

The Possibilities and Potential Pitfalls of Contemporary Global Environmental(ist) Imaginaries: The *Human/Nature* Project and Philip Krohn's *EARTH Sticker*

Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

In the past decade, scholars in environmental literary and cultural studies have begun to address some of the key questions and fundamental challenges identified by the contributors to the 1999 *PMLA* "Forum on Literatures of the Environment" (Arnold et al.). In an attempt to expand or even transcend the problematic limits of first-generation North American ecocriticism, which were the result of its historical and institutional origins in the early to mid-1990s as well as the related initial emphases on nature writing, place-based aesthetics, and interpretive models centered around the concepts of place or the bioregion, critics such as Lawrence Buell, Patrick Murphy, or Ursula Heise have begun to ponder the significance of the postcolonial and the global from various theoretical and critical perspectives. Buell's ecocritical work in the past fifteen years, for instance, has gradually shifted from an increasingly inclusive canon of American environmental writing and a preoccupation with a national Thoreauvian tradition to an expansive view of "environmentality" in a global context.¹ His recent considerations of and contributions to the shift from place to planet in ecocritical discourse, especially as outlined in the third chapter of *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) and in his essay "Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of U.S. Environmental Imagination on a Planetary Scale" (2007), represent persuasive arguments for the necessity for such a critical undertaking while simultaneously suggesting the considerable theoretical difficulties that such projects necessarily entail. Heise, in "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies" (2008) and especially in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), has most likely offered the most cogent and comprehensive solutions to this conundrum to date. Her deft application of risk theory to classic texts such as Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), for example, has opened new possibilities for ecocritical scholarship that carefully considers the processes of globalization as well as its numerous consequences and that reflects "the urgency of developing an ideal of 'eco-cosmopolitanism,' or environmental world citizenship, building on

¹ It is important to note, however, that Buell's perspective, even in his early landmark study *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), is far from parochial and, for instance, uses comparisons between several national traditions as well as canonical postcolonial texts in order to examine basic concepts and approaches available to ecocritics.

recuperations of the cosmopolitan project in other areas of cultural theory” (Heise, *Sense* 10).

Heise’s rigorous assessment of contemporary “deterritorialized” or global environmental imaginaries in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* is also significant inasmuch as it does not only apply its comparatist and interdisciplinary theoretical framework to an exemplary body of literary texts, but also examines how other forms of artistic creation attempt to move, formally and ideologically, beyond the narrow confines of place and place-based aesthetics (*Sense* 10). In addition to novels such as Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990) or Richard Powers’s *Gain* (1998) as well as poems such as John Cage’s “Overpopulation and Art” (1992, 1994), she analyzes, for instance, the experimental documentary *Der Ursprung der Nacht (Amazonas-Kosmos)* (The Origin of Night [Amazon-Cosmos]) (1973-77) by the German artist Lothar Baumgarten (*Sense* 91-115), the line of HazMaPo toy figures by UNKL and the “HAZMAT Crew” by toy manufacturer Playmobil (*Sense* 119-21), or John Klima’s installation *Earth* (2002) (*Sense* 65-67). Heise’s engagement with these particularly illuminating examples of the new and often hard-to-categorize cultural forms engendered by the numerous processes of globalization demonstrates that sustained ecocritical investigations of the global necessarily have to move across traditional disciplinary boundaries. More specifically, further explorations of global environmental imaginaries will, as *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* compellingly shows, most likely also have to consider the partly neglected areas of art as well as what has variously been referred to as earth, land, or environmental art.

While selected genres, periods, or artists as well as some of the insights of art history, theory, and criticism, for instance with regard to landscape painting, have been cited in several major debates by environmental literary and cultural scholars,² it seems that a comprehensive ecocritical stocktaking of the vital and ongoing discourse on earth, land, or environmental art has yet to occur. Over the past fifty years, art historians, critics, and curators have—in exhibitions, catalogues, reviews, as well as in specialist and academic publications—grappled with many of the same concerns and problems as ecocritics,³ and to revisit these

² For instance, Alison Byerly’s essay “The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque and the National Park System,” which selectively engages with the tradition of the picturesque (thereby contributing to the wilderness debate of the 1990s), is included in one of the key texts of the early ecocritical canon, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). In her book-length contribution to contemporary ecofeminist discourse, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (2000), Stacy Alaimo briefly discusses one of the untitled “earth-body sculptures” by Ana Mendieta (133), whose work has also been regarded as earth or environmental art.

³ A cursory review of the primary documents collected in anthologies such as Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis’s *Land and Environmental Art* (1998) suggests a treasure-trove of intriguing ideas. While some of the excerpts contained in the volume by Kastner and Wallis will be familiar to environmental literary and cultural scholars—Henry David Thoreau, Kate Soper, or Simon Schama—the selections from the writings of artists such as Robert Smithson, James Turrell, or

critical projects might be a boon to ecocriticism in general and green cultural studies in particular. The reverse is, however, also true, albeit on a different scale. As Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher point out in their introduction to *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (2009), what is still missing is a “‘greening’ of art history” that draws on the critical and theoretical contributions made by ecocritics in the past two decades (3). Braddock and Irmscher also argue that “[i]n the current age of globalization, an ‘ecocritical insurgency’ in art history need not be limited to North American topics” (14). They therefore expect “a more global rethinking of art history’s horizon” in the future (15), a critical project also already suggested by Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

This essay is meant as an intervention at the gradually emerging juncture between the current ecocritical assessments of the global and the “‘greening” of art history and criticism described by Braddock and Irmscher. It explores how contemporary works of art such as *EARTH Sticker* (2005) by the North American artist Philip Krohn as well as artist residency and exhibition projects such as *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet* (2008) parse and represent the political, socioeconomic, cultural, and especially environmental implications of globalization. *EARTH Sticker* and two contributions to *Human/Nature*, the sculptures *Sapukay: Cry for Help* and *Teko Mbarate: Struggle for Life* by the Portuguese artist and current San Francisco Bay Area resident Rigo 23, engage with different dimensions of globalization and global environmentality, and they employ rather different aesthetic strategies to convey the results of their engagements, and yet both are equally invested in probing the shifting conditions on which the increasingly globalized production of contemporary art is always predicated. As Krohn and the contributors to *Human/Nature* demonstrate, even art that is created in an environmentalist context (*Human/Nature*) or with an ostensible activist purpose (*EARTH Sticker*) cannot escape this double bind. To identify this dilemma is not to dismiss Krohn’s or Rigo 23’s works as hypocritical or self-contradictory artistic failures, but to highlight precisely these important insights with regard to material and institutional conditions, current means and sites of cultural production, and technologies for the dissemination of information for other global environmental imaginaries and particularly for further ecocritical investigations. Krohn’s and Rigo 23’s works of art foreground and self-consciously engage with these dimensions, which are often erased from the equation and from critical analysis. They develop deterritorialized imaginaries while simultaneously exploring the multiple connections between their artistic creations and the global conditions that make the production and dissemination of these works possible in the first place.

Nancy Holt as well as critics such as Alan Sonfist might offer productive perspectives for future ecocritical investigations.

These ever-changing conditions have been most astutely and prominently mapped by Arjun Appadurai, whose *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) provides a dynamic albeit “elementary framework” for mapping “[t]he new global cultural economy [that] has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)” or, for that matter, in terms of many of the other models that were used until the early to mid-1990s (33, 32). One possibility to understand the “fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics,” Appadurai argues, “is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) *ethnoscapes*, (b) *mediascapes*, (c) *technoscapes*, (d) *financescapes*, and (e) *ideoscapes*” (33). To Appadurai, these “landscapes” are “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors,” and they are “fluid” and “irregular,” subject to and instigating incessant change (33).

As a highly commodified work of art that is, among other aspects, marketed and sold online, *EARTH Sticker* depends on several of the global flows of people, information, technology, capital, and ideas that Appadurai lists, especially the interlocking *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, and *mediascapes*. Krohn not only harnesses these flows in order to generate funds for local and regional environmental campaigns, but he also emphasizes the dependency of his project on these potentially disruptive *-scapes* with ironic excess. The Portuguese artist Rigo 23 and his indigenous collaborators on the sculptures for *Human/Nature* likewise explore the contemporary “complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” by tapping into several global flows and by reinscribing exploitative and destructive First World technologies and ideologies with environmental(ist) imaginaries that considerably negotiate multiple perspectives on pressing concerns from vastly different geographical, socioeconomic, and political positions.

Rigo 23’s contributions to *Human/Nature* and Krohn’s *EARTH Sticker* both continue and depart from the traditions of what has been referred to as earth, land, or environmental art.⁴ These three designations have been commonly but inconsistently evoked in discussions of large-scale works of art such as *Spiral Jetty* (1970) by sculptor and painter Robert Smithson, *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76) by land artist, photographer, and film maker Nancy Holt, *The Lightning Field* (1977) by sculptor Walter De Maria, and numerous other well-known “earthworks” that have been created in often remote locations across the globe since the 1960s. This narrow definition and first generation of earth art, with its distinct emphasis on usually site-specific investigations of the intersections between nature, culture, and history through the use of natural materials (rocks, sand, vegetation, and so

⁴ The short historical survey presented in this paragraph is based on the overviews given by Kastner and Wallis, Malpas, and Tiberghien.

on) and changes to the original landscape on a major scale, is almost synonymous, if not identical with, the one traditionally reserved for yet another contested category, land art. Indeed, some art historians often seem to use the terms interchangeably,⁵ whereas other critics, to heighten to the general terminological confusion, propose additional (and even slightly misleading) terms, for instance “environmental art” or “ecological art,” in order to pigeonhole the various tendencies in the art world that have aimed to buck rampant consumerism and its ugly outgrowths (particularly in the culture industry) and to contribute to the emerging discourses on ecology and the environment for the past several decades.⁶ This broader definition has also been applied to environmentally or ecologically concerned works of art that have been displayed in galleries or museums since the late 1960s and that are usually not as site-specific or ephemeral as, for example, the delicate creations by British artist Andy Goldsworthy, which, in true ecological fashion, often exist only long enough to be documented.⁷ Thus, as Jeffrey Kastner notes,

The range of work referred to as Land Art and Environmental Art encompasses a wide variety of post-war artmaking. It includes site-specific sculptural projects that utilize the materials of the environment to create new forms or to adjust our impressions of the panorama; programmes that import new, unnatural objects into the natural setting with similar goals; time-sensitive individual activities in the landscape; collaborative, socially aware interventions. (12)

While indebted to several distinct movements in land art, the works of art by Krohn and the contributors to *Human/Nature* belong primarily to Kastner’s last category. Engaging with deterritorialization and globalization and thereby extending the aesthetic and ideological limits of earlier land art, these artists must reconsider understandings of situatedness and site-specificity. With locations emerging and disappearing at the various disjunctures among the global flows of people, information, technology, capital, and ideas, Krohn, Rigo 23, and others have to come to terms with constantly evolving intermediate spaces between the local and the global, between, for instance, a physical exhibition site such as a museum

⁵ William Malpas, for example, writes that “The term ‘land art’ is used here [i.e., in *Land Art in the U.S.A.*] as a shorthand to refer to many kinds of art, including landscape art, earth art, earthworks, nature art, green or ecological art, and installations” (24).

⁶ The quotations are taken from Gilles A. Tiberghien’s *Land Art* (1995). The title of the volume unequivocally indicates Tiberghien’s preferences with regard to terminology, but it is quite telling that he, like many other art historians working on earthworks and land art, first needs to clarify his choice (cf. 13). The adjective *environmental* in this context may lead to misunderstandings inasmuch as art historians also specifically use it to discuss works of art that create spaces or environments that visitors can enter.

⁷ For an excellent selection of early photographs and several compelling perspectives on Goldsworthy’s art and documentary practices see, for example, *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue*, a project by the artist, the Crichton Foundation, and the University of Glasgow’s Crichton Campus and Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII).

and a multimedia online exhibition gallery that can be accessed from anywhere in the world at all times.

Billed as “a pioneering artist residency and collaborative exhibition project” “organized by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), in partnership with the international conservation organization Rare” (“About”), *Human/Nature* very much depends upon and contributes to the landscapes described by Appadurai.⁸ Indeed, the exhibition of “new commissioned, site-specific works by Mark Dion, Ann Hamilton, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Marcos Ramírez ERRE, Rigo 23, Dario Robleto, Diana Thater, and Xu Bing,” which was on display in San Diego between August 17, 2008, and February 1, 2009, as well as in Berkeley between April 1, 2009, and June 28, 2009 (“About”), represents, due to its institutionalized setting, perhaps the most tangible nodal point where several of the constantly changing global flows temporarily intersect or surface in their very failure to connect. The multiple configurations of ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes that inform the *Human/Nature* project become, however, also visible in other unexpected ways, for instance when it comes to the eight artists funded by the BAM/PFA and the MCASD.

The participants, who received financial assistance from the two museums as well as logistical and scientific support from Rare and who were issued artistic cartes blanches to explore, sometimes intermittently over the course of several years, the changes and threats to one UNESCO World Heritage site of their choice, are, in many respects, the beneficiaries of globalization processes. Backed by an increasingly globalized infrastructure of art schools, museums, foundations, and other institutions that often encourage transnational migration to cultural centers such as the North American metropolis, the artists who were chosen to contribute to *Human/Nature* generally enjoy privileged positions as cosmopolitan public intellectuals and as highly skeptical chroniclers of the very socioeconomic, political, and ecological developments on which their positions are predicated. The limited *ethnoscape*—Appadurai defines this term as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (33)—they inhabit is, for the most part, characterized by choice and possibility; in contrast to, for instance, the harsh diasporic experiences of third-world workers in search of economic opportunity and social mobility in the West, their temporary relocations to UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Komodo National Park or Waterton Glacier International Peace Park are set up through Rare’s global network and collaboratively financed by the MCASD and BAM/PFA. Similarly, all artists were encouraged by the organizers of *Human/Nature* to collaborate with the local populations at their respective sites. To enter and explore vastly different *ethnoscapescapes* on their own

⁸ Factual information on *Human/Nature* in this and in the following paragraphs are taken from the project’s website, the printed catalogue to the exhibition, as well as Laurel Braitman’s concise insider’s contribution in *Orion*. Braitman’s article sparked my interest in this project.

terms was yet another choice, and the rather different results of the residencies reflect the extent to which participants used their privileged positions to interact with local inhabitants or scientists, similarly privileged transnational subjects in their own right.

The results of these interactions were usually displayed on site, that is, in or near the parks where the artists worked on their projects as well as in exhibitions staged at the two museums on the West Coast. Although the actual exhibitions were restricted to these local venues, the website that was created by the project's organizers and that offered further information on *Human/Nature* extended its reach well beyond the temporally and spatially limited scope of UNESCO World Heritage sites or the BAM/PFA and MCASD. Partly due to its inclusion of multimedia content such as photographs or audio and video files, the website suggests the project's imbrication in several global *mediascapes*, a term that Appadurai uses to "refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media" (35).

The complex intersections among this and some of the other landscapes are also very much apparent in Rigo 23's contributions to *Human/Nature*. His collaborative explorations of the numerous interstices between local and global environmental imaginaries, *Teko Mbarate: Struggle for Life* and *Sapukay: Cry for Help*, offer necessarily limited but nonetheless promising visions of an ecologically savvy, environmentally aware, and socially just work of art that gestures beyond the local or, rather, investigates global concerns with specific places as starting points. These two sculptures are nuanced responses to the Atlantic Forest South-East Reserves in Brazil and particularly to its inhabitants and, at the same, a self-implicating analysis of global connections via numerous landscapes and across different registers. Between 2005 and 2008, Rigo 23, whose work has usually been more concerned with the social rather than with the ecological,⁹ traveled four times to Brazil, where he not only explored the coastal rainforests, but also, according to the project summary on the website for *Human/Nature*, established "strong connections with three local communities: the Guaraní community of Pindoty, an indigenous community; the Quilombola communities of Ivaporunduva and Sapatú, founded hundreds of years ago by escaped and freed slaves; and the Caiçara Community of Itacuruçá, a fishing village near São Paulo" ("Rigo 23"). Rigo 23 brought to these communities what he believed to be "most disparate from how they live, from their daily concerns," namely the blueprints of an American Ohio-

⁹ In a short interview posted on the project's website, Rigo 23 describes himself as an artist who has always been more concerned with social issues, for instance social justice or political resistance movements. His artistic practice, he says, has been "to honor nature so much by never trying to compete with it or represent it" (Interview).

class ballistic missile submarine, which is presumably built by one of his neighbors in San Francisco, Lockheed Martin, and information about a CBU-94 cluster bomb (Interview).¹⁰ After extended negotiations and discussions with the communities in Brazil, Rigo 23 and local artisans built their own versions of these advanced weapons systems, which were later arranged in a “diorama” and suspended from the ceilings at the museums in Berkeley and San Diego (Interview).

Teko Mbarate: Struggle for Life, the 350-inch-long version of the Ohio-class submarine, was built in Cananéia, Brazil, by Rigo 23 and members of the Guaraní and Caiçara communities, who used both traditional materials and techniques as well as recent technological gadgets such as mp3 players.¹¹ The dull dark exterior and the aseptic interior of the hulking SSNB (ballistic missile submarine) have been recreated with earth-colored materials such as bamboo, banana trunk fibers, feathers, sisal, mud, and similar materials; officers and sailors in uniform have been replaced by tiny, brightly colored, and individualized figurines who appear to belong to the indigenous peoples of southeastern Brazil; instead of torpedoes, a swarm of fish emerges from the tubes in the bow of the submarine; the command and control center in the forward compartment has been reimagined as a Guaraní place for communal prayer, and it has therefore become a symbol for an invigorated “Guaraní way of life” (Rigo, Interview). What Rigo 23 at first intended as only his straightforward critique of globalization as well as the First World and its destructive bent—the “submarine of death”—was, in a collaborative artistic effort, reinterpreted and literally reinscribed by the local people as “a submarine of life” “strengthening the Guaraní way of life” (Interview).¹²

Sapukay: Cry for Help, a 60x137x60-inch version of a CBU-94 cluster bomb, likewise fuses both Rigo 23’s and his collaborators’ perspectives on another largely ignored and deadly threat hidden on current and former battlefields in countries across the globe. The havoc wreaked by this pernicious type of bomb—for instance, some of the bomblets contained in cluster bombs do not detonate until they are accidentally touched by civilians years after the weapon has been deployed, often in violation of international agreements, in armed conflicts such as the civil war in former Yugoslavia—stands in stark contrast to the exuberant biological diversity spilling from the version of the bomb created by the indigenous communities in Brazil and by Rigo 23. Instead of bomblets, tiny carved animals such as anteaters or jaguars emerge from handmade baskets in mid-flight or on the floor; death from above has been replaced by a celebratory cornucopia made out of banana trunk fibers and woven taquara.

¹⁰ I was unable to verify all the factual information on these weapons systems provided by Rigo 23.

¹¹ The factual information on both sculptures is taken from the exhibition catalogue and from the project’s website.

¹² The second quotation was translated first into Portuguese and then into Guaraní: *Teko Mbarate* (Rigo 23, Interview).

Both the submarine and the cluster bomb, then, have been appropriated by the local communities of the Atlantic Forest South-East Reserves, but this process of collaborative and positive reinscription is more than an artistic exercise. These advanced weapons systems, particularly the submarine, which Rigo 23 identifies with his current place of residence in the Bay Area and which is also a potent symbol of Cold War military might, costly nuclear deterrent policies, as well as swift and apocalyptic destruction on a global scale, seem, at first, indeed “disparate” from the lives of the people in southeastern Brazil, but the juxtaposition of two rather different places thousands of miles apart is by no means coincidental. These two places are both haunted, of course, by the possibility of armed conflict and the specter of nuclear annihilation, and in this sense, inhabitants of the Bay Area like Rigo 23 and the numerous groups living in or near Atlantic Forest South-East Reserves ultimately belong, to echo Heise’s use of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck in the second half of *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* here, the same global risk society.

The threat of annihilation posed by an Ohio-class submarine is, however, but one link between Rigo 23’s current place of residence as well as his socioeconomic and cultural location in the First World and southeastern Brazil. In order to become a potential threat to the entire planet from, in theory, almost any location in the world’s oceans, SSNBs require state-of-the-art technology, and this technology comes at tremendous financial and ecological costs. The vexed issues of “allocation of resources,” “sustainability,” as well as “accumulation of wealth” are, as Rigo 23 puts it in an interview posted on the project’s website, intimately tied to the development and deployment of powerful weapons systems such as submarines with ballistic missiles (Interview). To Rigo 23, “the developed world often exploits the resources of economically disadvantaged nations to support unsustainable, and often destructive, ways of life” (Interview). This assessment, which is likely shared by peace activists and many critics of the processes of globalization and which has been repeated so many times and in so many variations that it has almost become a cliché, does, however, not quite capture the complexity of the two sculptures created by Rigo 23 and the artisans with whom he collaborated on the project. The two sculptures *Teko Mbarate* and *Sapukay* do offer a hopeful vision, as they represent an at least symbolic reclamation of the natural resources that have been appropriated worldwide by the U.S. and other First World countries in order to develop and operate advanced weapons systems, which, in turn, are used to maintain the status quo. Moreover, these two sculptures reinterpret these destructive technologies with global reach or of worldwide impact in a collaborative act of local cultural self-assertion and transnational solidarity between Western artists and indigenous populations.

This reinscription is, however, only possible under the auspices of *Human/Nature* and the use of the numerous cultural flows this relationship implies, a dilemma that is not lost on Rigo 23 (Interview) and, it is safe to assume,

his collaborators. The project is dependent on and thus implicated in, albeit on a different level, the very many of the potentially destructive global flows described by Appadurai. But the works of art created by Rigo 23 with the Brazilian communities nevertheless suggests enticing possibilities for truly global environmental(ist) visions of the future, particularly because exploitative power relations and practices have been partly replaced by a non-hierarchical, collaborative effort in which the negotiation of different socioeconomic, political, cultural, and geographic perspectives requires a shift in ideology and aesthetics from the local to the global.

The turn to collaborative practices and formats on a global level in contemporary art may result in more complex global environmental imaginaries in the future and instigate paradigmatic shifts similar to those made possible by recent collaborative online writing projects.¹³ Ultimately, it may allow for a crucial and long-overdue revision of traditional Western conceptions of artists as lone Romantic geniuses and lead to a more “ecological” and globalized understanding of artistic processes. It is unlikely that current understandings of the artist will completely disappear anytime soon, but *Human/Nature* as well as *Sapukay* and *Teko Mbarate* hint at potential alternatives that both resemble and depart from earlier instances of artistic collaboration, as they are greatly shaped by the unpredictable dynamics of collaboration between cosmopolitan artists and local inhabitants.¹⁴ While he is listed on the website and in the catalogue as the creator of the two sculptures, Rigo 23 portrays himself in various interviews more as an instigator and mediator of an extended collaborative effort (Interview). This process involves the negotiation of perspectives from vastly different ecological, social, national, and geopolitical vantage points on shared concerns such as global warming, the loss of biodiversity, or the specter of nuclear warfare. These multiple perspectives, then, are mediated in works of art and aligned to form kaleidoscopic global visions, which provide and represent snapshots of Appadurai’s numerous flows as well as their ecological preconditions and consequences.

¹³ Collaboration is, of course, not an entirely new phenomenon, but it seems that the availability of information technology and the access to global travel may, in addition to other factors, generate new possibilities in this respect. For a discussion of these projects and their possibilities see the article by Laddaga.

¹⁴ The collaborative dimension did not end with the completion of the sculptures but continued with educational programs accompanying the exhibition at the two museums in California. According to the website of the BAM/PFA, visitors did not only learn about *Teko Mbarate* and *Sapukay* from museum guides and Rigo 23, but also directly from several of the Brazilian artisans who collaborated on the project (“Gallery Talk”). Including all parties involved in the creative collaborative process is thus yet another step toward an egalitarian discourse on the complex political, socioeconomic, and ecological dimensions of globalization.

EARTH Sticker



Philip Krohn's 2005 *EARTH Sticker* offers rather different perspectives on these global flows and on artistic identity. Indeed, his identity as the creator of the work of art is not apparent, and it seems to have been added on the website primarily for copyright reasons.¹⁵ Krohn's project thus de-privileges, perhaps even effectively eliminates, the artist from the equation, thereby foregrounding the medium and the performative dimension of his work. Thus, *EARTH Sticker* represents a marked departure for Krohn, whose other projects seem more strongly indebted to previous generations of land and environmental art. In contrast to, for instance, *The Kindling* (2009), a large outdoor sculpture constructed from firewood, or the indoor installation *Transit* (2008), which combines salvaged organic and nonorganic materials,¹⁶ *EARTH Sticker* ostensibly breaks with more traditional environmental aesthetics and embraces a subversive interventionist politics, environmental activism, as well as radically different modes of representation, production, marketing, and distribution. It is also predicated on the contrast between the simple argument conveyed by the text on the sticker and the work of art as such, the bumper sticker whose very existence depends on and highlights the global cultural flows described by Appadurai.

The minimalist layout of Krohn's glossy twelve-by-three-inch bumper sticker is marked by a startling contrast between the stark black background and the five brightly colored capital letters that seem to hover ever so slightly above it. Formatted in an unadorned rectilinear font, with the first and the last of the letters E, A, R, T, and H printed in a glitzy white, the rest of them in a luminous red reminiscent of vintage fire trucks, these letters simultaneously spell three closely connected terms: EARTH, ART, and EARTH ART.¹⁷ The argument implied by this juxtaposition is rather broad—the words are not merely capitalized; they are formed entirely of capital letters—and presumably straightforward: Art, Krohn seems to suggest with his deft use of psychological primary colors and the ensuing visual conflation of the terms, is and has always been embedded in, dependent on,

¹⁵ Further information on Krohn's oeuvre and biography is available only to those visitors who follow the hyperlink to his personal homepage.

¹⁶ Several images of these and several other works are available on Krohn's homepage; separate entries with URLs for *Transit* and *The Kindling* are also given in the list of works cited.

¹⁷ A reproduction of this bumper sticker is available on the website operated by Earth Sticker LLC.

or reflective of the bafflingly complex physical realities on planet earth as well as on constantly evolving and contested concepts such as nature or wilderness, particularly but not exclusively in the Western(ized) world. It is thus not only understood as the “expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), or even as the “Human effort to imitate, supplement, alter, or counteract the work of nature” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Although both of these common denotations are certainly evoked here as well, the color-coded interlocking of the words points, perhaps following some vaguely sociobiological reasoning, to an embedment of culture in nature and the unexpected emergence of art within larger evolutionary processes. Conversely, art as well as its attendant conceptual and semiotic frameworks provide smoky looking glasses through which *Es* and *Hs* on the fringe of an always culturally inflected human vision become discernible and a slice of EARTH can be apprehended or experienced. Indeed, it is earth, land, or environmental art that functions as the most conspicuous intermediary between and interrogator of the imbricated realms of art and the earth.

To exercise its role as a go-between between art and the earth *Earth Sticker* requires neither the “natural” aesthetics that Krohn adopts in his other works nor the organicist, mimetic discourses of conventional environmental(ist) rhetoric and iconography, for example lush green colors or classic images such as Apollo 8 astronaut William Ander’s photograph “Earthrise” (1968).¹⁸ Instead, Krohn draws on the work of earlier environmental artists who have, to return to Kastner’s overview, placed “new, unnatural objects into the natural setting” or who have used “unnatural,” that is, man-made materials and elements. Krohn takes this direction to its logical extreme by adopting a minimalist design that deliberately privileges art over earth and that flaunts its very estrangement from the material (pre-)conditions of artistic processes and products. Due to its overemphasis on materiality, mediality, and functionality, *EARTH Sticker* thus indirectly and non-mimetically reintroduces planet earth through the back door.

Krohn’s work can be used to embellish a door or office space, the frame of a bicycle, or the wooden panels of a horse-drawn hearse, but, as the term and the standardized format already indicate, *EARTH Sticker* has most likely been designed to be glued to the rear end of a motorized vehicle that spews out carbon dioxide

¹⁸ For a fascinating discussion of this photograph’s historical background and impact see Robert Poole’s recent study *Earthrise* (2008) as well as the promotional website of the same title, which includes, among other information, high-quality reproductions of Ander’s picture and Harrison Schmidt’s “Blue Marble,” yet another iconic image. Heise also provides a lucid analysis from an ecocritical perspective of these photographs in her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (cf. 22-24).

and other emissions that continue to degrade earth's already strained fabric and that accelerate global climate change. In order to remain bonded to the paintwork and to withstand, among other things, severe weather, the sticker must be made of tough material, and it is safe to assume that its polymerized compounds and adhesives are likely to stick around on this planet longer than any earth artist may wish for. Moreover, as a fairly cheap curio sold in numerous museum gift shops or online through a website specifically designed to distribute only this product, Krohn's work of art becomes yet another commodity of questionable necessity in an economy that is, partly also due to the emergence of companies in need of little start-up capital and with low operating costs such as Earth Sticker LLC, global. That the profits generated by these sales are funneled to a variety of local and regional environmental organizations, many of them located and operating in the American West, may do little to ultimately justify the sticker's environmental footprint. *EARTH Sticker*, then, is, unintentionally or not, an activist artist's partial solution to interlocking ecological, socioeconomic, ideological, and perhaps spiritual crises on a global scale and, at the same time, a manifest part of the problem.

Krohn's contribution to earth art also reintroduces, however, numerous audiences to planet earth in a viral and egalitarian manner, and as his activist argument is (at least in theory) disseminated worldwide, the sticker becomes part of an increasingly global environmental(ist) discourse even if it cannot escape and therefore must highlight the inherent contradictions of contemporary artistic production in general and earth art in particular. The medium, combined with the sticker's deceptively simple argument and straightforward design, gives Krohn's work a competitive edge in an accelerated mediascape, because it echoes the universalist visual and verbal language deployed in branding by the vast majority of corporations—think, for instance, of Nike Inc.'s Swoosh logo and ubiquitous slogan "Just do it." The arrangement of words dominating *EARTH Sticker* is at least as catchy and appealing as the tag line introduced by the sporting goods and apparel manufacturer located near Beaverton, Oregon. Selling this desirable product through a website is only possible because Earth Sticker LLC can acquire the domain, security certificates, and other technological tools that make personal online commerce an increasingly viable option for the global transmission of money from consumer to environmental organization via a nodal point, the website maintained by Krohn. His Benjaminian *EARTH Sticker* can be swiftly ordered with any major credit card from almost any country on the planet via a website specifically designed to market and sell this sticker, and this dimension, the circulation and marketing of the cultural object via existing technoscapes, mediascapes, and financescapes, is as much part of the work as the design on the sticker itself.

As suggested above, Krohn's engagement with global flows—on a formal or generic level, but certainly also on the contextual, material level—could well be

construed as a weakness despite all financial benefits for environmental organizations, but it would be a moot point to condemn Earth Sticker LLC for complicity in these processes, which may be affected, to some extent, by this art project, but which would certainly continue to evolve without it as well. Krohn's project aims to acknowledge these shortcomings, to make these inconsistencies and contradictions the focal points of artistic engagement with global disjunctures, and to expose aesthetic, imaginary, and activist limitations as well as hidden or unacknowledged ecological and socioeconomic costs, and its excessive reliance on the processes it aims to challenge as well as its quasi-corporate design throw the multiple disjunctures into high relief. In this respect, Krohn's work is even more radical than the *Human/Nature* project or the sculptures by Rigo 23, as it not only insists on art's intimate connection to the earth on a textual level, but simultaneously on the material object's dependence on the shifting mediascapes, technoscapes, and financescapes that Appadurai delineates in his *Modernity at Large*.

Krohn's and Rigo 23's attempts to grapple with globalization and its attendant problems and possibilities as well as their respective global imaginaries are inextricably intertwined with the ecological, socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts that determine the production and dissemination of these works of art. *EARTH Sticker*, *Sapukay: Cry for Help*, *Teko Mbarate: Struggle for Life*, and the *Human/Nature* project cannot escape this double bind, as they are, on a variety of levels, implicated in and reliant on the frequently detrimental global processes that they dissect. The works by Krohn, Rigo 23, and the other contributors to *Human/Nature* to a nascent global environmental imagination and to earth art matter precisely because of their self-conscious and self-implicating explorations of this conundrum. Artists and ecocritics would do well to consider these important lessons in the future as well.

Works Cited

- "About the Exhibition." *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. U of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Rare, n.d. Web. Apr. 5, 2010.
- Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000. Print.
- Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue*. Andy Goldsworthy, the Crichton Foundation, and the U of Glasgow's Crichton Campus and Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII), n.d. Web. May 15, 2010.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. Print. Public Worlds 1.
- Arnold, Jean, et al. "Forum on Literatures of the Environment." *PMLA* 114.3 (1999): 1089-1104. Print.

- "Art." Def. 1. *American Heritage Dictionary*. 4th ed. 2002. Print.
- "Art." Def. 8.a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Print.
- Braddock, Alan C., and Christoph Irscher. Introduction. *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*. Ed. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irscher. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2009. 1-22. Print.
- Braitman, Laurel. "Human/Nature: Museums, Artists, and Conservationists Collaborate on a Groundbreaking Show." *Orion* Jan.-Feb. 2009: 58-65. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. "Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of U.S. Environmental Imagination on a Global Scale." *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Buell. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. 227-48. Print.
- . *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Print.
- . *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P-Harvard UP, 1995. Print.
- Byerly, Alison. "The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. 52-68. Print.
- Earthrise: How Man First Saw the Earth*. Robert Poole, n.d. Web. May 20, 2010.
- "Gallery Talk and Workshop: Environmentalism and Art in the Atlantic Forest of Brazil." UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), 2009. Web. Apr. 15, 2009. <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/events/education/human_nature/environmentalism_and_art>.
- Heise, Ursula K. "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies." *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (2008): 381-404. Print.
- . *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and U of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2008. Print.
- Kastner, Jeffrey, and Brian Wallis, eds. *Land and Environmental Art*. London: Phaidon, 1998. Print.
- Kastner, Jeffrey. Preface. *Land and Environmental Art*. Ed. Kastner and Brian Wallis. London: Phaidon, 1998. 10-17. Print.
- Krohn, Philip. *EARTH Sticker*. 2005. *Earth Sticker*. Philip Krohn/Astrov and Earth Sticker LLC, n.d. Web. May 3, 2010. <<http://www.earthsticker.com/>>.
- . Homepage. Philip Krohn, n.d. Web. May 3, 2010. <<http://www.philipkrohn.com/>>.
- . *The Kindling*. Rouge et Noir Cheese Company. Philip Krohn, n.d. Web. May 3, 2010. <<http://www.philipkrohn.com/images.php?id=7>>.

- . *Transit*. Berkeley Museum of New Media Commons, Berkeley, CA. Philip Krohn, n.d. Web. May 3, 2010. <<http://www.philipkrohn.com/images.php?id=5>>.
- Laddaga, Reinaldo. "From Work to Conversation: Writing and Citizenship in a Global Age." *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 449-63. Print.
- Malpas, William. *Land Art in the U.S.A.* Maidstone, Kent: Crescent Moon, 2008. Print.
- Poole, Robert. *Earthrise: How Man First Saw the Earth*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. Print.
- "Rigo 23." *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. U of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Rare, n.d. Web. Apr. 5, 2010.
- Rigo 23. Interview. *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. U of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Rare, n.d. Web. Apr. 5, 2010.
- . *Sapukay: Cry for Help*. 2008. Sculpture. Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and U of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. "Online Gallery." *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. U of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Rare, n.d. Web. Apr. 5, 2010.
- . *Teko Mbarate: Struggle for Life*. 2008. Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and U of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. "Online Gallery." *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*. U of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Rare, n.d. Web. Apr. 5, 2010.
- Tiberghien, Gilles A. *Land Art*. New York: Princeton Architectural P, 1995. Print.