2. Situating Ecological Agency: Anthropocene Subjectivity and Settler Place-Making in the Poetry of Juliana Spahr

Juliana Spahr is an Anglo-American writer, literary scholar, and the author of several collections of poems, scholarly essays, and mixted-genre pieces.[1] Like most American poets who are also academics, Spahr has lived in many different places in the United States, including Applachian Ohio, the Hawaiian island of O'ahu, and the urban centers of Buffalo, New York City, and Oakland.[2] Instead of leading a life on the move detached from place, the short biography on the dustjacket of her poetic memoir *The Transformation* (2007) informs readers, Spahr "has absorbed, participated in, and been transformed by the politics and ecologies" of each of "the many places she

1 Spahr has published numerous individual poems, poetic essays, and chapbooks that later reappeared in collections distributed by different presses. In these collections, several of which are mixed-genre works, Spahr touches on a wide range of issues, including environmental ones: she reflects on the challenges of producing art in a post-Cold-War nuclear age (*Nuclear* 1991); evokes the absurdities of life in a world shaped and distorted by the mass media (*Response* 1996); comments on the aftereffects of 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq (*This Connection of Everyone With Lungs* 2005); engages with the social, cultural, and environmental effects of U.S. colonization in Hawai'i and the global politics of climate change (*Fuck You–Aloha–I Love You* 2001, *The Transformation* 2007, *Well Then There Now* 2011); examines the ecologies, histories, meanings, and functions of a small urban plot of land (*An Army of Lovers* 2013, written with David Buuk); and considers the ethical implications of choosing either writing or marching in protest of corporate exploitation and state violence (*That Winter the Wolf Came* 2015).

2 Juliana Spahr was born in Chillicothe, a small town located in the rural Southeast of Ohio also known as Appalachian Ohio. After attending Bard College on a stipend and receiving a Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1996, Spahr spent several years teaching at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Only months before the events of 9/11, she moved to New York City, where she witnessed the collapse of the World Trade Center and the traumatic aftereffects of the terroristic attacks on the city's inhabitants. After moving back and forth between Hawai'i and New York for several years, Spahr took up an academic position at Mills College in Oakland, California, in 2003, where she continues to teach courses in literary studies as well as creative writing.

has lived in." While such a statement must of course be taken with the necessary caution, it is undeniable that place-based poems have been a central feature of Spahr's poetic work throughout her career, as has been the decidedly mobile perspective of an American settler poet and academic migrant. In the following, I focus on selected poems Spahr wrote after and in response to her move to Hawai'i. It is in these texts, I contend, that Spahr's poetry examines how human and nonhuman mobilities of varying scales—from the movement of chemicals between bodies and ecosystems to the large-scale migrations of peoples, plants, and animals—shape human-nature relations. Foregrounding these different scales of mobility and the conflicted human-nature and human-human relations that result from them, I demonstrate in this chapter, raises pertinent questions about settler place-making in the context of global capitalism and U.S. imperialism.

Spahr is well-known as a poet of collectivity and entanglement whose work addresses the complex connections between environmental degradation, climate change, militarism, capitalism, and imperialism (see Arigo, Ergin, Ronda). She is also known as an experimental ecopoet who has emphatically rejected traditional nature poetry along with the traditional lyric and, instead, embraced ecopoetics as a more self-reflective and politically engaged form of writing (see Carr, Chisholm, Luger). Exploring notions of "dis/connection, complicity, and accountability" (Ergin 8) along with the personal and social effects of living in a world of multiple crises, Spahr's poetry frequently deals with the quandaries of cultural positioning, social privilege, and political responsibility that arise when a highly educated, white settler poet from a working-class background, such as herself, moves between and writes about places as different from each other as rural Southeastern Ohio, Hawai'i, New York City, and the San Francisco Bay Area. Focusing on issues of nature and mobility in Spahr's poetry draws attention to the complex ecosocial conditions that shape anthropocene subjectivity and matters of ecological agency, two issues that have generated considerable debate in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities in recent years (see Bennett *Vibrant Matter*, Latour, Alaimo, Iovino and Oppermann). Rather than merely highlighting nonhuman agencies or flattening hierarchies between human and nonhuman agencies, Spahr's ecopoetics of mobility—or rather, her ecopoetics of multi-scalar mobilities—explores the cultural and political conflicts as well as the emotional and cognitive contradictions produced by life in the Anthropocene for the more privileged demographic segments in the United States. Because I am interested in poetic place-making as well as ecological agency, I highlight moments in Spahr's poetry in which entanglement as an unavoidable fact of life in the Anthropocene is juxtaposed with notions of entanglement as an effect of (ecopoetic) place-making. Analyzing Spahr's poems about Appalachia and Hawai'i, I begin by demonstrating how Spahr employs para-lyrical experimentations to present anthropocene subjectivity as embodied and located. Considering different scales of human and nonhuman mobility in connection to the highly differentiated

ecological agencies of embodied and located anthropocene subjects in Spahr's poetry, I argue, points to the importance of situated perspectives in poetries of mobility. It also points to the fact that acts of (ecopoetic) place-making can become ethically fraught when they are represented as or conflated with conditions of material-discursive entanglement, not only but especially in cases where the migrants engaging in place-making are also settlers.

Embodied Anthropocene Subjectivity and Para-Lyrical Experimentations

Spahr's poems frequently evoke different scales of place, stretching from the home or neighborhood and regions of varying expanse to the entire planet (Keller *Recomposing Ecopoetics* 32). They also consider different scales of mobility, ranging from the "little mobilities" of chemical exchanges on the molecular level to the "'big mobilities' of people's mass movements across long distances all around the globe" (Adey, *Mobility* 7, 10). The most well-known example for Spahr's treatment of little mobilities on a global scale is probably her "Poem Written after September 11, 2001" from the collection *This Connection with Everyone with Lungs* (2005). Often discussed by scholars interested in ecopoetry and ecopoetics (see Keller *Recomposing Ecopoetics*, Milne "Dearly Beloveds," Ronda), "Poem Written after September 11, 2001" imagines how residues of the buildings destroyed during the 9/11 attacks such as "titanium and nickel" circulate around the globe, "mixing inside of everyone" with more common organic materials such as "suspended dust spores and bacteria" (Spahr, *This Connection* 9–10). The "connection of everyone with/ lungs" that the poem conjures is "lovely" (Spahr, *This Connection* 10) because it is suggestive of a temporary global community, although its members are separated by borders, degrees of privilege, and species boundaries. At the same time, though, it is also "doomed" (10) because the air circulating between the individual members of this imaginary collectivity carries the hazardous micro-particles coming from the fallen towers. What I explore in my reading of Spahr, amongst other things, is which tensions arise in her poetry, when we consider the mobility of people along with the mobility of substances, acknowledging the fact that not "everyone" is exposed to environmental harms in the same manner, not least because of class-based and racialized mobility regimes.

In "Poem Written after September 11, 2001" as in many others of Spahr's poems, the vulnerable bodies of individual subjects constitute an important if contested point of reference. Indeed, it is this vulnerability of bodies that raises questions in Spahr's work about the boundaries of what Stacy Alaimo refers to as the "anthropocene subject" (*Exposed* 144), that is, a subject that must be viewed "as immersed and enmeshed in the world" (157). Although the anthropocene subject, Alaimo contends, is commonly imagined "en masse" and hence as part of "a safely abstracted force" (*Exposed* 167), one should consider it also, if not more importantly so, in terms of "a

fleshy posthumanist vulnerability that denies the possibility of any living creature existing in a state of separation from its environs" (167). Spahr's poetry frequently evokes this same vulnerable fleshiness of bodies along with anthropocene subjects who yearn toward, but are also troubled by the material realities of being entangled with their environs and an existence "en masse."

A case in point for what one might call with Kate Rigby Spahr's "affective ecopoetics" (18), that is to say, a way of writing that turns the subject's "attention back upon the self in its trans-corporeal responsiveness to its environs" (18), is Spahr's poem "Tradition" from *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015). "Tradition" uses experimental language to suggest how the small-scale mobilities of substances accentuate the vulnerability of the embodied anthropocene subject. "Tradition" begins with a gesture of tender bodily contact that evolves into a meditation on the material dimensions of social relations in the context of anthropocene toxification:

> I hold out my hand.
> I hand over
> and I pass on.
> I hold out my hand.
> I hold out my hand.
> I hand over
> And I pass on.
> […]
> This hand over
> and this pass on.
> This part of me and this not really me.
> This me and engine oil additive.
> This me and not really me and engine oil additive.
> Back and forth.
>
> (*That Winter* 53)

Repeating a limited set of phrases with slight variation, the poem's beginning describes both intimate human-human interactions and the resulting transmission of petrochemical substances from one person to another. The hand that touches things as well as other bodies takes center-stage here because it is the vehicle for the "engine oil additive" and other substances that pose a substantial health risk to individuals repeatedly exposed to them. The text's repetitive structure and its repeated use of phrases without grammatical subjects foreground the concrete material and social effects of unconscious everyday bodily gestures and chemical processes rather than the intentional actions and thought processes of a sovereign subject. Contesting humanist ideas of bounded, fully rational, and disembodied subjectivity, "Tradition" sounds a warning about the dangers of petrochemical pollution as one of the less visible environmental problems in the Anthropocene, drawing attention to what

Alaimo describes as the far-reaching "traffic in toxins" that "may render it nearly impossible for humans to imagine that our own well-being is disconnected from that of the rest of the planet" (*Bodily Natures* 18). What is more, "Tradition" experiments with lyrical poetry to challenge the humanist idea of independent and individualized subjectivity: while it initially seems to project such an individualized subject through the repeated use of the pronoun "I," it eventually abandons that I and instead draws attention to shifting bodily constellations in which the "I," the "you," and later an ambiguous "we" exist in relation as well as in tension with each other.

"Tradition" is not just a poem about one singular vulnerable and fleshy body. It is also a poem about nursing, an intimate physical and social act during which toxins travel from the mother's body to that of the child, "this other thing that once was [her], this not really [her]" (53).[3] Evoking a caring, quasi-symbiotic relationship but also a potentially harmful one, the poem presents a long list of "chemicals commonly found in breast milk" (*That Winter* 87), including "refractive index testing oils and wood preservatives," "pesticide extenders," "dedusting agents," and "hydraulic fluid" (*That Winter* 54). Reinforcing the list's shock effect, "Tradition" weaves the names of the chemicals into a description of breastfeeding that taunts the romanticized depictions of the nonhuman world as a source of bodily and spiritual regeneration. Instead of offering the "cup" of life to her child or the "nectar" (54) of the gods that promises immortality or at least a long and healthy life, the speaker passes on to her infant a disturbing cocktail of industrial poisons and thus the burden of toxification that she herself has been forced to bear. The chemicals recorded in the text, the poem insists, are frighteningly mobile. Their movement from body to body is proof of the porosity of the boundaries between human bodies and their environs, while also being suggestive of an intimate connection between embodied anthropocene subjects that points to the sociopolitical dimensions of embodiment in our contemporary petrochemical age brought on by global capitalism.

"Poem" and "Tradition" reflect each in their own way on shared experiences of environmental vulnerability as a source of and community-formation. Both poems thus explore the social, political, and cultural dimensions of "trans-corporeal" exchanges. Stacy Alaimo coined the term "trans-corporeality" in her influential study

3 Spahr references scientific studies that address the transmission of toxic substances during breast-feeding in an endnote to the poem. Stacy Alaimo too notes the considerable threat that toxic traffic poses, amongst many other things, to "children's health and welfare" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 18). For a detailed discussion of the dangers of POPs (persistent organic pollutants)—toxic, fat-soluble and semi-volatile chemical substances which enter the food-chain when pesticides such as DDT, the class of industrial oils called PCBs, or dioxins are released as a result of waste incineration and come in contact with the environment, amass in the human body, and are then passed on from mother to child—see Sandra Steingraber's *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (137–45).

Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self (2010) to point to "the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures" (2) and to re-conceptualize the body as a "literal contact zone […] in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (2). Trans-corporeality, according to Alaimo, "opens up a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (*Bodily Natures* 2). Analyzing how such mobile spaces are evoked in and at least partly generated by scientific discourse, literary texts, and popular culture, Alaimo calls for a "trans-corporeal ethics" that requires us to "find ways of navigating through the simultaneously material, economic, and cultural systems that are so harmful to the living world and yet so difficult to contest and transform" (*Bodily Natures* 18). Because "trans-corporeality denies the human subject the sovereign, central position" (*Bodily Natures* 16), Alaimo notes, it produces conditions in which "ethical considerations and practices must emerge from a more uncomfortable and perplexing place where the 'human' is always already part of an active, often unpredictable, material world" (16–17). Juliana Spahr's poems about small mobilities focus on such an "active, often unpredictable, material world." What is more, Spahr's experimentation with poetic language and form can be understood as an attempt to articulate the "uncomfortable and perplexing" repositioning of the humanist subject in relation to a more-than-human world with which anthropocene subjects are always already intimately entangled, even if the effects of that entanglement greatly vary depending on the individual subject's social position and geographical-physical location.

As Alaimo's discussion of ethics highlights, the repositioning of anthropocene subjectivity does not relieve human beings—and particularly those in positions of privilege—of their responsibility to act against the environmental harm caused by governments and corporations. The "the intimate multitudes" (Ergin 101) evoked in "Poem Written after September 11, 2001" holds the potential for such an action, as do what one might describe as the "material sympathies" (Bennett, "Material Sympathies" 239) evoked in "Tradition" through allusions to the last stanza of Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" (1856): "Camerado, I give you my hand!/ I give you my love more precious than money, […] will you come travel with me?" (Whitman 307). Indeed, in agreement with what Dianne Chisholm observes about Spahr's collection *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, "Tradition" revises Whitman's logic of "democratic affection" (Folsom and Price, n. p.) for our contemporary age, in which vulnerable embodied subjects are called upon to form insurrectional political collectivities. Indeed, while "Tradition" initially focuses on the close relationship between a mother and her child ("this not really me"; Spahr, *That Winter* 56), the group of people to whom toxins are passed on in the poem gradually becomes much larger. In the end, the poem includes everyone, even "those of you who are *not really me* at all" (*That Winter* 56; emphasis added), a choice of words that suggests that although every-

one is being exposed to the toxic substances the poem lists, the risk is considerably higher for those less privileged.

"Tradition" affirms and simultaneously casts doubt at the hope that poetry might be able to help forge alliances across differences and lead to truly collective political action at the very moment in which the poem extends its address to a wider audience: "I'd like to think we had agreed upon this together, / that we had a tradition, / that we agreed *these things explained us to us*" (*That Winter* 55; emphasis added). The responsibility of the (privileged) poet to the larger community, the poem suggests, is to continue a poetic "tradition" invested in inspiring democratic sympathies and collective political action. What such an approach to poetry cannot easily solve, however, is what happens, when "we" do not "agree" on a shared "tradition" that "explain[s] us to us" or when the available traditions are in fact harmful because they promote structures of oppression, exclusion, and exploitation, a problem I come back to in my reading of Spahr's poetry about Hawai'i. My primary interest here lies not so much in the moments in Spahr's poetry in which breathing the same air, coming in contact with the same toxins, or, more generally, being together in the same place translate into some form of material sympathy or ecological affection, but in those moments when such processes are called into question in ways that are, to circle back to Alaimo, uncomfortable and perplexing.

One way in which Spahr's poetry challenges the sovereign humanist subject in her poetry is by challenging the self as presupposed and projected by conventional lyrical poetry. If Spahr thus revises Whitman's expansive political lyric (Altieri 134), she also engages with the experimental poetics and leftist politics of an avant-gardist tradition represented by such poets as Ron Silliman or Charles Bernstein. This is why scholars have sometimes described Spahr as a representative of a second generation of Language poets (Spencer-Regan 16–17), or, as Lynn Keller would have it, as a representative of a "post-language generation" who readily avows her debts to her predecessors without feeling "bound to the practices of her Language mentors" ("Post-Language Lyric" 75). Indeed, while Spahr affirms her investment in "an avant-garde practice" that can be traced back to high modernist experimentations with "fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, [and] agrammatical syntax" (*The Transformation* 49), her poetry is referential and politically engaged in different ways than traditional Language poetry. Influenced by the formal innovations of poets such as Joan Retallack and Lyn Hejinian, Spahr embraces a complex, community- and system-oriented lyricism that tries to de-center the authoritative lyrical subject (see Spahr "Resignifying Autobiography"). Indeed, although some of Spahr's poems omit first-person pronouns, many others retain a more or less fragmented "I," or go back and forth between an explicitly relational "I" and a highly ambiguous "we." In other words, Spahr does not fully abandon the lyric; she employs an experimental political lyric.

Spahr relies on variations of lyric out of "a sense of political urgency" (Keller, "Post-Language Lyric" 83), while also struggling with the limits of the genre in connection to what she perceives as poetry's responsibility to engage critically with history and contemporary systems of oppression. Both Heather Milne and Moberly Luger comment on Spahr's investment in writing a socially responsible and politicized lyric. Analyzing themes of connectivity in *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, Milne posits that Spahr "engages the potential of the political lyric to advance a poetics of global intimacy" ("Dearly Beloveds" 203) as well as to evoke a "spatial poetics that connects body to world" ("Dearly Beloveds" 206). Luger, who also reads *This Connection*, finds in Spahr's lyric experimentations a "new poetics of witness" (176) based on distance, liminality, and a logic of "circulation" (183). While I agree that it is crucial to examine precisely how Spahr's poetry connects "bod[ies] to world" and also see her desire to bear witness to social and environmental injustices operating in many of her collections, questions of intimacy and distance play out differently in her more emphatically deterritorialized poems than in her more explicitly place-based poems about Appalachia and Hawai'i. Apart from exploring the political consequences of the material entanglements of embodied subjects with the world and each other, these poems respond to the challenge of expressing in and through poetry the situated perspectives of mobile subjects along with the differentiated agencies that come with different social positions.

In an analysis of "Poem Written after September 11, 2001," Dianne Chisholm suggest that Spahr conceives of social responsibility and collective political agency in relation to a "cosmic bodies politic" (144). Chisholm borrows the phrase "bodies politic" from the materialist philosopher John Protevi, who in turn employs it to emphasize that the social collectivity commonly referred to as the "body politic" is constituted not by abstracted political subjects but by highly diverse, embodied subjects. As a complex, hierarchically ordered structure, Protevi's "bodies politic" is determined by processes that are not subject-directed, but instead go "above, below, and alongside the subject" (4), highlighting how "our bodies, minds, and social settings" (xi) are imbricated with each other in ways that are politically significant. Rather than viewing subjects as self-contained entities, Protevi's materialist understanding of sociopolitical relations aims to capture "the emergent—that is, the embodied/ embedded/ extended—character of subjectivity" (xii). It acknowledges that subjects are produced discursively by cognitive processes smaller than the self as well as by sociocultural forces that lie far beyond it (22). At the same time, it acknowledges that subjects are constituted materially through their "ecosocial embeddedness" (Protevi 22) in the world as well as through biochemical processes that affect both physical environments and the bodies these environments hold. When I thus suggest, then, that Spahr uses *para*-lyrical experimentations in order to evoke embodied anthropocene subjectivities, I mean to emphasize that she goes "above, below and alongside" (Protevi 4) the "rational cognitive subject" (Protevi 3) as well as the traditional

lyrical subject in her poetry about nature and mobility and in doing so questions notions of ecological agency.

Located Poetry, Ecological Agency, and Place-Making

As the dustjacket of *Well Then There Now* (2011) suggests, Spahr's poetry is informed by an "investigative poetics," a phrase that carries two different, yet ultimately complementary meanings. On the one hand, it implies an impulse in poetry toward the kind of journalistic-scholarly detective work that is also a key feature of documentary poetry, a popular mode in contemporary ecopoetry that I discuss in more detail in the chapter on Craig Santos Perez. On the other hand, the phrase "investigative poetics" refers to a long-standing American tradition of non-descriptive, non-expressive experimental poetry that "operate[s] in the interrogative, with epistemological curiosity and ethical concern" and uses language as an instrument for "investigative engagement" (Retallack, "What is Experimental Poetry" n. p.). This second kind of "investigative poetics" resonates with the idea of ecopoetics as an experimental creative-inquisitive practice, an understanding promoted, among others, by Jonathan Skinner, the founder and editor of the journal *ecopoetics* (2001–2005). In his introduction to the first issue of *ecopoetics* (2001), Skinner criticized the environmental movement for taking largely conventional approaches to literature, culture, and art and for having "protected a fairly received notion of 'eco' from the proddings and complications, and enrichments, of an investigative poetics" ("Editor's Statement," paragr. 1.7). Juliana Spahr's poetry combines these two strands of investigative poetics: it not only documents and enquires into matters of social and environmental injustice, it also prods, complicates, and enriches readers' understanding of their own and others' experiences of the world through experimental language and form.

An investigative poetics also informs what Joan Retallack and Spahr in their joint introduction to an edited collection on *Poetry & Pedagogy* (2006) describe as "located poetries" (5). When Retallack and Spahr use the phrase "located poetries," what they mean is poetry that employs "investigative or critical modes that take environmental, ecological, social, and/or political awareness into their framework" (6), or more succinctly, poetry "that is less about the self and more about the world" (6). In Spahr's own work, this shift of attention from the self to the world—or rather, from the self to the entanglement of self and world—produces tensions: while her poetry often avoids evoking the traditional humanist subject by going above, below, and alongside the lyrical I, Spahr also frequently demonstrates a preoccupation with her own ecosocial position and the exploitative relations that privileged subjects like herself enter into with other human beings and the nonhuman world. Spahr writes "located poetry" insofar as her poetry is often keenly invested in specific places as well as in the perspective that the resulting ecosocial embeddedness produces. This does not

mean, however, that Spahr's located poems are localist or "local poems" in any traditional sense (see Ramazani, *Poetry in a Global Age* 51–55). Indeed, Spahr's poetry documents the ecological specificity of places, while at the same time prodding and complicating ideas of the local by investigating how multiscalar human and nonhuman mobilities shape the ecosystems in different places along with the differentiated ecological agencies of the more or less mobile subjects who are embedded in these ecosystems.

Questions of agency have been a central matter of debate in the environmental humanities at least since Paul J. Crutzen's and Eugene F. Stoermer's concept of the Anthropocene and new materialist ideas inspired by such thinkers as Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, and Jane Bennett began to circulate more widely in the field along with other posthumanist theorizations aimed at decentering the humanist subject. As Gabriele Dürbeck, Caroline Schaumann, and Heather I. Sullivan note, the idea of an "epoch of accelerated and global human impact throughout the Earth's biosphere […] poses many challenges to the humanities, particularly in terms of human and non-human agency" (118). Thinking about agency in the Anthropocene, they contend, confronts scholars with the paradoxical fact that "human agency is now […] equivalent to a geological force" while "the sum of countless human activities lacks any characteristics of a coordinated collective action" (118–19). What is more, it forces us to reckon with the new materialist idea that agency is "always part of larger cultural and material flows, exchanges, and interactions" (119). Describing such flows, Jane Bennett draws on Bruno Latour theorizations of "a more *distributive* agency" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* ix; emphasis original) to describe "the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* ix) in ways that acknowledge the "vital force" of "[e]ach member and proto-member of the assemblage" (24). While I am interested in explorations of nonhuman agencies in Spahr's poems about small mobilities, I am even more interested in how Spahr negotiates differently distributed human and nonhuman agencies in light of multiscalar mobilities. Because my analysis centers on the question of how mobile subjects can forge more meaningful and less harmful relationships with the nonhuman world, I concentrate on ecological agency rather than agency more generally. In doing so, I also try to be attentive to the complications that arise when one considers matters of ecological agency in Spahr's located poems about Appalachia versus her poems about Hawai'i. These complications include the "difficulties of reconciling an awareness of different kinds of ecological agency, inflected by socioeconomic inequality and political oppression as well as by divergent historical memories, social structures, and cultural practices" (Heise, "Introduction" 4).

The poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache" from the collection *Well Then There Now* (2011) is one of Spahr's place-based poems that investigates the socio-ecological conditions that determine whether more *or* less mobile subjects are more *or* less vulnerable to environmental harm and have more *or* less ecological agency. In

contrast to poems such as "Poem Written After September 9/11, 2001" or "Tradition," "Gentle Now" can be precisely located geographically based on information in the text. While the poem is preceded by a drawn map and coordinates that point to Oakland as its place of composition, the geographical details in the text identify it as one of two poems from *Well Then There Now* set in Appalachian Ohio. The discrepancy between the expository map and the poem's content, together with the fact that "Gentle Now" is positioned at the end of the collection after several poems concerned with the speakers' life in Hawai'i, allow for a reading of the poem as a poem of work-related migration. As the poem explores changing human-nature relations in a context of toxification in which prolonged physical contact with and long-term embeddedness in a particular environment constitutes a risk to one's well-being that some can avoid more easily than others, it also examines questions of place-making in the context of social and geographical mobility.

"Gentle Now" begins by drawing attention to the biological fact that human beings are enmeshed in the "world without" (*Well Then* 124) from the moment they "come into the world" and "breathe in it" (124). "*We* come into the world" (24; emphasis added), the poem asserts, using a universal first-person plural, only to then imply that life for some is characterized by constant movement between different, more or less damaged environments. Having "move[d] between the brown and/ the blue and the green of it" (124), the poem's plural speakers remember a time when they stood "at the edge of a stream" that "flowed/ down a hill into the Scioto that then flowed into the Ohio that then/ flowed into the Mississippi that then flowed into the Gulf of Mexico" (*Well Then* 124). By focusing on a place for which a mobile body of water is of central importance, "Gentle Now" indicates that even seemingly local places are always intricately connected to larger ecosystems. In reference to Appalachian Ohio and the larger bioregion it is part of, this insistence on the interconnectedness of ecosystems has important implications, because Appalachia is a "unique place where one of the highest biodiversity levels in the world overlaps geographically with some of the most destructive land use practices in the world" (Curry qtd. in Payne n. p.). Spahr's poem "Gentle Now" documents the diminishing biodiversity of Appalachian Ohio caused by the local "chemical/ factory and […] paper mill and […] atomic waste disposal plant" (*Well Then* 132). What is more, it emphasizes that the pollution that harms biodiversity in the region is also a threat to human beings, especially those who cannot avoid being exposed to the region's polluted environment.

Rather than only employing the river as a metaphor of origin or (re)birth, "Gentle Now" portrays it as a complex ecosystem teaming with life. Using the kind of sprawling catalogues Spahr is known for (Keller, "Post-Language Lyric" 78), the poem names over one hundred local species, including many that have been extinct or are at acute risk of becoming extinct. In mentioning all of these disappeared and vulnerable species, the poem resists what Ursula K. Heise describes as the "'proxy logic'

of discourses about endangered species and biodiversity" (*Imagining Extinction* 23), that is, the tendency to choose one exemplary species as representative for all the endangered species in a particular environment. In "Gentle Now," it is not charismatic megafauna that captures the speakers' loving attention, but Appalachian creaturely life on a much smaller scale:

> We immersed ourselves in the shallow stream. We lied down on the rocks on our narrow pillow stone and let the water pass over us and our heart was bathed in glochida and other things that attach to the flesh.
> And as we did this we sang.
> We sang gentle now.
> Gentle now clubshell,
> don't add to heartache.
> Gentle now warmouth, mayfly nymph,
> don't add to heartache.
> Gentle now willow, freshwater drum, ohio pigtoe,
> don't add to heartache.
>
> (*Well Then* 128)

Having undergone a form of baptism in nature, the poem's speakers become emotionally attached to "the shallow stream" that extends not only to endangered creatures such as the "clubshell," but also to parasites such as the "glochida and other things that attach to the/flesh" (128). The speakers' affection for the stream is not portrayed as an automatic consequence of having been born in the stream's vicinity, as the poem's beginning implies. Rather, their affection is the effect of prolonged physical contact as well as sustained intellectual engagement with the local ecosystem. What is more, the speakers' place-attachment depends on the kind of "re-enchantment" of human-nature relations ("We sang gentle now") that materialist ecocriticism has long been interested in.[4] In other words, the speakers' intimate rela-

4 As Jane Bennett notes in *Vibrant Matter*, "the figure of enchantment" (xii) is useful not only because "moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world—with nature but also with commodities and other cultural products—might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviors" (xi), but because it "points in two directions: the first toward the humans who *feel* enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and the second toward the agency of the things that *produce* (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies" (*Vibrant Matter* xii; emphasis original). "[M]aterialist ecocriticism," Serpil Oppermann contents, "enhances the postmodern concept of reenchantment" by proposing that "agentic materiality generat[es] meanings and stories in which both microscopic and macroscopic and even cosmic bodies display eloquence" and that "these material agencies are self-

tionship to the stream depends on physical exposure, intellectual engagement, and poetic place-making.

Initially, "Gentle Now" using poetic language reminiscent of both love poetry, Indigenous chant, and traditional nature writing to describe a state of blissful immersion:[5]

> We loved the stream.
> And we were of the stream.
> And we couldn't help this love because we arrived at the bank of the stream and began breathing and the stream was various and full of information and it changed our bodies with its rotten with its cold with its clean with its mucky with fallen leaves with its things that bite the edges of the skin […]
>
> (*Well Then* 125)

With the help of carefully placed line breaks, Spahr emphasizes that the speakers' "love" of the stream is the result of physical immersion as well as of cognitive engagement. Pointing to how "the stream […] changed [the speaker's] bodies" as soon as they "arrived at the bank of the / stream and began breathing," this passage imagines human-nature relations as trans-corporeal on the molecular level. For the speakers, engaging with the nonhuman world in this place means letting the "things" populating the stream "bite the edges of [their] skin" (125). It also means being attentive to nature. Indeed, as the poem progresses, the speakers revise the notion that "[their] hearts took on new shapes, new shapes every day" simply because "[they] went to / the stream every day" (*Well Then* 127), instead suggesting that they actively "shaped [their] hearts into the water willow and into the eggs / spawned in the water willow" (*Well Then* 128). In the same measure as the speaker's attentiveness to nature increases, the poem's tone changes from an exuberant celebration of the small stream's aliveness to a more mournful tone, a gradual shift foreshadowed by the references to the "rotten" and the "cold" in the passage just quoted. In the second half of the

---

representational, interlocked with human social practices, and compounded of each other" ("From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism" 28).

5 Meliz Ergin links the chant-like quality of "Gentle Now" to Spahr's encounter with Pacific literatures and specifically with "nature poetry composed by islanders" (92). Listing texts that inspired "Gentle Now" preceding the first poem in the collection, Spahr herself credits "a writing workshop at Goddard College in the winter residency of 2004" and "a hypnotherapy session with Michelle Ritterman" (*Well Then* 7) as well as several books that illustrate the range of Spahr's readerly interests: *A Guide to Ohio Streams*, a text published by the Ohio Chapter of the American Fisheries Society; the anthology of Indigenous songs, chants, and poems *The Path of the Rainbow: The Book of Indian Poems* (1918), the scholarly monograph *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (1991) by Gail Holst-Warhaft and, as a source for the poem's central phrase, *Stations of Desire: Love Elegies from Ibn Arabi and New Poems* (2008).

poem, "Gentle Now" turns into a "species elegy" (Heise, *Imagining Extinction* 32), albeit an unusual one, insofar as it uses the "enumerative logic" (59) of lists to expresses collective rather than "individual mourning" (*Imagining Extinction* 61).[6]

"Gentle Now" explores regional biodiversity loss together with what is at stake for human beings when they make themselves vulnerable to damaged environments, or, as is more often the case, when they have but little choice to be in close contact with these environments. Moving from a gentle but enthusiastic love song to a "lament for whoever lost her elephant ear lost her/ mountain madtom/ and whoever lost her butterfly" (*Well Then* 131), the poem begins to list the chemicals that pollute the stream ("chloride, magnesium, sulfate […] nitrate, aluminum, suspended solids, zinc, phosphorus, fertilizers" and "pieces of plastic […] travel through / the stream," 131). Combining scientific data with highly figurative language, Spahr engages what Lawrence Buell calls "toxic discourse" ("Toxic Discourse"), exposing species loss and expressing concern for the well-being of the human as well as the nonhuman inhabitants of the region. Indeed, while the speakers of "Gentle Now" are people on the move who have options when it comes to which environments they want to immerse themselves in, the poem also points a different demographic: the less mobile working-class inhabitants of Greater Appalachia, a segment of the U.S. population that is disproportionally affected by the kind of environmental disenfranchisement that Rob Nixon describes as "displacement in place" (*Slow Violence* 17). Displacement in place, as Nixon defines it, not only expresses itself in an emotional alienation from nature; it also expresses itself in mutually destructive human-nature relationships, insofar as marginalized social groups are often victims of environmental injustice as much as the inadvertent agents of environmental destruction (*Slow Violence* 17–22). Spahr implies as much in "Gentle Now," when she switches from a plural to a singular speaker in section five of the poem, a speaker who, after having spent her childhood in nature, joins the local workforce, becoming part of and profiting from the very same industries that harm the region's natural environment and its human population:

6 Whereas lists of endangered species in literature usually point to a "confrontation with global loss" (Heise, *Imagining Extinction* 61), the catalogue of species in "Gentle Now" sheds light first and foremost on regional biodiversity loss. At the same time, it is implied that the great dying chronicled in the poem should be of concern for people on site as well as for people elsewhere, not only because the pollution that causes species loss cannot be geographically contained, but also because (seemingly) localized biodiversity loss prefigures what will eventually happen in places that, as of yet, seem untouched by environmental degradation, a point underlined in another poem from *Well Then There Now*, "Unnamed Dragonfly Species."

> Ensnared, bewildered, I turned to each other and from the stream.
> I turned to each other and I began to work for the chemical
> factory and I began to work for the paper mill and I began to work
> for the atomic waste disposal plant and I began to work at
> keeping men in jail.
> […]
> I replaced what I knew of the stream with Lifestream Total
> Cholesterol Test Packets, with Snuggle Emerald Stream Fabric
> Softener Dryer Sheets, with Tisserand Aromatherapy Aroma-
> Stream Cartridges, with Filter Stream Dust Tamer, and Streamzap PC
> Remote Control, Acid Stream Launcher, and Viral Data Stream.
>
> (*Well Then* 132–33)

While Spahr does not deny people's active involvement in the activities that destroy the places they inhabit, whether by occupation or consumer choices, the play with pronouns in this section suggests that individualizing responsibility for environmental harm caused by corporations creates an incomplete picture. Indeed, I would argue, Spahr questions neoliberal notions of ecological agency by showing how industrial capitalism and consumer culture force workers to participate in the production of the very substances that harm them, their communities, their immediate living environments, and, due to the longevity and mobility of many industrially produced toxins, ultimately the entire local, regional, and global ecosystem.

Instead of unequivocally promoting an environmental ethics of proximity, then, "Gentle Now" ultimately asks how exactly people are to love nature in the places they inhabit or revisit, if these places are toxic and the very behavior that is commonly believed to strengthen humans' emotional attachment to place, namely intimate, long-term engagement with it, poses a serious health risk. One option, the poem suggests, is song or poetry. Although "Gentle Now" ends with the speaker's assertion that she "did not sing" (*Well Then* 133) when she first moved away from her place of origin, the poem's retrospective perspective indicates that she eventually began to do so. Her song, the poem in Spahr's collection, draws attention to biodiversity loss and environmental degradation in Appalachian Ohio as well as to the frightful mobility of pollutants. It also implies that less mobile working-class communities are at a disadvantage compared to more socially and geographically mobile individuals, when it comes to avoiding exposure to toxic environments. One thing that subjects with more mobility privilege and more ecological agency can do, the poem implies, is care enough about the places and communities they leave behind and to help expose instances of environmental injustice along with those larger social and economic structures that cause them. Even though their perspective on the more-than-human world is decidedly different from that of less mobile working-class people in Appalachian Ohio, the migrant speakers who have been doubly

alienated from their place of origin have one thing in common with the working-class people that have stayed put: for both groups, a less destructive relationship to the nonhuman world in Appalachian Ohio is not a given. It is not an automatic result of material-discursive entanglements. It must be arrived at and worked for. Because immersion in nature of the kind the speakers imagine at the beginning of the poem may no longer be a viable option, one alternative that remains is engaging with located poetry as a practice of attention and care. Modelling such a practice of attention and care, "Gentle Now" explores environmental degradation, species loss as well as questions of "ecological agency, inflected by socioeconomic inequality," to circle back to Ursula Heise's caution quoted earlier. While the speakers of "Gentle Now" confidently turn to song as an alternative means of place-making in relation to Appalachian Ohio, their place of origin, the same strategy causes problems, where ecopoetic place-making in Hawai'i is concerned.

Dis/Located Poetry, Settler Ecological Agency, and Place-Taking

In their preface to the *Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street use a quote from Juliana Spahr's poem "Things of Each Possible Relation" to illustrate the difference between traditional nature poetry and environmental(ist) poetry. The quote taken from Spahr, which appears in slightly different versions in several of her writings, criticizes nature poetry for its tendency "to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that [is] about to destroy the bird's habitat" (Spahr qtd. in Fisher-Wirth and Street xxviii-xxix).[7] Spahr's image of the bird and the bulldozer is simple and evocative, which is probably why it is routinely mentioned by scholars who address Spahr's ecopoetics. Contextualizing Spahr's statement as one made about human-nature relations in Hawai'i specifically, Christopher Arigo discusses a talk in which Spahr admitted to having long held the opinion "that nature poetry was the most immoral of poetries because it showed the bird, often a bird that like them had arrived from afar, and not the bulldozer" (Spahr qtd. in Arigo 4). Rather than merely rejecting traditional nature poetry as "immoral" for its failure to address environmental destruction, Arigo argues, Spahr used the image of the bird and the bulldozer in her talk to demand an "anti-colonial poetry" that acknowledges both "ecological and sociopolitical colonization" (4). Or,

7 It is not clear which version of "Things of Each Possible Relation" Anne Fisher-Wirth refers to in her preface, since the introduction does not specify the source. In any case, the version of the poem included in the collection *Well Then There Now* (2011) has a slightly different wording: "But I was more suspicious of/ nature poetry because even when it got the birds and the plants and/ the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often/ the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat" (*Well Then* 69).

as Jim Cocola phrases it when he takes up the bird-and-bulldozer image in his discussion of Spahr's *The Transformation*, the poet aims for a "poetry of place making" that insists not merely on a discussion of bird and bulldozer, but on "the who, what, when, where, why, and how of bird and bulldozer alike" (Cocola 184). While those questions are worth asking in relation to poetry written about all kinds of places, most of the iterations of the bird-and-bulldozer image to be found in Spahr's own writing makes it clear that she began to think about place-based poetry differently as a result to her work-related move to Hawai'i and in light of the specific sociopolitical and environmental conditions she encountered there, conditions determined in crucial ways by Hawaii's political status as a colonized, or as some hold, an occupied place.

The Hawaiian archipelago consists of 137 volcanic islands, atolls, and islets located in the northern Pacific Ocean and thus belongs to the Polynesia subregion of Oceania. With the exception of Midway Atoll, one atoll belonging to the mostly uninhabited Northern Hawaiian Islands, the Hawaiian island chain forms the U.S. state of Hawaii.[8] Hawaii only became a state in 1959, a little over 60 years after the sovereign Kingdom of Hawai'i had been taken over by the United States, a political move that must be viewed either as an act of colonization that ended Indigenous sovereignty over the archipelago or an act of occupation that occurred and continues despite the *de facto* persistence of Indigenous sovereignty. Even before the United States occupied Hawai'i, Indigenous control of the island chain had been challenged by foreigners. British explorer James Cook had arrived on the archipelago in 1778 and was soon followed by traders, missionaries, planter colonists, and immigrant workers from the continental United States, Western Europe, and East Asia. The influx of explorers, traders, whalers, and missionaries as well as foreign immigration to, and settlement on, Hawai'i led to a dramatic decline in the local Indigenous population: it is estimated that the number of Kanaka Maoli on the archipelago decreased from between 500 000 to 800 000 at first contact to only 40 000 at U.S. annexation in 1898 (Jonathan Osorio 10–11). As both Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio and Haunani Kay Trask note, this massive decline in the number of Native Hawaiians weakened the traditional land tenure system on which pre-contact Hawaiian society had depended, resulting in the continual expansion of foreign influence on the islands and in a general reorganization of social, political, and religious life (Jonathan Osorio

8 The U.S. state of Hawaii derives its name from the island of Hawai'i, the largest of the eight major islands in the archipelago. People use both *Hawai'i* and the simplified *Hawaii* to refer either to the state or the archipelago as a whole, but for the sake of clarity and because the Americanized spelling is linked to U.S. control of the island chain, I will use *Hawaii* or *the state of Hawaii* when I mean the U.S. state, *Hawai'i* or the phrase the *Hawaiian archipelago/ island chain* when I mean the geographical place in contrast to (but due to the current political situation never truly independent of) the state, and *the island of Hawai'i* when I mean the Big Island specifically.

44–45, Trask 3–4). In response to this "population collapse" (Trask 6), under pressure from influential missionaries, and threatened by the private land claims of non-Native inhabitants of Hawai'i, local Kanaka officials formed the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles, an attempt at maintaining Indigenous control over the land that instead set in motion the large-scale privatization, division, and dispossession of Native-owned lands in Hawai'i (Jonathan Osorio 45–46, Trask 6–7). The resulting disruption of century-old land-and-sea-based Indigenous practices had disastrous consequences for Native Hawaiians, Native Hawaiian culture, and the local ecosystem, consequences that are still felt today as U.S. occupation and conflicts over land rights continue.

Despite constant infringements on Native sovereignty by foreign settlers and continental American settlers in particular, Hawai'i remained an internationally recognized independent Kingdom until 1893, when a powerful group consisting mainly of white American businessmen, politicians, and plantation owners, who had formed the so-called "Hawaiian League" in 1887, deposed the reigning Kanaka monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, with a coup supported by U.S. state officials (See Jonathan Osorio 235–49). Five years later, in 1898, the United States officially annexed the short-lived Republic of Hawai'i, a fact that has caused ongoing social, political, and cultural conflict on the archipelago, as Kanaka Maoli groups continue to fight for (the recognition of) Hawaiian sovereignty and restitution of Aboriginal lands (See Trask 92–97). Frequently, this fight has made use of notions of *aloha 'āina*, an ethics and politics of "love of the land" that, as Kanaka poet and scholar Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio explains, has complex social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions and relies in important ways on story, song, and poetry as forms of community-oriented political practice (1–2). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that at least since the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement of the 1990s, but arguably already since the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s, the fight for political and cultural sovereignty on Hawai'i has prominently involved Native poets whose works frequently combine a particular Native Hawaiian form of ethnic nationalism with concerns for the environment.[9] It is in this context of social, political, and cultural

9 One particularly vocal advocate for Native sovereignty was the late Haunani-Kay Trask (1949–2021), a Kanaka activist, poet scholar, and staunch Hawaiian Nationalist. Originally a professor at the American studies department, Trask became a key figure in establishing Hawaiian Studies as a discipline. She was also the founding director of Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she continued to work and teach until her retirement in 2010, which is to say that she was still active when Spahr joined the university's English department in 1997. In her poetry, which includes the collections *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994) and *Night is a Shark* (2002), Trask wrote about the strain put on the relationship between Native Hawaiian communities and the land by U.S. occupation. Trask not only used her poetry to call into question the actions and legitimacy of the U.S. government, though, she also leveled heavy criticism at all foreigners on Hawai'i and

conflict and with increasing awareness of her own problematic position as a white continental American university instructor and *haole* poet in Hawai'i that Spahr has written about human-nature relations on O'ahu, pointing to settler place-making as a form of place-taking and to the political and ethically suspicious dimensions of environmental imaginaries of mobility formed in the context of the ongoing U.S. occupation of Hawai'i.

If one closely examines the bird-and-bulldozer passages in Spahr's writing with an eye to questions of mobility, it becomes apparent that this image does not only evoke the detrimental effects of environmental destruction and colonization. Indeed, when Spahr specifies in her talk about anti-colonial (eco)poetry that the bird, whose habitat the bulldozer encroaches upon, is "often a bird that *like them* had arrived from afar" (Spahr qtd. in Arigo 4; emphasis added), she specifically highlights the effects of both human and nonhuman mobilities on the local ecosystem. When Spahr compares human and bird mobility here, the question arises in how far these mobilities are similar and in how far they are different. While both kinds of mobility are shaped by colonization/occupation, they cannot be viewed in equal measure as colonizing practices, even if we employ a broad understanding of colonialism, as scholars such as Max Liboiron do. When Liboiron (Red River Métis/Michif) suggests that "colonialism" is not "a monolithic structure with roots exclusively in historical *bad action*" but, rather, "a set of contemporary and evolving land relations that can be maintained by *good intentions* and even *good deeds*" (6; emphasis added), the Indigenous scholar makes the important point that intention is not what distinguishes colonial practices from anti-colonial ones. At the same time, settler agency in the sense of the heightened potential of settlers to impact the world through their actions and settler ecological agency in the sense of settlers' heightened potential to impact the environment as well as other peoples' relationships to nature, remains an undeniable fact. It is especially acute in places such as Hawai'i, where the harm on the more-than-human world caused by settler activities, Spahr's poem indicates, is as omnipresent as the destruction wrought by bulldozers.

The identity of the "migratory" human beings who arrive "from afar"—human beings who are like migratory birds but perhaps more importantly *unlike* them because they possess an ecological agency heightened by the sociopolitical status of Hawai'i that birds do not—is revealed in the bird-and-bulldozer passage included

---

especially at those who exploit Hawaiian culture and natural resources for personal or corporate profit. Her criticism also centered on colonial education and specifically on the role of haole scholars and instructors at the University of Hawai'i, that is to say, positions like Spahr's. Not least due to the lasting influence of Trask's on Native Hawaiian poetry and politics, a new generation of politically engaged Native Hawaiian poet scholars has emerged in recent years, one of them Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio.

in *Well Then There Now* (2011). The relevant passage appears in a short poetic commentary that concludes Spahr's poem sequence "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another." The passage in question reads as follows:

> *Shortly after I moved to Hawai'i I began to loudly and hubristically proclaim whenever I could that nature poetry was immoral. There is o lot of nature poetry about Hawai'i. Much of it is written by those who vacation here and it is often full of errors. Rob Wilson calls these poems 747 poems. These poems often show up in the* New Yorker *or various other establishment journals. But I was more suspicious of nature poetry because even when it got the birds and the plants and the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat. And it wasn't talking about how the bird, often a bird which had arrived recently from somewhere else, interacted with and changed the larger system of this small part of the world we live in and on.* (69; emphasis original)

Hinting at how nature, mobility, and poetry as a means of place-making are brought together in her work, Spahr's commentary avers that the poet changed her attitude toward nature poetry after moving to Hawai'i and after reading what Pacific studies scholar and poet Rob Wilsons calls "747 poems," that is to say, poems written by (American) tourists and continental migrants with only cursory knowledge of the local environment, history, and culture (Wilson ix, fn. 4). While Spahr also sometimes raises the question whether ongoing continental American migration to and settlement on Hawai'i can ever be defensible, the passage quoted above implies that she sees a qualitative difference between the way many tourists interact with the natural environment of the archipelago and the way migrants may engage with it, if they make an effort to learn about their new place of residence, something Spahr tried to do by reading extensively about the archipelago's natural environment and taking an ethnobotany course (*Well Then* 51; see also Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics* 191). As her own activities suggest, the difference between tourists' engagement with place and (some) continental migrants' engagement with place is one that results from a different quality of place-making for which a different perspective on the natural world is key.

As "Things of Each Possible Relation" suggests, people "who vacation" on the archipelago are at least indirectly responsible for the considerable infrastructural development that threatens local ecosystems. "Things" emphasizes that some kinds of mobility cause destruction of "habitat[s]" (69), while other kinds of mobility have been crucial in creating or sustaining those same habitats in their current form. Even seemingly self-contained ecosystems, the quoted passages stresses in accordance with what scholars focusing on island ecologies have long recognized (DeLoughrey, "Island Ecologies" 298), have always been open to certain forms of

human, plant, and animal migrations, resulting in environmental change of varying scale and consequence. In denying this fact in favor of a romanticized depiction of Hawai'i as an untouched "island paradise" (Wilson 80), many continental poets writing about the archipelago, Spahr insists, have promoted colonial fantasies that erase the ongoing effects of colonization/occupation and environmental degradation on the island chain. One way to trouble these fantasies is to examine more closely how different kinds of mobility affect "the larger system of this small part of the world" (*Well Then* 69) and how some of them do more harm than others, whether socially, politically, culturally, or ecologically.

When Spahr writes about human-place relations in Hawai'i —just as when she writes about Appalachian Ohio, New York City, or the Bay Area—her poetry often explores what it means to have a body while being in a particular place and moving between different physical environments. Specifically, Spahr explores the complicated situated perspectives that arise from the experience of feeling simultaneously dislocated and ecologically embedded. In her influential essay "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1991), Donna Haraway points to the politics and epistemologies of embodiment and embeddedness, calling for "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (195). As Haraway elaborates, such politics and epistemologies of location require privileging "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" ("Situated Knowledges" 195). However, emphasizing situatedness and situated perspectives, Haraway continues to insist in later publications, does not simply mean acknowledging "what your identifying marks are and literally where you are" (*How Like a Leaf* 72), nor does it mean "only to be in one place" (72). Rather, it means "to get at the multiple modes of embedding that are about both place and space" (72), that is to say, at the ecological and the social, the material and the discursive dimensions of human beings' embeddedness in what Haraway so aptly describes as "naturecultures" (*The Companion Species Manifesto* 1). Situatedness in this sense does not rule out mobility, nor does it imply a simplistic understanding of emplacement. Instead, situatedness, as I understand it here, is the material-discursive fact of the anthropocene subject's ecosocial embeddedness enriched by an awareness of how the social, political, and cultural dimensions of embodiment differ depending on a person's social and geographical location. While this definition of course shows certain similarities with Indigenous conceptualizations of multispecies relationality and human embeddedness in a more-than-human world, including ones that precede Haraway's reflections, I draw from Haraway's non-Indigenous feminist standpoint theory to describe Spahr's explorations of embodiment, embeddedness, and situated perspectives, rather than from Indigenous theorizations, to describe Spahr's poetic explorations as a non-Indigenous, settler-colo-

nial epistemological project. What Spahr tries to understand by thinking through her own situated perspective in and through her poetry, I argue, is what it means for a continental American migrant and settler to engage in ecopoetic place-making in relation to Hawai'i.

Spahr's poetry collections *Fuck You—Aloha—I Love You* (2001) and *Well Then There Now* (2011) are highly evocative when it comes to exploring "multiple modes of embedding" and experimenting with a "view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" versus the "view from […] a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body" to recall Haraway's phrasing. As if to signpost a shift in Spahr's publications toward a poetry of dis/location invested in situated perspectives, "localism or t/here," the first poem of *Fuck You—Aloha—I Love You* (2001), traces the progression from a painful sense of placelessness to an exuberant, though in no way stable sense of place. In ways similar to, yet also different from, the blissful immersion in nature evoked in "Gentle Now," the exuberant sense of place in "localism or t/there" is figured as physical intimacy between the poem's plural speakers and the natural world of their new place of residence. Employing a poetic language reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's poetics of repetitions and grammatical variations (Altieri 134), "localism or t/here" begins as follows:

> There is no there there anywhere.
> There is no here here or anywhere either.
> Here and there. He and she. There, there.
>
> Oh yes. We are lost there and here.
> And here and there we err.
> And we are that err.
> And we are that lost.
>
> (*Fuck You* 3)

The first lines of "localism or t/here" conjure an abstract, almost existential sense of being "lost there and here" that evokes feelings of displacement experienced by Spahr's migrant speakers as much as feelings of disconnection and confusion experienced by "err[ing]" lovers. Rather than reading like an environmentally suggestive poem of place, "localism or t/here" initially reads like a poem of dis/location that expresses—through the repeated insistence on the absence of a "here" and of a "there"—a deep-seated longing for the kind of stable, uncontested sense of place commonly associated with settler emplacement.

While the poem's speakers are trying to reorient themselves in relation to their new place of residence, they realize that they have been "misunderstanding fullness and/ emptiness" (*Fuck You* 3). Where they initially felt dislocated, they begin to see a "here" that becomes increasingly concrete and tangible. By using punctuation that skillfully inverts subject and object relations, Spahr turns the poem's marker

of location "here" into the speakers' addressee ("Oh here, you are all that we want"; *Fuck You* 3). Switching from expressions of loss and longing to a song of love and praise—a reversal of the narrative progression in "Gentle Now"—the poem begins to invoke the fullness of "here," which becomes the object of the speakers' adoration. At the same time, appealing to all the senses, "location or t/here" starts to imagine the more-than-human world Spahr's plural speakers encounter in highly sensual terms, stressing its almost excessive materiality: the natural environment is "rich and dark with soil" (3) and made fertile by "soft rain" that "refreshes and stimulates" (3); it is "encouraging of growing" (3) and "full of seeds" (4). Given the sensual language in this passage, one may be tempted to read these lines as evocative of what Catrin Gersdorf, in following Susan Griffith, calls "an *ecology of intimacy*" ("Ecocritical Uses" 179; emphasis original), that is, as an expression of deep appreciation for and attraction to nature that "articulates ideas of interrelatedness and interdependency as well as experiences of pleasure and joy" (Gersdorf 179). Yet, because "localism or t/here" is not concerned with the abstract act of establishing human-nature relations but with the aftermath of the speakers' work-related migration from the continental United States to Hawai'i, the poem's celebration of nature's receptiveness and fertility cannot simply be reduced to an environmentally suggestive erotics of place.

In light of Hawaii's occupied status and history of colonization, it is a risky poetic move to figure the longing of U.S. continental migrants for emplacement as a desire for physical intimacy with a "rich and dark" natural world, risky because the poem's ironic play with the tropes of conventional nature poetry can easily be overlooked or misunderstood. At the same time, there is subtle irony in the poem, I would argue, for example when a personified natural world receives these migrants like it receives the rain, "without complaint" (*Fuck You* 3), as the poem stresses, using an odd metaphor that I read as mockery of the conventional imagery of 747 poetry, in which the trope of the lush (female-coded) island paradise awaiting (sexual) conquest has been as pervasive as in U.S.-American settler-colonial depictions of Hawai'i at large (Wilson x). In this light, Spahr's use of an erotically charged rhetoric in a poem that depicts settler place-making in the aftermath of migration risks perpetuating the racist and sexist discourses of colonization that structure western understandings of human-human and human-nature relations in the Pacific. At the same time, Spahr's ironic use of an eroticized, gendered language may be said to challenge the destructive patriarchal "*economy of power*, in which language functions in concert with and in support of techniques and tactics of domination and subjugation" (Gersdorf, "Ecocritical Uses" 178–79; emphasis original). The fact that Spahr portrays the gradual embedding that follows the migrants' arrival on the archipelago as an effect of place-making, not just as a natural consequence of arriving in a place, is significant as well. What this portrayal of empowered speakers cannot undo, however, or indeed what it foregrounds, are the problematic settler-colonial dimensions of the environmentally suggestive place-making that Spahr's speakers engage in.

Indeed, even though the speakers of Spahr's dis/located poems noticeably struggle with the realization that their position as settlers changes the political and ethical implications of their place-making, what one might view as migrants' understandable longing for an intimate connection with their new place of residence cannot necessarily be seen as culturally sensitive or ethically defensible in the case of settler migration to Hawai'i.

Instead of insisting on the colonial trope of the welcoming island paradise, one can argue, "localism or t/here" dramatizes the migrant speakers' struggle with the politics of place and the politics of place-making in the context of colonization.[10] In the last stanza of the poem, Spahr counters the idea of a blissful union between its migrant speakers and the natural world by undercutting it with the everyday realities of "banal globalization" as they are enacted in "tourist discourse" (see Thurlow and Jaworski). Troubling the trope of the welcoming island paradise, the poem ironically alleges that the island's natural world is "as accepting of the refrigerator" as it is "of the bough loaded with/ fruit" (*Fuck You* 4), criticizing the false colonialist and capitalist logic that the resources of an exoticized "there" ("the bough loaded with/ fruit" 4) are and will always remain plentiful and available for consumption. The poem also draws attention to the fact that seemingly mundane actions—such as one's unquestioning reliance on common amenities of modern life (represented by "the refrigerator" 4) and casual far-distance travel ("And you and you and you are here and/ there and there and here" 4)—may have far-reaching environmental consequences and implicate people in larger systems of exploitation and oppression. Even though Spahr's speakers seek to establish a relation of intimacy with the islands' natural environment, their place-making does not lead to a balanced, let alone mutually enriching exchange. Rather, the final line of "localism or t/here" suggests that the speakers' move to Hawai'i and the mass mobility of other people like them—whether other continental migrants or tourists—produces a "tear[ing]" or disruption. This disruption points to the cultural, social, and political conflicts that have been caused by settler mass mobility between the continent and Hawai'i and the considerable stress this movement imposes on the archipelago's environment. Continental migrants coming to Hawai'i, such a reading suggests, would do well to

10 In her memoire *The Transformation*, Spahr too addresses the problems of writing poetry about Hawai'i as a "continental haole" (109), that is to say, as a white American migrant and temporary inhabitant of the archipelago. As a result of becoming aware of her own and her lovers' position as settlers, Spahr notes, she/they devised a very specific set of rules for writing about the place they had moved to: "Whenever they discussed the island, they had the responsibility to address the legacy of colonialism on the island" (*The Transformation* 108), they had "to point out both that they supported the sovereignty movement and that this movement was larger than them" (108), and "they should not claim to understand the culture that was there before the whaling ships arrived" (109). While many of her poems about Hawai'i follow these rules, others, like "location or/there," wrestle with them.

critically examine their longing for emplacement, their impulses toward place-making, and the responsibility that comes with the significant ecological agency they derive from their specific position of privilege.

Like other poems in *Well Then There Now,* "localism or t/here" suggests that continental migrants' longing for emplacement and acts of place-making are understandable but difficult to justify amidst ongoing Indigenous demands for decolonization. It is especially difficult to justify, where settler place-making comes into direct conflict with Native Hawaiian land rights, as the poem "gathering palolo stream" from the collection *Fuck You—Aloha—I Love You* demonstrates. The poem's title points not only to a little stream approximately four miles east of downtown Honolulu, O'ahu, and to the island's name, which means "the gathering place" in Native Hawaiian, it also to different acts of engaging with places and the nonhuman world ("gathering"). From the onset, the poem thus draws attention to the material-discursive dimensions of place, different forms of place-making and conflicts surrounding land rights:

> A place allows certain things.
>
> A place allows certain things
> and certain of we of a specific
> place have certain rights.
>
> (*Fuck You* 19)

In its very first line, "gathering palolo stream" avoids a human speaker and instead establishes "place" as a grammatical subject. The open-ended, ambiguous phrasing implies that places "allow[/] certain things" within their bounds while keeping other things out and permit certain interactions to take place while preventing others. While the second line may initially only seem to repeat the first line, it marks the beginning of a short stanza that introduces a hierarchy between the "things" that constitute a place such as Palolo Stream through their presence and activities. It differentiates between "things" and "we," a pronoun that sometimes refers to a very specific group of people in Spahr's poetry and sometimes to every human and nonhuman being on the planet. In "gathering palolo stream" the pronoun "we" is more narrowly defined insofar as the poem discusses the relationship of "certain of we of a specific / place" to the stream. Rather than being a grammatical object that the stream acts upon, as in the first line, "certain of we of a specific/ place" in the second sentence of the poem is a grammatical subject, which not only tells the reader that the people in question have agency but emphasizes that "certain of we of a specific / place *have certain rights*" (19; emphasis added). The insistence on rights implies that "certain of we" in this particular instance neither refers to all living beings nor to all human beings on the island. Instead, it refers only to "*certain of we* of a specific / place" (19; emphasis added), that is, to certain human beings but not others. This dis-

tinction adds an explicitly social and political dimensions to the material relations evoked in the text and draws attention to the contested politics of place in Hawai'i.

By specifying that "certain of we *of a specific / place* have certain rights" (19; emphasis added), the poem indicates that peoples' places of origin matter when it comes to their right of access to and use of the land. In the case of Hawai'i, where Indigenous control of the land has long been limited by haole settlement and codified by settler law, this is not only to say that mobility can affect a person's or group's relationship to place, in the settler state of Hawai'i it is also to say that racial politics determine peoples' rights, access, and, relationship to the land, a fact that Spahr explores, for instance, in her poetic photo-essay "2199 Kalia Road" also included in the collection *Well Then There Now*. Like Waikīkī's beaches and coastal waters, which has been turned into a wasteland "full of silt and/ pesticides and oils and other urban run-off" (*Well Then* 119) by mass tourism and made almost inaccessible for Kanaka Maoli while they remain accessible for continental migrants (103), Palolo Stream, the plural speakers explains in "gathering palolo stream," too is difficult to access, because it is blocked by "a fence," "buildings," and a "parking lot" (*Well Then* 24). Instead of pointing to tourism as the culprit, Spahr here points to the transposition of continental American car culture to the much less spacious geographies of Hawai'i as the cause for disrupted access to public lands on the island chain: "It is because *certain of we* are / always driving," her speakers note, "that the parking lot / matters" (28; emphasis added). Put differently, it is at least in part because the land and mobility rights of some—here the right to private property and automobility rights—matter more than the land and mobility rights of others—here the right to access to certain sections of public land—that locales such as Palolo Stream remain contested spaces in which the ecological agency of some is legally heightened, while it is severely limited for others.

Spahr's poems are highly ambiguous in how they speak about rights of access to and rightful versus ethical use of public land. This ambiguity points to a tension that emerges in her ecopoetry about Hawai'i between her anti-colonial views, which lead her to support Indigenous claims to the land, and what one might describe as her anarchist views, which lead her to promote common uses of the land. More or less explicitly, some of Spahr's poems thus also explore the problems that arise for settlers invested simultaneously in anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and environmental politics. Over the course of several pages, each of which only consists of a few lines, "gathering palolo stream" explores this tension along with the discrepancies between ecological agency and land rights through word-play and code-switching:

To go to the stream is a right for
certain people.

To go, to gather.

[*page break*]

The stream is right.

It is a place for gathering.

A place for gathering āholehole

or for gathering guava, mīkana,
maiʻa

or for gathering palapalai.

(*Fuck You* 20–21)

Playing with different connotations of the word *gathering*, the poem alludes to the multiple meanings that places accumulate and to the different functions that places fulfill for different people in different social and cultural contexts. A distinction that matters in Hawaiʻi, as the poem indicates by combining references to legal discourse and Native Hawaiian words, is the one between the meanings and uses of places in Native Hawaiian cultural practices as opposed to the meanings and uses of these places in settler-colonial practices. What matters, too, the poem implies, is which of these meanings and uses are given priority, both legally and in everyday material and discursive practices.

As Spahr explains in a note following "gathering palolo stream," the Supreme Court of Hawaiʻi ruled in a 1995 landmark case—*Public Access Shoreline Hawaii US* vs. *Hawaiʻi County Planning Commission* (*PASH*)—that state agencies had the right to protect "indigenous Hawaiians' traditional and customary rights of access to gather plants, harvest trees, and take game" (*Fuck You* 31). Despite this law, the note adds, Indigenous land rights in Hawaiʻi are still "constantly eroded by property owners who restrict physical access by fencing" (*Fuck You* 31). Or as the last stanza of "gathering palolo stream" puts it:

Certain of we have rights and
these rights are written so that
there is a possible keeping, a

keeping away, that denies
gathering.

(*Fuck You* 30)

Subtly modifying phrases, the text lays out an intricate chain of cause and effect that evokes what I discuss in more detail in my chapter on Craig Santos Perez as the practice of colonial enclosure, that is, a fencing in of land and a "keeping away" of Indigenous (and other non-propertied) people. In line with the logics of colonial enclosure, which depends on the idea of land as legal property, the "written" word (of law) in Spahr's poem stands accused of perpetuating the marginalization and dispossession of Native Hawaiians. Insofar as the poem's speakers exhibit a certain self-consciousness about their own social positioning—after all they are members, one can infer, of the group that has historically claimed land rights in Hawai'i at the expense of Native Hawaiians, namely continental haole—this charge in the poem against the written word is also one that poetry as a practice of place-making enacted by a continental migrant poet must grapple with.

In the Native Hawaiian tradition, "gathering palolo stream" suggests, the stream is a place "to gather" or come together as well as one "for gathering āholehole" (a type of sweet water fish), guava, "mīkana" (papaya), "mai'a" (banana or plantains), and "palapalai," a fern-like plant used for *lai* and *hula*-making. In such a tradition, places like Palolo Stream would be understood as environments that sustain a community physically, culturally, and spiritually by way of accommodating a range of place-making practices. Yet, places can only sustain communities this way if the larger ecosystem does not change too drastically or too quickly and if the communities in question have rights of access to and use of the land. In the case of Palolo Stream neither is guaranteed. Hinting at the dangers of ecological degradation, Spahr's poem depicts Palolo Stream as a local ecosystem that "gathers" many disparate "things" with potentially dire environmental consequences. Punning on two different connotations of the word *thing*, which can refer to a concrete material object as well as to an abstract idea or meaning, Spahr asserts: "The stream is many things. / Is busted television and niu [= coconut]" (22). Although they may be fenced off, the poem suggests, places such as Palolo Stream are porous environments, open to intrusions. Apart from being impacted by pollution, the extended ecosystem surrounding Palolo Stream too has changed as a result of introduced species. Indeed, in the list of flora and fauna from the excerpt just quoted, only the first and the last, "āholehole" and "palapalai" (21) refer to native Hawaiian plants. The other three, "guava," "mīkana" (papaya) and "mai'a" (banana) are tropical transplants, although they can easily be mistaken for native species given their ubiquity on the archipelago. By listing these transplants together with native plants, the poem highlights the extent to which nonhuman mobilities have shaped Hawaii's ecosystem. At the same time, the presence of these plants on the islands points to the (colonial)

human migrations that led to the introduction of foreign species to and spread of these species on Hawai'i. The place-making practice of poetry, Spahr's poem shows, can obscure these intertwined histories or make them visible. Drawing attention to her speakers' ecosocial position and imbrications in larger structures of domination as well as to the conflicts that arise from settler migrants' interactions with Hawaii's more-than-human world, Spahr attempts the latter, although her poetry also demands of her readers to be informed. By writing "ecological text[s]" that "highlight[/] the tangle of nature and society" (Ergin 32), she revisions poetry as a situated practice that reveals the potential pitfalls of settler place-making in the specific context of continental American migration to the Hawaiian Islands, even though it can never completely avoid all of them.

Dis/Entangled Poetry, Diffractive Ecopoetics, and Anti-Colonial Place-Making

Spahr's poetry draws attention to the agency of nonhuman beings and the agentive potential of matter, not least by highlighting their mobility, while also emphasizing human agency by examining the ways in which ecological agency, including settler ecological agency, is conditional on the individual's position within larger ecosocial structures. In the remainder of this chapter I elaborate on the tensions produced by these different understandings of ecological agency: first, as an ability to act and have an impact on the world that is more widely dispersed among nonhuman agents than commonly assumed and, second, as a power to act and a tendency to impact that some human agents possess to a much greater degree than others for historical, political, economic, social, and cultural reasons. More specifically, I explore how Spahr uses experimental language and form to investigate place-making by settler subjects moving back and forth between Hawai'i and the continental United States, that is to say, settler ecological agency and responsibility in the context of settler migration more broadly conceived.

Among recent work on matters of representation in materialist ecocriticism and materialist feminism, Karen Barad's notion of "agential realism" is particularly instructive not only for understanding ecological agency as dispersed among human and nonhuman agents, but also for thinking about how the material reality of such dispersed agency can be made seen or known and understood. Drawing from physicist Niels Boer amongst others, Barad recasts human-nature interactions as "intra-actions" and hence proposes the idea of "representation" with the idea of "agential realism" as an epistemological and ontological framework that depends on a "posthumanist notion of performativity" (Barad 808). Rather than being a purely human activity and product of human agency alone, posthumanist performativity, as conceptualized by Barad, "incorporates important material and discursive, social and

scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors" (808) and thus continues to examine the ever-shifting boundaries between human bodies and nonhuman natures, instead of (cl)aiming to describe phenomena in the world. As a result, all "intra-actions," among which human efforts at describing phenomena in the world are just one example, are open-ended "*[m]aterial-discursive practices*" as well as "*specific iterative enactments*" (Barad 822; emphasis original) involved in the continuous re-constitution of human bodies in relation to nonhuman entities as well as in the constant reconfiguration of the shifting boundaries and constellations of meaning these processes of materialization produce (815). What happens, Spahr's ecomaterialist poetry invites readers to ask, if one reads her poetries about different places not merely as an attempt at representing human-nature relations but as an attempt at foregrounding poetry as a material-discursive practice? Or, for my purposes, what happens when one reads Spahr's poetry as a material-discursive practice that conceives of poetic place-making as an iterative enactment of human-nonhuman relations in the context of mobility? As I will suggest, it shows the im/possibility of settler attempts at anti-colonial place-making, whether through poetry or otherwise.

Rather than conceiving of representation in terms of "reflection," Barad suggests, much like Donna Haraway, the work accomplished by material-discursive practices should be thought of in terms of "diffraction" (Barad 803). As Filippo Bertoni notes, both Barad and Haraway propose diffraction as a figure for a "method of inquiry, a technique for writing and reading, a genre of storytelling, an ethics, and a politics" that "embraces the situated, modest interventions that it makes possible, and uses them towards bringing about different worlds" (178). Such an understanding of writing as inquiry as well as a political practice and ethical project has much in common with the ideas of ecopoetics as an investigative practice discussed earlier. As Paulina Ambrozy notes in drawing in part on Lynn Keller's reflections on the experimental poetic works of Adam Dickinson and Evelyn Reilly, "a diffractive approach [to reading poetry] helps to uncover fluid entanglements as well as intra-actions between poetry and science, reworking their boundaries and actualizing their new possibilities as well as ecosophical concerns" (381–82; see also Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics* 67–97.). As it examines the boundary-making processes resulting from the intra-actions of human and nonhuman agents, writing as inquiry—whether in the form of scientific discourse, critical theory, or in Spahr's case investigative ecopoetry—remains interested in the shifting distribution of agencies as well as in the responsibilities of the situated and embodied human subject, precisely because the anthropocene subject's boundaries with and position in the world is never fixed:

> Agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary artic-

> ulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in the enactment of a causal structure. Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering. (Barad 827)

In Spahr's experimentalist poetry, place-making in and through poetry is the kind of situated, open-ended, material-discursive practice Barad describes here. As such, it asks questions about different subjects' changing positions and "possibilities for acting" in the world rather than providing simplistic answers for social or environmental problems. Employing para-lyrical experimentations with poetic voice and perspective, ungrammatical sentence structures, and language defamiliarized by translation machines, Spahr's poems constantly prod and reconfigure what could be perceived as naturally occurring material-discursive entanglements of human and nonhuman agents in the context of mobility as well as the gradations of ecological agency that these entanglements produce. At the same time, Spahr's poetry thinks about what Barad describes as humans' "responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming" (Barad 827), or what Haraway discusses as humans' responsibility "to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others" (*Modest_Witness* 36). The ways of life Spahr casts her lot for with her diffractive ecopoetics are more ecologically viable and socio-politically just ones, which is why she continues to address settler colonialism.

Among Spahr's collections to date, *Well Then There Now* is most invested in examining the ethical implications of mobile subjects' entanglements with the more-than-human world. In the poem "Sonnets," as in "location or/here," the initial response of Spahr's migrant speakers to the overwhelming physical presence of Hawaii's natural world is a mixture of intense attraction and confusion. The recent arrivals are unsettled by "[t]his growing and this flowing into all around [them]" (*Well Then* 28) and the breaking down of barriers between themselves, "others," and "the land" (28). In an attempt to maintain (a sense of) control over the transformative encounter with the more-than-human world in Hawai'i, Spahr's speakers decide to "uproot," "buil[d]," and "bunker" (*Well Then* 28). Their acts of place-making, which at this point aim at separation and mastery, are destructive, although they lead to a sense of belonging. Or rather, they lead to a sense of entitlement and possession equated with a sense of belonging, as a later passage implies:

> And because we could not figure it out bunkering was a way for us
> to claim what wasn't really ours, what could never really be
> ours and it gave us a power we otherwise would not have had
> and we believed that this made the place ours.
>
> (*Well Then* 29)

Once the speakers' place-making has been marked as an act of land-taking, it is implicitly contrasted with a different form of place-making that leads to a more critical understanding of human-nature relations in Hawai'i. Rather than relying on notions of intimate entanglements with the non-human world as something that occurs naturally as a result of moving from one place to another, this critical understanding depends on the speakers' acknowledgement of their ecosocial positioning as continental migrants and settlers in a colonized/occupied place and a reckoning in poetry with the realization that the material-discursive entanglements resulting from continental settler migration to Hawai'i are in many ways highly unnatural:

> But because we were bunkered, the place was never ours, could
> never really be ours, because we were bunkered from what
> mattered, growing and flowing into, and because we could not
> begin to understand that this place was not ours until we
> grew and flowed into something other than what we were we
> continued to make things worse for this place of growing
> and flowing into even while some of us came to love it and let
> it grow in our own hearts, flow in our own blood.
>
> (*Well Then* 29)

Rather than continuing "to claim what wasn't really [theirs]" and "what could never really be / [theirs]," some of the speakers "let / [this place] grow in [their] own hearts, flow in [their] own blood," even though doing so "make[s] things worse for the place of growing / and flowing." It is significant, I believe, that the two final lines of the passage of "Sonnets" just quoted are similar to the lines from the poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache," discussed earlier. This echoing of a poem about Spahr's place of origin raises the question in how far, for Spahr's speakers and other continental migrants, place-making in the "house where [they] are from" (25) is different from place-making in Hawai'i, "the house where [they] live" (25). At the same time, this passage urges readers to ask whether, and in what contexts, the difference between Hawai'i and Appalachian Ohio matters, given that the United States as a whole is a settler state.

"Sonnets" explores questions of identity and belonging, place-making and place-taking in relation to Hawai'i by addressing discourses of migration as well as discourses of blood. The right side of every page consists of passages like the one quoted earlier, in which the speakers comment on the experience of arriving in Hawai'i and being confronted with the more-than-human world in their new place of residence as well as its history of colonization. The first two stanzas point to flying and walking as two ways of encountering Hawai'i from two vastly different perspectives, one from above, one more planar:

We arrived.
We arrived by air, by 747 and DC10 and L1011.
We arrived over the islands and we saw the green of them
out the window.
We arrived and then walked into the green.

Things were different.
The air was moist and things were different.

Plants grew into and on top of and around each other and things
were different.
The arrival of those before us made things different.

(*Well Then* 19)

While the right side of each opposing page of the poem evoke a process of arrival, the left side of each page (with the exception of the last pair of pages) consists of lists of blood components, including different types of white blood-cells (20), different enzymes, fatty acids, and proteins (21, 22), and the levels of essential minerals as well as of certain waste products produced by biochemical processes in the body (24, 26). In some ways similar to the record of "the chemical self" that experimental Canadian poet Adam Dickinson proposes in his latest pataphysical poetic project (Ambrozy 376), where he conceptualizes poetry "as an alternative form of science in its own right capable of expanding what matters in semiotic and material environments by interrogating the distinctions between culture and nature, and between human and nonhuman" (A. Dickinson, "Pataphysics" 147), Spahr uses the test results to explore the measurable and immeasurable-but-sensed consequences of being an American settler poet and continental migrant living in Hawai'i. As she puts it in one of the sections of "Sonnets," she is compiling

A catalogue of the individual and a catalogue of us with all.
A catalogue of full of thought.
A house where we with all our complexities lie.
A catalogue of blood.

(*Well Then* 25)

While Adam Dickinson uses "microbiological and chemical burden tests" to write "the potentialities and intensities of 'the transversal' self" (Ambrozy 376), "opening [it] up to new levels of interiority, intimacy, and relationality" (376), Spahr's "catalogue of blood" is at once an indictment of racist discourses and an acknowledgement of decolonial discourses converging on the metaphor of blood. Without excluding the possibility that Spahr may be "shift[ing] her focus from the search for an originary identity based on lineage and blood to the urgent need to speak col-

lectively against capitalist-military build-up and environmental destruction" (Ergin 177), as Meliz Ergin suggests, I want to highlight that "Sonnets" evokes the opposition between "[t]hose who had a home" and "have a right to a home" (*Well Then* 25) and "[t]hose who took" or at least "stayed with the taking" (25), even if she doesn't ultimately affirm this opposition. One of the "complexities" that arises in a place such as Hawai'i, a reading of her poems focused on issues of mobility indicates, is that continental migrants are at the same time human beings who "had a home" and "have a right to a home" and privileged individuals "who took" and "stayed with the taking." Another complexity is that there may be no form of settler place-making, however critical or consciously anti-colonial, that can resolve this tension. Viewed in this way, any form of settler ecopoetic place-making intent on producing a deeper sense of belonging and a more stable sense of emplacement, just like any form of settler place-making affirming a settler migrant's uncritical sense of place and right to emplacement, for example by depicting continental migrants' arrival in Hawai'i as an unavoidable entangling with the archipelago's natural world, can be said to perpetuate a settler-colonial logic of land-taking.

"Sonnets" suggests that place-making can all too quickly become an act of land-taking in the sense of an appropriation by which settlers come to lay claim to or maintain control over a given place. The poem "Things of Each Possible Relation" too asks this question while it imagines alternative forms of (ecopoetic) place-making from a perspective of migration. As Spahr points out in the short commentary following "Things of Each Possible Relation" mentioned earlier, the poem was in part inspired by the two complementary views that define positioning practices in the Pacific, one from the sea and one from the land (*Well Then* 71; see also Ergin 184).[11] As Rob Wilson explains, the directional distinction that new arrivals in Hawai'i have to

11 Spahr refers to *Islands and Beaches: Discourses on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774–1880* (1988) by Australian historian Greg Dening in her commentary (*Well then* 70), when she mentions this double view. In *Islands and Beaches*, Dening reflects on the beach as a zone of cultural contact and conflict, describing islands as places defined by mobility: "Every living thing on an island has been a traveler. Every species of tree, plant and animal on an island has crossed the beach. In crossing the beach every voyager has brought something old and made something new" (Dening 31–32). As can be seen here, Dening's description conflates different kinds of mobility in ways that is highly problematic because it does not distinguish voyaging from settling and settling from colonizing, a fact that becomes even plainer in the following passage: "Human beings are voyagers to islands, as any plant or any other animal. They might land naked on an empty beach, but in their minds, their languages, their relationships they bring a world with them. The island might be to them something given. They inherit its soils, its climate, its products. But they are also the creators of the world they come to live in. They give names to all its parts and in naming they order and divide. The colours, the winds, the mountains, the valleys, the fruits, the fish, the peoples, all things are theirs because they name them and give them separate being" (32). By differentiating between different kinds of mobility and place-making, my analysis tries to avoid such conflations, as does Spahr's poetry, I would argue.

learn as quickly as possible is the one between "*mauka* ('inland toward the mountain') and *makai* ('toward the sea')" (126), a distinction Spahr refers to in her collection as well (*Well Then* 36, 38). In the version of this double view included in "Sonnets," the Native Hawaiian positioning practice is revised from and for a perspective of migration as "a view from the sea (*the view of those who arrived from elsewhere)* and the view from the land (those who were *already there*)" (*Well Then* 71; emphasis added). Before Spahr's poem arrives at a "view from land" (65) toward the end of the poem, it opens with "the view from the sea" (55):

> the view from the sea
> the constant motion or claiming, collecting, changing, and taking
> the calmness of bays and the greenness of land caused by the
> freshness of things growing into
> the arrival to someplace else
> the arrival to someplace differently
>
> (*Well Then* 55)

The "arrival to someplace else" is described here as a prolonged and active process that engages all the senses of the unidentified speaker/s ("calmness of bays and the greenness of land caused by the freshness of things"). In conjunction with the shifting perspective, the emphasis in the poem on bodily sensations recalls what Jonathan Skinner in his discussion of "somatics" as a concern of ecopoetics calls "proprioception," that is, "those stimuli perceived within an organism connected with the position and movement of the body, amongst other indicators" (*Jacket 2*, "Somatics" n. p.). Even though "Things of Each Possible Relation" presents proprioception, the embodied speaker(s) remain somewhat elusive in large parts of the poem, which omits pronouns, even where conventional sentence structures would demand their use. Rather than featuring a lyrical "I" or a lyrical "we" like so many of Spahr's other poems about Hawai'i and continental North America, these passages avoid explicit speakers, without eliminating evocations of embodied experiences or allusions to situated, yet mobile perspectives.

Importantly, "Things of each possible relation" evokes many different kinds of human and nonhuman mobility, ranging from peoples' historical and contemporary migrations to Hawai'i to the small-scale biochemical processes that produce the islands' lush vegetation. Viewing Hawai'i while approaching the islands by ship, as the poem's beginning indicates, the speaker/s emphasize/s "the freshness of the things increasing / the greenness of the ground / the calmness of the compartments" (*Well Then* 55). Through repetition and anaphora as well as through the use of gerunds that allows for a collapsing of subject and object positions, the poem depicts the islands' more-than-human world as a strange and wonderful system "of things growing into [each other]," that is, of emergent interconnections and intra-actions:

the constant movement to claim, to gather, to change, and to
    consider sea
constant motion
the green of the soil which increases the freshness of things
then calmness and the sail
the requirement on meeting to modify and to regard
the inbound of this someplace differently
the constant movement

(*Well Then* 55)

The migrant subjects' encounter with Hawaii's more-than-human world is associated here with the emergence of interdependencies that never settle into permanently fixed formations (see Ergin 185). On the one hand, the speaker/s recognize/s the "requirement on meeting to modify," that is, the inevitability of her/their material-discursive impact on the local ecosystem; on the other hand, she/they must "regard / the inbound of this someplace differently," that is, they must consider how the "constant movement" they become part of is changing them in return.

While "Things of Each Possible Relation" insists on a certain degree of reciprocity in migrants' engagements with the islands' more-than-human world, then, it does not pretend that the field is leveled between the different actors when it comes to questions of ecological agency. One of the ways in which the text points to the differences rather than the similarities between the various inhabitants of Hawai'i is by alluding to the harm some migratory species have caused to the archipelago's ecosystem. While "the snipe" and "the plover" (*Well There* 57), two vagrant bird species mentioned in the poem, are seasonal migrants that appear naturally on the archipelago, at least as long as their migrations are not disturbed by changing climatic conditions, the "tree of heaven" and the "cow" (57) mentioned in the same passage were introduced on the islands in order to increase their agricultural profitability and with the least regard to the far-reaching effects on the local ecosystem. Using numerous similes and comparisons that withhold the stable second element of comparison and thus a resolution, "Things of Each Possible Relation" suggests that both human and nonhuman migrations have caused "a series of great and extremely fast changes" (57) in Hawaii's more-than-human world. At the same time, the text warns against "the problems" of drawing this kind of "analogy" (57; see also Ergin 186). As Tana Jean Welch notes in her reading of the poem, "analogy contributes to the violence and justification of colonialism by perpetuating a singular perspective that reduces everything to type" (13). Overly simplistic equivalences such as the one that equates a migratory bird to a human migrant, Spahr's poem warns, risk obscuring how ecological agency, political power, and social responsibility are distributed unevenly within the "diverse formed assemblies" (*Well Then* 57) that different human and nonhuman agents enter into as a result of their respective mobility.

Referring to the intertwined physical and cognitive processes at work in poetic human-place engagements, many of Spahr's poems can be read as meta-poetic commentaries on ecopoetic place-making as a self-conscious and self-reflexive process. Rather than proposing without any reservation that poetry is always an appropriate means of place-making for all types of migrants, Spahr emphasizes the epistemological limits, representational challenges, and ethical quandaries involved in enlisting poetic language for the project of place-making:

> while what we are knows the unalike and
> while one becomes the various compositions formed by nature
> the problems of the analogy
> are the sight of the trace
> and nature as the way to see the fly-catcher
> and the series of large and extremely fast modifications
> in the sight of the land
> and the introduction of the plants and the animals, others, exotic
> when it is we, it is the unalike knowing and
> if one were to transform nature's given forms
> then the problems of the analogy of it appear
>
> (*Well Then* 64)

When poetry tries to account for the complexity of natural processes and humans' entanglement by way of analogy, this dense passage suggests, it faces the double-challenge of trying to represent inherently mutable phenomena from a perspective that is equally mutable because "what we are" cannot be kept separate from "the various compositions formed by nature." And yet, even if takes such a perspective on the world and the subject's place in it as one's analytical point of departure, it is still possible to "know" which phenomena are "unalike" others at a given moment in time. At the same time, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to argue for the general likeness of two phenomena, even though this is precisely the idea that poetic techniques of comparison and "analogy" rely on. Indeed, "problems of analogy" not only reveal themselves in "the sight of the trace," which is to say in those constantly changing aspects of complex phenomena that testify to their processual and mutable character, they also lie in conceptualizations of "nature as the way to see the fly-catcher," that is, in an equation of natural phenomena with humans' perception of these phenomena. Last but not least, the "problems of analogy" Spahr's poem addresses also result from "the series of large and extremely fast modifications in the sight of the land," or put differently, from the kinds of anthropogenic environmental changes that threaten to make old analogies meaningless. While analogy may thus be a useful tool to explain unfamiliar phenomena with the help of familiar ones, Spahr's poem questions the logic of analogy because it is wary of the fixed ontologies it presupposes.

Like several other poems in *Well Then There Now*, "Things of Each Possible Relation" foregrounds "the interconnectivity of the various elements of the ecosystem as a means for resisting colonial taxonomies and exposing irregularities of identification as well as the eco-ontological ambiguities at the heart of all existence" (Ergin 8–9). "Things" uses a variety of poetic strategies of diffraction (i.e. of inquiry and investigation rather than representation or reflection) to portray Hawai'i as a place in which the boundaries between some phenomena that may conventionally be presumed to be clearly distinct in western/ settler-colonial thought begin to blur (see also Ergin 191), while other differentiations *stay in place* because they are *kept in place* through material-discursive processes of boundary-making. One such differentiation, and a highly contentious one, is that between settlers and natives, a differentiation that has stabilized in some contexts while it is contested in others, such as when settlers lay claim to land and resources in Hawai'i by claiming non-Indigenous nativeness. The strategies in Spahr's poem uses to explore this kind of boundary-making are repetitions with slight modifications, agrammatical sentence structures that verge on the nonsensical, and analogies that either fail to make clear which phenomena they mean to compare or offer equivalences that remain highly obscure even as they suggest the interrelatedness of thing. Indeed, the "things sewn together" (*Well Then* 59) on the "pages" (62) of Spahr's book range from individual "cells" (62) to entire organisms, from inanimate to animate nature (the "wings of the blow[hole]" 62), from human to more-than-human bodies ("the tongue of humans and the tongue of hummingbird" 62). This poetic stitching questions the boundaries between the paired phenomena, between human subjects and the natural world, and between nature and culture ("analogy/ drives pages together on the branch"; *Well Then* 62). Engagement with place here becomes an open-ended process of diffraction that crucially depends on "things of each possible relation hashing against one another" (67).

Ecopoetic place-making as an activity that should allow subjects to establish meaningful relationship to the natural world in cases where long-term intimate engagement with a place is not an option is re-conceptualized here as an ongoing practice that depends crucially on the place-maker's socioecological positioning and the ecological agency that results from it. Importantly, the "view from land" Spahr's speaker/s eventually arrive/s at via a "sight from the earth" (*Well Then* 64), mentioned right before the shift from one perspective to the other, is a sight that highlights Spahr's environmentally-oriented approach to place-making. Contrary to what the poem's transition from a "view from the sea (*the view of those who arrived from elsewhere)*" to "a view from land" (65; emphasis original) might suggest, however, the more ecologically informed perspective "from land" that Spahr's speaker arrive at in the poem is not one based on notions of stability, mastery, or ownership, nor is it the view of "(*those who were already there*)" (65; emphasis original), i.e. a perspective that claims any kind of native-ness. Instead, it is a perspective that acknowledges different kinds of mobility as both harmful for and constitutive of the islands' more-

than-human world and humans' entanglements with it. Conceived of as a situated yet mobile material-discursive practice, the ecopoetic place-making that "Things of Each Possible Relation" is and investigates, challenges humanist notions of bounded subjectivity, while still emphasizing bodily perspectives and the unique position, agency, impact, and responsibility of the continental migrant who is also a settler-colonial subject.

While poems such as "Sonnets" and "Things of Each Possible Relation" reflect on the discontents of settler ecopoetic place-making in Hawai'i, "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours" transposes these reflections onto continental North America. Written in response to Robert Frost's "The Gift Outright" (1923; see Ergin 194), a poem about human-place relations in (North) America written from a settler-perspective that famously begins with the claim that "The land was ours before we were the land's" and ends by suggesting that America was "unstoried, artless, unenhanced" before the arrival of European settlers (Frost 224), "Some of We" weaves together impressions from Spahr's travels from California to France with allusions to her French grandfather's migration to Canada over half a century prior, reflecting on the longer history of European migration to and settlement in North America. "Some of We" constructs interlinked thematic sections based on the repetition and variation of sentences translated, as Spahr notes, back and forth between the colonial languages of English and French with the help of an online translation machine (*Well Then* 15). Arranging the resulting de-familiarized, often ungrammatical and unidiomatic phrases into constantly shifting poetic constellations, the poem explores what it means to live off and—through the everyday material, trans-corporeal exchanges of eating— "to be of" land that "was never/ some of ours" and of "ground [that] was never sure with us. Is never some/ of ours. Be never certain with us. Never will be rightly some of ours" (*Well Then* 12). Unable to deny the appeal of a hard-won intimacy with place that comes from practices such as farming ("the green/ of the ground is the possession of the ground of us" 12), but equally unable to ignore the historical reality of colonial land-taking and the dramatic present-day consequences of treating land only or primarily as property and resource, the speakers of "Some of We" interrogates traditional notions of settling:

> What it means to settle. What means it arrangement. To we are all in this world together. We all the small ones are together in this world. To eat the grapes and not to plant the seed. To eat the grapes and not to plant seed. To hold on too tight. To be too strongly held in the function. To change. To change. To make the change. To make the change. To change the land. To change the ground.
>
> (*Well Then* 14)

In this excerpt, a way of settling reminiscent of the type of agrarianism also evoked in the U.S. passages of Walcott's poetry is criticized here for its disavowal of Indige-

nous claims to the land. Settler-capitalist ways of living off the land are put under scrutiny for valuing the land only based on its "function" or usability and for fostering a disconnection between processes of production and consumption. Both historical forms of settler agriculture and the land-use practices of contemporary agribusiness, the poem suggests, can be blamed for having disturbed inter-species relations in a global ecosystem in which "all the small ones"—a phrase that alternately refers to birds and to all human and nonhuman beings—"are together" (*Well Then* 14).

Bringing into relief different forms of being in the world and different modes of exploiting the land, "Some of We" raises urgent questions about ecological agency and the ethics of (ecopoetic) place-making in the context of migration and settler-colonialism. Self-consciously engaging with North America's heritage of territorial expansion, Spahr's poem points to the need for anti-colonial approaches to place-making that consider the complex politics of mobility and settlement in North America:

> […] How to
> move. How to move from settle on top to inside. How
> to move stabilization on the top inside. To embrace, to not settle. To
> embrace, not to arrange. To speak. To speak. To spoke. With the
> spoke. To poke away at what it is that is wrong in this world we are
> all in together. To push far what is with it is incorrect in this world
> which all the small ones are us in the unit.
>
> (*Well Then* 14)

While the poem does not give any concrete instructions on how to "move from settle on top to inside" and how to "embrace" instead of arranging, it tries out possible ways of thinking, speaking about, and acting differently while living with and off the land. Moreover, it demands a critical interrogation, not least through poetry, of how historical forms of social and environmental injustice continue to shape human-nature relations in the twenty-first century.

When mobile settler subjects hope to find a way of relating to the places they inhabit temporarily without settling/land-taking, Spahr's poetry indicates, they must "speak" about "what is wrong with the world" and "push far what is with it is incorrect in this world which all the small ones are us in the unit" (*Well Then* 14). Ultimately, however, Spahr's diffractive ecopoetics of mobility poses the question how collective settler ecological agency relates to the responsibility of individual privileged settler migrants:

> We tried not to notice but as we arrived we became a part of arriving
> and making different.
> We grew into it but with complicities and assumptions
> and languages

and kiawe and koa haole and mongooses.
With these things we kicked out certain other things whether we
meant to or not.
Asking what this means matters.
And the answer also matters.

(*Well Then* 19)

Questions about settler ecological agency in the context of mobility and about the ethics and politics of settler place-making matter and so do the answers to these questions. While Spahr's poetry asks these questions, it only provides tentative answers, perhaps because, ultimately, she may not be the person to recommend a certain course of action. Still, insofar as settler ecological agency figures in her poems alternatively as the power and will to take and destroy or as the power and will to engage in/ join in a making and repairing, any attempt at imagining an anti-colonial approach to settler place-making, in poetry or otherwise, Spahr's poems indicate, requires that mobile settler subjects examine their own material-discursive position and their ecosocial impact on the places they inhabit. At the same time, Spahr's poetry implies, reckoning with the concrete ecosocial impact of settler ecological agency also means for settler subjects to make careful choices about when to allow themselves to become entangled with the more-than-human world of a place and when to try to disentangle themselves, when to stay and when to leave, when to engage and when to withdraw.