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An Archaeology of Ruderal Futurism

PLANT PERSPECTIVES
doi: 10.3197/whppp.63845494909731

ABSTRACT

Language used to describe plant life and their environments is shaped by how plants are perceived. In turn this language reproduces how plants continue to be perceived and contributes to the further shaping of attitudes toward them. This essay presents the ruderal as a framework for understanding and envisioning being-with more-than-human others in a world altered by colonial and capitalist exploitation, extraction and expansion. Enacting an archaeological tracing of language and cultural thought towards ruderal plant species, consideration is given to: vernacular language applied to vegetal beings; identities of belonging applied to the movement of vegetation at a planetary scale; and decolonial modes of thinking-with and being-with vegetal others in the aftermath of colonialism and capitalism. Particular consideration here is given to the classification systems of botanist Albert Thellung, the thought of gardener and landscape architect Gilles Clément and the work of artist Andrea Callard. This paper extends an ongoing area of research I have previously examined in the curatorial research project *Ruderal Futures* (2022) for SixtyEight Art Institute and the essay 'A brief constellation towards a ruderal futurism' (2020).

KEYWORDS

decolonisation, post-capitalism, futurism, agriculture, ruderal, weeds

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> As the cellar window looked into an area in the street, down which boys might throw stones, it was protected by an outside shelter, and was oddly festooned with all manner of hedge-row, ditch, and field plants, which we are accustomed to call valueless, but which have a powerful effect either for good or for evil, and are consequently much used among the poor. (Gaskell 1906 [1848]: 12)

WEED THINKING

On a small patch of earth, immediately adjacent to the front door of my Pittsburgh apartment, I am joined by no fewer than five plants whose English common names give direct indication of the weedy status that has been conferred upon them. They are: common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), low smartweed (*Persicaria longiseta*), pinkweed (*Persicaria pensylvanica*) and pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*). At the time of writing, the pokeweed has reached full

maturation, with its clusters of purple berries, dark to the point of being nearly black, plump on their stems. Meanwhile, the red deadnettles (*Lamium purpureum*) that had encircled its shoots earlier in the year have long since decomposed to humus.

This lot, an edge effect area where asphalt road and concrete sidewalk margins terminate at the precipice of a steep hillside, is also host to additional co-occupants: amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*), common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), common hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), field mint (*Mentha arvensis*), green bristle grass (*Setaria viridis*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), spotted spurge (*Euphorbia maculata*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) and a host of other wild vegetal life. Of these, common buckthorn, Japanese knotweed, multiflora rose and wild parsnip are listed by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (2022) as Class B Noxious Weeds, which are defined as plants that 'cannot feasibly be eradicated' – although efforts are frequently made by landholders. Others on this lot are subject to being perceived – and colloquially referred to – as weeds and may be more or less likely to be isolated for extermination on public or private lands. Having been deemed weeds, these plants are suggested to be, as Beal (1910: 103) and later Gissen (2009: 150) claim, 'out of place.'

Weeds are frequently defined in a Western context as plants that disturb some quality of anthropic order, be it agricultural, urban or otherwise – with Salisbury (1961: 15) even pathologising them as criminals who 'rob cultivated plants'. Others, such as Baker (1965), have attempted to situate weeds in more ecological terms as spontaneously growing denizens adapted to – and primarily located in – areas disturbed or otherwise modified by human action. Holzner (1982: 5) succinctly combines these definitions with the summary: 'weeds are plants adapted to manmade habitats and interfering there with humans'. Mabey (2010:1) further refines this sentiment, stating: 'plants become weeds when they obstruct our plans'. While perceiving the characterisations contained in such accounts serves to elucidate the fraught epistemic constructs imposed upon these plants, further reproduction of the term would constitute the continued propagation of error and harm. Perhaps more circumspectly, Frenkel (1977 [1970]: 4) advises: 'despite the widespread employment of this term the denotation of weed is sufficiently imprecise, variable

and relative to give cause for caution in its use'. He continues, stating 'the word [weed] has strong connotations and though it has economic meaning, there is controversy regarding its ecologic denotation' (Ibid.). We might more assertively state: while the word 'weed' may be of use as an indicator of human prejudice towards certain vegetal beings and their perceived relation to various economic schema, it is of little to no use as an ecological category.

Returning to the plants outside my door – several of whom are presently entangled in this linguistic mess by their English common names alone, as though the categorisation of weediness was somehow intrinsic to their being – we might think-with these plant companions beyond the delimitations and antagonism embedded within the English word 'weed'. This is not to say that the negative connotations contained in the designation of weed are limited to the English language. The implicit anthropocentric prejudices and negative connotations of this word are present in many analogues found in modern European languages – some with even greater transparency such as French, Spanish and Italian: all of which contain equivalent words for 'weed' that directly translate to 'bad herb' (Holzner 1982: 3). However, in considering the vegetal others with whom I am presently thinking, it is my hope that I might address both the plants themselves – and their interrelationship with others – with language that is inclusive of their simultaneous agency and conditionality. To think-with these plants is to acknowledge the relationality of thought. Or, as Bataille (1985: 181) writes: 'what I have thought or represented, I have not thought or represented alone'. Similarly, to think-with these plants is to think alongside what Uexküll (1957) calls their '*umwelt*' – their experience as plants as they operate within their world according to how they themselves perceive it. To this end, I look to the word 'ruderal' as a means to meet the turn towards thinking and being-with other life, like the vegetal beings at my door, with terms of interdependency: to not think them purely conditional to any form of human action, even as colonising humans affect change to the earth – both geologically and climatically – on a planetary scale.

RUDERAL RELATIONS

The word 'ruderal', adapted from the Latin *rudera*, which broadly refers to rubble or ruins, is here proposed as the most resonant with the conditions experienced by the plants just outside my door. Ruderal plants are those whose 'life-history' traits and adaptive strategies allow them to establish themselves in varying intensities of stressed and disturbed grounds (Grime 1979: 47).[1] The category ruderal encompasses those plants whose propagation methods and habitats are facilitated by human activity, both intentionally and unintentionally, as well as those indeterminately existing adjacent to the realm of human causation. The appearance of writings on plants wherein they are clearly positioned as possessing characteristics of, and moreover are classified as, ruderal can be traced to botanists in nineteenth-century Europe studying the adventive flora of industrial cities.[2] In the nineteenth century, and continuing into the twentieth, numerous categorical systems were introduced in the West by practitioners of botanical sciences in an attempt to understand plants and their dispersal as they relate to – and are affected by – human activity. While definitions of ruderal may differ from scholar to scholar – with some sharing varying degrees of affinity with classifications that focus on plant origins and imperatives of being determined by the geographies to which they are considered to belong – this terminology is preferred for its ability to be descriptive of both the environmental and biotic characteristics of the plant life it describes. Additionally, unlike the word 'weed', it is generally employed without the import of whether humans consider a lifeform to be desirable or not.

Ruderal vegetation has been characterised by both its relation to human activity and land use and its relation to the systems that impact and organise human activity and land use. As an example of the former, Numata (1982: 21) classifies ruderals as a distinct category from

1 Grime (1979) divides plant adaptation strategies into three categories based on the ability to inhabit different intensities of environmental stress and disturbance: competitors (low stress, low disturbance), stress-tolerators (high stress, low disturbance) and ruderals (low stress, high disturbance). These categories are extremes and not mutually exclusive. For example, a species may have both ruderal and stress tolerant traits.

2 As a plant growing in ruins, the word 'ruderal' has been used since the 1835 version of J.C. Loudon's *An Encyclopædia of Gardening* (1835: 458) (OED).

both cultivated crops and agrestals – the latter of which he refers to as 'weeds' that grow in 'tilled, arable land' for crops. Numata defines ruderal plants as explicitly residing in 'the area not being used for the production of economic crops, where the original community is destroyed and a destructive agent is repeatedly applied' (Ibid.). Such categorisation, centring the division of plant groups into how they factor into different land use practices, presents only a limited scope of the ruderal as it will be employed here. Yet, Numata's definition is instructive in its emphasis on the repetition of destruction and economic extraction to connote whether something is or is not ruderal. Regarding systems that impact and organise human activity and land use, writings by Naegeli and Thellung (1905) and Anderson and Woodson (1935) are noteworthy for their consideration given to the interrelationship between environmental disturbance, economic extraction and ruderal vegetation within systems of capitalism and colonialism, respectively. In *The Flora of the Canton of Zürich* (*Die flora des kantons Zürich*) (1905: 226), Otto Naegeli and Albert Thellung characterise the distribution of ruderal flora as running parallel to the size and intensity of trade and industry while further suggesting that they serve as a direct measure of technical culture. According to Naegeli and Thellung (Ibid.), industrial activity not only provides ruderal plants with suitable soil, but also takes care of the influx and sowing of seeds. They locate the spread of ruderal plants in Zurich within the context of industrial capitalism, specifically noting the unimaginable extent that the opening of the Swiss Northern Railway in 1847 would have on their migration (229). Writing from the North American continent, in *The Species of Tradescantia Indigenous to the United States* (1935: 67), Edgar Anderson and Robert E. Woodson situate the ruderal within colonial exploit when they state:

> The flora of today surely differs from that of five hundred or more years ago, due largely to the influence of an increasingly complicated civilization; may it not be of interest to record the ruderals and escapes of to-day as a prophesy of the flora of the not-too-distant future?

The dispersion of ruderal environs can be understood as a simultaneous result and indicator of the reorganisation of matter arising from both colonialism – regardless of whether conducted as feudal plunder or capitalism – and industrial capitalism. Similarly, ruderal vegetation can be understood as a result and indicator of the relationship that it

have with these systems that organise the production of anthropogenic space. While ruderal vegetation is adapted to sites of naturally occurring disturbance (forest fires, floods, landslides, etc.) – and is spread across vast geographies through colonialism – the continued proliferation of ruderal environs at a planetary scale exists as the result of capitalism and its 'need to impose its imperatives as universally as possible' (Wood 2002: 155). In other words: not all ruderality is the result of colonialism and capitalism, but the planetary ruderal certainly is.[3] Descriptive of the unfolding interrelationships between spaces, species and anthropogenic systems that structure the reorganisation of matter, the ruderal functions as a broadly applicable category. This may consist of any of the following: disturbed areas; a heterogeneous cohort of life (particularly vegetation) whose life-history traits and adaptive strategies correlate with living in disturbed areas; and the systems that produce disturbed areas alongside which life there spreads.

While the history of the use of the word ruderal may reveal some differences in the target of its application, rather than creating contradiction, these distinctions can be seen to provide a more holistic understanding of the conditions that contribute to ruderality. Further, adding to this understanding, different nomenclature and systems of categorisation from commonplace to rarified have intersected – and shared varying degrees of consonance – with definitions of the ruderal. Of such categorisations, perhaps among the most pertinent to the development of the ruderal as it is presented here is the concept of the 'anthropophyte' as outlined in several papers and the publication *The Adventive Flora of Montpellier* (*La flore adventice de Montpellier*) (1912) in the early twentieth century by botanist Albert Thellung. Thellung's categorisation of anthropophytes is of particular interest as it provides an earnest attempt to dislodge the nomenclature of plant typologies from the limitations of the 'colloquial metaphors' and prejudices contained in both vernacular language and prior botanical systems through the use of descriptive Greek root words (Chew 2011: 145). Nominally, the term anthropophyte centres the human in the relation of human (*anthropo-*) and plant (*-phyte*) as well as the conditions that the plants it describes inhabit. However, Thellung's articulation of anthropophyte

3 This line deliberately echoes Max Liboiron's (2021: 18) framing of pollution: 'not all pollution is colonial, but the idea of modern environmental pollution certainly is'.

contains within it a measure of mutability between the myriad subcategories of 'anthropochores' (plants introduced to an area by humans both intentionally and unintentionally) and 'apophytes' (indigenous plants), thus at least partially subduing the primacy of the human within interrelationships between plant species and soils.

Prone to the continuous reworking and expanding of his system, in *Plant Migrations under the Influence of Man* (*Pflanzenwanderungen unter dem Einfluß des Menschen*, 1915) and *On the Terminology of Adventive and Ruderal Floristics* (*Zur terminologie der adventiv- und ruderalfloristik*, 1918–19), Thellung would return to the concept of the ruderal as a distinct element within his categories of anthropophytes, which itself appears to have been phased out in favour of 'hemerophyte' to denote the entirety of plants living with humans regardless of how they came to do so.[4] Thellung describes ruderal plants as inhabitants of the secondary cultural formations of human-made wastelands. Subsequently, Thellung's (1918–19) subcategories of 'ruderal apophytes', 'true ruderals', and 'apophytoids' proceed to reproduce all subclassifications of plants contained in his original overarching anthropophyte category.[5] Notably, the inclusion of the 'apophytoid,' which encompasses all plants living with humans that have migrated to wastelands, provides an intimation of a wholesale alienation of plant life, which is at once a wholesale naturalisation of all plants existing amid ruderal conditions regardless

4 Preferring Greek root words for his taxonomy of anthropophytes, Thellung's use of the Latinate word ruderal is conspicuously absent in his major work introducing this concept, *La flore adventice de Montpellier* (1912).

5 Thellung's concept of hemerophytes (the entirety of plants living with humans, native or introduced, with or without human intervention), with consideration to the ruderal appears to potentially fold nearly all plants into relationship with ruderality. The classificatory system of hemerophytes consists of: A - ruderal plants (inhabitants of secondary cultural formations, wastelands), A(i) - ruderal apophytes (native plants transitioning to wastelands), A(ii) - true ruderals (most abundant wasteland plants), A(iii) - apophytoids (species normally inhabiting cultivated land, both crop and weed, which migrate to wastelands including: ergasiophiles, ergasiophytes, and ergasiosyntrophophytes), B - ergasiophiles and ergasiophilophytes (inhabitants of full cultural formations, plants in human cultivated/worked soil), B(i) - ergasiophytes (cultivated/worked plants), B(ii) - ergasiosyntrophophytes (plants interacting with cultivated/worked land), B(ii)a - cultivated land apophytes, B(ii) b - cultivated alien land weeds, B(ii)b1 - archaeophytes (present since prehistoric times, recurring), B(ii)b2 - epokophytes (present in recent times, recurring), B(ii) b3 - ephemerophytes (present recently, transiently) (Thellung 1918–19)

of place of origin. Written during World War One, Thellung's concept of the ruderal here extends beyond the remnant waste piles of early human settlement niche construction, as well as his and Naegeli's earlier observations, to something much vaster in the scale of the World War itself. As Thellung (1915) would assert, during this time, 'among those factors which are now, before our very eyes, transforming the surface of our planet, man's activity must undoubtedly be foremost'. With the increased scale of geography affected by war, which would become the *de facto* geography of broad swaths of Europe, Thellung's thoughts appear to have shifted towards an ever-expansive view of the role of ruderal species and spaces within the anthropogenic landscape. Thellung directly attempted to postulate the effects of war in relation to vegetation in his essay 'Stratiobotany' (*Stratiobotanik*) (1917). Therein, Thellung provides observations of the new secondary cultural formations of plants (ruderal plants) arising in the aftermath of the war, the effects of elements of modern warfare – such as shrapnel and poisonous gases from artillery – on vegetation, initiatives to gather and cultivate wild culinary and medicinal plants that may have previously been disdained, forgotten, or otherwise underutilised as a response to interrupted trade and food shortages, and imperatives to expand cropland into wasteland. By imagining post-war ruderal environments as a posthuman grounds for the restructuring of biota, we might also think of the ongoing anthropogenic transformation of the Earth at a geologic and climatic scale via the framework of the ruderal.

RUDERAL, BIOTA WITHOUT A FLAG

Whereas Thellung positioned the ruderal within an archaeological system of plant and human interrelations with consideration to biotic and social factors, Gilles Clément orients the ruderal as the condition of an ongoing future-oriented process of planetary transformation. In *In Praise of Vagabonds* (*Éloge des vagabondes*) (2011 [2002]: 282), Clément positions the ruderal condition as a force that contributes to the 'mixing' of 'all living things'. In the first sentence of the text's introduction, Clément succinctly states: 'Plants travel.' Deeming movement as central to the ontological condition of vegetal beings, Clément pronounces plants not to be bound by belonging to any geographical confines. In

so doing, he disavows the systematic antagonism towards alien species widely espoused – under the auspices of origins, rootedness and place-based biotic belonging – in the West through the proliferation of conservation biology and invasion biology rhetoric. Chew (2011) locates this tendency to regard introduced species as unwelcome elements within a larger ideational framework of nineteenth- and twentieth-century 'anekeitaxonomies', or categorical systems for classifying biota as belonging to specific places.[6] These place-based taxonomies intersect with the practice of states and nations either domesticating and declaring natural through colonisation and assimilation or excluding any and all moving living things deemed undesirable, human or otherwise. Countering such practices of exclusion, Clément (2011 [2002]: 277) positions the ruderal as part of a planetary condition whereby Earth becomes a 'country without a flag'. Proposing a theoretical single world continent, Clément's vegetal planetary citizens travel freely across geologic continents and are bound solely by the biomes and soils that their adaptive strategies allow them to become established within. The 'general ruderalization of territory' articulated by Clément (2011 [2002]: 293), while in some manners not entirely dissimilar to Thellung's concept of the ruderal, becomes the central organising principle for perceiving plants and other life forms as capable of universal belonging in the wake of the near-totalising disturbances wrought by colonialism and capitalism on Earth.

Via Clément, the ruderal may be understood as a planetary process of making dynamic futurities against the enforcement of borders and the preservation of environments as static and past-oriented. In thinking towards a practice of planetary ruderalisation, we might again refer to Clément (2005: 127), who – identifying as a gardener – states:

> I decided not to do what one usually did, which was to work systematically *against*, but to do as much as possible *with*. In all gardens, we are constantly working against something that's in the process of happening: we cut, we prune, we spray, we poison, we water when it's dry, we drain when it's too wet: we don't accept the situation. We therefore expend an incredible amount of contrary energy, we labor, we pain. I didn't want to work in a way that might make something so pleasant and harmonious become detestable.

6 Anekeitaxonomy is a neologism from Chew (2011), derived from 'anekei' a Greek word for belonging, and is used to describe systems that are used to determine where certain species belong.

To engage the ruderal is to articulate a form of being-with that is open to that which is possible. The ruderal is thus situated outside of work, which is a mode of being-against the other to which it is applied. Clément (2005: 134) urges for a 'garden politics', that may perhaps be better understood as a ruderal politics, where 'nothing is planned' as a site of 'non-work' and 'non-doing'. Non-doing, as a transformation of values away from doing, is bound with undoing. When an action ceases, the unworking that contests the *against-ness* of work begins. This non-work or worklessness entrusts the world to the other. Clément's gesturing towards passivity is evocative of that of Maurice Blanchot. In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot (1986 [1980]: 18) locates in such passivity a self that is wrested from the self, unsubjected and patient in 'sheer alterity'. Sara Ahmed (2000: 137) writes of Blanchot's writing of the disaster: 'a writing of and for the other, begins with the refusal to identify the other as enemy'. Akin to Blanchot's refusal to identify in the other an enemy, ruderal futurisms look to such models of passivity that consign the world to the other as a means of 'unsettling colonial and capitalist realities' (Young 2020: 132).

In this sense, the conception of a ruderal futurism aligns with the concept of alterlife as articulated by Michelle Murphy in *Against Population, Towards Alterlife* (2018: 112). Murphy writes:

> Making futurities in the aftermaths of ongoing violence requires alternative decolonial ways of retheorizing life with and against, alongside and athwart, technoscientific framings of life and the environment. It is to learn from and propagate politics and concepts in the tensions between violences that have already happened and the need to undo them nonetheless, the condition of being already altered and the struggle to become otherwise in the aftermath.

In the state of having been 'already altered', Murphy (2018: 113) locates a ground for 'the struggle to exist again but differently'. In the sense of the already altered, the ruderal is here suggested as grounds upon which more-than-human alterlife may be asserted towards alterworlds of becoming otherwise in ruderal futures. Arising from the remnants of colonial and capital extractive relations to land and life, ruderal ecologies as sites of future-oriented thinking must be positioned counter to the conditions of their creation. As with Murphy's alterlife, the decolonial distinction is central to existing again differently in the context of a planetary ruderal.

How such a distinction is made is relative to who is making it. As a settler, the decolonial might be understood, at least in part, as a practice of openness to alterity that receives rather than appropriates or erases the other. Non-work and non-doing provide a position from which to remain open. From this position of openness, ruderal futures may be arrived at through actions – or perhaps, more fittingly, forms of inaction – that entrust the planetary ruderal to plural decolonial, as opposed to universal colonial and capitalist, modes of thinking and being-with more-than-human others.

While, thus far, the pernicious and rather pervasive concept of invasive species has for the most part not factored into this writing, it bears brief introduction here for the purposes of contrast with beliefs outside those that are replicated by colonial and capitalist worldviews. Biota labelled 'invasive' are typically seen as human-introduced alien species that unwantedly establish themselves in territories where they were not previously present. Once perceived as such, they are often prohibited and eradicated by states for reasons that intersect with conservationist notions of belonging and economic interests. As with 'weed', the life forms described by the term 'invasive species' are often the very same as those here described as ruderal. However, unlike the word 'weed,' the violent prejudice contained in the term 'invasive species' is nothing if not opaque. This invasive paradigm is challenged by many individuals whose cosmologies differ from that of settlers and Europeans. In *Anishnaabe Aki: An Indigenous Perspective on the Global Threat of Invasive Species*, Nicholas Reo and Laura Ogden (2018: 1448) summarise a sampling of perspectives toward 'invasives' from Anishnaabe elders in Michigan, with whom they conducted fieldwork, noting that their interviews showed 'a repeated caution to not judge plants for attributes beyond their control' and feelings that people 'should not intervene using … drastic management techniques'. Among Reo and Ogden's interviewees, Rita Bulley laments: 'I feel bad for those things that are getting introduced, because … they don't know they're invasive. They're just growing, doing the only thing they know how to do.' Working from or with the ruderal is to begin with such challenges – of harm, trauma, eradication, erasure and any complicity we may have therein – facing more-than-human others and further, in processing these challenges, discerning what should in turn be challenged by doing so.

A FIELD OF CLOVER WITH OR WITHOUT A POSTGLACIAL HISTORY

'Technically, there is no postglacial history of vegetation on this site, since the highway was built on landfill that extended the original Manhattan shoreline 150 meters', Lance F. Howard (1985: 92) writes of a portion of the West Side Highway in Lower Manhattan, New York City. When his *Plant Colonization on an Abandoned, Elevated Highway in New York City* (1985) was published, the West Side Highway had been closed for many years following a partial collapse in 1973. The Battery Park City landfill, on which the West Side Highway stretches, was formed by successive waves of landfilling that extended the lower western area of Lenapehoking Manahatta (Manhattan) into the New York Harbor.

While, technically, one might say that there is no postglacial history of Battery Park City (in that it was formed by human activity), geologic, biotic and human cultural history remain as intertwined elements within the moved matter that constitutes the site. An extension of Battery Park City completed at roughly its present-day footprint, largely through the movement of earth and rubble excavated during the creation of the original World Trade Center, opened to the public in 1976. From the opening of Battery Park City through the 1980s, numerous art and cultural practitioners engaged this site with the creation of sculptural and performance-based works. The breadth of works realised on this site provide an opportunity to discern a range of approaches to working with and against ruderal conditions through the representation or omission, acceptance or negation and mutualism or alienation of the multispecies life residing there.

Images from the years immediately following the opening of Battery Park City depict a lively world of artists and idlers amid the ruderal plant-covered manufactured beach on top of the land fill that preceded it. Today, the area has been thoroughly developed as originally intended by the Battery Park City Authority, but for a decade it served as a site of indeterminate use and adventive exuberance. However, in stark contrast to this image of Battery Park City, the most iconic visuals of it during this time are perhaps those of Agnes Denes' 1982 work *Wheatfield: A Confrontation – Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan*. In *Wheatfield*, Denes saw to the alteration of the grounds of Battery Park

City to accommodate a two-acre plot of wheat, from the importing of large quantities of soil to sowing seed, weeding, irrigating, spraying fungicide and ultimately harvesting the crop. Widely reproduced images of the project, cropped to show solely Dene's field of wheat against the towering monoliths of the Lower Manhattan skyline, visually erase the great social and ecological diversity of Battery Park City. What remains is a condensation of settler colonial dichotomies of 'stone city against soft rural lands' – towers of accumulated wealth and the colonial crop with which hierarchical cereal/human/state/capital environmental relations were composed (Denes 1987: 86).

In 1976, the year of Battery Park City land fill's completion and six years prior to Denes' wheatfield, Andrea Callard created two Super 8mm films on the site: *Lost Shoe Blues* (1976) (Figure 1) and *Flora Funera (for Battery Park City)* (1976). In both works, Callard reveals fragmentary views of the ruderal zone that was the land fill and its vegetation that would be judiciously rendered absent in Denes' representation of Battery Park City. In *Flora Funera*, a stationary camera focuses on a concrete retaining wall with protruding rebar that forms the edge of the park land fill and the Hudson River. At the foot of the retaining wall, ruderal vegetation slowly sways in the wind. Gently, stones and rubble lobbed overhead by Callard – and friends Bernice Ruben and Richard Friedman – sonorously impact the metal bars above, as though mallets upon a marimba. The film both heightens the presence of the vegetation through its colour contrast while, at the same time, reducing the plant life to an indistinct mass of green-stuff. My eye wants to see clover or sow thistle, but the soft edges of the film grain allow them to remain elusive. As Callard lifts the camera from its tripod position at the end of the film, the context of this tableau is established as further terrain of the urban prairie is revealed. A still indistinct mass of green slowly reveals hazy outlines of white and red clover as well as mullein.

In *Lost Shoe Blues*, Callard moves through the terrain of Battery Park City, only partially glimpsed in *Flora Funera*, revealing the dense vegetation surrounding her as well as the Hudson River, the retaining walls and the skyscrapers, cranes and other city infrastructure that enclose the park. Much of the vegetation remains an ambiguous green mass to my eye, as with *Flora Funera*, again with a few exceptions such as white and red clover, mugwort and mullein. Callard's camera points to the ground shaking up and down with her gait as she ambles and spins

FIGURE 1.
Still from Andrea Callard, *Lost Shoe Blues*, Super 8mm sound film (preserved on 16mm film and digitally), 4 min, 1976. Courtesy of the artist.

about, crisscrossing through the field focusing at times on one group of plants or another. All the while, she sings:

> I lost my shoes
> in a field of clover.
> I stayed so long
> that the clover growed over.
> I lost my shoes.
> I got the blues.

Through this process of time spent being-with the plants of Battery Park City, Callard performs an act of non-doing that is also an act of unworking, making space for herself as well as the vegetal life at her feet. The shoes with which one might step to the pace of working against our environs or trample plant life underfoot are instead lost within the growth of this vegetal other. The growth of the vegetal is, as Marder

(2011: 95) writes, 'enacted in a seemingly limitless extension in every conceivable direction' that is, in turn, by becoming possible in every direction: 'a becoming-literal of intentionality'. The clover that swallows up and conceals the lost shoe in Callard's song enacts its will: combining there with Callard's will as it is directed towards non-doing. In this mutualistic way, both Callard and the vegetal beings of Battery Park City resist legibility and the logic of the colonial capitalist city looming overhead, gesturing towards less defined, more entangled forms of cohabitation.

THOSE THAT WILL WORK, THOSE THAT CANNOT WORK AND THOSE THAT WILL NOT WORK

> I sell chickweed and grunsell, and turfs for larks. That's all I sell, unless it's a few nettles that's ordered. I believe they're for tea, sir. I gets chickweed at Chalk Farm. I pay nothing for it. I gets it out of the public fields. Every morning about seven I goes for it. The grunsell a gentleman gives me leave to get out of his garden: that's down Battlebridge way, in the Chalk-road, leading to Holloway. I gets there every morning about nine. I goes there straight. After I have got my chickweed, I generally gathers up enough of each to make up a dozen halfpenny bunches. (Mayhew 1968 [1851]: 153)

Between 1849 and 1851, the English journalist Henry Mayhew endeavoured to conduct interviews reporting on the conditions of the urban poor in London for *The Morning Chronicle*, which would later be published as the voluminous *London Labour and the London Poor*, originally subtitled *A Cyclopedia of the Conditions and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work, and Those that Will Not Work*. In this reporting, Mayhew provides exhaustive accounts of mid-nineteenth century London street-folk, excluded from the spoils of the nation's colonial and capital exploits, encompassing sellers, buyers, finders, performers, artisans and labourers. A significant portion of this writing focuses on costermongers – or individual merchants selling goods in the street – among whom are the 'street-sellers of green stuff' within which Mayhew (1968 [1851]: 145) includes 'street-purveyors of water-cresses, and of the chickweed, groundsel, plantain, and turf required for caged birds'.

This account by Mayhew is introduced here as a curious example that stresses the awkwardness, if not total incompatibility, between ruderal futurisms predicated on that which is possible in all directions, and capitalism's articulation of itself as the one and only universal possibility. The ruderal, like those plants growing amid the urban margins of mid-nineteenth-century Manchester that, Elizabeth Gaskell muses in *Mary Barton* (1906 [1848]: 12),'we are accustomed to call valueless' and are 'much used by the poor', is for the most part of little use to capital. The ruderal plants plucked freely from public and private grounds by these nineteenth-century London street-sellers of green stuff represent the vestigial resources of an impoverished and disregarded all-but-eliminated commons. Mayhew (1968 [1851]: 145) remarks that the purveyors of green-stuff 'seem to be on the outskirts, as it were, of the costermonger class'. He further claims that 'regular costers look down upon them as an inferior caste' comprising 'very poor persons, and generally … children or old people' (Ibid.). By attempting to insert that which is freely abundant, not worked, and not already held in private into the private commerce of capitalism, the green-stuff sellers – while not to be criticised for subsisting – may be regarded as diverting the radical potential of the ruderal as a force beyond capitalist land use.

Written less than a decade after Friedrich Engels published *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1845), Mayhew's recording of the lives of London street-folk is also situated in relation to an epistemic of work, even when in the absence of work. The London poor documented by Mayhew, however, have little to do with the working class that Engels and would term the proletariat. Rather, those described within would best be likened to the *lumpenproletariat* whom Engels (1926 [1850]: 16) and Marx (1906 [1852]: 41; 1850/1952: 44) describe variously as 'scum of the decaying elements of all classes', 'that whole undefined, dissolute kicked-about mass' and 'people without a definite trade, vagabonds, *gens sans feu et sans aveu* [people without hearth or home]'. Neither Marx nor Engels would allow the lumpenproletariat to be included in their vision of a communist future. To this end, Engels (1926 [1850]: 16) would declare: 'every leader of the workers who utilizes these gutter-proletarians as guards or supports, proves himself by this action alone a traitor to the movement'. The poor, of whom Mayhew writes, subsisting in the aftermath of capital, are alienated from all but their complex relationships among the ruins. As Marx's and Engels'

lumpenproletariat, they themselves are ruderal: decaying, undefined, vagabonds on an Earth in a persistent state of alteration.

The London poor of the mid-nineteenth century, whose lives were entangled with the social and environmental ruins of an emergent industrial capitalism, offer an alternate starting point to the worker of Marx and Engels to become otherwise amid our world as already altered. As Ian Shaw and Marv Waterstone write in *Wageless Life* (2019: 117):

> The struggle Marx articulated rested on workers in industrializing Europe. Today, it falls on capitalism's billions of surplus lives. The future will not be dictated by those with waged work. For better or worse, it is in the hands of the outcast.

From the ruderal, the outcast acts in a form of solidarity with more-than-human others in the unworking of exploitative land relations towards care and mutualism. Ruderal futures – read as decolonial ruderal futures – entail being-with and doing-with or doing not-at-all with more-than-human others. Confronting the already altered, the ruderal represents the struggle to exist again but different from that of the joyless cities of Europeans and settlers, which as Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert describe in *The Falling Sky* (2013: 355), are populated by those persons for whom: 'once their hair is white, they disappear, and the work—which never dies—survives them without end'. Ruderal futures are those that flourish in the aftermath of work as working-against as alienation from belonging to a possible more-than-human whole, without reducing what those possibilities – of the whole, in all directions – might be.

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