



EcoFutures: Queer, Feminist and Decolonial Ecologies in Live Art
Curated by Arts Feminism Queer / CUNTemporary

August 2020

LADA Study Room Guides

As part of the continuous development of the Study Room we regularly commission artists and thinkers to write personal Study Room Guides on specific themes.

The idea is to help navigate Study Room users through the resource, enable them to experience the materials in a new way and highlight materials that they may not have otherwise come across.

All Study Room Guides are available to view in our Study Room or can be viewed and/or downloaded directly from their Study Room catalogue entry.

Please note that materials in the Study Room are continually being acquired and updated. For details of related titles acquired since the publication of this Guide search the online Study Room catalogue with relevant keywords and use the advance search function to further search by category and date.

Cover Image: Ecofutures poster. Designed by Graphicalism.

Introduction

This Study Room Guide draws on the festival [EcoFutures](http://cuntemporary.org/ecofutures-festival) [cuntemporary.org/ecofutures-festival], curated by Giulia Casalini and Diana Georgiou, as part of the activities of Arts Feminism Queer / CUNTemporary, a London-based non-profit and volunteer-led organisation founded in 2012.

With *EcoFutures* we explored urgent topics ranging from ecological disasters and their impact on climate refugees to plastic/toxic waste and the contamination of aquatic and human bodies; the relationship between increasing air pollution and human/animal diseases; high-speed capitalist consumption and the ungovernable production of trash and techno-waste; neo-colonialist soil exploitations and indigenous land reclamations; the rise of temperature and sea levels and the effects of environmental exploitations on the Global South/Majority World.

The festival took place in April 2019 and involved approximately 40 invited artists and speakers and over 30 artists selected from an open call process, which received over 300 submissions. There were artists contributing from all over the world, offering diverse and creative explorations of current ecological and environmental issues, whilst critically engaging with queer, feminist and decolonial perspectives. The project included a two-week long exhibition, workshops, a residency, an outreach programme, talks, screenings, performances, a one-day conference and a club night with live art. The programme also produced two [online articles](#), one dedicated to the [ecofetishist practice](#) of Genevieve Belleveau and Themba Alleyne, and the other to the '[lesbian moon lobster](#)' performance-fiction by Martabel Wasserman. This Study Room Guide and the dossier *Queer Feminist Decolonial Ecologies*, available to [download for free on our website](#) and on LADA's online shop Unbound are also part of this expanded programme.

EcoFutures took place across 7 venues/locations in the borough of Tower Hamlets, East London, including the Mile End Art Pavilion, the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), Queen Mary University of London, Genesis Cinema, Chisenhale Dance Space, Bethnal Green Working Men's Club and the Limehouse Townhall. The programme partnered with local organisations Artsadmin, LADA, Platform, Stitches in Time and Women's Environmental Network. *EcoFutures* has been funded by Arts Council England, Tower Hamlets Events Fund and Queen Mary University of London, with some of the travels and accommodations being covered by STEP travel grant and the British Association of American Studies.

Why do we need an intersectional approach to ecology?

In recent years we have witnessed an increasing number of artworks, conferences and festivals exploring issues related to climate change, pollution, health and sustainability. However, these programmes and works frequently employ a universalistic approach to ecology, which rarely takes into account factors of gender, race, sexuality, class and (dis)ability. As these perspectives predominantly account for a white, male, ableist and 'Global North' subject position, they often do not benefit individuals outside of these subject categories. It is without a doubt that climate change and environmental injustices are impacting every single person across the globe, yet some humans and non-human species are more likely to be affected than others.

As an organisation, we have centred our programming in methodologies that are queer, feminist and intersectional. It is for this reason that with *EcoFutures* we aimed to create a platform that would approach ecology as a subject matter whilst taking into account different axes of power and oppression. To explore this, we will highlight below some of the 'macro themes' that can be drawn from the live art practices of a selection of artists that took part in the programme. These are not exhaustive themes and in most cases they intersect or overlap with each other.

Race and Climate Change

The violent effects of colonialism and industrialisation disproportionately affect Black and Brown people, whose health and access to resources have been further compromised by structural racism. From a Majority World perspective, the neo-colonial capitalist exploitation of local natural resources and the consumer culture advanced in the Global North have contributed to the problem of land expropriation, ecological disasters and mass migrations. In most of these cases, women are most significantly impacted because of their reliance on agricultural resources and the traditional gendered roles they play as community carers, which makes them less able to escape natural disasters.

The work of artist [Eca Eps](#) *From Chibok to Calais* examines how migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe is related to the extreme exploitation of natural resources and climate change. For this piece, the artist choreographed a group of Black women from different afro-diasporic contexts to read out Google map coordinates in different languages, going through the journey of refugees from Nigeria to France. Simultaneously, the artist would hurl water-filled bags at the women as a way to simulate the violent interventions that often interrupt these journeys, whilst symbolically recalling the lack of fundamental resources, such as water, that they were deprived of.

Artist [Raisa Kabir](#) has been working across Bangladesh (in collaboration with the Chakma ethnic group, Rangamati region) and the UK (with a group of Bangladeshi women based at the Tower Hamlets' charity Stitches in Time) to empower marginalised groups of women through the learning and sharing of traditional back-strap loom weaving techniques. The artist engaged the participants in story-telling and inter-generational dialogues around the exploitation of feminised and racialised labour within the textile industry. She also created a trans-continental bridge by teaching the East London group those traditional patterns that the Chakma community shared with her for preservation purposes.

The work of writer, curator and artist [Ama Josephine Budge](#) is exemplary in the way that it adopts speculative fiction to revise present scenarios of climate change and envision future ones through performative reading sessions. Budge's sensual language and poetics offer a way for queer Black and Brown bodies to explore their relationship towards the environment in empowering and innovative ways.

Sexuality, Gender and Nature

In the domain of ecology, queer and feminism allow us to rethink sexual practices by taking into account sustainability and notions of care in relation to our desires. These perspectives allow us to formulate embodied and conceptual solutions to the ecological crisis through a sensual communion with nature. Ecosexuality, and its pioneers [Beth Stephens & Annie Sprinkle](#), consider nature not as a 'mother', but as a 'lover' – therefore challenging the idea that nature will always be there to serve us unconditionally. In this respect, it is our duty to fight for the preservation of nature and to defend it against abuses.

[Zheng Bo](#)'s work *Pteridophilia* is inspired by the concept of ecosexuality as a political tool. The artist depicts young Asian men engaging in sensual and sexual activities with indigenous plants in Taiwan. This highly performative expression of desire blurs the boundaries between performance for camera and video art. In this work, the artist also makes a statement against colonisation and around what is deemed as 'natural' (e.g. eating plants) or 'unnatural' (e.g. making love to them).

In a 4-year long project, the artist [Niya B](#) produced a non-hierarchical and gender-neutral family of approximately 400 Aloe Vera plants grown with asexual reproduction, which were then adopted by people who would choose for them a gender-ambiguous name. Following this project, in her performance *Collective Lover* she explores the potential of 'ecoromance' and the possibilities of an 'ecogender' identity – a term inspired by the artist [Graham Bell Tornado](#).

[Liz Rosenfeld](#)'s on-going project *Glimpse of Manipulated Stills* situates the artist's fully naked queer body against the backdrop of various natural landscapes, ruins and 'man'-made structures in order to figuratively embrace them with her skin. In this performance for the lens, the artist captures a journey through nature that acknowledges both its force and beauty, as well as the decline it has to endure.

Internal Ecologies

Another example of ecofeminist thinking applied to sex-positive practices is the re-appropriation of female ejaculation (and in general of female body fluids) that have been eclipsed after centuries of patriarchal oppression, leading to a progressive disconnection with women's 'internal ecology'. When a female body ejaculates, it makes a statement about its own agency and bio-power which is not restricted to its reproductive capacity. Caring for it and rediscovering its potential and value is key for the ways we relate to the environment.

In the work *Beauty Kit* by artist [Isabel Burr Raty](#) the artist presents a range of beauty products that are produced from women's fluids, extracted at a dedicated feminist 'farm'. In her performative lecture, the artist rehearses questions regarding women's bodies and capitalist labour.

[Arise Amazons](#) (Karin Victorin and Rebecca Tiger) reflect on the parallels between 'inner climate' and 'outer climate'. With the use of a real Swedish 'cuntsauna' [*snippetsauna*] of their own design, they create a burlesque-inspired experience on stage for the liberation of the yoni.

Similarly, the collective [Intimate Animals](#) free their bodily fluids from gender hierarchies through a ritual that draws from Viennese Actionist aesthetics. The performance involves a symbolic mutilation of genitals and cutting of fruits, whose juices are sexually merged.

Health and Ecology

As we have seen, queer and feminist communities cannot reproduce discourses on sexuality and ecology without also seriously considering aspects surrounding wellbeing and health. Human and non-human health are increasingly compromised by air pollution, land toxicity and invasive technologies. From a human perspective, very often we underestimate the impact that digital technologies have on our own physical and mental health. These are accompanied by accelerated capitalist lifestyles, digitally distanced 'social' relations (that in some cases can isolate individuals even more from each other) and unsustainable working conditions. The way we experience our bodies and affects, both privately and as part of activist, sexual and creative communities, are an integral part of larger synergies of care in a global ecological landscape.

The work *Ophelia* by [Nadja Verena Marcin](#) investigates the parallels and biases between natural and female 'hysteria' by connecting the historical psychiatric medicalisation of hysteric women, such as the figure of a drowning woman best known from Shakespeare's literary works, its contemporary meme reproduction and the way that natural disasters are associated with ideas of unruly femininity.

[Tabita Rezaire](#) has been exploring the holistic healing qualities of rituals and collective energetic fields in her performances and digital art. Her contemporary digital environments merge past and present practices of well-being through ancient Egyptian traditions, nature-based spirituality and Black epistemologies. The artist aims to reclaim the body as a space of pleasure and connection with natural elements associated with femininity such as the Moon and the water.

In a similar vein, in her *Sonic Healing* performance, artist [Fallon Mayanja](#) explores through a live Afrofuturistic visual and sonic journey the political and cosmic connections of brown and queer bodies to the elements, the planet and the universe.

[Ivy Monteiro](#) and [Javier Stell-Fresquez](#)' *Mother The Verb* performance work explores the redemptive potential of motherhood from an indigenous/of colour perspective. Their work investigates the effects of colonisation and industrialisation on bodies and natural resources, and how contaminations and land exploitations directly affect our health and the way we relate to our (chosen or biological) families and kinships.

On a speculative take, queer and feminist art has been able to reflect upon, as well as create new post-apocalyptic visions, about the future of humanity by pushing the damages of heteronormative, patriarchal, colonial, white supremacist and capitalist violence towards its most extreme conditions. In the videogame *Redshift and Portalmetal* (which can also be played online at micharoja.itch.io/redshift-and-portalmetal) [micha cárdenas](#) has situated Roja (a trans of colour character) at the backdrop of a dystopic landscape inflicted by extreme climate change. Audiences engage with this game by playing as the main character, following a storyline of migration towards other planets, infused with trans poetics.

Beyond the Human

Queer and feminist theories allow us to think of nature in non-hierarchical ways by decentring the human from its universal subject position. These strategies open up the potential for speculative scenarios based on ideas of co-existence with non-human identities. The idea of fixed identities is further deconstructed through an ecological framework, where essentialist categories centred on human privilege fall apart. For instance, the human can intersect with non-human entities and adopt perspectives that can relate to the bacterial, the animal, the geological or the botanical.

In the *Falling Birds* series of artworks and performative readings, [Helena Hunter](#) pays homage to extinct bird species found in the collections of the Horniman Museum and Gardens. The artist photographed x-rays of these taxidermy birds and then analysed these intimate images in a space of empathic connection in which she would write poetry 'with' them.

[Quimera Rosa](#)'s ongoing *Trans*Plant* project uses transfeminist (bio)hacking practices in order to speculatively and scientifically explore a human-plant hybridisation and transition process. This process involves DIY workshops, collaborations with scientists and pharmaceutical companies, the creation of open source toolkits, performances (such as injecting chlorophyll intravenously) and installations or video works.

[Mary Maggic](#) has been researching the effects that hormones play in our current landscape. Through performances, digital art and lab research, the artist thinks through the framework of the 'alien', the feminised body, the gender ambiguous and other queer embodiments to analyse how environmental toxicity is mutating and affecting our bodies and potentially 'queering' them.

How to use this Study Room Guide?

This Study Room Guide will serve as a reference for artists, researchers and the 'live art curious' to navigate titles related to the intersections of live art, ecology and queer, feminist, decolonial and critical race perspectives.

The collection of titles has been compiled by Giulia Casalini and Diana Georgiou, and it formed the background research to the project *EcoFutures*. Additional titles were recommended by a number of participants of the programme. We would like to thank for their suggestions: Cecilia Cavalieri, Izzy Bravo, Isabel Burr Raty, Joseph Morgan Schofield, Amanda Hohenberg, Anna Nagele, Landon Newton,

Javier Stell-Frésquez, Nadja Verena Marcin, Annie Sprinkle & Beth Stephens, Aleksandra Wojt, Fernando Schrupp, Ama Josephine Budge, João Florêncio, Zheng Bo, Liz Rosenfeld, Niko Wearden.

The selection of titles includes resources on or by live art practitioners such as Guillermo Gomez-Peña's *New World Border* or Kira O'Reilly's *Untitled (Bodies)* as well as books that specifically relate to the field of live art, visual arts and performance studies such as the edited volumes *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today* or *Readings in Performance and Ecology*. The selection also contains more theoretical titles with an investment in ecological discourses, that are often referenced or used in live art – even though they are not strictly related to the field – such as Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* and Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism* or Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species*).

We therefore divide the selection into two parts: 'eco live art' titles and 'eco theory & narrative', organised by date of publication and author. Titles that are available in LADA's Study Room are indicated with their catalogue number and can be found on the top of the lists.

ECO LIVE ART – LADA Study Room titles

Title: Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, and Exile
Author: Jane Blocker
Publisher: Duke University Press
Date: 1999
Format: Publication
Reference No: P2124

Title: Ethno-Techno
Author: Guillermo Gómez-Peña
Publisher: Routledge
Date: 2005
Format: Publication
Reference No: P0674

Title: Exhale
Author: Virtual Migrants
Publisher: Virtual Migrants Association
Date: 2007
Format: DVD
Reference No: D0928

Title: Love Art Lab
Author: Annie Sprinkle, Elizabeth Stephens & Guttersaint
Publisher: Provocateur Media
Date: 2008
Format: DVD
Reference No: D2191

Title: Readings in Performance and Ecology
Editor: Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan
Date: 2012
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3773

Title: Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination
Author: Nicole Seymour
Publisher: University of Illinois Press
Date: 2013
Edition/Format: Publication
Reference No: P3762

Title: Enacting Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Indigenous Performance
Editor: Birgit Däwes, Marc Maufort
Publisher: Presses Interuniversitaires Europeennes
Date: 2014
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3903

Title: The Ethics of Art: Ecological Turns in the Performing Arts
Editor: Guy Cools, Pascal Gielen
Publisher: Valiz
Date: 2014
Format: Publication
Reference No: P2530

Title: Animal Acts: Performing Species Today
Editor: Una Chaudhuri, Holly Hughes
Publisher: University of Michigan Press
Date: 2014
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3463

Title: Rambles with Nature
Author: Sheila Ghelani
Publisher: Sheila Ghelani
Date: 2015
Format: Publication
Reference No: P2763

Title: Animals
Editor: Filipa Ramos
Publisher: Whitechapel Gallery
Date: 2016
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3739

Title: Bioart Kitchen: Art, Feminism and Technoscience
Author: Lindsay Kelley
Publisher: I.B. Tauris
Date: 2016
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3324

Title: Kira O'Reilly: Untitled (Bodies)
Editor: Harriet Curtis and Martin Hargreaves
Publisher: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect Books
Date: 2017
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3415

Title: Trans*Plant: My Disease is an Artistic Creation

Author: Quimera Rosa
Publisher: Quimera Rosa
Date: 2017
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3936

Title: Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance: Politics, Ecologies and Perceptions
Author: Silvia Battista
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan
Date: 2018
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3648

ECO LIVE ART – Further Reading

Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, eds. (2002) *Land/Scape/Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Wallace Heim, Claire Waterton, Bronislaw Szerszynski, eds. (2002) *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance*. *Sociological Review*, 51(s2).

Timothy Morton (2007) *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Amanda Boetzkes (2010) *The Ethics of Earth Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sacha Kagan (2012) *Toward Global (Environ)Mental Change: Transformative art and cultures of sustainability*. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation. Available at:
https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/Toward_Global_Environ_Mental_Change.pdf

TJ Demos, ed. (2013) *Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, *Third Text*, 27(1). Available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ctte20/27/1>

Trevor Schoonmaker (2013) *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (2015) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. London: Open Humanities Press. Available at:
<https://archive.org/details/ArtInTheAnthropocene>

T.J. Demos (2015) 5. Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Gynocene: The Many Names of Resistance. *Still Searching...* Available at: https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/27015_anthropocene_capitalocene_gynocene_the_many_names_of_resistance

Stacy Alaimo (2016) *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/exposed>

T.J. Demos (2016) *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and The Politics Of Ecology*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Patricia C. Phillips, ed. (2016) *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*, New York and London: Prestel Publishing.

Christina Sharpe (2016) *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Linda Stupart (2016) *VIRUS*, London: Arcadia Missa.
<http://arcadiamissa.com/product/virus/>

Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
<https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-extractive-zone> Available at (extract):
https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-0-8223-6897-7_601.pdf

Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens (2017) *The Explorer's Guide to Planet Orgasm*, Emeryville: Greenery Press.
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Explorers-Guide-Planet-Orgasm-Every/dp/0937609854>

Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, eds. (2018) *The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions*, *Third Text*, 32(2-3). Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ctte20/32/2-3>

Kerry Oliver-Smith, ed. (2018) *The World to Come: Art in the Age of the Anthropocene*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

ECO THEORY & NARRATIVE - LADA Study Room titles

Title: The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution
Author: Carolyn Merchant
Publisher: HarperOne
Date: 1990
Format: Publication
Reference No: P2509

Title: When Species Meet
Artist/Author: Donna J. Haraway
Publisher: University of Minnesota Press
Date: 2007
Edition/Format: Publication
Reference No: P3658

Title: Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect
Author: Mel Y. Chen
Publisher: Duke University Press Books
Date: 2012
Edition/Format: Publication
Reference No: P3760

Title: Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide
Author: Boaventura de Sousa Santos
Publisher: Routledge
Date: 2014
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3755

Title: Indigenous Species
Author: Khairani Barokka
Publisher: Tilted Axis Press
Date: 2016
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3703

Title: The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins

Author: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing
Publisher: Princeton University Press
Date: 2017
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3918

Title: Xenofeminism
Author: Helen Hester
Publisher: Polity Press
Date: 2018
Format: Publication
Reference No: P3759

ECO THEORY & NARRATIVE - Further Reading

Ursula K. LeGuin (1986) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Grove Atlantic. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/17313163/The_Carrier_Bag_Theory_of_Fiction_-_Ursula_K._Le_Guin

Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) *Women who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Londa Sshiebinger (1993) *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Boston: Beacon Press.

David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995) *Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11(2), pp. 113-122. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/iBCS2>

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Winona LaDuke (2002) *The Winona Laduke Reader: A Collection of Essential Writings*. Beverly, MA: Voyageur Press.

Val Plumwood (2002) *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature*. London and New York: Routledge.

Winona LaDuke (2005) *Recovering the Sacred: the Power of Naming and Claiming*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Joyce Audry Green, ed. (2007) *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, ed. (2007) *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. London: Verso Books.

Scott Herring (2007) *Out of the Closets, Into the Woods: RFD, Country Women, and the Post-Stonewall Emergence of Queer Anti-urbanism*, *American Quarterly*, 59(2), pp. 341-372

Lucas Cassidy Crawford (2008) Transgender without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36(3/4), pp. 127-143. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27649790?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A3a6b29c0e2981715cf69fae5ccf709ce&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

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Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano, eds. (2015) Queer Inhumanisms, *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21(2-3).

Line Henriksen, Marietta Radomska and Margrit Shildrick, eds. (2015). Missing Links and Non/human Queerings. *Somatechnics*, 5(2). Available at: <https://www.euppublishing.com/toc/soma/5/2>

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