N

Novel[i]

Christoph Rupprecht[ii]

"*We have grown up under a shadow, and if we sometimes resemble fungus it should be taken as a credit to our adaptability*."[1]

Early in my journey as a scholar fascinated by novel ecosystems in cities[2], I was told by a white senior scientist in Australia that the places I was interested in studying -- vacant lots, road verges, cracks in the pavement, all teeming with plants not supposed to be there -- were dangerous, worthless, and "should be sprayed" with herbicides. Having grown up in continental Europe, with its long history of plants arriving intentionally or unintentionally from all over the world, climbing up the roots of colonialism and imperialism since the Roman Empire,[3] I was shocked. The native vs. alien, or Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous divide being much less prominent outside of specialist circles, new arrivals are often simply called neophytes (or staple food). Likewise, an Australian identification course on invasive weeds turned out to be almost a taxonomic repetition of my European undergraduate botany course. I knew these plants, but during this unexpected re-encounter, the affection I remembered hidden in my European lecturer's voice stood in stark contrast to the feelings among instructors and participants in the invasives training course: a mix of hostility, grudging respect for their hardiness, and sense of fighting a just war protecting native Australian bushland from alien invasion. At the time, I felt unable to point out the irony of white settlers standing on unceded Indigenous lands, using Western scientific authority to decide which species belonged, and which was out of place.[4] During the following months of literature review, learning about the very real, extreme and wide-ranging ecological impacts of ongoing plant and animal introductions under colonialism, imperialism and capitalism,[5] I struggled to convince myself that measures attempting to eradicate non-natives were reasonable, scientifically supported practices. Even if, as I couldn't help but notice, the vocabulary of invasive species "management" all too often resembled the language I had been taught to recognize and resist in school in order to never repeat German history.[6] And even if the apparatus of eradication trying to stop the invasives-mediated ecological effects of capitalism was itself seamlessly integrated into the capitalist system, through the corporations producing the pesticides.

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[1] Flynn, *Solarpunk*.
[2] Hobbs et al., "Managing the whole landscape."; Kowarik, "Novel urban ecosystems."
[3] Witcher, "On Rome's ecological contribution."
[4] Seth, "Putting knowledge in its place."
[5] Beinart and Middleton, "Plant Transfers in Historical Perspective: A Review Article."; Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*.
[6] Warren, "Perspectives on the `alien' versus `native' species debate."

I never succeeded in convincing myself. In intense months of fieldwork spent documenting spontaneous vegetation across Brisbane, Australia and Sapporo, Japan, the plants taught me something I would only later discover as an emerging topic across a variety of fields: more-than-human agency is real, and unfolding in everyday life before our eyes.[7] Portrayed in this photo essay without captions, free to engage with viewers in their own way, the plants I met shaped and transformed spaces, shaped and transformed me, now-entangled agencies leaving me a different person. Yet acknowledging this entanglement of multispecies agencies brings with it challenging new questions. If invasion ecology is a result of more-than-human agency, what new perspectives does this open on past and present species introductions?[8] How to rethink what it means to be human (across what makes us different, and what unites us), if our actions and their consequences are not ours alone? How to engage with, or interface with, other agencies?

Only some of this is novel ground. As Australia burns in climate change-induced bushfires at the end of 2019, notions of settler science having all the answers, its truths self-evident and above politics, are crumbling. Turns towards Indigenous knowledges across disciplines in search of new alliances are signs of change and hope, [9] although care and humbleness are vital in these engagements.[10] Yet I believe that acknowledging novelty in an encounter allows those involved to remember that care and humbleness are wise ways to proceed, be it with shadow places, more-than-human agency, a new global climate, or modes of knowing that are not novel, but novel to many encountering them. Novelty implies mistakes, and invites forgiveness: essential elements of care-fully engaging with shadow places. Admitting defeat can open up new paths, as the question of "Now what?" appears.[11] No wonder then that solarpunks, self-identifying members of a novel literary movement imagining futures worth living under or after climate change, call for moving quietly, and planting things.[12] And maybe novel ecosystems, shadows teeming with life out-of-place, hold some of the clues for re-imagining the cities they emerged from as more-than-human, co-created places.[13] Might a shadow map of spontaneous vegetation in Australia next to the more familiar ones of forests and crops further the case 'against nativeness, but toward an open future'?[14]

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[7] Dwiartama and Rosin, "Exploring agency beyond humans."; Head, Atchison and Phillips, "The distinctive capacities of plants."; Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency."
[8] Bocci, "TANGLES OF CARE."
[9] Reo and Ogden, "Anishnaabe Aki."
[10] Barker and Pickerill, "Doings with the land and sea."; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
[11] Osborne, "For still possible cities."
[12] Hudson, "On the Political Dimensions of Solarpunk."
[13] Houston et al., "Make kin, not cities!"
[14] Head, "Decentring 1788: Beyond Biotic Nativeness."

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