

## **The Highlights - On Looking at Nature: An Untitled Petition on Crapomimicry**

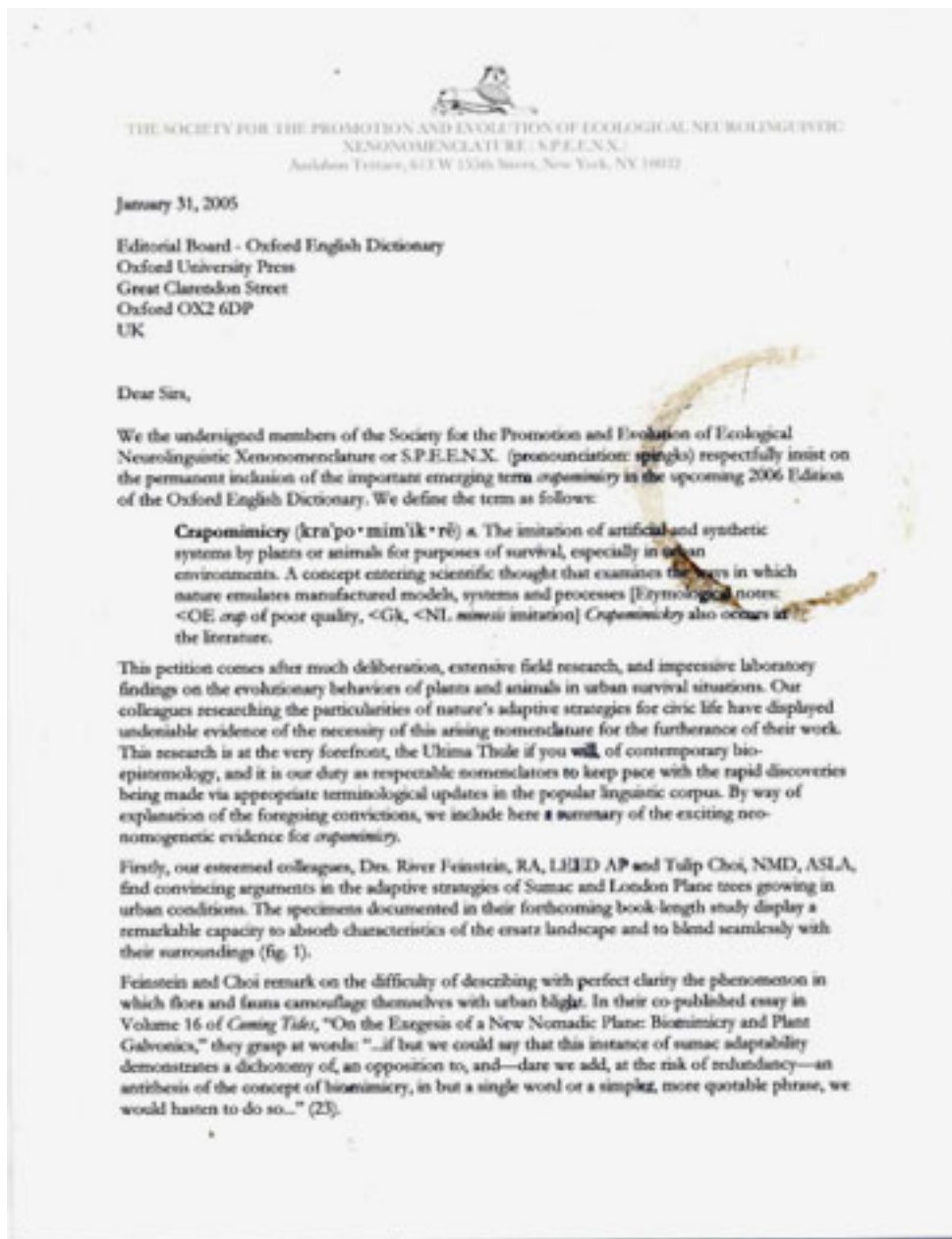
We were visiting our new favorite book, *The Secret Life of Plants* (1970) at a reading room of the New York Public Library the other day. On occasion we go there to read the book aloud to each other, illustrating key parts of the text (an account of extrasensory experiments done with plants) with images drawn at random from the picture library. This is an unusual area of the library that features a collection of images filed thematically under headings like "burns," "scars," and "surrenders." More than once, we have fancied ourselves "renegade librarians," by re-shelving the book in locations other than where it belongs, hoping the librarian who is paid to be there (who sometimes shoos us away) might notice the uncanny pattern in which the book circulates and attribute it to teleportation.

On this last visit, we found the book returned to its home on the Occult shelf, fat with a pile of loose stationery papers, folded and stuck between pages 178 and 179 (at the chapter titled "Force Fields, Humans, and Plants"). Naturally, we spent the evening poring over the twenty-seven pages of affixed photographs with type-written text, which we concluded (to the best of our abilities) to be a plea for the word "crapomimicry" to be added to the Oxford English Dictionary.

At first we had, well, probably the same reaction as you: derision with a healthy amount of ridicule. But the tender nature in which the authors describe instances of crapomimicry - the sad, yet somehow heroic, and certainly intriguing behaviors of plants and animals that use urban blight as camouflage in order to survive in the post-industrial wasteland - won us over. We began to think of how this petition by a group calling itself SPEENX critiques urban aesthetics, much celebrated in consumer and youth culture, by using the slang and novelty language endemic to the culture itself.

Intrigued, we decided to digitally scan parts of the petition and transcribe some key selections from it here, as our contribution to The Highlights.

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THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION AND EVOLUTION OF ECOLOGICAL  
 NEUROLINGUISTIC XENONOMENCLATURE (SPEENX)  
 ?Audubon Terrace, 613 W 155th Street, New York, NY 10032

January 31, 2005

Editorial Board - Oxford English Dictionary  
 Oxford University Press  
 Great Clarendon Street

Oxford OX2 6DP  
United Kingdom

Dear Sirs,

We the undersigned members of the Society for the Promotion and Evolution of Ecological Neurolinguistic Xenomenclature or SPEENX (pronunciation: spingks) respectfully insist on the permanent inclusion of the important emerging term *crapomimicry* in the upcoming 2006 Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.

*Crapomimicry* (kra'po'mim'ik'r?) n. The imitation of artificial and synthetic systems by plants or animals for purposes of survival, especially in urban environments. A concept entering scientific thought that examines the ways in which nature emulates manufactured models, systems, and processes [Etymological notes: *crap* of poor quality, *mimesis* imitation] *Crapomimickry* also occurs in the literature.

This petition comes after much deliberation, extensive field research, and impressive laboratory findings on the evolutionary behaviors of plants and animals in urban survival situations. Our colleagues researching the particularities of nature's adaptive strategies for civic life have displayed undeniable evidence of the necessity of this arising nomenclature for the furtherance of their work. This research is at the very forefront, the Ultima Thule if you will, of contemporary bio-epistemology, and it is our duty as respectable nomenclators to keep pace with the rapid discoveries being made via appropriate terminological updates in the popular linguistic corpus. By way of explanation of the foregoing convictions, we include here a summary of the exciting neo-nomogenetic evidence for *crapomimicry*.

Firstly, our esteemed colleagues, Drs. River Feinstein, RA, LEED AP, and Tulip Choi, NMD, ASLA, find convincing arguments in the adaptive strategies of Sumac and London Plane trees growing in urban conditions. The specimens documented in their forthcoming book-length study display a remarkable capacity to absorb characteristics of the ersatz landscape and to blend seamlessly with their surroundings (fig. 1).



Fig. 1, Adaptive crapomimicry in Sumac and London Plane

Feinstein and Choi remark on the difficulty of describing with perfect clarity the phenomenon in which flora and fauna camouflage themselves with urban blight. In their co-published essay in volume 16 of *Coming Tides*, "On the Exegesis of a New Nomadic Plane: Biomimicry and Plant Galvonic," they grasp at words: "...if but we could say that this instance of sumac adaptability demonstrates a dichotomy of, an opposition to, and-dare we add, at the risk of redundancy - an antithesis of the concept of biomimicry, in but a single word or a simpler, more quotable phrase, we would hasten to do so..." (23).

In a later 2004 essay on common Thale Cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*), published in the same peer-reviewed journal by Dr. Nicholas Harberd, BSc, SIT, we stumble upon the first documented use of a variant of the term:

Finding *A. thaliana* alive and thriving in an empty parking lot, three shades more grey than a population of specimens in nearby restored meadows, the authors of this essay apply an awkward but highly satisfactory term to the surprising behavior. The *crapomimicry* principles on which this plant exemplar had been able to survive were found embedded in its DNA. Offspring of *Arabidopsis thaliana* X650 and X540 both exhibited an abnormal 30% more grey in its epidermal and mesophyll cells than control group X130 (45).

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Fig. 2, Crapomimetic variation in Thale Cress



Fig. 3, Crapomimicry manifested in popular culture.

Let us not belabor this compelling scientific evidence, but direct your attention also to the myriad ways in which this term has entered into both the academic lexicon and the quotidian vernacular. For instance, in a video published on a private YouTube channel and shot on location in Brooklyn, New York by the prolific musician Shawn Corey Carter, who performs under the moniker "Jay-Z," the camera pans the sidewalk along North 6th Street in the neighborhood popularly known as Williamsburg. Between two jump cuts of the artist performing in studio, a tableau of post-industrial decay frames a collection of trees that have been spray-painted, or "tagged," to blend in with the surrounding brick wall (see a still from the video in fig. 3, below). Viewer comments listed on the video's page range from scatological critique to grandiose adulation, with variants of *crapomimicry* appearing frequently. In regard to the "funky ass tag - bombed trees," the viewer identified as StreetSmartS99 writes, "they're crapomimickin' for their lives!"

In a verification study performed by Professor Vinoo McCarthy, MP, KM, a randomized selection of 100 subjects were given a choice of three utterances to describe the scene excerpted from the video. *Crapomimicry* was chosen a highly significant 77% of the time (11). This popular usage betrays the rapidity with which an emerging term can usurp its original professional application in service of the rambling, ceaseless, chaotic development of slang. The leading linguists of the day agree that this free evolution is a characteristic of all language, and should be taken as an indication of the veracity...

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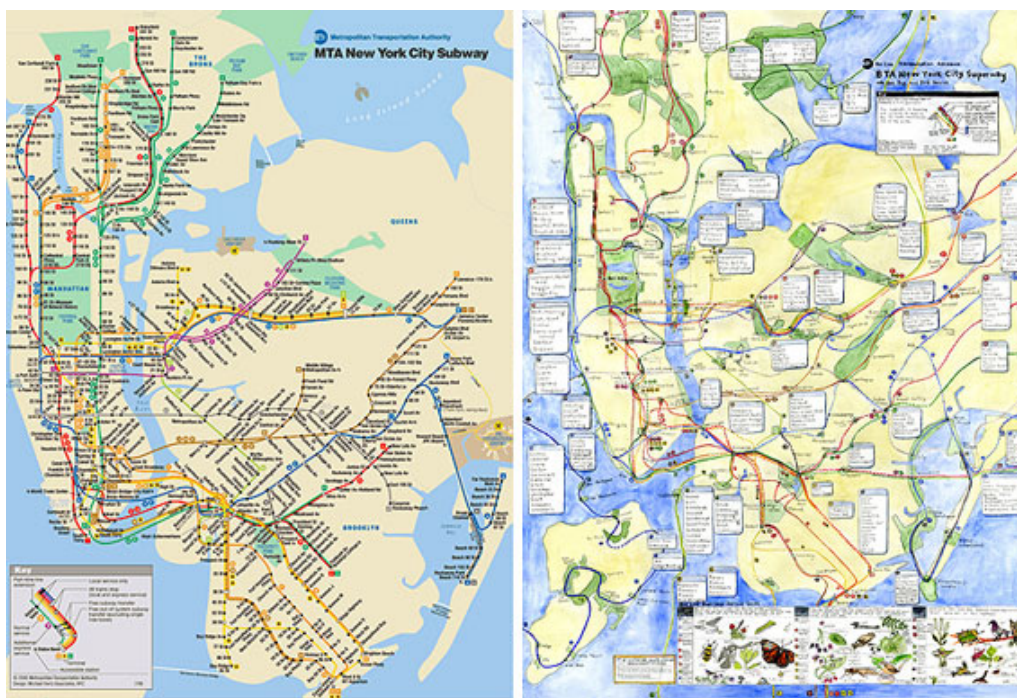
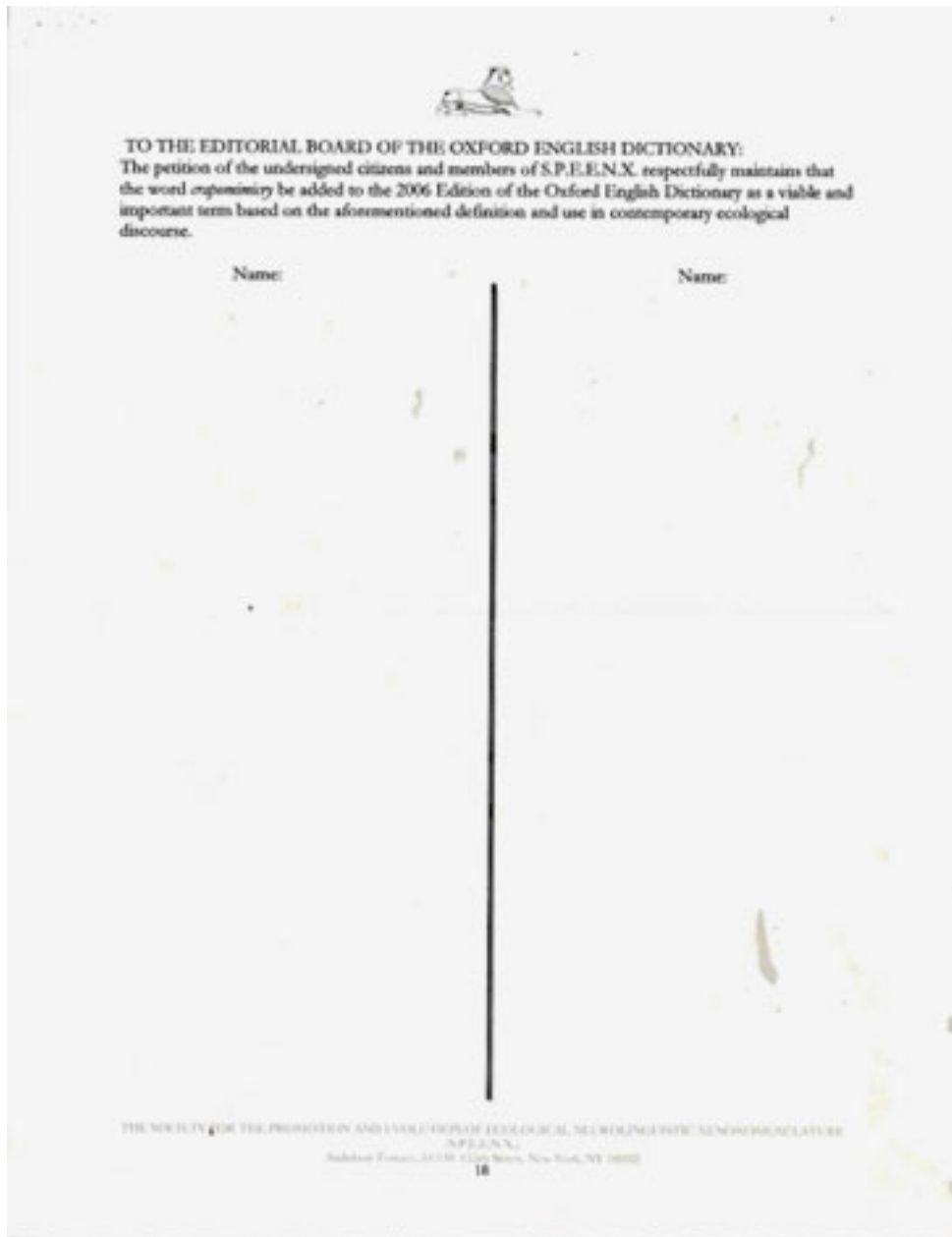


Fig. 4, The NYC Subway Map and its crapomimic, The Bee Line Superway Map.

In academic circles we again see the persistently expanding application of *crapomimicry*. Significantly, we see it even in disciplines as far afield from hard science as contemporary visual literacy studies and educational philosophy. Certain interdisciplinary practitioners identifying themselves as Secret School and the KIDS (Kindness and Imagination Development Society), for example, have made a study of the *crapomimetic* habits of avian and entymological fauna, as well as the flora they pollinate and ingest, in New York City. Moreover, they have presented their research as a parodic "crapomimic," to use their own term, of the New York City Subway Map (fig. 4).

The map produced by these, our respected colleagues from the humanities, marks a gesture of solidarity and shared purpose with our own struggle as urban botanists and zoologists and indeed with the brave struggle of the urban plants and animals we study as well. Their *Bee Line Superway Map* elaborates a sophisticated imagining of the complex migration routes and pollination patterns of birds, bees, and other insects traversing the concrete jungle's limited green spaces, pointing out the challenging conditions the natural world has been subjected to in metropolitan areas. On the other hand, as a result of these onerous conditions nature offers up a whole new field of study in urban evolutionary survival tactics, broadly grouped as the rich emerging discipline of *crapomimicry*, already listed as an independent study option at several major institutions of learning, including Rutgers and NYU. In a recent article in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, the authors stated...

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TO THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY:  
The petition of the undersigned citizens and members of SPEENX. respectfully maintains that the word *crapomimicry* be added to the 2006 Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary as a viable and important term based on the aforementioned definition and use in contemporary ecological discourse.

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It seems as if their 2006 campaign was not successful, but language is forever changing, and



we sincerely hope that the publication of this petition now will serve to advance the SPEENX mission in some modest way.