

 **Elina Siltanen**

University of Turku

 **João Paulo Guimarães**

University of Porto

Clark Coolidge's *The Land of All Time*: An Affectively Restless Ecopoem

ABSTRACT

Clark Coolidge (1939–) is often connected with language poetry and the New York School. The language of his poetry is opaque and disjunctive, like that of the artists associated with the first group, but it is also energetic, rambling and fast-paced. Curiously, in his most recent book, *The Land of All Time* (2020), Coolidge displays ecological preoccupations, the first poem in the collection, “Goodbye,” asking us to reflect upon how nature and culture are today nearly indistinguishable: “hark! an ocean as / generator see the wires? me neither oh well / there’s a heat vent somewhere in this wilderness.” In this article, we explore how Coolidge mobilizes his extreme wordiness for ecological purposes, arguing that Coolidge’s *The Land of All Time* proposes a model for harnessing restless affect for responding to climate change and ecological crises in a way that allows for the exploration of possibilities rather than falling prey to environmental despair. Coolidge is interested in experimenting with how to respond to extreme situations with vibrancy, speed, and flow, aligning the dynamism of language with that of nature.

Keywords: Clark Coolidge, ecocriticism, New York School, language poetry, affect.

The first poem, “Goodbye,” of Clark Coolidge’s most recent poetry collection, *The Land of All Time* (2020), begins by clearing the table and taking stock of what is left of the natural world after humans started defacing it (with more and more serious consequences as we get closer to our own time):

Clear away all the trees and rocks and dirt and shrubs and
 beasties and such and you and me
 what have you got? wild caress of airs?
 a balance of poems? hark! an ocean as
 generator see the wires? me neither oh well
 there’s a heat vent somewhere in this wilderness
 (Coolidge, “Goodbye” 11)

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The act of “[c]lear[ing] away” elements such as trees and rocks and “you and me leaves us with nature that has nevertheless been infiltrated by human influence, as “a balance of poems” and such technological apparatus as heat vents and generators with their invisible wires interfere in the “wilderness.” Somewhere in this wilderness there is a heat vent which supposedly makes the temperature rise. The poem proceeds in large imaginative leaps all the way through to a kind of an extreme, a “Land of No People and No Things,” a designation found on the last line of the poem, which may well be what we will end up with after climate change is complete and we have had to say our goodbyes, as the title of the poem indicates.

As Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino remark in their introduction to *Affective Ecocriticism*, considering climate change provides plenty of opportunities for mobilizing affects, and these bodily, unnameable reactions often tend to turn into rather negative emotional states, like “anxiety, fear, sorrow” (2), for obvious reasons. Coolidge’s poetry also mobilizes affects, but it does so in ways that are more complex than simply negative. On the whole, “Goodbye” is fast-paced and it evokes images of swift action (“we’ll go up run and jump then stop go out”) (11), as if the speaker has just taken an idea and run with it. The speaker accentuates his care-free attitude with the insertion “oh well.” Coolidge plays with instability of meaning through his swift, improvisatory transitions from one idea to the next, which is likely to have its own effect on the reader.

Coolidge, who was born in 1939, has a long track record of writing poetry: his first poems were published in the 1960s, and critics have observed a variety of periods in his work, connecting him with the New York School, particularly its second generation (Ladkin 425) and language poetry (Wilson 1426). He experiments with language, producing

disjunctive, complex poetry that defies simple readings. Coolidge's poetry works by introducing a multitude of possibilities of meaning and unusual combinations of words and, as Aldon L. Nielsen writes of Coolidge's earlier poem "Comes Through in the Call Hold," he allows his readers to "reenter the poem by means of any of its referential openings, but what counts is the shape and generative force of the improvisation" (106). In other words, the "generative force" of free association is significant, and readers are invited to join the play of association, like in the quoted passage above, where we are presented with a rapid transition from a "wild caress of airs?" to "a balance of poems?" (Coolidge, "Goodbye" 11).

In this article, we argue that Coolidge's *The Land of All Time* proposes a model for harnessing affects for responding to climate change and ecological crises. Instead of allowing anxiety and sorrow to wear us out, Coolidge shows how we might remain aware of the gravity and extremity of what we are dealing with when it comes to ecological crises without merely collapsing under their weight. What is extreme about Coolidge's work is not so much a strong sense of doom, but rather radical forms of awareness through cultivating play, speed, and attention to how language can register restless affect. He works with indeterminacy in a somewhat similar sense as the poets discussed by Marjorie Perloff in her classic study *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*: "[I]ndeterminacy or 'undecidability,' . . . literalness and free play" (vii). The freedom provided by Coolidge's improvisatory shifts of meaning, as exemplified by the disjunctions of the first poem as cited above, encourage the exploration of possibilities and a focus on movement rather than the search for solace in fixed meaning and easily determined affect. Language poet Rachel Blau DuPlessis's recent book *Late Work* (2018) displays a similar attitude towards today's environmental challenges. The hour is late, we are running out of time, but this does not mean we should despair and do nothing. "For who," she notes, "faced / with the future, / would choose not / to try a little something?" (DuPlessis 10). The ecopoetic possibilities of language writing have only recently begun to be studied, and in this exploration, we join critics like Sarah Nolan, who writes in *Unnatural Ecopoetics* (2017) about how experimenting with the possibilities of language in poetry is apt for tackling the interconnections between natural spaces and "individual memory, personal experience, ideology, and the limitations of the senses" (8–9). Nolan argues that Lyn Hejinian's language experiments in *My Life* (1980/1987), which are geared toward forming a sense of, indeed, her life in as multifaceted a form as the limitations of language allow, enable her to simultaneously explore the interconnectedness of nature and culture (47).

Coolidge's language experiments, as we suggest, are designed to tackle similar concerns, especially given that this recent poetry collection

explicitly works with nature-culture connections. While the collection can be read as commenting on many other issues too, the opening poem, as discussed above, clearly sets the tone for the book. Its last line, which points to a “Land of No People and No Things,” corresponds with the title of the book, *The Land of All Time*, as well as with the last lines of the last poem “and then / they all left the planet” (Coolidge, “What Begins” 133), which are also repeated on the back cover. The Earth is simultaneously seen as becoming empty and being somehow enduring, “of all time.” In a poem titled “A History,” “Mars is what happened when the light went out,” which alludes to the common idea that humans might need to escape to space if the Earth becomes unlivable (Coolidge 20). Further emphasis on the possibility of facing imminent doom is added by the front cover image which features the poet “gazing into Kilauea firepit, the island of Hawaii” (Coolidge, *The Land of All Time* n.pag.). Such themes of imminent destruction and the need for escape recur throughout the collection, but as we suggest, the improvisatory shifts of meaning produced by disjunctiveness and extreme attention to language mean that the affective stance of *The Land of All Time* is more complex than straightforwardly negative. In what follows, then, we first discuss how Coolidge uses language as material for exploring the connections between nature and culture. Next, we proceed to discuss the affective possibilities of such uses of language. We connect Coolidge’s exploration of the connections between nature and culture to recent ecocritical theory while reading the possibilities offered by the poems in *The Land of All Time*.

In considering Coolidge’s work with the connections between nature and culture, we engage with two different frameworks: affect theory and ecocriticism. Both areas of research have been viewed in multifaceted ways during the last twenty years or so. As Alex Houen points out, affect has often been viewed “as a form of *bodily* feeling that is distinct from emotion, cognition, and language” (3, italics in the original). However, as Houen emphasizes, this view is not shared by all (4). Houen’s conception of affect “is neither strictly cognitivist nor noncognitivist, and [it] is open to considering literary affect in terms of fusions of content and form” (5). Brian Massumi has suggested that affects can be defined as autonomous, unconscious bodily intensities that can be qualified further into emotions (85–86, 88). For their part, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg have defined affect as “those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)” (1). For our purposes, a strict delimiting of affect to something that is entirely separate from cognition and language is unnecessary, but an emphasis on the body and materiality as central to affect is a useful starting point. For Bladow and Ladino, who discuss affect studies and its connection to ecocriticism, “[b]oth affect

studies and ecocriticism emerged in part as reactions to the poststructuralist focus on discourse” and there has been an “overemphasis on discourse at the expense of embodied experience” (4). They proceed to note that the emergence of materialist thought in ecocriticism is linked to affect (7). Indeed, for Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, material ecocriticism is also connected to discourse since, as they write, it “examines matter both in texts and as a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces express their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (2). As we consider Coolidge’s engagement with play, speed, and attention to language in response to climate change through affect, a focus on materiality is of importance, as we show below.

About Coolidge’s early work, Steve McCaffery states that it presents us “a textual field with minimal to zero signification” (159). According to McCaffery, Coolidge challenges readers “to engage words outside the regime and expectancies of description and propositional language, words in a condition that we might consider as prior to meaning” (161). In his early work, such as *Space* (1970), Coolidge was interested in treating language as material in ways that have connections to geology, as discussed for example by Michael Golston (297–98). In *The Land of All Time*, although the mangled words that populate Coolidge’s early work are less frequent and, in general, the poems make grammatical sense, we can say that here too Coolidge seems to be more interested in using words in a sculptural manner than in making meaning in a conventional sense. Most often, he appears to choose words based on their aural properties and on what they allow him to do in terms of the rhythm and the flow of the poem, a good example being the poem “Stottered (Grubbish),” where we find “lunchish vitrines presented in dim red bulb glow / atrash in their wastes and gooey possible filmishes” (Coolidge 32). Particularly the more peculiar words here are overloaded with possible meanings, but also with other qualities. Such work with words as material is connected to Coolidge’s oft-quoted poetics statement, also reproduced in his author biography in *The Land of All Time*, where he considers the material qualities of words: “Hardness, Density, Sound-Shape, Vector-Force & Degrees of Transparency/Opacity.” As in his early work, he seems to include words because they are interesting, which allows him to not only add colour and life to the poem, but also to use language like an instrument in improvisatory music.

The Land of All Time foregrounds ecological themes, the extent of which we can observe even in the two lines cited above where vitrines (objects lit up in “dim red bulb glow”) have been contaminated by wastes and some kind of a gooey film-ish substance, giving them an aura of uncanniness. The poem draws a direct line between pollution or waste and consumerism, as the references to window displays and eating (consumption) make

plain. The condensed expressions foreground the role of language (and the noxious ideologies it sustains) in spelling out human influence on nature. Language is treated as efficient and productive, and at the same time, it risks being seen as wasteful if words and sentences are viewed as nonsensical. Nevertheless, as Coolidge's comment about word qualities such as hardness and sound-shape suggests, if words are considered akin to material objects, already their presence can serve to reveal something new. Instead of simply managing the apocalypse, Coolidge's poetry seeks ways to remain on the move and to generate something productive by way of an improvisatory poetics. Language is treated as material that can, through playful movement of words and meanings, reveal intensities that would otherwise remain unarticulated.

Nature and language have, as discussed by Scott Knickerbocker, been considered to be incompatible particularly in first-wave ecocriticism even though, as Knickerbocker argues, the capacity of poetry "to make nature matter to us depends precisely on the defamiliarizing figurative language and rhetorical devices too often associated with 'artificiality'" that can often be found in poetry (2–3). Experimenting with the possibilities of language through poetic indeterminacy allows Coolidge to tackle human influence on nature and the connection between nature and culture head-on.

As mentioned above, improvisation is a central mode of creativity for Coolidge. Improvisation can also be said to relate to natural processes. In an article in Iovino and Oppermann's *Material Ecocriticism*, Hubert Zapf argues, with reference to Wendy Wheeler's discussion of creativity and biosemiotics (Wheeler 270), that "creative processes in nature and culture share an element of agency and improvisational flexibility" (Zapf 53). According to Wheeler, who discusses biosemiotics as a way in which natural organisms engage with meaning and interpretation with reference to Charles Sanders Pierce's thinking (271), "[i]mprovisation is the key to both natural and cultural creative evolution" (273). We can, thus, propose that creating new combinations in language through improvisatory explorations allows Coolidge to propose alternative connections between nature and culture. This exploration is based on trial-and-error, deviance, spontaneity, nonsense—values and methods that go against the official way of handling problems about the environment, the official way meaning, for example, minor bureaucratic tweaks and policies that pander to the very corporations that are responsible for environmental problems in the first place.

Like "Goodbye," "Stottered (Grubbish)" gestures to human effects on the environment, but it does not do so simply through lamenting on the destruction humans have wrought on the environment. Instead, it states the facts through a condensed, fast-moving language that, nevertheless, displays awareness of humans' negative effects on the environment. The

poem presents several verb-like words in the form of adjectival past participles, such as “squashed,” “vercrusted” or “bunsted and loppered,” which seems to suggest that some action, although we cannot quite specify what, has been taken on something else (Coolidge 32). The abundance of adjective-like words presented as a list adds layers upon layers of potential meanings so that the play with language is in constant movement.

Coolidge uses language as material for energetic transitions from one line and idea to the next. In this kind of writing, meanings are in motion and readers' attention is drawn to the movement of *affect* underneath the play with language. Coolidge's writing engages with that which, much like affect, circulates under the surface of texts. We can, indeed, propose that precisely affects, which in Massumi's definition (85–86, 88) are autonomous, unconscious bodily intensities that can be qualified further into emotions, can serve to “make nature matter to us” (cf. Knickerbocker 2) when we encounter them in poetry. As Patricia T. Clough remarks, “for Massumi the turn to affect is about opening the body to its indeterminacy, the indeterminacy of autonomic responses,” which is why he determines affect to be separate from language (209). However, when we consider Coolidge's writing which is concerned with indeterminacy, disjunction and rapid movement, we can see that precisely inventive ways of using language and indeterminacy allow him to mobilize affect in ways that explore the material world.

In recent ecocriticism and environmental philosophy, one notices a tendency to portray nature as a reality that is inseparable from human society and culture. Material ecocriticism “traces the trajectories of natural-cultural interaction” in texts (Iovino and Oppermann 6). Furthermore, for example Timothy Morton, in *Ecology without Nature*, considers the role of nature in human society (1). For her part, Sarah Nolan notes that “the concept of a purely natural environment is becoming increasingly fictional” (20). Similarly, Timothy Clark points out that the concept of “Nature” needs redefining not merely because there is no returning to nature that would be untainted by humans, but also because the concept of “natural” is frequently used uncritically to refer to distinctions that become untenable at a closer look, such as the idea that a particular food being marketed as “natural” tends to lead us to assume that it is automatically good (31–32).

Ultimately, nature is inextricable from the human world not only because of the damage that industrial development has done to the environment (the atmosphere, water, and forests, for example) but also because it has increasingly become clear to us that our ideas about nature are never innocent and neutral, but rather the product of cultural models which negotiate particular human desires and fears. It is not surprising, therefore, that the kind of nature we find in Coolidge's book is not at

all the green and pristine nature of the Romantic imaginary but rather of a compromised sort—the forests and bodies of water we encounter are permeated by pipes, cables, and electronics, which make clear that these environments have been transformed and moulded by humans. As Morton remarks, there is no simple answer to the question of what the environment is, and we cannot find it by clearing away “rabbits, trees and skyscrapers” (11–12). In a similar vein, if we “[c]lear away all the trees and rocks and dirt and shrubs and / beasties and such and you and me” (Coolidge, “Goodbye” 11), we will hardly be left with just “the environment” or pure “nature”. Thus, for Coolidge’s poetic speaker too, such an act of “[c]lear[ing] away” will only produce more questions, like “what have you got?” (Coolidge, “Goodbye” 11). This sense of unresolvedness, or indeterminacy, is common in Coolidge’s book overall.

In “Goodbye,” Coolidge presents composite nature-culture spaces in lines like: “hark! an ocean as / generator see the wires? me neither oh well / there’s a heat vent somewhere in this wilderness” (11). Even when environments appear to be in a virginal or wild state, a closer look shows how they are in fact always already enmeshed in human networks, both tangible and intangible. As Morton points out in *Ecology without Nature*, apropos the recent notion of the Anthropocene, today, the damage humans have done to nature is physically all-pervasive, in the sense that there is really no space in nature that has not somehow been affected, say, by climate change. On the other hand, the media we consume inflects the way we perceive nature, overlaying a series of meanings upon actual geographical locations. Coolidge says as much, for example in “What’s Up? Water”: “Without this camera I’d be in Panama” (123). The line could also be read as a comment on how a more informed perspective on the environment disrupts the illusion that there are still paradisiacal spaces in nature that remain untouched by humans. Similarly, in “But Not at Home,” Coolidge writes about

The rocks outside of town a secret
 people see everyday driving by
 still don’t know they’re there spots
 only showing on special maps appear
 sometimes only in freight novels beyond the grasp
 of even the curious there are places
 out in the open that don’t leave traces for most
 movies shown on the woods balloon stains
 (48)

For the poem’s speaker, “[t]he rocks outside of town” and places “that don’t leave traces” are secrets waiting to be discovered, hidden in plain view. Something as ordinary as rocks can only be visible on “special maps” and

in bulk novels that are “beyond the grasp / of even the curious.” If a movie is shown *on* the woods, it does not leave a trace. People have become accustomed to not noticing the traces they have left on the environment, even when such traces are inscribed on a map or clearly projected on nature. Nevertheless, these human-influenced places are “out in the open,” always already out there and mediated by the mediatized environment in which we live. While this reading of the poem attempts to resolve some of its disjunctions, we can note that it is nevertheless fast-paced, as suggested for example by the seemingly random compound word “freight novel.” The improvisatory disjunctions in the poem, again, suggest a restless affect and an undecidability about how to view nature.

Like Donna Haraway, who in *Staying with the Trouble* encourages us to love the compromised and fragile nature we find all around us (including in cities, labs and even homes, which we normally do not see as “natural” spaces), Coolidge appears to tell us that there is no going back to the unsoiled Romantic spaces of yore. “Neverland” (the title of one of the poems) is gone forever, and so is our innocence and youth. All we are left with is a “ticking crocodile” (132), a symbol of a cataclysmic collapse (perhaps our extinction as a species?) that has yet to happen, but which will very likely coincide with the “death of Mrs. Prevaricate,” a figure that evokes the perpetual waffling and stalling of the bureaucratic apparatus when it comes to the environment.

Although Coolidge sees environmental damage as something ubiquitous and inescapable, he nonetheless does not seem to think, as scholars such as Claire Colebrook do, that we are already living in the end times and that all that is left for us to do is to manage the ongoing environmental apocalypse in the best way we can, a notion that is evident throughout the introduction to her book *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*. Instead, the strategy of Coolidge's poems is to acknowledge the facts while keeping things moving. Not all the poems in *The Land of All Time* obviously lend themselves to ecocritical readings, and those that do often do this with sly insertions that gesture to the state of our planet, such as the line “where ice grows faint” in the poem “Location Liquid” that describes a place or a location “where the end's just one more inch” (Coolidge 22). “Location Liquid” is a list poem that qualifies the place it describes with fourteen different relative clauses, which do not really form a coherent whole. The clause “where ice grows faint” is perhaps the one that makes sense most immediately as it registers the thinning of ice, an evident problem on a global level. The notion, however, is contrasted with other events and places that are not obviously related to nature, such as “[w]here pencils buckle” (Coolidge, “Location Liquid” 22). The location that is being described appears to be deferred indefinitely or in motion, as

the word “location” only appears in the title, not in the poem itself. The poem qualifies the location in several incommensurable clauses. Moreover, the location is liquid, a form of matter that is by definition free-flowing, fluid, and the logical result of ice growing faint. These remarks point to the damage that has already been inflicted on nature casually, as if they were simply facts among a multitude of other, equally relevant facts.

The collection features many similar list poems where meanings are in motion and that exhibit, above all, a playfulness with both meaning and sound that does not allow readers to stop to brood over the desperate state of our “land of all time.” While the end is nigh, it may not be here yet. In many of the list poems such as “Location Liquid” (22) or “A Forward List” (26), the focus is on recording observations rather than on the observer and their experience. Even when “ice grows faint” and “the end’s just one more inch” (Coolidge, “Location Liquid” 22), not only poetic play but also affective engagement must go on.

In a sense, *The Land of All Time* charts similar territory as the writer Min Hyoung Song discusses in *Climate Lyricism*, defining the titular concept as “an attention to expression itself, to consider how *innovations in speech, address, image, sound, and movement* call forth shifting ways of apprehending a phenomenon that eludes familiar scales of comprehension” (3, emphasis ours). Furthermore, climate lyricism is “a demand for a response” (Song 3). For Song, particularly suitable for such exploration are certain kinds of recent lyric writing that engage with “compression of expression, a heavy investment in apostrophe, the careful observation of what is observable in language, a probing of what comprises the human” without, however, solely focusing on “the individual ‘I’” (4). This, then, is lyricism that is concerned with movement and that extends from the traditional lyric focus on an individual “I” to a more global level.

Indeed, in Coolidge’s work too, attention is focused not only on a lyric speaker but also on the reader. Many poems do not explicitly mention or focus on a singular “I,” and address an explicit “you” or another listener like the reader is relatively frequent, as can be seen in the many questions that we find in Coolidge’s work. Often, questions call on readers to join in on the observation of natural phenomena, as in an inquiry posed by the speaker of “Ever Seen Before”: “See those clouds up ahead?” (Coolidge 49). Another example of Coolidge’s many questions is “Can I have a pizza and a body of water?” (“More Room!” 81), which subtly distorts a commonplace speech form, an order for a pizza and a bottle of water, so that it expands to a broader scale. The line seems both familiar and strange, and the reader is invited to consider the unexpected combination further. The line seems to suggest the human desire to have both the unending delights of the Western world, symbolized here by something as banal as

a pizza, as well as to take advantage of nature on a larger level. The response to the question that we find on the next line is “yes but relations never work” (81), which might be taken to indicate that such an easy comparison is not worth the trouble, but ultimately, the comment is more of a quasi-answer that does not unambiguously answer the question. The poetic play, combined with an attention to ways of thinking and forms of speech and affect are, thus, also viewed as collaborative processes.

Coolidge's use of language is improvisatory, as we have discussed throughout the article, but this does not mean complete randomness. Rather, it is about creating various kinds of arrangements. Michael Golston points out, in his essay about the poet's early work, that “in *Space*, Coolidge metaphorically equates words and rocks (both of which ‘contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures’)” (298). It is fairly well known that Coolidge's work is deeply concerned with geology, another instance where his work overlaps with materiality. In a lecture he gave at the Naropa Institute in 1978, titled “Arrangement,” Coolidge explains that he became fascinated with rocks as a child. When he was six years old, his parents took him to the natural history museum in Boston. This is how he describes the visit:

Imagine, six years old, and there it is—minerals! Crystals, quartz, calcite, agates, opals—things; I didn't know what they were. Push the button, see this arrangement. And the minerals themselves as an arrangement of molecules, the axes of a crystal. They are distinct substances and they have powers.

Coolidge goes on to say that from then on, he started collecting rocks and for a long time toyed with the idea of becoming a geologist.

In another interesting anecdote he relates in the lecture, the poet says a trip to the Lurey Caverns in Virginia also had a big impact on him. He describes it thus:

A beautiful cave full of orange and red stalactites, totally covered with these beautiful and weird formations. . . . Some of these caves had thirty or forty miles of passageways. . . . You're following the result of a natural process. You go where it goes. . . . From that, I think about the arrangements of the actual world. This stuff. (Coolidge, “Arrangement”)

“Arrangement” is, for Coolidge, a term that evokes Olson's expansive poetics of field as well as John Cage's semi-random patterns. We notice here that Coolidge was already quite attentive to the so-called natural flow of things, the question of improvisation and staying faithful to the heterogeneity of the material world, its sharp edges as well as its messy

diversity. Going back to the poet's early work, according to Golston, Coolidge takes a cue from Robert Smithson as regards the figurative overlaps between grammar and geology. Both linguistic and geological structures are composed of sediments (for example, we can find fragments of words and ideas from the past lodged in those we use in the present).

If we similarly apply this analogical model to *The Land of All Time*, we can perhaps say that the text seems to be less interested in geology and the properties of rocks (hardness, opaqueness, stasis) than in ideas of vibrancy, speed, and flow. This is a text that keeps us on the move, and if there is any analogy here, it is one between the diversity, playfulness, and dynamism of language and that of nature. This is evident, for example, in Coolidge's invented words in "Stottered (Grubbish)" as discussed above, and in unexpected combinations such as "A glass of snake? / jar of an orange" (Coolidge, "El Condor Pasa" 37). Even the "Giggling layers of sandstone" that we find in "Tales from Wagner" seem to be somehow vibrant, and this layered arrangement, too, collapses sooner rather than later into an overload of meanings including "jiggling dioramas a clogged coal chute," "layers and layers of radioactive redwood," and a host of cultural references including Captain Ahab and Superman (75).

The playful mood of Coolidge's work suggests a complex restless affect that does not dwell in mere disappointment, while it also steers clear of untroubled delight and satisfaction. In her essay in *Affective Ecocriticism*, Lisa Ottum suggests that while a negative mood such as disappointment is often viewed as leading into inaction and propelling passivity, or even functioning as an "ugly feeling" in Sianne Ngai's (1) sense, it can, in fact, foster cognizance of "a disjuncture between something we expected to feel and something that we actually feel" which, in turn, can lead to "politically useful" reflection (Ottum 259–60). For Ottum, disappointment is productive because it can lead us towards positive action, but she also notes at the end of her article that "[w]e would do well to cultivate a radical openness to good surprises, to affects such as delight and interest, even in the midst of melancholy" (273–74). For Coolidge, restless affect means a fundamental indeterminacy that does not aim to be simply positive or negative.

Similarly, as Song points out, living in denial might be needed temporarily in order to keep going, but what is even more significant is "to feel overwhelmed and to dwell on such a feeling so as to appreciate the enormity of what is happening" (75). However, we can say that a sense of being overwhelmed can also be created through other means than merely dwelling in disappointment, as can be observed in Coolidge's work. Far from suggesting that living in denial would be productive, his poetry presents movement in language and focusing on play as an equally overwhelming strategy as dwelling in disappointment might be. Coolidge's poems do not

present finalized emotions like disappointment or joy. Instead, they hover somewhere in between an imminent sense of doom and taking delight in play and movement.

What is productive for Coolidge, then, is remaining in instability and indeterminacy. Ultimately, his poetry proposes that experimenting with various possibilities while remaining open to their affective force is vital. He experiments with language, acutely aware of how particular arrangements in language, like lists or newly coined words, might propose affective movement. The poems in *The Land of All Time* showcase the compromised connection between nature and culture without suggesting that all that is left for us to do is to wait for the inevitable. In reading Coolidge's poems, we can encounter energetic intensities that are not quite processed into finalized emotions. His poems make visible an explorative energy that does not take for granted assumptions about appropriate ways of reacting to the environmental apocalypse.

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Dr **Elina Siltanen** was University Lecturer at the Department of English, University of Turku, at the time of writing the article and currently works at the University of Eastern Finland. Her research focuses on contemporary American poetry and the role of affect. Recently, she has published articles on the connections between conceptualism and confessionalism in poetry in the *Journal of Modern Literature* and on metamodernism and New Sincerity in *English Studies*. Her book, *Experimentalism as Reciprocal Communication in Contemporary American Poetry: John Ashbery, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman*, was published by John Benjamins in 2016.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8478-2278>

etsilt@utu.fi

Dr **João Paulo Guimarães** is Full-time Researcher at the University of Porto (ILCML). He specializes in contemporary American poetry and science studies. His first book, *American Experimental*

Poetry and the New Organic Form, will be published by Bloomsbury in 2024. He is also currently editing two essay collections in the field of aging studies: *Aging Experiments: Futures and Fantasies of Old Age* and *Fear of Aging: Old Age in Horror Fiction and Film*.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7368-2522>

guimaraesjpc@gmail.com