville seeking more and deeper meanings of whiteness.³² Her rereading draws out a commentary on US race and racism in Melville’s exposition. Attention to the bountiful nature of words is essential to the work of poets and humanists.

What did you think of the example in the Feral Atlas and the More-than-Human Anthropocene intro text of the cane toad)

In this spirit, too, *Feral Atlas* includes Indigenous spokespeople writing across epistemological and ontological gaps. Aboriginal artist [Russell Ngadiyali Ashley](#) tells of invasive cane toads in northern Australia based on his perspective through Yolngu kinship and law. Ashley's entry centers on a "map": a painting of his people's relationship with goanna lizards, on the one hand, and cane toads, on the other. Ashley's map illuminates one of the major goals of *Feral Atlas*. Each entry presents firsthand evidence of how nonhuman feral action constitutes the Anthropocene. But the entries are not alike, in many ways, including authors' relationships to their materials. The entries reach out to each other across relations of difference, and they sometimes refuse each other's logics. To bring them together without any expectation that they would form a single common map is *Feral Atlas*'s goal. Yet the atlas does not leave the problem as worlds that never meet; it does not proceed as if *East is East and West is West*.¹⁴ Indeed, through his depiction of a fatal meeting of worlds, Ashley is already contributing to the emergence of a transcultural Anthropocene history. He shares images and stories for an audience beyond his people, and he mixes several different languages in the telling.

What did you think of the ways in which humanistic texts, social science and scientific narratives are brought together?

Humanists, including humanistic social scientists, often want words to be flexible, open signifiers, drawing readers through the charismatic and suggestive multiplicity of their referents. Many natural scientists find such looseness horrifying; science, they argue, depends on precision in definitions. Such precision, some humanists would reply, confines the research in unselfconsciously narrow ruts. This division can make it very difficult to recognize each other's scholarly expertise...

...For example, the atlas asked natural science contributors to be true to their scientific standards, even as the digital architecture allows users to read these reports in a social science frame. It seems likely that natural scientists will find the frame inadequately scientific; yet humanists and social scientists will criticize it for taking science too seriously.