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Harry Thurston's *Ova Aves*: Exposure to the Animal *Other* in the Anthropocene

ABSTRACT
This article offers an ecocritical reading of the collection *Ova Aves* (2011), co-authored by award-winning Canadian poet-naturalist Harry Thurston and prestigious photographer Thaddeus Holownia. The book gathers thirteen poem-photograph pairings that constitute a moving meditation on the animal other as it manifests in bird eggs originally kept at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick, curated by ornithologist Gay Hansen. By drawing readers' attention to the uniqueness and fragility of eggs, *Ova Aves* is a timely reminder of the need for humankind to rethink how we relate to the nonhuman in the Anthropocene.

KEYWORDS
ecopoetry; birds; Anthropocene; species extinction; animal other

1. Introduction

As attested by abundant research in the burgeoning field of Animal Studies, a significant body of recent ecopoetry or Anthropocene lyric (Bristow, 2015; Bryson, 2002; Gilcrest, 2002) probes how humans relate to nonhuman animals. Such attention comes as no surprise, as the alarming decimation of animal species precipitated by anthropogenic action is a genuine cause for concern. Ecopoetry is a form of social activism, as it is "nature poetry that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world" (Shoptaw, 2016). In this regard, ecopoets see it as their mission to attend to "the more-than-human world" (Abram, 1996, 2010) and to "set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. 14). Thus, environmentally sensitive literature can be "a catalyst for social action" (p. 12) and help us rethink how we interact with other Earth dwellers. In so doing, it may counteract the suicidal course taken by human civilisation. As Barry Commoner points out, "we are in an environmental crisis because the means by which we use the ecosphere to produce wealth are destructive of the ecosystem

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itself. The present system of production is self-destructive" (quoted in Rueckert, 1996, p. 116). If we take the planet's life, we are taking our own lives.

Drawing on Derrida's (2002) and Agamben's (2003) reflections on nonhuman animals, Abram's (1996, 2010) ecophilosophy, and Iovino's (2010) notion of "non-anthropocentric humanism", this article investigates *homo sapiens*'s embodied encounters with the animal *other* in *Ova Aves* (2011), a limited-edition letterpress book and a collaborative artistic project undertaken by prestigious Canadian photographer Thaddeus Holownia (born 1949) and award-winning poet-naturalist Harry Thurston (born 1950). *Ova Aves* is the first book in a series formed by *Icarus, the Falling of Birds* (2017) and *Of a Feather* (2024), to which Thurston and Holownia have contributed their artistic talents. Whether there might be a fourth or fifth book in the series remains to be ascertained in the future. At any rate, all three books constitute a sobering reminder that poetry is first and foremost a form of paying attention to what-is in its minutest details. Based in Tidnish Bridge, Nova Scotia, Thurston is one of Canada's best-known nature writers and has spent a whole lifetime paying attention to the more-than-human world, which has resulted in poetry collections and more than a dozen non-fiction books on environmental issues exploring the impact of anthropogenic action on the nonhuman world at large. All his works testify to his commitment as a writer, educator, and ecologist, for "[t]he common theme running through all of his books is a deep interest in the environment" (Mattinson, 2012, np). For his part, Holownia is also a polymath – a visual artist, letterpress printer, and publisher. He has been a professor in the Fine Arts Department of Mount Allison University for more than three decades. As a photographer of consummate talent, he has taken part in collaborative projects with various Canadian poets, including *Silver Ghost* (2008) and *Markland Tree* (2022) with Thurston.

Published by Anchorage Press, *Ova Aves* (Latin for *bird eggs*) is an accomplished tribute to eggs and to avian life in the Tantramar Marshes, or "a celebration – a hymn and a prayer – of eggs" (Rogers, 2011). It is a beautifully produced art object, a pleasure to hold in one's hands, and a fundamental addition to the body of ecopoetry that is being written nowadays in response to the unprecedented environmental crisis humankind is faced with. The collection offers an exploration of "both visual and textual interpretations of birds' eggs found in New Brunswick's Mount Allison University's biology collection" (Armstrong, 2012, p. 126). It comprises 13 poems and 13 full-colour photographs carefully arranged as a whole: the lefthand page shows Thurston's untitled poems written in ghazal-like couplets, while the righthand page shows Holownia's photos of the eggs, accompanied by English and Latin bird names that serve the purpose of cataloguing humans' encounter with the physical world. In piecing all these textual and visual elements together, and countering an anthropocentric conceptualisation of birds, Thurston conveys a deft denunciation of humans' disregard for nonhuman animals

and the alarming species extinction unleashed in the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). At the same time, he advocates respectful encounters between human and nonhuman bodies in the spirit of what Iovino (2010) has called "an extended, non-anthropocentric humanism" (p. 32), one that situates humanism in an ecological paradigm marked by an "ethical 'culture of co-presence'" (p. 32) and an enhanced awareness of "our ecological interdependence" (p. 33).

2. 'Shining out of the blackness of time'

Ova Aves is dedicated to two women, Gay and Cathy, Holownia's partner and Thurston's wife, respectively. Both women are central to the whole conception of this *livre d'artiste*. A biologist by training (like Thurston himself, whom she met while both were biology students at Acadia University), ornithologist Gay Hansen worked at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick, where hundreds of students benefited from her knowledge on and passion for birds. She tirelessly curated the egg collection at her university. As she said, "it is essential to educate people about birds – they are extremely important in ecological, environmental, cultural and recreational realms. Ornithology is one of the few fields of biology where citizen science makes significant contributions" (Anonymous, 2024). It is only a gesture of poetic justice that she should be one of the book's dedicatees. What follows the dedication is a quotation lifted from Joseph Brodsky's collection *Ab Ovo* (1996) that reads thus: "Ultimately, there should be a language in which / the word 'egg' is reduced to O entirely" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011[1]). Brodsky suggests that "the logic of language should dictate that the word for egg embody the form of the egg: signifier and signified – the word, both shape and sound, and its sense – in such intimate relation to each other that their distinctions are erased" (Rogers, 2011), with the "O" being "a long-standing symbol of wholeness, completeness" (Rogers, 2011). The fact that *Ova Aves*, a book about bird eggs, should open with this epigraph is obviously a deliberate decision. By deploying Brodsky's words as a paratextual threshold for readers to step into a book that weaves poetry and photography, Thurston and Holownia are inscribing their artistic undertaking in a constellation of previous texts also concerned with an investigation of the nonhuman. Poetry and science join efforts in *Ova Aves* to explore the evocative nature and mystery of eggs in themselves. According to Rogers (2011), "nature, science, language, and art are layered, membranous, and interpenetrative" in this collection. After all, as French philosopher Alain Badiou (1999) has convincingly argued, science, philosophy, art, love, and politics constitute forms of conversing with and shedding light on the world and the place humans occupy in the larger mesh of things. The book interweaves poetic and scientific approaches to the nonhuman as it manifests in bird eggs of a variety of species, which are palpable

[1] There are no page numbers in *Ova Aves.*

evidence of animal being and hold the promise of a new life. Time and again, the poems and the photographs underscore the beauty and fragility of the eggs as both physical entities and as *sui generis* works of art. Thurston composes well-wrought lyrics where each single word falls exactly into place to celebrate the uniqueness of each egg, whereas Holownia contributes high-resolution images where eggs seem to be art objects suspended mid-air and surrounded by utter darkness. At any rate, *Ova Aves* inscribes itself in a constellation of contemporary art forms that ponder, defy and provide alternatives to the dominant political, social and economic forms of neoliberal globalisation, as theorised by T. J. Demos[2] (2016, 2017), an art historian and cultural critic concerned with visual representations of anthropogenic action in contemporary art. As he notes, visual art can "play a critical role in raising awareness of the impact" of the Anthropocene on the web of life, showing, for instance, "the environmental abuse and human costs, of fossil fuel's everyday operations, mediating and encouraging a rebellious activist culture" (Demos, 2017, p. 58). In this regard, *Ova Aves* is one more artistic meditation on the fragility of the Earth and its dwellers in a world run amok.

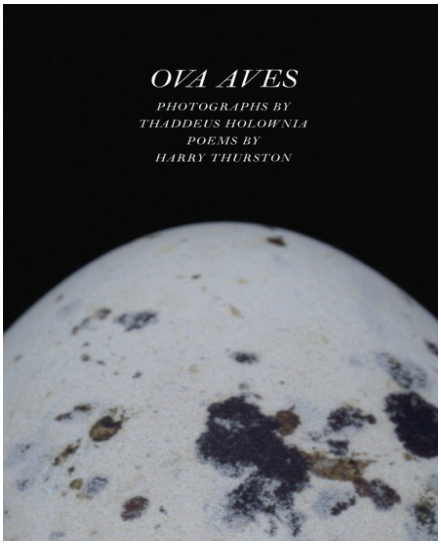

Figure 1: Front cover of *Ova Aves* (source: https://anchoragepress.ca/publications/ova-aves/)

Evidence of the scientific compulsion at work in *Ova Aves* is discernible in the short prose text titled "The Colour of Eggs" that readers encounter before definitively stepping into the book. The text consists of two quotes penned by Bernd Heinrich and Hansen, respectively. The former ponders how "the motion

[2] Demos only uses his initials to sign his research.

of the egg affects the colour patterns" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011) on its surface, whereas the latter emphasises the uniqueness of bird eggs: "All bird eggs have unique markings and colouration which are very much like a fingerprint" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011), she writes. Such markings exist for a good reason, as "[p]igments function as camouflage as well as reducing the harmful radiation from ultra violet light. The eggs of ground and nesting birds are heavily pigmented while hole nesters are often completely white" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). No two eggs are identical; the spots and streaks on their surface create unique patterns. Thus viewed, eggs are highly sophisticated entities whose very design serves a most practical purpose: ensuring the survival of the being *in potentia* they hold within themselves despite the myriad dangers lurking in their surroundings. As Hansen claims, "despite being so fragile, they are perfectly adapted to perpetuate their own kind" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). What eggs represent is the promise of a new life, protected within the thin walls of a temporary home that has a special kind of singularity. Most interestingly, the egg "is forged by the body of the bird, marked with the pigments of her womb" and "within the egg another body is being forged" (Rogers, 2011).

When the photographs gathered in *Ova Aves* were exhibited to the public, spectators were much more than simply scrutinising artistic images of bird eggs. Probably without their being aware, they were also being exposed to the nonhuman other. As Abram (2010) notes, "the simple act of perception is experienced as an interchange between oneself and that which one perceives – as a meeting, a participation, a communion between beings" (p. 268). In a landmark essay titled "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," Jacques Derrida (2002) ponders the animal gaze and the question of animal being. An animal is conceived as "an existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (p. 379) and "the absolute other" (p. 380). The French philosopher argues that nudity is what we humans and animals share. Whereas humans are aware of their nakedness, "[t]he property unique to animals […] is their being naked without knowing it" (p. 373). Derrida then explores what it means for a human being to be seen naked by an animal, which offers to his sight "the abyssal limit of the human" (p. 381). To be seen in complete nudity by a nonhuman animal is an uncanny experience. As he notes, the vacant, uninterpretable animal gaze raises "the unsettling question, not of how *we* see animals, but of how they see *us*" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. 218), a question rarely asked by philosophers. The thirteen poems making up *Ova Aves* were written in response to Holownia's photographs of bird eggs on facing pages, creating thus a conversation between two different art forms (verbal and visual) that opens up a space for close observation of what otherwise might have gone unnoticed for us. The poems are not subservient to the images nor the images to the poems. Rather, they exist as two complementary forms of investigating the nature of eggs as a natural extension of birds' bodies. In this regard, the photos "place

each egg in a universe of blackest black, so it floats into the eye of the viewer as if coming in from a far, unknown galaxy", whereas Thurston's poems "float on the facing page, black on white" (Rogers, 2011), directing readers' attention to the dialogue in each image-text pairing. In all cases, the focus is on the human gaze rather than the animal gaze, but the photographed eggs give us hints about what it may mean to be seen by the animal other. After all, as argued by Giorgio Agamben (2003), "*[h]omo* is a constitutively "anthropomorphous" animal […], who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human" (p. 27).

One of the most captivating aspects of *Ova Aves* has to do with poetic voice, namely, with the question of who speaks in the 13 poems in the sequence. In fact, a theme subtly running throughout the entire collection is the conundrum of speaking for or in the name of the animal other in a kind of poetry that is explicitly biocentric. In a non-anthropocentric poetic investigation of birds' being, how are poets to engage with and give voice to the animal other? Hard though it may try, ecopoetry seems to be condemned to rely on writing as a most sophisticated technology to convey birds' singular existence and speak on their behalf with a view to raising readers' awareness that it is a matter of utmost urgency to relate to the nonhuman with care and a sense of duty. The poetic voice in *Ova Aves* betrays an autobiographical substratum that suggests that Thurston's lyrical subject is the poet-naturalist looking at eggs with the eyes of a scientist and boundless curiosity. The amount of scientific data about each bird species packed into the poems is a clear indicator of the kind of poetic voice speaking in these pieces. It is no coincidence that in most of the poems it directly addresses different bird species, not readers. The closing piece is the only one where Thurston directly gives voice to a bird, the emu, an endangered species and the last of its kind.

In most poems (with just a couple of exceptions) in *Ova Aves*, the poetic voice directly addresses the species in question, drawing an anatomy of their singularity and hence underscoring their uniqueness and losability at a time of accelerated species extinction. In what might be considered a dexterously consummated ekphrastic exercise, the incipit poem in *Ova Aves* deliberately illustrates a photograph of a bird egg of unknown origin. Pondering that "We all must come from somewhere. Out of the blackness of time" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011), the poetic voice in Thurston's piece offers a cosmogony in words marked by utmost linguistic economy: "The sacred ibis spoke gods into being, / laying an egg from which the sun burst forth. / The rest is history" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). Thurston's opening piece situates the origin of the world in a mythical time, now lost in memory, and ascribes the beginnings of the Earth (including gods and human beings) to a specific bird species, the sacred ibis. It was an ibis (not a god or human being) that spoke everything that exists into being. Ibises even taught humans the advanced technology of writing to perpetuate their findings and insights into the deep future: "With their hooked beaks / down-turned like

the nibs of pens", these birds "gave us writing" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011)[3]. On the facing page, Holownia contributes a photograph of a white egg whose surface is pigmented with spots and streaks, shining against a pitch-dark backdrop that further enhances the egg's whiteness. The unfathomable dark space behind the egg suggests "the blackness of time" from which all life emerged eons of time ago. In fact, as Rogers points out, "[t]he association between eggs and the universe is ancient. Creation stories from several cultures depict the birth of the universe as the breaking of a cosmic egg" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). Both the cosmos and the egg "inhabit a realm of meaning which collapses definitions of beginning and ending, birth and death, interior and exterior" (Rogers, 2011).

When juxtaposed, both Thurston's poem on and Holownia's photograph of this unknown bird egg reveal a non-anthropocentric cosmogony that significantly differs from the biblical account found in the Book of Genesis, where God's primordial word – *fiat lux* – brings everything into being. Likewise, in the cosmogony found in Hesiod's *Theogony* in Graeco-Roman mythology, it was the god Uranus (the sky) who married the goddess Gea (the earth), bringing forth all forms of life, human and nonhuman. In Thurston's mythological account, it is a bird – not a god as a construct or figment of the human imagination – that creates the world and all the beings populating it. A myth is not to be dismissed as a naïve story that seeks to shed light on the real with premises alien to scientific discourse, since it is "a theorem about the nature of reality, expressed not in algebraic symbols or inanimate abstractions but in animate narrative form" (Bringhurst, 2007, p. 63). Like science or philosophy, it is an attempt at meaning-making before science and philosophy became dominant forms of knowing what-is in prevalent western epistemologies. By decentring human agency from the overall picture and offering a bird-centred mythical explanation of the origin of the world instead, Thurston and Holownia offer a timely reminder that humans are not the measuring rod of all things and beings on Earth. They also gesture towards the fact that there are alternative epistemologies that celebrate the imbrication of the human and the nonhuman as part of a totality comprising the mutual entanglements of earthbound beings in an act of shared becoming.

3. The fascinations of avian life

Up to twelve different bird species are celebrated in *Ova Aves*: the common loon (*Gavia immer*), the thick-billed murre (*Uria lomvia*), the ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*), the great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*), the black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*), the killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), the northern harrier

[3] Writing and the letters of the alphabet are said to have been inspired by the shapes formed by birds in the sky, or by footprints of birds' feet on the sand. An open book in the codex format evokes the wings of a bird indeed.

(*Circus cyaneus*), the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the northern raven (*Corvus corax*), the red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), the common grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*), and the emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*). According to Hansen (2011), "while each species of bird lays characteristic eggs, there is still a surprising amount of variability within the eggs of a single species and even within the eggs of a single nest". Such variability is a clear indicator of how creative and prolific nature is as it manifests in existing animal (and more specifically bird) species. Since the very cradle of humanity, birds have held endless fascinations for humans. Whether in philosophy, religion, history or art, birds have played a central role and occupied a place of honour in the human imagination (Sax, 2021). However, if they exist, they are likely to be destroyed by humankind. Humans "began steadily reducing the population of birds around the world during the Neolithic era by over-exploitation, habitat destruction and introduction of invasive species" (Sax, 2021, p. 328). Later on, around the sixteenth or seventeenth century, "the killing of birds became far more deliberate, systematic and extensive, […] done with unprecedented exuberance" (p. 329). Nowadays, we are witnessing an alarming and accelerated anthropogenic-induced decimation of bird species (Kaplan, 2025) that is a cause of concern for biologists and ecopoets alike.

The second poem in *Ova Aves* is an accomplished celebration of the common loon (*Gavia immer*), a "most ancient, most prehistoric" bird, whose call hearkens back "to a time before humans / began to gawk at the night sky" and scrutinise "this cosmic commotion" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). Directly addressing the loon by means of an apostrophe, the poetic voice sees the loon as embodying "the belief in an abiding mystery, / something alive in the mute cosmos / besides our nattering selves" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). The loon is, in other words, a reminder that the Earth is an animate and expressive being, even if *homo sapiens* may have lost all sense of connection or communion with the world at large. As ecophilosopher David Abram observes, there is an urgent need for humans to reconnect with their own animal bodies as being an extension of breathing Earth. Like loons, humans are also born of the Earth – we are of "earthly nature" (Abram, 1996, p. 58) – and literally inscribed in the biosphere as the *oikos* of all life. The reference to "an abiding mystery" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011) in Thurston's poem belies that consciousness is not the sole prerogative of our species, but rather "a ubiquitous quality of the world" (Abram, 2010, p. 37). As such, "[m]ind arises, and dwells, between the body and the Earth, and hence is as much an attribute of this leafing world as of our own immodest species" (Abram, 1996, 112). There are specific signs in the book of nature needing no verbal tradition to make themselves understandable to others. Sensuously immersed in a world of vibrant, communicative matter, the lyrical subject in Thurston's poem perceives a concerto woven "out of the diverse vocalizations of other creatures",

with human poetry being just "a mode of participation in the polyphonic song of the Earth" (Rigby, 2016, 54). Hence the allusion in the poem to "A voice / that vibrates in the reptilian brain, echoing / an old word we once knew, need more than ever" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011) might be expressive of the fact that human language was created by analogy with the polyphony of nonhuman voices heard on Earth, even if humankind may have forgotten these ancestral origins.

In the poem addressed to the ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*), the poetic voice draws readers' attention to this species's "indelible signature at the bill tip, / from too much probing in the black earth" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011) in search of worms. Pondering the anatomy of this species, the poet's persona in this composition confesses a feeling of empathy, as he carries "smudged words / at my fingertips. Loafing, waiting / for something to turn up, to swallow it whole" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). If the ibis "gave us writing," the ring-billed gull is a metaphor for poets themselves to Thurston's mind. Whereas ring-billed gulls probe the earth with their beaks to pick the flesh of worms to appease their hunger, poets use language to express part of the grandeur and mystery of what-is. Poetry is present to begin with, it is an attribute of reality that poets seek to capture the best way they can through the medium of words. Poets are thus emotionally and intellectually alert to potential signs that they may swallow and digest to make it communicable to others in the form of poems. Although poems are inexhaustible verbal artefacts, they always fall short of the real. Ring-billed gulls are also poets of sorts; the environmental literacy deeply ingrained in their DNA allows them to instinctively probe the earth with their beaks in search of nourishment. By contrast, poets need to make a muscular effort and pay undivided attention to the world in the hopes that something may "turn up" and they might capture it before vanishing into airy nothingness.

Thurston's poem on the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is possibly one of the most accomplished pieces in the sequence. The poet writes: "All of us are worlds, planetary, alone, / wobbling through chaos" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011), as if to suggest that each person is a sphere, closed on the outside, following its own trajectory as a solipsistic entity, disentangled from the rest of existence. However, in subsequent lines he relies on a creation myth to underscore the vitality and interconnectedness of what-is: "From the egg of night was born Eros / who pierced us with life, even joy" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). It was Eros/ love that infused life into everything that exists in this world. As Karen Barad (2012) observes apropos this primordial element, "[e]ros, desire, life forces run through everything… […] [F]eeling, desiring and experiencing are not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers" (p. 59). What comes next is a celebration of the osprey in words that gesture towards how the elements making up the natural world coalesce to forge the osprey: "Burnt sienna and cobalt blue, the

alchemy / of earth, sky and water, swirl in your hovering flight" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). As one of the most ancient and powerful birds of prey, the osprey is celebrated for the magnificence of its flight: "stone-heavy, speed is your only mercy" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). Likewise, mythology pervades the poem on the northern raven (*Corvus corax*), which subtly packs a wealth of information – mythological and ornithological – into its lines as well. "When all the other voices have fallen silent, you rave on, / keeping the faith in the power of a few well-chosen syllables" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011), writes the poet addressing the raven, a bird that occupies a prominent place in the mythology of some of the First Nations of Canada as a trickster figure of amazing ingenuity. "You hatch the word, an original mischief", says the poet in words that seem to credit this bird species with the invention of language.

The poem addressed to the common grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) offers a picture of ill omen that is possibly related to the woes associated with the Anthropocene, the era of humankind: "When they cloud the sky above the dying earth, / we withdraw into the dark recesses of resignation: / The time is come, there is no turning back" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). In the new geological era dominated by *homo sapiens*, scientific evidence suggests that the damage caused by anthropogenic action has gone past a critical threshold and that humankind is bound to adapt to the conditions of a "dying earth". In the light of the current environmental crisis, ecopoetry like the one composed by Thurston seeks to "counteract the instrumentalism of hyper-rationalist and materialistic values and to celebrate 'the totality of nature' by engaging with human feelings and sympathies in a broadly intersubjective, mutually beneficial way" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. 104). By directing readers' attention to eggs, Thurston is thus honing attention skills – his and ours – at a time of alarming attention deficits (Citton, 2017). Howewer, the Canadian poet is not alone in calling for a renewed form of attention to the nonhuman. He cultivates what Anna Tsing (2015) calls "arts of noticing," that is, a new kind of attentiveness aimed at collaborative survival on the part of humans and nonhumans alike. According to Tsing, modern capitalism has spread "ideas of progress" and "techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources" (p. 19), segregating the human from the nonhuman, devastating natural landscapes, and "obscuring collaborative survival" (p. 19) as a result. Humans, she argues, are part of shifting polyphonic assemblages marked by utter indeterminacy, which is "frightening" yet "makes life possible" (p. 20). Countering narratives of human exceptionalism, she points out that agency is not the sole prerogative of *homo sapiens* and that we are not the only species on Earth capable of making worlds. Underscoring the mutual entanglements across the biosphere, she writes that "all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water. […] In the process, each organism changes everyone's world" (p. 22). Along similar lines, Donna Haraway (2016) has lucidly noted that

"ontologically heterogeneous partners become who and what they are in relational material-semiotic worlding" (p. 13) and that the words 'human' and 'humus' are interconnected: "We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman" (p. 55). Against this backdrop, *Ova Aves* is an artistic project that seeks to raise awareness among readers of what it means to live at a time of climate crisis with responsibility, attending to the specifics of nonhuman animals, awakening to the shared vulnerability of human and nonhuman beings.

Ova Aves comes to an end with a poem on the emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*), a flightless bird species (and the third-tallest living bird) native to "down under", namely Australia, where "birds walk instead" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). As is common practice with Thurston, the poem is packed with a wealth of scientific information about this bird species. The voice readers get to listen to in this piece is the emu's: "I, emu, am the last of my kind" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). Aware that it is the only extant member of the genus *Dromaius*, the emu is an apt reminder of the havoc and piecemeal destruction caused by *homo sapiens* – of which species extinction is but one more example in a long litany of woes. Though females lay the eggs, it is the males who look after the young, who soon run "with their faithful parents, like dinosaurs / kicking along at 50 kilometres an hour / in a race to outdistance time" (Thurston & Holownia, 2011). The emu's gigantic egg is particularly beautiful, and one of Hansen's favourite ones: "extremely large, textured with a black bumpy rind-like surface, with specks of bright turquoise colour emerging from behind the black" (Hansen, 2011). It is no coincidence that *Ova Aves*, a collection concerned with the alarming species extinction rates unleashed in the Anthropocene, should close with a poem about the emu, the last of its kind.

4. Conclusion

In *Ova Aves*, Thurston and Holownia bring together poetry and science to pay homage to birds and their eggs as a symbol of completeness. The thirteen poem-photograph pairings constitute a moving meditation on the animal other as it manifests in bird eggs originally kept at Mount Allison University. By drawing readers' attention to the uniqueness and fragility of eggs, *Ova Aves* is a timely reminder of the need for humankind to rethink how we relate to the nonhuman in the human-dominated geological era of the Anthropocene, as well as an invitation to attend to the more-than-human world, of which we are a part, not apart from.

Announcement

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