



Ottmar Ette / Gesine Müller (eds.)

# New Orleans and the Global South

*Caribbean, Creolization, Carnival*

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## Introduction

Much has been written about New Orleans. In the United States it has been called the 'most un-American city' and a 'socio-geographical accident.' Regardless of whether it is viewed as Caribbean, African American, European (French, to be exact), or Creole, the city is seen to be exotic and different – 'The Big Easy.' From the perspective of traditional *francophonie*, as a former French colony *La Nouvelle-Orléans* is a constituent of the cultural legacy of the *Grande Nation* and should be preserved as such.

However, if one extends one's methodological perspective beyond the narrow confines of national, linguistic, or disciplinary borders and instead views the delta metropolis from the perspective of an *histoire croisée* or transfer history, which no longer privileges a center periphery logic, then New Orleans reveals itself to be a nexus of manifold transareal circulation processes – one that could play a key role in a hemispheric understanding of the Americas. In this way, New Orleans has been successfully placed in the context of the French Atlantic in recent anglophone and francophone research (Bill Marshall, Cécile Vidal, William Boelhower); and a number of current research projects focus on Caribbean (Rebecca Scott, Nathalie Dessens) and global (Adam Rothman) transfer processes intersecting there.

Therefore, this volume goes definitely beyond the myth(s) of New Orleans, analyzing the myth(s) of New Orleans. The city's potential as a paradigmatic metropolis of the Global South is what it aims to explore. The goal is to map out the dynamic, transareal network of relations that New Orleans inhabits. The contributors, experts from the US, the Philippines, France, Great Britain and Germany deal with the linguistic and cultural creolization processes in literature, with carnival and music, and with the idealistic and material transfer movements on which they rely. The focus lies not only on hegemonic transfer processes, which tend to be bilateral, but especially on multilateral ducts of circulation that are substantially dependent on the network of relations between regions of the Global South. A chronological arc is traced from the beginning of New Orleans's *post-colonial* era, which was launched with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, to

the *post-Katrina* period of today – 2015 marked ten years since the hurricane and its devastation.

The volume starts with a transareal introduction on the nature/culture-paradigm by Ottmar Ette from Potsdam about “Carnival and other Catastrophes.” The first section concentrates on creolization processes in literature and language. Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh from Regensburg opens this section with reflections about the Créol of Louisiana and Philipp Krämer explores the Louisianan Créol from a historico-linguistic perspective. The literary production of the free people of color is in the center of Gesine Müller’s contribution, followed by Owen Robinson from Essex, who enriches the volume with his analysis of Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *Mysteries of New Orleans*.

In the second section, dedicated to the relationship between New Orleans and Carnival, playwright Rosary O’Neill – originally from New Orleans but currently working in New York – offers an inside view on the outstanding role of Carnival in New Orleans, while Aurélie Godet from Paris focuses especially on the so-called ‘Mardi-speak’ and its linguistic roots.

Wolfram Knauer from the Jazz Institute Darmstadt opens the third section about more extensive cultural creolization processes with an overview of New Orleans’s mythical role in jazz history. William Boelhower from the Baton Rouge University in Louisiana explores the socio-geographical foundation of musical practice in the early days of New Orleans jazz. Hans Jürgen Lüsebrink from Saarbrücken examines the transversal relations between Louisiana and Quebec and Tobias Kraft from Berlin revisits New Orleans as a virtual world in computer games. Berndt Ostendorf from Munich closes this section with reflections about “Culture Formation and the Layering of History” in New Orleans.

The focus of the last section is on New Orleans as seen in a transareal context and aims to examine the Caribbean interconnections and also, in a second step, to go beyond the Caribbean concept. In a comparative approach, Sonja Arnold throws light on the “South-South Connections” between New Orleans and Brazil. Bill Marshall from Stirling, Scotland, elaborates on the historical dimension of New Orleans as one of the most important intersection points in the French Atlantic, followed by Michael Zeuske from Cologne who provides an

insight on Havana and New Orleans as two historical metropolises of slave trade in the Greater Caribbean. The volume closes with a contribution from Eugenio Matibag from Iowa City, in which he radically re-thinks the transareal dimension by including the Philippines into his Asian-American-Creolization concept.

This volume is based on the conference of the same title which took place in February 2015 at the University of Cologne, organized by both Departments of Romance Studies in Cologne and Potsdam, and part of POINTS, the Potsdam International Network of Transarea Studies. We would like to thank Michael Bollig and Barbara Potthast, speakers of the Global South Studies Center Cologne (GSSC), who provided our conference with significant financial assistance and who lent their close support to its organization. We also would like to express our special gratitude to the coordinator of the GSSC, Clemens Greiner. Many thanks also to the “Competence Area 4: Cultures and societies in transition” at the University of Cologne, in particular to Meike Meerpohl and Thomas Widlock, for their financial and professional support as well as for their precious advice. Thank you very much to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for their continuous support of the Emmy-Noether Junior Research Group “Transcolonial Caribbean.”

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Potsdam and Cologne in September 2016,  
Ottmar Ette and Gesine Müller



Ottmar Ette

(Potsdam)

## **Carnival and other Catastrophes**

### **New Orleans: A Global Archipelago**

#### **1. On Setting and Un-seating the Opposition of Nature and Culture**

Nature is not natural. Since, at the latest, the 1957 appearance of the *Mythologies* by the French semiotician Roland Barthes, we have surely known that the myths that surround us and inform our lives function as “mytho-logics” (see Ette 2014: 41–66) to the extent that what has historically come into being, beyond this historical coming-into-being, can and will be circulated as Nature. Often guided by special interests, this transformation (of that which was devised, produced or invented by human beings into something ‘natural’) protects the thing declared to be Nature from being viewed as something changeable, and thus something that can be questioned. Nature is, naturally, a political issue.

But if Nature no longer appears to be something discovered by humans, but is rather understood to be shaped, even invented by humans, a pattern of thought develops whereby both a policy on Nature and the political element of Nature can be critically reflected upon. For if Nature can, by its nature, be reflected as something not ‘merely’ natural, then the changed relations between the discovery (of Nature) and the invention (of Nature) allow a new experience and recognition of Nature as being always a component of that which we can designate as cultural – no longer as something given, so much as something that has become, or even more, as something that has been created (be it on one side or the other of the divine act of creation, as it is so variously developed from culture to culture). But is not Nature then simply subsumed by Culture?

As they are, things are clearly more complex. On the one hand, the ‘Not-Naturalness’ of Nature proves to be more than a consequence of the fact that that which is Nature has always been culturally de-

terminated and set by human beings. Rather, it also proves to be no less than the logical consequence of the fact that, within the tripartite structure of finding, inventing, and experiencing (which makes possible a substantially more complex understanding of the world than the bipolar opposition of fact and fiction could ever allow), we understand Nature as the creation of a specific cultural axiom (*Setzung*) which constitutes the core of Western thought. On the other hand, the un-seating of this cultural *Setzung* (*Ent-Setzung* as it were) must not evoke any reactions of horror (*Entsetzen*) in the face of a simple equalization (*Gleichsetzung*) of Nature and Culture. How then might a way of thinking be set in motion in which Nature is neither strictly separated from Culture, nor casually equated with it?

It is most likely one of the long-term effects of the short texts of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (first published in various periodicals over the course of the 1950s) that early on, and particularly in France, notions could develop that reflected upon the nature of Nature and drew into the focal point of their considerations the connection between (the concept of) Nature and Politics. Thus do the following sentences from Bruno Latour's influential volume *Politique de la nature* (see Latour 1999) seem to be composed quite in keeping with the thinking – if not so much with the style – of Roland Barthes when they stress the fact that Nature and Culture – and with them, especially, Politics – cannot be artificially separated from one another, neither from the viewpoint of philosophy nor that of culture theory. Right at the beginning of his book, the French social scientist and philosopher expressed himself in the following manner, as emphatic as it is enduring:

Since the word "politics" was invented, politics has consistently been defined by its relationship to Nature, whose every feature, whose every characteristic and function goes back to the aggressive will to restrict, reform, establish, illuminate, or short-circuit public life. (Latour 2010: 9)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Engl. trans. O. E.

It lies within the nature of things that the recourse to Nature is, itself, made in light of a naturalness that is advanced in order that the constructedness of such an intervention into the lives of others is not allowed to intrude upon the consciousness. Nature can easily be placed both as a norm and as normative. This eminent political dimension of the Nature concept, and of the *naturalization* of the historical toward the goal of a Politics that does not speak its name, is at the same time of such great efficacy and efficiency that the idea of Nature as a regulating factor of both a Politics of Culture and a Culture of Politics, unfortunately, simply cannot be left out of either the concept or the understanding of Nature. Yet even if Nature indisputably follows certain Natural Laws, Nature ‘itself’ should not be used and abused as a norm or as a corrective of societal or cultural action. For in being so used, Nature becomes not only abstract – that is, removed from things – but absurd.

The question as to where the political efficacy of Nature or of the Nature concept originates can probably only be adequately examined when one becomes familiar with the axioms, whether historical or having to do with the history of science, that were decisively set forth in the second half of the 19th century. For if we follow the analysis in French cultural anthropologist Philippe Descola’s 2011 book *L’écologie des autres*, it was during this period that “the respective approaches and fields of the natural sciences and the cultural sciences were finally delimited” and sharply separated from one another (Descola 2014: 7). Descola, who had already placed the relationship of human beings to Nature at the center of his theoretical attention in his book *Par-delà nature et culture* in 2005, proceeds in *L’écologie des autres* from the insight that, in both the realm of theory and the realm of institutional praxis near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, those borders between the realms of Nature and Culture had become established which up to today contribute to the determination of the foundations of Western thought – a delimitation of great consequence that (as we might express along with the mythologist Roland Barthes) has long since succeeded in developing into a seemingly unassailable, and thus ‘natural,’ mythos.



From this development, however, arises a fundamental set of problems that Descola formulates in the “Conclusions” of *L'écologie des autres* in the following manner:

One need not be an expert to predict that the question of the relationship of human beings to Nature will most probably be the most crucial one of this century. One need only look around to become convinced: the climatic convulsions, the decreasing number of species, the increase in genetically manipulated organisms, the depletion of fossil fuel sources, the polluting of Megacities and of sensitive areas in Nature, and the accelerating disappearance of tropical forests – all of these have become the topic of public debate the world over, feeding the fears of its inhabitants. At the same time, it has become difficult to continue to believe that Nature is a realm fully separate from social life, a realm that is hypostasized, according respectively to conditions, as a nourishing or a resentful and uncaring mother, or as a mysterious beauty waiting to be unveiled, a realm that humans have sought to understand and control, and to whose moods they have occasionally been vulnerable, but which forms a field of autonomous regularity in which values, conventions, and ideologies would have no place. (Descola 2014: 87)

If the question of humanity's relationship to Nature is apostrophized by Descola as “the most crucial” for people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then this can only mean that we must learn, as quickly as possible, not only to think of Nature and Culture in their associations and connections, but at the same time, in their irrevocable interweaving and, still more, entanglement. The examples given in the passage quoted above make it clear how inadequate for today is the pattern of thinking that artificially separates the two realms from one another and seeks to lead us to believe that, in its developments, Nature simply follows some law of its own with which the actions of humans are not connected. How ‘natural,’ though, are the catastrophes that we designate as ‘natural catastrophes’? And which Nature is conserved when we speak, from traditional ecological thinking, of ‘Nature conservation’?

The denunciation of a way of thinking that sets Nature and Culture in opposition has inevitably come to a point in time where the human being has become an influential, sometimes enduringly decisive factor in the altering of ‘natural’ events and processes. The fact that

this questioning has consistently been of the highest importance in the literatures of the world is not reflected in the work of the French anthropologist, but should necessarily be assessed in the critical reflections on the new outlines of ecology in the writings of Philippe Descola or Bruno Latour. For since the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the possibilities and limitations of human coexistence (see Ette 2012b) (not only with gods or other people, but with the animals, plants, and objects with which human beings interact in any way) have stood at the center of that specific knowledge that the literatures of the world have developed over millennia in countless different languages and cultures as a knowledge for living, a knowledge of experience, a knowledge for survival, and a knowledge for living together.<sup>2</sup> One could consequently state, with reference to the development of this specific knowledge found in the literatures of the world, a knowledge that is in no way easily disciplined (and therefore not easily transferred into any particular discipline), that the question prioritized by Philippe Descola regarding the relationship of human beings to Nature can be regarded as an important subdomain that is formed within the actual central question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: how, and with the help of which knowledge, human beings in this world, on this planet, can coexist with one another in peace and diversity. And the plural form, speaking not of *the* human being per se, but of human beings, is of decisive importance.

But let us at this point further pursue the considerations of Descola in order to understand more precisely to what extent the anthropologically posed question as to the relationship between Nature and Culture may be understood to be a substantial element of a comprehensive convivence, or perhaps *convivialité*,<sup>3</sup> in which the most diverse realms of human thought and action can be brought together and considered together. For Philippe Descola puts an end to the simple bipolarity of Nature versus Culture:

This picture is no longer valid. Where does Nature end, where does Culture begin when it comes to the warming climate, the depletion of the ozone layer, the production of specialized cells from omnipotent

<sup>2</sup> See the trilogy by Ette (2004, 2005, 2010). In English, see Ette (2016b).

<sup>3</sup> See also Caillé/Chanial (2014) and Adloff/Leggewie (2014).

cells? One can see that the question no longer makes sense. More than anything, the facts as they now stand, quite apart from the many ethical problems that arise from them, shatter old notions of the human person and all his or her properties, as well as shattering those of the configuration of individual and collective identity – in the Western world at least, where, unlike the situation in other places, we have become accustomed to differentiating very clearly between that which is natural in the human being and his environment and that which is artificial. On other continents, in China and Japan for example, places where the idea of a Nature is unknown, and where the human body is not perceived as a symbol of the soul and an imitation of a transcendent model – once as divine creation, today as genotype – this problem does not arise. (Descola 2014: 88)

The cultural comparison shown here and examined more exhaustively in the book reveals the fact that the term Nature in no way represents a universal or an anthropological constant, but instead indicates a distinct cultural, historical, and social *Setzung* (axiom), the accepted transhistorical continuity of which proves to be a historically and spatially determinable *Setzung* that has long since become mythos in the Barthesian sense, and which today needs to be un-seated (*ent-setzen*). But how might this axiomatic setting (*setzen*) be fundamentally un-seated (*ent-setzen*) without generating horror (*Entsetzen*)? How might a school of thought be imagined which could succeed in examining Nature and Culture in all of their mutual permeation in a new and fundamentally changed manner, and even more, in Dilthey's sense, *to experience them throughout* (*durchzuerleben*) (Dilthey 1985: 139) at the same time? This school of thought exists: it is the literatures of the world.

## 2. Political Ecology and Ecology of the Literatures of the World

Far beyond the examples of technological pragmatics illuminatingly introduced by Philippe Descola, a categorical separation of Nature and Culture, of Nature versus Culture, no longer makes sense. How problematic and (at least for the cultural sciences and the humanities) counterproductive it is to speak of the "Two Cultures," as circulated

by Charles Percy Snow, has already been demonstrated elsewhere (see Ette 2010: 27–30) from the perspective of the life sciences. For some time now, it has not been possible to explain or understand phenomena of ‘Nature’ by means of the methodologies and procedures of natural science alone. We use and shape Nature, transform it as needed, but we suffer quite literally, like the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, the backlash when ‘Nature’ strikes back at us in the form of an increase in natural catastrophes, the number of which has increased markedly. Here progress turns against itself, as it were, as described in the “Convivialist Manifesto”:

Conversely, no one believes that this accumulation of power can perpetuate itself in a logic of unchanged technical progress without turning against itself, and without threatening the physical and intellectual survival of humanity. Every day, the signs of a possible catastrophe become clearer and more unsettling. Doubt lies only in the question of what is most threatening and what needs most urgently to be done. (Adloff/Leggewie 2014: 39)

This also applies specifically to the catastrophes of Nature that are caused by or contributed to by human beings. These natural catastrophes are natural only insofar as processes are involved that can no longer be steered by people and which take their course according to the laws of a no longer controlled or controllable Nature, which we will never succeed in dominating in its entirety. For even the catastrophes visited upon human beings in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in the *Shijing*, in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, or in the Bible, are transparently the result of other forces, factors, and players that are decisively at work in them. The developments in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have brought forth a growing sensitivity to the fact that behind the mythos of Nature and its catastrophes, there are other forces working that are of a thoroughly anthropogenic ‘Nature’ – right up to the awareness (that decades ago had already precipitated in the relevant geographical handbooks) that it no longer made sense to differentiate in any way at all between ‘natural landscapes’ and ‘cultural landscapes’ (see Neef 1974: 700). Our focus should no longer lie upon the definition, the delimitation, and the divisive contention (*Aus-einander-setzen*), but rather, upon



putting together (*Zusammensetzen*), and upon the comprehensive relationality of all forces.

Many (though by no means all) of the problematics implied here may undoubtedly be connected to a term that was first introduced into the discussion in 1873 and since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has found an increasing echo in a wide variety of disciplines, especially those included among the cultural sciences. While it is quickly spreading today (though it is not, as far as I can see, employed by the two French philosophers) the use of the term 'Anthropocene' goes back to the early conceptual formation 'Anthropozoic Era,' first used by the Italian geologist Antonio Stoppani in 1873 (see Stoppani 1873). With this phrase, the Italian scientist circumscribed his insight into the fact that, in a new era that at that time had already dawned, geological and geographical phenomena had entered into the increasingly dominant realm of human influence, and were being, to an accelerating degree, anthropogenically reshaped or reconfigured. With ever greater consequences, human beings disrupted not only the topsoil of the Earth's surface, but the geological layers, faults, and flexures as well.

This notion that the works of human beings themselves have penetrated and intruded into the realm of geology, a realm that is thought of in completely different timespans, was first discussed according to these settled terminological choices around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The present-day application of the term 'Anthropocene' gives name to the fact that the human being has meanwhile become one of the most significant factors in terms of influence upon biological, geological, climatological, or atmospheric processes.<sup>4</sup> Foremost among the originators of today's formation of terms are the Dutch chemist and atmospheric researcher Paul Crutzen and the biologist Eugene F. Stoermer,<sup>5</sup> for whom the discussion surrounding this concept, proceeding from the natural sciences, had long since expanded into, and settled in, the cultural sciences. For if we wish to understand what relationship *recorded history*, that is, the history written down over the

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding the questions posed here, see also, among others, Chakrabarty (2009: 197–222).

<sup>5</sup> This was then precisely stated by Crutzen in 2002 in an article for the journal *Nature*, where he spoke of the "Geology of Mankind" (Crutzen 2002: 23).

course of the last four or five millennia, has to *deep history*, that is, all of human history before the invention of agriculture (see Chakrabarty 2009: 212), then the un-seating of a customary, conventional Nature/Culture opposition of occidental stamp becomes indispensable.

Philippe Descola, who in the volume mentioned above does not go into the concept of the Anthropocene, describes in his *Ecology of Others*, in a wide variety of contexts, the tremendously powerful force that humans exert upon Nature, drawing attention to the fact that human beings had already begun to exercise a long-term shaping influence upon the vegetation and form of the Earth's surface long millennia ago. At the same time, he explains by way of contemporary examples the degree to which the inextricability of the effects of Nature and the effects of Culture makes necessary an understanding of both anthropology and ecology, which is not directed toward delimitation and exclusion, but rather toward an increasing mutual permeation of these two realms. There can be, of course, no doubt regarding the fact that these are questions that from early on were presented and represented in the literatures of the world. For the question of how we can coexist in our world has included within itself, since the very earliest written accounts, the question regarding the relationship of humanity to the animals, the plants, and the world of things.

Obviously, the intimate relationship between what we in the West designate as 'Nature' and what we today in the Occident refer to as 'Culture' or 'civilization,' is as old as human history itself. Thinking of them as separate, as the poles of human knowledge for living and experiential knowledge is, however, bound to times and cultures equally, and thus in no way 'natural.' It is unnecessary to point here to midsummer celebrations or to the rites on the occasion of the winter solstice, to the expectations of the fructifying flood cycles of the Nile, or to the lyrically sung thaws of lakes and rivers in order to understand in what a fundamental way our entire culture – and especially all of those rites and events that return with the rhythm of the year – as well as the very concept of Culture itself depends upon the constant interaction of the Nature-Culture continuum in the various zones and time-periods of our planet. The experience of what we in the cultural circles shaped by the occidentally perceive as phenomena of Nature is embedded in the cyclically returning festivals in which a

specific knowledge for living, knowledge of experience, knowledge for survival, and knowledge for living together finds expression, coming finally to be aesthetically shaped and 'preserved' in a condensed form in the literatures of the world. Nature, in the sense of human experience, is always Culture: as an object of human perception – and still far more, appropriation – as well as an anthropologically semanticized landscape, with all of its structures and functions.

The inseparability of Nature, Culture, and Politics was called into memory with renewed arguments by Bruno Latour in his development of a *Politique de la nature* (1999), in a manner that is equally culture-philosophical and political:

One may not in any case, however, maintain that this had to do with two different concerns that had developed always separately from one another, their paths having crossed only thirty or forty years ago. Conceptions of Politics and conceptions of Nature always formed a pair bound as firmly together as the two seats of a seesaw, where the one can only sink when the other rises, and vice versa. There has never existed any other Politics besides that of Nature, and never another Nature than that of Politics. Epistemology and Politics are, as we now see, one and the same thing which, in (political) epistemology, has come together to render the praxis of the sciences as well as the object of public life incomprehensible. (Latour 2010: 44)

While the connections to Roland Barthes are not explicitly revealed in this passage, they are certainly evident upon a more precise reading, had the author of the *Mythologies* but clearly contoured the practices of the (bourgeois) Mythos. For according to Barthes, the mythos unrelentingly seeks to transform history and Culture into Nature and thereby to render them unrecognizable and incomprehensible as Culture (*and, at the same time, as history and, even more, as Politics*).<sup>6</sup> The political ecology toward which Latour aspires clearly starts with a broadening of its field of view and its realm of influence to the degree that it is, for the philosopher, a matter of "a common world," of "a cosmos, in the sense of the ancient Greeks" (Latour 2010: 18)

<sup>6</sup> On Barthes' approach and his epistemological problematics, see Ette (2007: 107–129).

– and thus as much order as beauty. But the question of coexistence, it seems to me, is closely connected to this, such that it comes as no surprise when Bruno Latour time and again puts forth the problematics, recently considered from the standpoint of a (future) ecological politics, of “Can we coexist?” (Latour 2010: 17) and reflects upon “the values and difficulties of coexistence” (Latour 2010: 29). Latour presents his vision of the future State in the following compressed fashion:

The State of political ecology has yet to be invented, for it no longer rests upon some sort of transcendence, but upon the quality of the monitoring protocol of the collective experiment. The civilization that can put an end to the state of war depends upon this quality, this art of governing without dominating. (Latour 2010: 306f.)

This “art of governing without dominating” may be understood as the expression of a political ecology that seeks to develop, through thinking of Nature, Culture, and Politics together, an art of coexistence and thus a complex knowledge for living together. There is, precisely within this area of convivence, a conspicuous intersection with a thematic realm to which Roland Barthes dedicated his first cycle of lectures at the *Collège de France* under the title *Comment vivre ensemble* (“How to Live Together”) (see Barthes 2002). This intersection reinforces the impression that there is more than merely selective agreement between the two thinkers. For both of them, the axioms of Nature and Culture are of seismographic relevance to both assessing and changing societies that have been shaped by the West. From this, one could draw the conclusion that any sort of reflection regarding a knowledge for living together presupposes the relationship of Nature and Culture. Convivence is decidedly more than just (peaceful) coexistence.

Differently from what is to be found in the aforementioned writings of Bruno Latour and Philippe Descola, I find it at this point clearly necessary to bring the knowledge of the literatures of the world into our considerations, if we really wish to be open to an “ecology of others.” For the literatures of the world are aimed toward an innovative examination of the question of the relationship between the human



being and Nature and – in a still more comprehensive sense – of the question of the possibilities and limitations of an art of coexistence: in their polylogical structuring, which may only be traced by means of a multilogical philology,<sup>7</sup> they seek forever and anew an art of governing without dominating, and still more, an art of convivence in peace and diversity. The difficult and changing relationship of Gilgamesh to ‘his’ city of Uruk reveals the (strictly speaking) political problematics of convivence.

But how might the knowledge of the literatures of the world be integrated into an ecology that is oriented toward a coexistence, a convivence on a great variety of levels? The first step is to proceed from the assumption that the knowledge of the literatures of the world is a *sustainable* knowledge<sup>8</sup> that lays things away without laying them to rest. It is in constant motion, and is thereby not preserved such that it should be ‘disused,’ but rather, to the extent that it is kept alive through continual transformations. The beating heart of the literatures of the world is, from the viewpoint of sustainability, intertextuality: it is this that allows us to translate Homer’s *Odyssey* into the Dublin of the Irishman James Joyce, and Scheherazade into the world of the Algerian-born writer Assia Djebar. The spatiotemporal, linguistic, and cultural transfers of these translations include fundamental transformations that open upon new literary formations and aesthetic formats in such a way that, within a text, the multiplicity of other texts always remains dynamically preserved. That which is found (perhaps in the form of the prior, referenced text) is related to something which is invented, or is to be invented, in such a way that a new experience, something newly livable can unfold (and not solely through starting anew). As an intertext within the invented text, the discovered text remains always so present that, in the oscillation between the discovered and the invented, it produces a sustainability of that which is actually past within the prospect of that which may be experienced and lived in the future. To express it pointedly: the sustainability of the Homeric world, or of that of the *Thousand and One Nights*, rests upon its capacity for transfer, translation, and transfor-

<sup>7</sup> See, on a similar concept, Ette (2013b).

<sup>8</sup> On the history of the concept of enduringness, see Grober (2010).

mation. By means of intertextual inscription, a revision is achieved that both preserves and perpetuates the 'old' form within the new transformation: sustainability can then be understood as the dynamic, transformative processivity of the literary. Herein lies the secret of that other ecology, which is delineated by the literatures of the world.

### **3. From Sustainability to the Laboratory of Life and the Living**

In the sense of this sustainability, the literatures of the world embody and develop a laboratory of life that continually tests the different gnosemes of a knowledge for living, a knowledge of experience, a knowledge for survival, and a knowledge for living together, while at the same time allowing these different dimensions of life to live through the serious play of literature. As precarious and destructible as this laboratory of thought, of cognition (see Nünning 2014), and, even more, of experience may appear to be, the literatures of the world demonstrate a consistency across the millennia, across the many different and often long-disused languages, and across the great variety of cultures, that is far above that of the political power structures that respectively surround them, above that of the cities and architectures that house them, and even above that of the languages and linguistic communities that once gave them birth and gave witness to them. The translatability, the transferability, and the form-and-transformability of the literatures of the world are the guarantors of a sustainability that cannot be exhausted through plundering.

On the contrary: every creative evocation of a text extends its sustainability, vitality, and longevity. And this sustainability is granted, independent of whether the literatures of the world are put in writing and passed down on clay tablets, papyrus, or paper, on celluloid, or on virtual storage systems. Consequently, when speaking in the literary realm on the topic of sustainability, it can by no means be but a matter of the content's presentation or representation of enduring processes or objects; much more, the focus of reflection must be placed upon the sustainability inherent to the transhistorical and transcultural praxis of the literatures of the world.

Sustainability always implies the examination of the limits of the possible and achievable with a prospective perspectivity in which the potential futures are polylogically reflected. In the process, literary texts from schools of thought can develop into schools of life, insofar as they test forms of living and norms of living. As in Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* (see Ette 2013a and 2013d), text and test are always interwoven in a most intimate way. As a laboratory of life, the literatures of the world demand the test, a practical trial that, indeed, always carries with it the danger of failure. For if literature translates the imaginable into the imagined, the thinkable into what has been thought, the writable into the written, the publishable into what is published, the readable into what has been read, and the livable into what is, and has been, experienced, then it also constantly develops certain forms of the test to which the text is subordinated. Failure, however, in this context of times marked by a growing sensitivity to sustainability, is not a losing proposition or some frightful specter, but rather, it opens up the chances of becoming decidedly smarter by means of the reflection upon the failure of oneself or of others. The poetics of failure (see Ingold/Sánchez 2008; Sánchez/Spiller 2009) unlocks, by way of experiencing and living through failure, those productive paths of a prospective knowledge that, without its own failures – and thus without a knowledge of its own border zones and limitations – could never have come into existence or have been developed. Knowledge without (one's own) failures is as unimaginable as is intelligence without (one's own) stupidity (see Ette 2001).

It is important to note that the logics in the laboratory of the literatures of the world are not oriented toward dismantling and dissecting life so as to draw, through examination of the dead, conclusions about (just newly extinguished) life; far more, they compress and intensify life, and in so doing counteract the expulsion of life from the humanities and cultural sciences.<sup>9</sup> To hold new concepts and delineations from the perspectives of cultural theory and literary science in opposition to this expulsion of life from the philologies and cultural sciences is the prerequisite for the survival of those sciences which up to now have set little that is conceptual against the spectacular

<sup>9</sup> With reference to Kittler (1980).

appropriation of the life-concept by the life sciences. In the near future, it will become decisively important, through the influence of the literatures of the world, to breathe (new) life and innovative life-conceptualities into not only the philologies, but into the humanities and cultural sciences in general, so as to gain a renewed sustainability for this universally threatened ensemble of fields.

While the occupation of content with questions of sustainability and, especially, with the problematics of the coexistence of people with other people, with gods, with animals, with plants, or with other objects may be of highest importance, it is also of enormous relevance to incorporate into these deliberations the sustainability that is transhistorically and transculturally written into the literatures of the world, just as it is to incorporate the use of these laboratories of the knowledge of life, in life, and for life, into the sciences and disciplines that are best suited to a translation of the sustainable knowledge of literature. The condition for this, however, is that the multiculturally based ambiguity of the life-concept and the various ways of understanding that which can be designated as "living"<sup>10</sup> are multilogically incorporated and societally imparted in the interpretations of the literatures of the world. For the laboratory of life also includes the testing of that which the living thing respectively is or claims to be.

The (political) ecology of the literatures of the world establishes itself in the context of the above considerations on a level of at least three tiers: on one that is thematic, one that is intrinsically transhistoric and transcultural, and one that is institutional. It is beyond doubt that with the help of literary texts, a history of the broadly various delineations of coexistence or of the notions of sustainability could be written, as could a history of ecological thought, assuming that the "Parliament of Things" is indeed ubiquitous in the literatures of the world. In the process, the boundaries of life could be thought of and experienced in a new way, if the boundaries between the living and the not-living are indeed not infrequently drawn in an entirely different way than, for instance, in the disciplinarily broadly differentiated life sciences and natural sciences of the occidental stamp. The vitality of the cosmos and the vitality of the world of things offer us

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<sup>10</sup> See also Kimmich (2011).



other forms of understanding whatever we can imagine, experience or live as 'life' and 'alive.' For it becomes apparent from a life science perspective that, in their laboratory of life, the literatures of the world develop a life-concept that allows us to understand life not only multidimensionally, but above all multilogically, following widely differing logics simultaneously. A progressive reduction of the life-concept can thus be counteracted.

The value and meaning of the literatures of the world may not be measured in terms of their capacity to place at our disposal documents of climatological or astrological, botanical-geographical, geological, historiographical, sociological, politicosscientific, or psychoanalytical relevance that may be reviewed and empirically evaluated as unambiguously as possible. The knowledge of the literatures of the world is not to be disciplined, cannot be reduced to specific disciplines, and as such does not separate the great variety of realms and disciplines from one another: it goes for it all.

To this degree, it is quite self-evident that within their knowledge for living, the literatures of the world never sharply separate Nature and Culture from one another, nor subordinate them to different logics or disciplinary categorizations. It is decidedly more a matter of a coexistence between differing logics, between controversial semantic variations or opposing epistemologies. Of the greatest relevance is the development of an ecology that is in the broadest sense transcultural and transareal, which becomes aware of the boundaries of the possibilities of a multilogical convivence, and which also both theoretically and practically develops the forms of life and norms of life in Nature and Culture.

An ecology of the literatures of the world that is oriented toward the coexistence of different logics calls upon the ability of these literatures to place at our disposal, within their experimental space, refined models that allow highly complex developments and processes to be presented *sensuously*, within a comprehensible space of reading and thought, in a manner that is traceable and understandable. The literatures of the world offer neither a database nor an arsenal of facts, neither a reservoir of argumentation nor a quarry of ideas, but they do offer models of understanding of the highest degree of concentration and of the highest aesthetic standards, that are readable, or can be

made readable, from other cultural coordinates or other coordinates in space and time. The sustainability of these models of thought and understanding is based upon their transhistorically and transculturally experienced modeling, which rests far less upon the literary *de-piction* of sustainability than upon its experienceable (and livable) *structuring*. For literature *is*, because it is more than it is. It unfolds a knowledge that wishes to be devised and further developed, but does not wish to dominate. And which may be shared, but not dissected. The literatures of the world form a many-voiced and multilogical logosphere and graphosphere through which the readability of the world (see Blumenberg 1986) is made possible – outside of Western tradition too, of course – from out of many areas and for many areas: they present in their Writing-between-Worlds, in the most fundamental sense, an art of convivence that includes the reflection on the boundaries of coexistence.

#### **4. On that which is Natural in Natural Catastrophes**

Natural catastrophes are not natural. At least, not in the sense that they unfold and can be explained only according to conditions and rules that are natural and in natural spaces. Natural catastrophes are of more complex considerations and tend to occur more, in the sense of the observations of Philippe Descola discussed above, at the point of intersection between Nature and Culture. Their striking increase over the previous decades, like the enormous rise in subsequent damage, reveals that their frequency has long been substantially influenced by the actions of human beings, and that this anthropogenic triggering of natural catastrophes is accompanied by a deficient capacity of humans to steer or in any way control these catastrophes, that proceed according to certain laws of Nature. In this sense, one could easily say that the concept of the natural catastrophe, like the long-since relativized concept of the natural landscape, no longer makes sense today, insofar as it, here in the Anthropocene, veils and forces into the background the essential cooperation of the human being and, consequently, the active role of 'Culture.' From the perspective of a (political) ecology in the sense of the previously dis-