

Symposium on Ecofeminism

Creating Worldly Interference Patterns



Methods for becoming worldly when we have never been human/ist: Stories from an ecofeminist peace camp

Dr Niamh Moore, Chancellor's Fellow, Sociology, University of Edinburgh

Re-storying *El Mundo Bueno*: Earth activist training, social permaculture and liveable futures

Dr Joan Haran, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow,
Center for the Study of Women in Society, University of Oregon

Thursday 15th December 2016, 2:30–4.30pm, followed by drinks

**Seminar Room 6, Lower Ground Floor, Chrystal Macmillan Building
University of Edinburgh, EH8 9LD**

All welcome – come join our discussion

Free event, but please book here <http://bit.ly/2eU2Erz>

An event from the Clayoquot Lives: Creating an Ecofeminist Story Web project
www.clayoquotlives.sps.ed.ac.uk; clayoquotlives@ed.ac.uk

Abstracts

Methods for becoming worldly when we have never been human/ist: Stories from an ecofeminist peace camp

Dr Niamh Moore, Chancellor's Fellow, Sociology, University of Edinburgh

Turns to more-than-human worlds and posthumanism have not only brought about transformations in ways of understanding, experiencing and conceptualising the world, but have also brought claims about appropriate methods for such research. Such turns have often been accompanied by calls for methodological transformations, which carry implicit or explicit assumptions about the limits of common research methods such as interviews, often understanding these as simply a talk-based approach which privileges and centres the human and human agency. Geographer Sarah Whatmore, for example, has argued that there is an 'urgent need to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text, with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject (Whatmore 2006: 606–607).

In this presentation I suggest possibilities of reconceiving the practice of interviewing, through drawing on what might appear to be resolutely human oral history interviews with ecofeminist activists involved in non-violent civil disobedience in Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Canada. In the summer of 1993, local activists set up a peace camp based on ecofeminist principles to support non-violent civil disobedience and the blockading of a logging road into temperate rainforest slated for clear-cut logging, leading to the arrest of over 800 people. In drawing on oral history interviews with activists as stories of nature, of women's nature, of naturecultures, of 'becoming worldly' (Haraway 2008), I suggest that interviewing has much more potential for natureculture work than many have thus far allowed.

In this process I bring discussions about 'whether there is a feminist method' to bear on the current imperative to develop new methods for more-than-human worlds. Through focusing in-depth on one interview, I explore how an apparently humanist method such as the interview, and specifically oral history, might also be mobilised 'to extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject', and suggest that interviews have much to offer in researching the process of 'becoming worldly when we have never been human' (Haraway 2008). Paying attention to how activists are becoming 'differently human' through restor(y)ing themselves and their relationship with the world, remains a profoundly important task for 'creating wordly interference patterns'.

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My current research takes up Donna Haraway's commitment to situating her own work as 'part of a larger, shared task of using antiracist feminist theory and cultural studies to produce worldly interference patterns' (Haraway 1994: 60). In particular, she has long paid attention to diverse forms of popular cultural production, community organizing and environmental activism as 'feminist, multicultural, antiracist technoscience projects'.

I use the term *imaginactivism* to name this intra-action of cultural production and social justice movements, as a way of trying to do justice to the creative and visionary work of much contemporary activism. My current project focuses on tracing/producing worldly interference patterns in the entanglement of fictional cultural production with social and environmental justice activism.

Specifically, my focus in this talk is on the work of ecofeminist writer, activist and trainer, Starhawk. Starhawk's 1993 novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* depicts a near future San Francisco that operates on consensus politics; that values and celebrates diversity in race, religion and sexuality and that has totally redesigned its energy, transportation, irrigation and food growing practices along sustainable, indeed regenerative, principles. It also reimagines pedagogy, with learning being practical and collective, rather than abstract and competitive. In this future, the residents of San Francisco have undertaken this reimagining and redesign of their society in resistance to the corporatist, militarist and religious fundamentalist organisation of the rest of the former US. This novel has had a profound impact on activist communities – including in Clayoquot Sound, the focus of Niamh's paper, where Starhawk was also one of the people arrested. In her commitment to sharing her visions of an alternative future, Starhawk has also recently been working to adapt her novel for the screen.

In this paper, I take up Starhawk's commitment to transformative pedagogy, not so much through a focus on her novel, but through attention to her commitment to providing training for activists. She regularly co-teaches a fortnight long course in *Earth Activist Training (EAT)*, at a range of sites across North America and Europe. The EAT course can be understood both as a skills-building exercise – in permaculture, in political organising, and ritual creation – to enable participants to create the (positive aspects of the) future imagined in the novel and as a brief rehearsal for that future. In this talk I will explore some of the elements of the course design with a particular focus on the concept of 'social permaculture'. I will discuss the ways that course leaders and participants handled a particular conflict that arose during the teaching session nominally focused on social permaculture. Drawing on my own experience of the conflict and its management I will discuss the ways in which *EAT* can be understood as a feminist, multicultural, antiracist technoscience project that creates worldly interference patterns.

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While Joan is visiting Edinburgh she is also presenting a seminar for STIS.
It will be earlier in the day in the same room, so everyone is welcome to join both events.

STIS Seminar

THURSDAY 15TH DECEMBER 12 - 1PM, SEMINAR ROOM 6, CMB BASEMENT

Making Up the Past: The Case of *Half Life* Dr Joan Haran, University of Oregon

"It's an art, making up the past," said Max ... "It's like science fiction, only backward.
Do you think you could do it, Nora? You're good at telling stories" (Jackson 2006: 144)

In this talk I will present a section of a chapter of my manuscript *Genomic Fictions*. That chapter, "Diffracting Speculation: Historiography and Ethnography", explores the ways that two novels -- *Half Life* and *The Speed of Dark* -- respectively diffract speculation through historiography or ethnography in an invitation to their readers to hone their critical literacies with regard to the governance of science. In the talk I will focus on the ways that Shelley Jackson's promiscuous entangling of historiography and speculation in *Half Life* enables her to draw particular questions about the ethics and politics of science, technology and medicine to the fore.

Half Life is evidently set in a version of the second half of the twentieth century. There is enough about the world of the text that is similar to our own for us to recognise that it is an alternate history (set mainly in the US with a brief foray to the UK) rather than some other sub-genre of science fiction or fantasy. At the heart of Jackson's novel is a rash of births of conjoined twins due to fall-out from continental nuclear testing, and the emergence of a subculture around this novelty. This is the key point at which Jackson's world departs from our own. All events prior to that phenomenon, and the context in which it emerges, can be mapped on to our own history. This spectacular (imagined) unintended consequence is chosen precisely to draw our attention to the speculative grid Jackson overlays on our own version of history.

I draw on Haraway's conceptualisation of diffraction as "an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world" to draw attention to the way that overlaying the textual practices of speculation and historiography upon each other invites a highly engaged reading practice. Diffracting historiography through speculation encourages the reader to reconsider the inevitability of the status quo and to open up questions that might have been considered closed. This in turn opens up possibilities for reshaping the questions we might ask about the future. I argue that in this way the novel produces a critical reading practice that can be redeployed in relation to the speculative dimensions of contemporary genomics discourse.