

Issue 4, 2019

SEI magazine

Sydney Environment Institute Magazine
The Multispecies Justice Collection



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

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The University of Sydney is located on the Gadigal lands of the Eora Nation. The Sydney Environment Institute acknowledges that these lands were never ceded, and we pay our deepest respects to elders, caretakers and custodians past, present and emerging, here in Eora and beyond.

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Multispecies Justice: A New Approach to a Growing Environmental Threat

By Professor David Schlosberg, Department of Government
and International Relations and Professor Danielle Celermajer,
Department of Sociology and Social Policy

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Photo by Aaron Burden

Confronting another climate change summer of extremes, it's obvious the future of humans and the health of the environment are inextricably linked. New theories of justice must respond to this ecological entanglement.

A few months back, a new research initiative of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Sydney Environment Institute, was criticised as an example of the 'useless' nature of the humanities, and the gap between the university and 'real problems' facing the world. The focus of the work is on the idea of 'multispecies justice'.

At the heart of multispecies justice is recognising the relationship and entangled functioning of human and nonhuman systems. It doesn't simply mean, as the critics scoffed, giving votes to wombats. Multispecies justice is about understanding that humans, other animals, trees, rivers, soil, and more are inter-dependent, and all depend on the viability of ecological systems. It means challenging the traditional western view that human success will be won through neglecting and exploiting other beings' interests, needs, or viability.

What was shocking to us, as leaders of this initiative, was that such a critique could come in the midst of myriad ecological crises, and in particular so shortly after a million fish died along the Murray River near Menindee (and even more serious die-offs are predicted for this summer). Stunned by the scale of that event, farmers and Barkindji elders alike articulated the spiralling relationship between the death of fish, the mismanagement of the river system, and threats to the viability of their communities.

They asked government ministers to simply come and listen to people who live on the river: to learn that viable and functioning rivers, environments, local economies, and ways of life all rise or fall together. The fish kill makes tragically explicit a range of injustices – most evidently the destruction of human and ecological functioning, but also inequality, lack of recognition, and political exclusion.

Environmental justice movements have been making the point for decades that some human communities, generally those that are already politically and socially disenfranchised, are forced to bear the heaviest burdens of environmental harms. The ongoing decimation of ecological systems, on which all human beings and communities depend, is likewise beginning to be considered a question of justice.

As political theorists, we see that a key part of the problem lies in longstanding theories of justice themselves. Classic liberal notions of justice, on which everyday western understandings and institutions depend, are based on the idea of the independent, isolated, liberal individual. But this idea of the individual is a fiction, as we are we are immersed in, a range of ecosystems. Our bodies also host an ecosystem: our gut microbiome.

Recent medical science has taught us that this microbiome impacts our health, actions, behaviour and moods. The viability of this single bacterial ecosystem is critical not only for our survival, but also to our very understanding of our own 'individual' identity.

Even more obviously, no singular human can survive isolated from the everyday entanglements with other parts of the 'natural' world – food, water, air, bacteria. We have denied this dependence by calling these parts of the environment 'resources'; but they, and we, are really just parts of systems in which we are all enmeshed.

So, we have never been individual. And that means that the vast majority of writing on justice, assuming as it does the primacy of the human individual, is based on a world that doesn't exist, and ignores the world that does. If we are going to take our place in the vibrant multispecies world, and assume our responsibility to it, we must move past this fiction of the liberal individual.

What researchers need to generate today are theories of justice alive to our entangled, ecological, multispecies lives. And for this, we need not look far. Amongst the many existing ways of knowing about an entangled multispecies world are those that have sustained Indigenous peoples on the Australian continent for tens of thousands of years.

Universities have a crucial responsibility to rethink and redirect the limitations of current and dominant ways of thinking, and to understand and engage with other ways of knowing. There are many concepts and practices of justice to explore to help us live in the real and complex world that we inhabit; that is the task of this crucial – and imminently useful – area of multispecies justice.

“We have never been individual. And that means that the vast majority of writing on justice, assuming as it does the primacy of the human individual, is based on a world that doesn't exist, and ignores the world that does.”

David Schlosberg and Danielle Celermajer

Project Leads



Danielle Celermajer is a Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney. Her research stands at the interface of theories exploring the multi-dimensional nature of injustice and the practice of human rights. She recently completed a European Union funded multi-country project on the prevention of torture, focusing on everyday violence in the security sector. Her publications include *Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apology* (Cambridge, 2009), *Power, Judgment and Political Evil: Hannah Arendt's Promise* (Routledge, 2010) *A Cultural History of Law in the Modern Age* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *The Prevention of Torture: An Ecological Approach* (Cambridge, 2018). She is now moving in to work on the relational intra-space between human and non-human animals.



David Schlosberg is Professor of Environmental Politics in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, and Director of the Sydney Environment Institute. His work focuses on contemporary environmental and environmental justice movements, environment and everyday life, and climate adaptation planning and policy. He is the author of *Defining Environmental Justice* (Oxford, 2007); co-author of *Climate-Challenged Society* (Oxford, 2013); and co-editor of both *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society* (Oxford 2011), and *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Oxford 2016). His latest book, *Sustainable Materialism: Environmental Movements and the Politics of Everyday Life*, will be published by Oxford this year.



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Thinking and Enacting Justice in a Multispecies World

Project lead Danielle Celermajer explores what motivates FASS's new research theme on Multispecies Justice.

By Professor Danielle Celermajer,
Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney

Published 18 November 2018

As I write, I am looking out on what I have always known to be the fecund green of the Kangaroo Valley on the South Coast of NSW. Like the rest of the state though, and pretty much the entire east of Australia, the grass is thin and brownish, and the ground – normally gumboot-muddy – has no give under your feet. There is a battle going on over legislative regulations requiring that a certain proportion of the river flows be preserved for ‘the environment’, as some demand an increase in the permissible proportion that can be diverted for their crops and animals (and hence their livelihood and our food), and gruelling images of starving animals make present to the urban majority the immediacy of climate change. Meanwhile, on the other side of the planet, the hurricane-led storms in the Carolinas have not only left the already marginalised without basic infrastructure, but have killed millions of chickens, unable to escape the industrial feedlots where they were caged, and broken the holding pens in which pig and mining waste had been ‘contained’, so that it now flows back into the water that will nurture all of us alike – humans, non-human animals and the environment. Today, we are no longer able to deny that we live in a multispecies world. All earth inhabitants are entangled in crises we are experiencing together.

What is a just response to the many instances our world now faces of resource scarcity, radical inequalities of power, intra and inter-species violence, competing and apparently incommensurable demands, and expected losses on an unfathomable scale? It is this question that motivates FASS's new research theme on Multispecies Justice, which I am co-leading with Professor David Schlosberg, and which includes SSPS scholars A/Prof. Susan Park (Government and International Relations), Dr. Rebecca Pearse (Political Economy) and Dr. Dinesh Wadiwel (Socio-legal Studies), and a rich inter-disciplinary team from across the faculty: Dr Francesco Borghesi (Italian Studies), A/Prof. Julia Kindt (Ancient History), Prof. Iain McCalman (SEI/History), Dr. Dalia Nassar (Philosophy), Dr. Astrida Neimanis (Gender and Cultural Studies), Dr. Killian Quigley (SEI), Michelle St Anne (SEI), A/Prof. Thom van Dooren (Gender and Cultural Studies) and A/Prof. Anik Waldow.

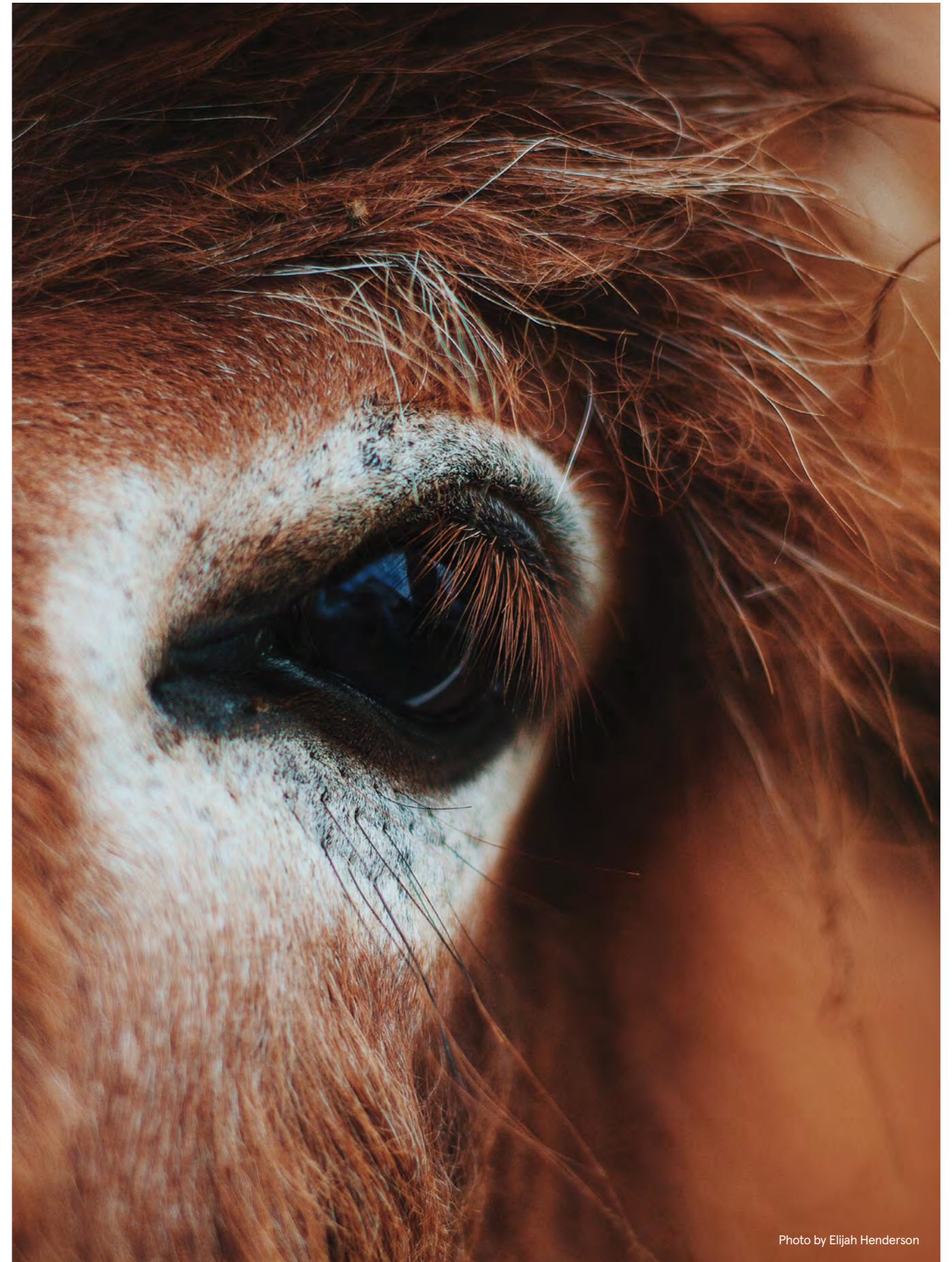


Photo by Elijah Henderson



Photo by Emily Goodhart



Photo by Cynthia Del Rio

“Joining scholarship up with the shared experience of the impacts of climate change, the extinction of species, eco-system and forms of life, and industrial farming, this scholarship asks us to think our plight and our aspirations for flourishing together.”

Danielle Celermajer

The latter part of the twentieth century was, in many respects, a boon time for scholarship oriented on questions of justice. John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* inaugurated a new era in normative political theory aimed at articulating principles for justice amongst humans, followed by (amongst others) Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, and Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young’s work on the inter-penetration of the structures of status and economic injustice. Robert Bullard’s work on unequal exposure and protection and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* catalysed what became the vibrant field of thinking about environmental justice, and, later, the emergence of radical challenges to both the anthropocentric and individualistic paradigms of justice, with ecosystems posited as intrinsic subjects of justice and personhood expanded to rivers, mountains, oceans and ecosystems, including in the law. And Peter Singer, Tom Regan and Carol Adam’s work on animal sentience, sapience, personhood and exploitation opened a vast field of political, legal, philosophical and ethological, scholarship on animal justice. As critical as these scholarly endeavours have been though, they have run along parallel tracks, meeting at points of disagreement (individualism versus system approaches) or sympathetic borrowing (the frame of rights). There have of course been important exceptions, such as ecofeminists, like Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood, who have drawn attention to the connections between human domination of nature and the domination of women inherent to patriarchy.

Indeed, more recently, scholars in the humanities and the social and natural sciences have been uncovering and articulating the fundamental entanglement of these apparently distinctive zones of life – humans, the ‘natural’ environment, and non-human animals. Responding to long and ongoing histories of colonisation, militarisation, extractivism, and more, this work is increasingly seeking out more situated, case-specific, ways of working through complex questions of justice and responsibility, engaging with a more diverse range of cultural perspectives and practices. Joining scholarship up with the shared experience of the impacts of climate change, the extinction of species, eco-system and forms of life, and industrial farming, this scholarship asks us to think our plight and our aspirations for flourishing *together*. Doing so will require nothing less than fresh ways of doing scholarship – with each other across our fields of specialisation and discipline, and in the world, as we learn to work *with* and not *on* these other subjects of justice. And perhaps most critically, given the stakes, it will demand that we find ways of bringing what might otherwise remain abstract theories and obscure, albeit potentially revolutionary ways of understanding the world, and bringing them into the way all of us – in the academy and beyond, make sense of ourselves, our intuitive sense of justice and the way we live with other earth beings.

Our grouping will be working on these issues, initially focusing on the development of new theories of multispecies justice, climate change, economic justice and biodiversity and extinction. Through a series of workshops and public events, the development of a faculty-wide HDR group, collaboration with artists, high impact multi-authored articles, and engaged media, we hope to establish Multispecies Justice as a critical new field of scholarship.

Danielle Celermajer is a Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney. Her research stands at the interface of theories exploring the multi-dimensional nature of injustice and the practice of human rights.

Beyond the Human: Imagining the Future of Justice

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, co-convenor of
the Human Animal Research Network,
asks how we can move from
anthropocentrism to true social justice.

—

By Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, Senior Lecturer in human rights
and socio-legal studies, University of Sydney

Published 30 January 2019

“Justice has traditionally been only applied to human relations and human institutions, almost as if there were no world outside these institutions. Non-humans were ignored or seen as simply resources to support human activities. But this view today seems unjustifiable.”

Dinesh Wadiwel

‘Social Justice’ is a powerful concept, evoking ideas of equality, democracy, freedom from violence and fairness. However, social justice has almost always been thought of through a human lens, as way to achieve fairer outcomes within human societies. Campaigns to save rainforests or end factory farms are rarely framed with the language of social justice. Traditional social justice goals – such as demands to redistribute wealth more fairly, or to reduce violence – are typically only understood as relating to human actors alone. However, today, social justice increasingly demands a view beyond the human.

Anthropogenic climate change for example, is a stark reminder that we can no longer treat the environment as an inexhaustible resource. Demanding justice in this context means recognizing the extent of human activity by taking into account the impact of our actions on the non-human world.

Moving beyond the human also shapes the strategies we have available to deal with human social justice issues. For example, we are aware that deep and growing income and wealth inequalities are a feature of human societies. In the past, governments have pursued economic growth as a way to raise living standards and address income poverty. But today we face the stark reality that pursuing unfettered economic growth is unfeasible without considering the effect on the climate. As the authors of the recent [IPCC 1.5° report](#) suggest, in order to respond to climate change effectively, sustainable development and poverty reduction can only happen through careful management and strong democratic consensus.¹

It is not only environmental concerns that pressure our traditional conceptions of social justice. The question of how we engage with non-human others in our food systems has been subject to a great deal of scholarly and public debate, and arguably this debate is intensifying. Public concern over the welfare and rights of animals used as food has led to significant demand for changes in how animals are treated and how food is seen. This includes strong consumer pressure to [improve the welfare of egg laying hens](#) and the expanding interest in [vegetarian and vegan foods](#).^{2,3}

Mass species extinction, driven again by human activities, continues to demand a response from human institutions.

The recent public horror over [mass fish death in the Murray-Darling river system](#), and the exposure of government mismanagement, perhaps highlight a growing sense of human responsibility for our impact upon our environment and other beings.⁴

Demands for recognition of non-human beings, whether through rights or some other form of moral or legal status, have also altered how we see social justice. We have already seen dramatic changes in how the law is conceptualised in relation to the non human. This includes recent moves to grant formal legal rights to nature, such as the rights awarded to [Whanganui river in New Zealand in 2017](#) and progress on [personhood rights for great apes](#).^{5,6} These shifts in how we see the our world in connection to ourselves show that we cannot ignore the non-human world around us – ecosystems, plants, animals, atmosphere. Justice in this sense is increasingly, whether we like it or not becoming *multispecies* in nature.

How might we reimagine social justice to take into account a multispecies perspective? In some ways this may require a fundamental re-think. The historian [Dipesh Chakrabaty](#) argues that climate change is more than just an environmental or political challenge, but something that forces us to renovate old ways of looking at the world, including in the humanities and social sciences. Chakrabaty makes [the important observation](#) that the traditional split between the natural sciences and the social sciences don’t make sense anymore.⁷ While in the past we imagined that the Earth’s geological systems did not necessarily shape or impact human institutions (and imagined that humans did not have the capacity to shape the Earth’s systems), today we can no longer maintain these ideas. The old view that there was a human history that was separate from a natural history is no longer tenable.

Chakrabaty’s observation applies also to key political concepts, including ‘social justice’. Justice has traditionally been only applied to human relations and human institutions, almost as if there were no world outside these institutions. Non-humans were ignored or seen as simply resources to support human activities. But this view today seems unjustifiable. Where might social justice move as a concept if it must take into account the world beyond the human? What would a multispecies justice look like?



Photo by Adli Wahid



Photo by Annie Theby

Dinesh Wadiwel is a Senior Lecturer in human rights and socio-legal studies. He has previously taught in Sociology and Politics at the University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University and the University of Notre Dame Australia. Dinesh is convener of The University of Sydney Human Animal Research Network (HARN). Dinesh is author of the monograph *The War Against Animals* (Brill, 2015). He is also co-editor (with Matthew Chrulew) of the volume *Foucault and Animals* (Brill 2017). Dinesh is currently working on a new monograph which explores the relationship between animals and capitalism. Dinesh is also working on several projects related to the application of international torture obligations to the treatment of people with disability. Dinesh has 15 years experience working within the non government sector. He has significant experience within the disability rights movement, and was a previous Executive Officer of National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA), the national peak organization representing people from Non English Speaking Backgrounds with disability. Dinesh continues to collaborate with a number of multicultural organisations working towards rights for migrants and refugees with disability.

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Stealing Worlds Into Being: On Crows

An excerpt from SEI Researcher Thom van Dooren's new book, *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds*, published by Columbia University Press in October 2019.

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By Thom van Dooren, Associate Professor, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, University of Sydney

Published 28 August 2019

In the early 2000s, a series of corvid heists took place at the Membury service station on the M4 motorway in England. In each case, events unfolded in pretty much the same way. Two rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) arrived and took up positions on opposite sides of the top of a garbage can. Working in tandem, they pulled the plastic liner up with their beaks, securing it at this new height with their feet before reaching down again with their beaks to pull it up further. Repeating this action about twenty times, the birds gained access to the once inaccessible waste at the bottom, bringing it ever so gradually within beak's reach.¹

Many of the remarkable behaviors that went into this heist — teamwork, patience, and calculation — have been experimentally demonstrated by corvids over the years.²

It isn't entirely clear that anything was really being "stolen" in this case: can one really steal what another has discarded? But there is an important act of theft lingering at the edges of this action. When the garbage was finally within reach of the rooks' beaks, reports indicate that one of the birds would start tossing the food over the side of the bin while the other, or perhaps a third rook, stood guard on the ground to ensure that the hard-won food wasn't stolen by others. The real site of potential theft took place *after* the elaborate heist, once the food had been secured. Here, in this seemingly mundane, everyday space of encounter — crows squabbling over bread or a chip on a sidewalk — a great deal of what it means to be a corvid takes shape. As these rooks diligently guarded their bounty they demonstrated both the capacity to *anticipate* theft by others and the ability to act preemptively to ward it off. This, too, is no small achievement; in fact, it may even be the case that these pilfering and antipilfering activities are in some sense *fundamental* to what it is to be a corvid.

Most crows, it seems, spend a solid amount of time each day stealing from others. Most crow species combine foraging, hunting and collecting activities with efforts to steal food from their neighbors.³ Northwestern crows (*C. caurinus*) in Washington State steal rather indiscriminately from relatives and strangers, although they seem to tailor their thieving strategies. When stealing from a more closely related bird, a crow often quietly approached and took the food, whereas when a less closely related bird was the target, theft often involved a noisy, squawking approach and a subsequent pursuit until the fleeing bird dropped the food.⁴ In this context, crows are primarily stealing from others opportunistically, as the food was procured. But, importantly, corvids don't limit themselves to this kind of theft. In addition, they have become highly skilled at raiding one another's "caches," that is, the little bits of food and other items — acorns and other seeds, bits of meat or even tools for extracting grubs from logs and tree trunks — that all species of corvids tend to hide away for later.⁵



Photo by Ade Tunji

“Here in this seemingly mundane space — crows squabbling over bread or a chip on a sidewalk — a great deal of what it means to be a corvid takes shape.”

Thom van Dooren

Thom van Dooren is Associate Professor and Australian Research Council Future Fellow (2017–2021) in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, and founding co-editor of the journal *Environmental Humanities* (Duke University Press). His research is based in the broad interdisciplinary field of the environmental humanities, with particular grounding in environmental philosophy, cultural studies, and science and technology studies. His research and writing focuses on some of the many philosophical, ethical, cultural, and political issues that arise in the context of species extinctions and human entanglements with threatened species and places. He is the author of *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (2014), *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds* (2019), and co-editor of *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations* (2017), all published by Columbia University Press.

With all this stealing going on, it makes sense that corvids try to cache things away from prying eyes, and if they are seen, they often return later to move the item to a safer location. These are complex cognitive and social operations. It seems that corvids are not only keeping track of their own caches but also of which other birds saw them cache which items where.^{6,7} Interestingly, an experiment with scrub jays (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) showed that only birds who had themselves previously stolen from others took these kinds of preventative actions.⁸ In short, as Nicola Clayton, professor of comparative cognition at the University of Cambridge, put it in our conversation, “it takes a thief to know one.”

Many of these studies of caching behavior are, more accurately, studies of *stealing*: of pilfering and antipilfering strategies. This topic has been of particular interest to biologists not because they have a strong interest in questions of corvid morality but because of what crows might here reveal about their ability to attribute mental states to others, referred to in biology as possessing a “theory of mind” (ToM). In acting in the ways that they do, crows seem to demonstrate an understanding of other crows as mindful beings, subjects with their own unique “perceptions, attentions, intentions, and beliefs”.⁹ Far from simply responding to where another bird is looking or going (“reading behavior”), recent studies strongly indicate that these birds are attributing mental states to others, as demonstrated in work in which ravens took preventative measures to stop pilfering by birds they could not see but knew *might* be watching them.¹⁰

Two of the main laboratories engaged in studying these complex interactions between pilfering and antipilfering—that of Nicola Clayton and that of Thomas Bugnyar at the University of Vienna—have reached a similar conclusion: this behavior may be the key driver in the evolution of the remarkable intelligence of corvids.^{11,12} Central to this possibility is the development of spatial and observational memory, which allow birds not only to relocate their own caches but to watch where someone else has cached, remember the location, and return later.

As Clayton explained to me: “Observational memory for caches has probably driven the increasing cognitive complexity of both stealing strategies and cache-protection tactics, because an individual bird is both the protector of its own caches and a potential pilferer of others”. As Bugnyar and Kotrschal put it: “this competitive game for food may fuel an intraspecific evolutionary arms race for deceptive and cognitive abilities”.¹³

This fascinating hypothesis places hiding and, of course, stealing at the center of our stories about how it is that crows became who they are. If Clayton and Bugnyar are correct, then perhaps it is pilfering and its prevention that have, more than anything else, enabled their complex cognitive and social lives. Corvid wakefulness is, at least in part, a product of and a preparation for theft—it is stolen property. Stealing is at the core of who crows are. In fact, the more I learn about these activities, the more comfortable I am labeling them as “theft”. While this term surely has a variety of meanings and associations within diverse cultural, not to mention biological, contexts, it seems to me that it is not right to assume that to apply it to the activities of nonhumans is necessarily an anthropomorphic projection. We are, at the very least, in the same neighborhood here. Crows do seem to have a sense of theft: they understand and negotiate its social intricacies, its hostilities and niceties, its conduct and its prevention. They steal knowingly, deliberately, sometimes even carefully—certainly from one another but perhaps also from others, including humans. In making this point, my aim is not to slip into the unhelpful forms of moralizing that so often accompany discussions of theft. Rather, it is to learn to see and appreciate in new ways what is at stake, what is *made possible*, by stealing. Whole modes of life—fascinating, rich, intelligent ways of being—have been stolen into existence, brought into our world in no small way through this particular space and practice of being with others.

Excerpted from *The Wake of Crows* by Thom van Dooren Copyright (c) 2019 Thom van Dooren. Used by arrangement with the Publisher. All rights reserved.

“These are complex cognitive and social operations. (...) My aim is not to slip into the unhelpful forms of moralizing that so often accompany discussions of theft. Rather, it is to learn to see and appreciate in new ways what is at stake, what is made possible, by stealing.”

Thom van Dooren

- Alongside the cited materials, this account draws heavily on an interview with Nicola Clayton, conducted by the author at Cambridge University on May 19, 2017.
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The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds

2019, Published by Columbia University Press

Crows can be found almost everywhere that people are, from tropical islands to deserts and arctic forests, from densely populated cities to suburbs and farms. Focusing on five key sites, *The Wake of Crows* is an exploration of the diverse and entangled lives of humans and crows, asking how we might live well with crows in the midst of ongoing processes of globalization, colonization, urbanization, and climate change. The substantive chapters of the book focus on human/crow encounters in specific sites, in an effort to imagine and put into practice a multispecies ethics for this time of extinction and extermination.

Throughout the book, a series of short vignettes, like the one above, offer reflections on some of the remarkable features of crow life. Drawing on research in behavioural biology, alongside interviews with leading scientists and visits to key labs, these vignettes explore what crows might be up to when they experiment with cars as a means of opening tough nuts (“Experimenting”), when they steal from each other (“Stealing”), when they pull a string together to access food (“Cooperating”), when they hold their wings open over a lit cigarette (“Fumigating”), and when they seemingly leave shiny trinkets for friendly people (“Gifting”). In each of these cases, we learn a little more—or at the very least are provided with some fascinating sites for careful speculation—about how corvids make sense of the world.



Just Coal Transitions In The More-Than-Human World

Political economist Beck Pearse discusses economic justice and the future of coal in Australia.

—
By Rebecca Pearse, Department of Political Economy,
The University of Sydney

Published 26 June 2019

The future of coal is in doubt. Declining coal production and major challenges to coal mine approvals in Australia are now established trends. Renewable energy is set to become over half of the nation's domestic electricity production by 2030.

This is good news for human and non-human lives on the line as climate crisis develops. At the same time, thinking about coal industry transition requires deeper questioning, about what kinds of economies and relationships with the non-human world are possible beyond fossil fuelled capitalism.

Debating the future beyond coal

There are many well-researched proposals for just transitions away from coal and other fossil fuels, addressing questions like – What scale of fossil fuel asset write-offs in Australia would [be fair and necessary](#) to ensure we don't break the global carbon budget?¹ Could a liberal internationalist program of 'cooperative decarbonisation' make an [Australia moratorium on new fossil fuels](#) feasible?² How are coal workers and regional economies impacted by industry transition already in play? What kind of [industrial policies](#) can best secure decent green jobs?³

These are all important questions to tackle. However, any one discrete policy proposal to address Australia's coal question will not alone tackle the structural malaise of inequality in contemporary capitalist societies. Economic justice requires a broader set of reforms.

[Recent discussion](#) about a Green New Deal (GND) in the US shows a way forward.⁴ A GND could be an ambitious program for economic justice, linking decarbonisation to measures to tackle inequality, precarity and wage stagnation. It calls for major public investment in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and water supplies, and at its centre – new rights to employment, housing, and public transport.

To secure a globalised GND that genuinely tackles the coal question, it will be crucial to push against the techno-speak of ['zero-net emissions'](#) in the existing framing of the climate goal.⁵ The later opens up scope for governments to displace the abatement task away from fossil fuel production e.g. with carbon offsets or geoengineering. These mechanisms are an evasion of the major questions concerning fossil fuels. Experimental engineering of the carbon cycle may further threaten life on the planet. Campaigns for a GND and other progressive economic reforms will need to resist technological fixes, and prosecute a popular social justice argument for keeping fossil fuels in the ground. Crucially, there is further reckoning to do when it comes to envisioning economies beyond coal.



Photo by Geoffrey Moore

Rethinking justice and inequalities in the age of climate crisis

Given the integral role fossil capital accumulation has played in fundamentally altering the biosphere and in turn, threatening human and non-human life, we need to carve out a vision for multi-species economic justice.

Our challenge involves what Dipesh Chakrabarty [describes as thinking](#) in two registers.⁶ That is, trying to get a grip on humanity's geological agency (which demolishes the human-nature divide) while also attending to enduring questions of social justice (uneven development, rising income and wealth inequalities, gender and racial discrimination, and more).

New lines of ecological thought in marxist, feminist, and decolonial political economics are crucial to the project of rethinking economic justice in the more-than-human world. These traditions provide the tools we need to historicise and politicise how value is extracted from human and non-human natures, helping us to identify who benefits and at what cost.

The historical and contemporary operations of settler capitalism are at the heart of our ecological crisis in Australia. Since colonial forces declared *terra nullius*, governments and capital have regarded land and non-human life as unlimited resources. Australia's economic development has proceeded via the domination of non-human others and violent denial of indigenous sovereignty.

Many hotly contested mine proposals show how the coal commodity continues this [brutal](#) environmental change.⁷

Coal capital and the politics of devaluation

Coal capital has a number of [orientations](#) to human and non-human life.⁸ Some bodies and communities are deemed productive and assigned monetary value; others are constituted as waste, as useful but unpriced, or as a threat. Expanded coal capital accumulation proceeds through the systemic [devaluation](#) of human and non-human life deemed 'outside', or in excess of, officially valued coal. However, there are problems.⁹ The scale and pace of coal development has been stemmed in recent times.

Consider the proposed Watermark coalmine proposed for the northwest NSW. Gomerioi people on the Liverpool Plains [have objected](#) to Shenhua's proposed mine, which entail plans to cut-out and relocate an entire rock face with grinding grooves and other artefacts from sacred sites during the thirty-year life of the proposed mine.¹⁰ Federal review of the government's 'management' of indigenous heritage has been stalled for over a year, with no resolution in sight. Gomerioi, landholders and environmentalists have all argued the many drawn our mine review procedures fail to meaningfully protect land, water, and non-human life.

Protections for endangered species are also weak and contested. For instance, the Queensland government's [recent environmental approval](#) for the Adani mine was given despite its impacts on the black-throated finch.¹¹ Government decisions like this do the political work of devaluing life rendered 'outside' coal's value proposition.

'Threatened species' are subjects to be managed to make way for coal. Environmental law and regulation has proven incredibly weak means to avoid loss of life, and the case for a new generation of environmental laws is increasingly urgent.¹²

As it stands, our environmental regulations calibrates human/non-human relations on profoundly unequal terms. For instance, biodiversity 'offsets' for coalmine approvals are common. It usually means directing coal companies to purchase land with similar flora and fauna in order to compensate for destruction at the mine site. The goal is 'no net loss.' But [the devil in the detail](#) reveals offsets fail to arrest aggregate loss.¹³

Biodiversity offsetting parcels up 'units' of non-human life in abstraction from place. This ignores the material specificity of non-human natures and renders conservation as a matter of trade-offs or exchange in biodiversity credits. Questions like *how much coal development is too much?* rarely get asked in mine environmental approval processes.

Thankfully, there is a little good news on this front. Earlier this year, the court finding that a coalmine proposed near the NSW town of Gloucester was in the ['wrong place at the wrong time'](#) points to another way to answer the coal question.¹⁴ Here, the [importance of place](#), as well as concerns about the global carbon budget came together in a judge's assessment that the mine should be refused.¹⁵

A multi-species economic justice outlook on Australia's coal question must take this kind of integrative thinking further. Only by thinking broadly and deeply will we have a chance at coming up with adequate answers to the coal question and climate crisis.

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- 1 *Carbon Tracker*, 2013 [Access Here](#)
- 2 *Beyond Zero Emissions* [Access Here](#)
- 3 *Lock The Gate* 2019 [Access Here](#)
- 4 *Jacobin* 2019 [Access Here](#)
- 5 *Politico* 2019 [Access Here](#)
- 6 Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2009. The Climate of History: Four Theses. *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 35, No. 2. pp. 197-22
- 7 *The Killing Times*, *The Guardian* [Access Here](#)
- 8 Rosemary-Claire Collard & Jessica Dempsey (2017) Capitalist Natures in Five Orientations, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 28:1, 78-97
- 9 Rosemary-Claire Collard and Jessica Dempsey 'Politics of devaluation' *Dialogues in Human Geography* Volume 7, Issue 3, November 2017, Pages 314-318
- 10 *The Northern Daily Leader* 2018 [Access Here](#)
- 11 *The Conversation*, 2019 [Access Here](#)
- 12 *Australian Panel of Experts on Environmental Law* [Access Here](#)
- 13 Martine Maron, Joseph W.Bull, Megan C. Evans, Ascelin Gordon. 2015 Locking in loss: Baselines of decline in Australian biodiversity offset policies. *Biological Conservation*, Volume 192, pp 504-512
- 14 EDO NSW 2019 [Access Here](#)
- 15 *Newcastle Herald* [Access Here](#)



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The Atmospheric Politics of Lively Capital

The giant panda is a conservation icon, an anthropomorphised star of advertising campaigns that tells a fascinating story of affective force and capitalist economies in the Anthropocene.

—

By Dr Maan Barua, Lecturer in Human Geography,
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Published 01 October 2019

In 1896, [Pierre Armand David](#), a French priest and naturalist, sent the first skins of ‘a strange black-and- white bear’ to Paris’ Natural History Museum. Virtually unknown to the West, the curiosity the creature sparked was so immense that people began to go to extraordinary lengths to lay hands on specimens. Collectors were sent in quest for larger, better preserved specimens, triggering what became an extractive ‘panda rush’.

The global panda spectacle took further grip when [Su-Lin](#), a live panda cub, was brought to the US by Ruth Harkness in December 1936. The ‘lady and the panda’ became overnight media sensations, appearing in magazines and tabloids, endorsing advertisements to sell commodities in depression-hit America. The panda’s charisma became inexorably entangled with capitalist accumulation. Bought by Chicago’s Brookfield Zoo, more than 53,000 visitors arrived to see Su-Lin on the first day. The institution’s costs were recuperated within a week. As other zoos began to follow suite, a new phase of panda extraction began, a trade that operated through primitive accumulation, tearing animals from their eco-social modes and rendering them into creatures for display and the generation of surplus value.

Manipulating affect

The term ‘charismatic’ was seldom used to describe the panda’s allure, but during the 1980’s, with the mainstreaming of market logics in conservation, the term gained ascendancy, and flagship species such as the panda were [seen as a means](#) ‘to sell the cause of conservation as a whole’.¹

Much of this entailed micropolitical channelling of affects. WWF’s famous panda logo has been rendered more infant-like over time, thanks to an advertising agency, Landor & Associates, which in 1986 was brought in to enhance the brand’s commercial appeal. Arguing that the old logo, designed by Peter Scott in 1961, looked ‘sick, depressed’, they accentuated the animal’s eyes and enlarged its cranium. There was a ‘[neotenic evolution](#)’ of the panda – paralleling the transformation of Mickey Mouse from a rat-like creature in the 1920s to a doe-eyed animal five decades later.²

This rebranding is about intervening in affective atmospheres to foster commerce, pointing to a wider ‘Disneyisation’ of the economy under late capitalism. Disneyisation is characterised by theming, the merging of consumption and play, and affective labour – features that are part and parcel of commercialised encounters with pandas in captive environments, where the animals not only generate intimacies, but are used to catalyse the consumption of a range of commodities from flights to ice-creams.



Photo by Elena Loshina

“Animals had to be alert and interested when they went live on television, and this required cultivating their attention – an affective attunement crossing porous bodies and species divides.”

Maan Barua

Affective labour

The life of Chi-Chi – [perhaps the most famous panda of all time](#) – shows how affective labour performed in captivity is vital for generating value-added encounters.³ Labour in the bodily mode, affective labour is immersed in the somatic and the corporeal, but its products are intangible.

Chi-Chi arrived in London in 1958. Her owner, an animal dealer named Heini Demmer, had plans of selling her to an American zoo, but this fell through due to an embargo on Chinese goods. Demmer sold Chi-Chi to London Zoo, with Granada Television paying a bulk of the money, in return for exclusive rights to film animals in the zoo.

Chi-Chi's allure depended on being lively. In a newly-designed enclosure, Chi-Chi and an assigned keeper entertained large crowds through a range of anthropomorphic antics, including playing football. Desmond Morris (then Granada TV anchor at London Zoo) remarked, “was to add glamour... but at the cost of never being treated as a ‘wild’ animal”, where the creature could retract from being watched.

Political economies of captivity thus entailed affective labours of coping: being subject to the constant gaze of crowds and television media. Affective labour was crucial for forging notions of ‘authenticity’, on which television programmes relied to create brand value. As Morris recalls, Granada’s Zoo Time programme “succeeded where others failed is because it is real” and did not ‘have a phoney ‘studio’ atmosphere [note term] which is all too easy to detect”. Animals had to be alert and interested when they went live on television, and this required cultivating their attention – an affective attunement crossing porous bodies and species divides. Whilst political economic straitjackets do not immediately recognise affective labours of animacy and authenticity as productive work, the immense success of Zoo Time and ZSL’s financial turnaround, evidence its economic valence. Affects of coping with stresses of captive environments is part and parcel of the lives of pandas in zoos today.

Atmospheric politics

Marxist feminists have long argued that the infrastructure of affective work is not only constitutive of immaterial economies under late capitalism, but vital for the reproduction of labour power.

This comes to the fore in the famous saga of getting Chi-Chi to mate. In 1962, Chi-Chi came into heat, displaying drastic changes in her temperament. From ZSL’s perspective, this was a potential infant panda wasted. Soon negotiations were underway to pair Chi-Chi with An-An, a male housed in Moscow zoo. In 1966, she was flown to Moscow.

A potential panda birth was an economic spectacle waiting to detonate: businesses planned ahead, manufacturing a range of panda-related commodities from teddies to key rings and even mugs of Chi-Chi minor. Whilst showing initial promise, the animals’ attempts to mate were eventually unsuccessful. Businesses took a hit, stranded with box loads of merchandise. An article in the Daily Mail perfectly summarised this turbulent affective economy: “never has such gloom been spread throughout the industrial world by the mere lack of mateyness by pandas”.

Chi-Chi, wrote her vet Oliver Graham Jones, “had become so conditioned to the zoo environment and the company of man [sic] that she developed anthropomorphic tendencies”. There were clear signs of imprinting.

The development of anthropomorphic tendencies is a barrier to the expansion of lively capital, and from the latter’s viewpoint, needs to be overcome. In the 1980s, following the transition to state-led capitalism, China initiated a lease model seeking to exploit the panda’s allure to the maximum, and animals were rented out to zoos and even state fairs on short-term loans. Captive panda reproduction was slow, posing a barrier to the limitless expansion of capital, so to meet demands, another round of primitive accumulation was set in motion: China began capturing wild animals to augment a captive population declining faster than it reproduced.

In 1994, after significant lobbying by conservationists, zoos were directed to participate in long-term loans that fostered captive breeding. Partnerships were developed between San Diego Zoo and China to improve reproduction, giving rise to an *atmospheric politics of lively capital*. Zoos began ‘environmental enrichment’ with the purpose of ‘drawing out species-appropriate behaviours’. Panda enclosures were altered from open spaces to those with more diverse terrains. Zoos began enrichment through targeting the animal-in-its-environment and its ecological, chemical and affective milieu, leading to a boom in captive panda populations. Today, there are many more animals available for loans, which China often exchanges for access to natural resources such as uranium and oil, or for access to markets for Chinese goods. Many of these pandas cannot be returned to the wild.

Lively capital and economies of the Anthropocene

Tracking histories of the global panda spectacle shows how its charisma is historically-situated, and long caught up in pathways of generating surplus value. Nonhuman charisma can be fetishistic, for its allure can hide coercive processes of capture and accumulation that is contingent upon nonhuman bodies and labour. Atmospheric politics, intervening in an animal’s volumetric environment and its affective intensities, and fostering a spectacular, Disneyised economy, enables us to attend to processes of extracting surplus from nonhuman life. Here, biopower is recast as a political technology of valorisation: making live and letting die is about fostering lively capital.

Maan Barua is lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Cambridge. As a cultural and environmental geographer with an interest in the spaces, politics and governance of the living and material world, his work brings posthumanist thought into conversation with strands of critical political economy to interrogate questions about nature, culture and capital. Maan’s research interests include urban ecology, more-than-human geographies, biodiversity conservation and the politics of lively capital.

1 Mittermeier R.A. (1986) Strategies for the Conservation of Highly Endangered Primates.

In: Benirschke K. (eds) Primates. Proceedings in Life Sciences. Springer, New York, NY

2 National Geographic 2009 [Access Here](#)

3 Time 2017 [Access Here](#)

Guessing at Depth

SEI Postdoc Fellow Killian Quigley unravels the asymptotic nature of artistic practice, and asks whether diving into new aesthetic and poetic spaces can help us to transcend our anthropocentric ethics of care.

—

By Dr Killian Quigley, Postdoctoral Research Fellow,
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Published 08 April 2019

Poetics and aesthetics are, among other things, theories and practices of attention. As an artist pays heed, they not only reveal the scope of their own regard—what gets noticed and imagined, and in what manner—but orient and compose their audiences' views. Arts configure worlds, and modify the contours of cognisance and care. In the context of bewilderingly rapid planetary change, these potencies acquire specific urgency. A responsive and integral "ecopoetics," write Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola, aims at nothing less than the "making of a new home," through "work of cultural and poetic invention that creates a more sustaining social and ecological context".¹ If it's true that by sensing, forming, and representing, artists may literally produce novel ways of "[dwelling] with the earth," and even of "being human," then this is potent labour indeed.^{2,3}

It bears noting, however, that opinions on these matters are neither homogeneous nor united. Some are a long way from sanguine. In a [recent essay](#) on climate fiction, or cli-fi, Katy Waldman posits a key, and possibly intransigent, problem for Anthropocene poetics.⁴ Literature, she writes, is essentially "humanist." No matter their style or subject, writers are bound to create art that redounds, however circuitously, upon *homo sapiens*.

Put simply, human writing is categorically incapable of addressing anything other than human preoccupations. Waldman's point, then, is not that writers are themselves to blame for these shortcomings. The issue is too basic for that: languages, and the things languages make possible, can only ever express an asymptotic relation to the "autonomous" meanings of "non-hominal" entities, of environments "on their own terms". Under these lights, the limits to literature's "capacity to imagine not only a different who, but a different where and when" appear soberingly stark.⁵

Nonetheless, the figure of the asymptote—a line that approaches another, following closely but never converging—intrigues. What if it's more than an emblem of art's insufficiencies? What if the asymptote represents a sort of space, and an ethic, for making? A kind of dynamic and unsteady ground for observing, interpreting, and inventing? The poet A. R. Ammons has written that to think ecologically is to occupy "a firmless country".⁶ Maybe the asymptote, by constantly moving and searching and never fully finding, is a theory and a practice for ecopoetic and ecoaesthetic work, as well as a humbling reminder of that work's fundamental contingency.

“As well as orienting her audiences toward deep-sea habitats, Simonson’s paintings continuously enact the mediated and uncertain nature of that very orientation.”

Killian Quigley

What practices and possibilities does asymptosy encourage, if it is deliberately and rigorously inhabited? It’s a question that recalls me to the work of the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, whose *How Forests Think* I’ve been fortunate to read alongside some of my *Multispecies Justice* colleagues in our monthly reading group. In that text, Kohn explores interactions among organisms—homo sapiens and otherwise—in and around Ávila, in western Ecuador. Learning with jaguars, dogs, leafcutter ants, humans, trees, and others, Kohn rejects the assumption that thought, interpretation, representation, and selfhood are exclusively hominal affairs. This inclines Kohn toward what he calls “a perspectival aesthetic,” whereby selves relate to other selves by making “provisional guesses” about the thoughts and experiences of those others. Sure, assents Kohn, those guesses are “mediated, provisional, fallible, and tenuous”.⁷ But that is, in a sense, beside the point, which is that all selves are guessing, about other selves and about their very own, all the time, and so framing asymptosy as a uniquely human, or human-linguistic, constraint misses the bigger, richer picture.

Can I become a better guesser? I’d like to think so, and I’d like to think that that’s the perplexing, animating challenge that Kohn’s work poses for poetic and aesthetic practice. At the same time, I can’t help wondering how guessing operates in environments that simply are “profoundly non-human,” such as the undersea.⁸ In surroundings where anthropic sensation, interpretation, and indeed *life* are exceptionally precarious, the asymptotic line may have a hard time swimming, let alone coming anywhere near the selves it seeks.

Last month, I heard the painter Lily Simonson and the biologist Peter Girguis discuss their collaborative efforts to sense, interpret, and represent life in the deep ocean.⁹ I also spent time with Simonson’s *Painting the Deep*, an exhibition of large paintings of abyssal spaces and abyssal selves, including hairy-limbed yeti crabs and some memorably sensuous giant tube worms. The pictures were composed, in part, from luminescent pigments, which make their colours and textures humanly accessible only when displayed under black light. As well as orienting her audiences toward deep-sea habitats, Simonson’s paintings continuously enact the mediated and uncertain nature of that very orientation. This is something different from triumphally expanding the human sensorium to incorporate yetis and giant worms. It’s something more serpentine, a bringing to view that is at the same time a sign of hominal incapacity. If this is home-building, it obeys a multifarious architecture, one whose chambers may be mutually dependent, but whose dimensions are never fully mine to make.

Killian Quigley is a Postdoctoral Fellow at SEI. Killian researches the poetic, aesthetic, and broader cultural histories of environments and ecosystems. He is focused, especially, on marine – and above all submarine – contexts. With Margaret Cohen, of Stanford University, he is co-editor of *The Aesthetics of the Undersea*, forthcoming late 2018 from Routledge Environmental Humanities.



Photo by Kristina Vackova



Photo by Annie Shirley

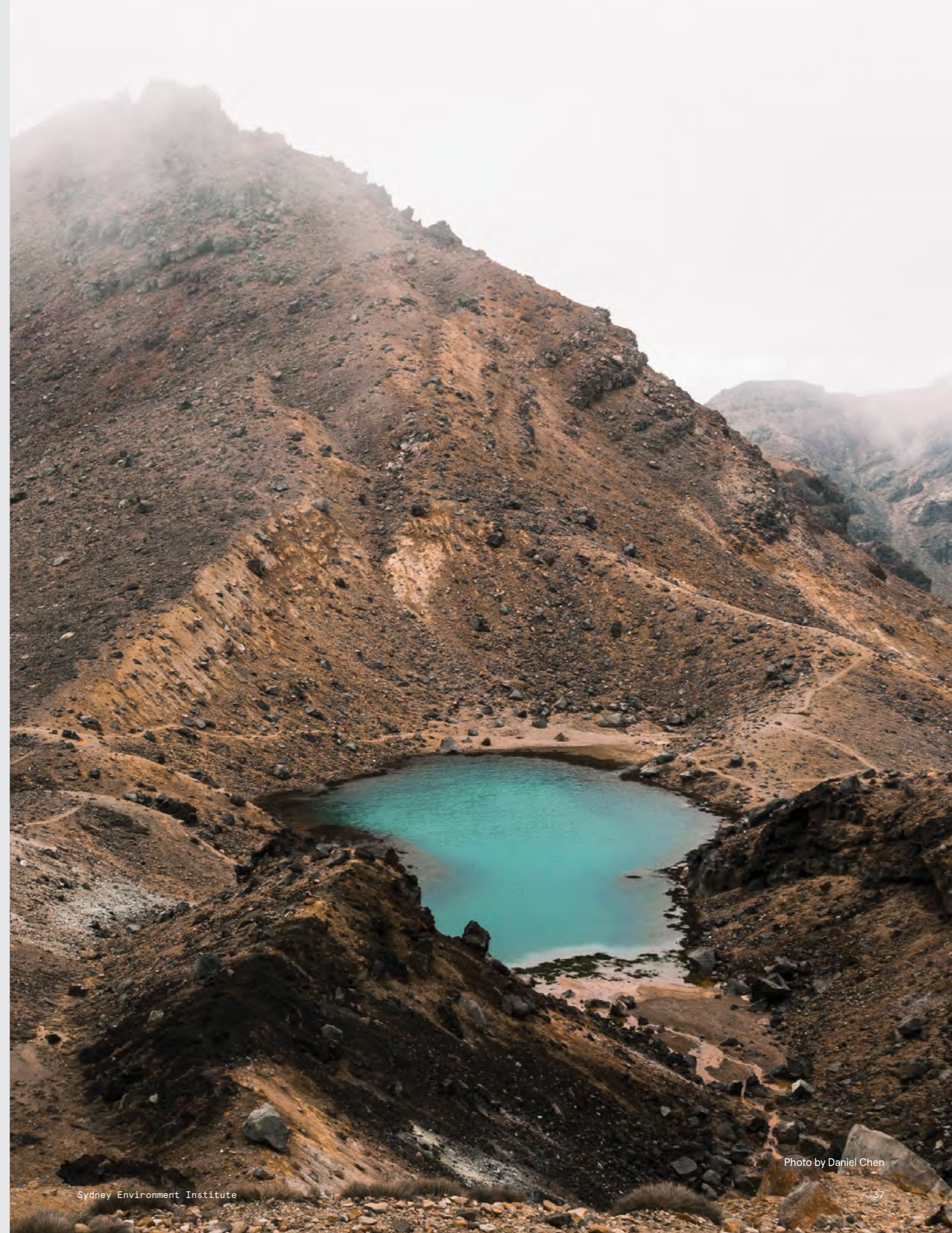
- 1 Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola, “Introduction: Queering Ecopoetics,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 25, no. 1 (2018): 134.
- 2 Jonathan Bate, quoted in Hume and Rahimtoola, “Introduction,” 138.
- 3 Stephanie LeMenager, “Cli-fi, Petroculture, and the Environmental Humanities,” interview by River Ramuglia, *Studies in the Novel* 50, no. 1 (2018): 155.
- 4 Katy Waldman, “How Climate-Change Fiction, or ‘Cli-Fi,’ Forces Us to Confront the Incipient Death of the Planet,” *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2018.
- 5 Ashley Hay, “Crossing the line: Unknown unknowns in a liminal, tropical world,” *Griffith Review* 63 (2018): 25.
- 6 Quoted in Lynn Keller, “Green Reading: Modern and Contemporary American Poetry and Environmental Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 612.
- 7 Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 86–97.
- 8 Alex Farquharson, “Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep,” in *Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep*, ed. Alex Farquharson and Martin Clark (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary and London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 6.
- 9 Harvard Museum of Natural History, [Access Here](#)

Georegional Justice from Legal Personhood to Democratic Agency

SEI Researcher Christine Winter asks whether the frameworks that grant environments like Aotearoa's Whanganui River legal personhood should include a right to vote.

By Dr Christine J Winter, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney

Published 04 December 2019





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“How might we move from seeing, hearing and responding to nonhuman as non-agental to viewing the nonhuman as a *companion* to human and corporate political representation?”

Christine Winter

Entanglement

Some scholars note the western idea that human and nonhuman are disjointed is fallacious.¹ Some also note that political theories that fail to account for a thriving environment are unlikely to meet the core thresholds of justice.² Simultaneously, there are Indigenous philosophies that identify the entanglement of human wellbeing and nonhuman wellbeing. The pace of environmental degradation draws us to consider a politics that recognises intrinsic value in nonhuman welfare. How might we move from seeing, hearing and responding to nonhuman as non-agental to viewing the nonhuman as a *companion* to human and corporate political representation? One means may be through legal personhood, a mechanism already employed to recognise nonhuman identity status.

Corporate Personhood

The mechanism of legal corporate personhood creates from a multitude a singular identity with which others can contract and which has rights and responsibilities.³ These rights and responsibilities can include democratic agency and the right to vote, rights usually associated with individual human persons.^{4,5}

There are clear reasons to challenge corporate influence in democracies, never-the-less, precedents exist. Do the examples of nonhuman personhood from Aotearoa, which blend Māori and Western philosophic and legal ontologies, also suggest that democratic political participation is a privilege which should extend to *nonhuman* legal persons?

Nonhuman Personhood

In Aotearoa, the idea of legal personhood is harnessed as part of the government's settlement and reparations for past breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. Legal personhood blends the framework of corporate personhood with the understanding of human-nonhuman kinship and entanglement of Māori philosophies. Two identities, Te Awa Tupua and Te Urewera, are legally recognised as legal persons, and a third, Taranaki Maunga, will be soon.

Each has been appointed kaitiaki (guardians or trustees) to 'think like', and act as their voice so that they have volition in their own ongoing maintenance, development negotiations, and 'land-use'.

The descriptions of legal personhood in the Acts take Māori frameworks for knowing the world to establish the parameters of the legal person's identity. These are and have always been identities of entangled beings and being. Identities are human and nonhuman, physical and spiritual, cultural and natural, one and many simultaneously. More importantly, they are agents. These identities are understood not as inanimate spaces, resources, economic units, plots on a map, legally owned by individual or collective humans. The Bill granting personhood to Te Urewera, for instance, 'recognises the mana and intrinsic values of Te Urewera by putting it beyond human ownership'.⁶

The protocol of kaitiakitanga is 'not passive custodianship, nor ... simply the exercise of traditional property rights, but entails the active exercise of responsibility in a *manner beneficial to the resource*'.⁷ Thinking as other, integral to Māori being and thinking, is necessary to benefit these identities.⁸

“Political will to limit or halt ongoing damage (and injustice) to the nonhuman realm has been limited, in part at least, because nonhuman lack direct political representation.”

Christine Winter

Beyond Environmental Management

That georegions have an agential identity is ontologically unremarkable for Māori. The genius of the Treaty claims negotiators has been to meld this complex compound being-ness with the detached and unromantic language of anthropocentric laws of incorporation.

Potentially, this pushes the boundaries of post-colonial governance structures well beyond environmental management.⁹ So while the Acts describe the ways the regions are *managed*, the identity descriptors suggest something far more than mere management – they identify and legislate *agency*.

The stated intention of the Te Awa Tupua Bill is to ‘preserve natural and cultural values’.¹⁰ Yet it identifies “an indivisible and living whole”, comprising the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, incorporating all its physical and metaphysical elements’. It is ‘a legal person with all the *rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person*’.¹¹ These are not just agreements to hand management back to iwi – these agreements grant nonhuman ‘the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person’. Does this suggest political agency?¹²

Political and Democratic Agency

Te Awa Tupua, Te Urewera and Taranaki Maunga are identities, like corporations, with multiple ‘shareholders’ who are animate and inanimate, animal, vegetable and mineral, human and nonhuman. Having the ‘rights, powers, duties and liabilities’ of a person, under normal circumstances, includes the right to vote.

Political will to limit or halt ongoing damage (and injustice) to the nonhuman realm has been limited, in part at least, because nonhuman lack direct political representation. Global statistics on species extinction, environmental degradation and pollution indicate each is increasing.^{13,14} Might these damages be curtailed with nonhuman political representation to counterbalance human and corporations influence?

While Australia and the USA, for instance, use different mechanisms to involve corporate persons directly in politics, they affect similar results – legal persons have the right to participate in the democratic process. Furthermore, corporate influence through lobbying and political donations is standard and accepted globally.

If corporate legal persons have the right to participate in the democratic process, why not Te Awa Tupua, Te Urewera and Taranaki Maunga? In many ways given the visceral, immutable and total entanglement of human and nonhuman, of human in nonhuman and nonhuman in human there is even more justification for that voice/vote. Corporates, once we pierce the veil between the ‘person’ and multitude it represents are *only* communities of people. Te Awa Tupua, Te Urewera and Taranaki Maunga are so much more: animate, inanimate, and spiritual, spatially diverse and temporally expansive, with interests that encompass all interests, all time, in all space. And here lies their potential power.

My argument is these Te Tiriti agreements are a means of blending incommensurate ontologies. A means of redressing the injustice of the universalising western paradigm and for embracing indigenous approaches to justice, the political and nonhuman relationships within a polity. They are the beginnings of decolonising the politics of Aotearoa. They demonstrate more than that, they offer other countries a way towards hearing all affected voices within the polity – human, corporate and nonhuman – allowing society, economy *and* environment fair representation.

How exactly might this look? One vote in local body elections per species in the identity’s boundaries? Or in national elections? A reserved number of seats on every neighbouring council for each identity? Whatever the mechanism the outcome should be to rebalance the triumvirate of national interests to become closer to more equal representation for persons, corporates and nonhuman. It is a means by which to recognise each is equally important to the other and all are inextricably entangled.

Christine Winter is a lecturer in the Department of Government & International Relations at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses at the intersection of intergenerational, indigenous and environmental justice. Drawing on her Anglo-Celtic-Māori cultural heritage she is interested in decolonising political theory by identifying key epistemological and ontological assumptions in theory that are incompatible with indigenous philosophies. In doing so she has two aims: to make justice theory just for Indigenous peoples of the settler states; and to expand the boundaries of theories of intergenerational justice to protect the environment for future generations of Indigenous Peoples and their settler compatriots.

1 Agamben 2004; Barad 2003, 2012; Bennett 2004, 2010; Haraway 2016; and multiple others.

2 For instance: Burarrwanga et al. 2012; Corntassel 2012; Coulthard 2014; Dotson & Whyte 2013; Panelli & Tipa 2007; Stewart-Harawira 2005; Watene 2016; Winter 2019a, 2019b.

3 Shareholders, executives, workers.

4 Such as making donations to political parties and candidates, broadcasting political messages, etc.

5 For instance, in local body elections in all states except Queensland in Australia.

6 New Zealand Government, 2014.

7 Ruckstuhl, Thompson-Fawcett, & Rae, 2014. Italics added.

8 Stewart-Harawira, 2005.

9 In some ways they may be thought to subvert the structures imposed by colonialism. More critically they might be seen to be a capitulation to and acceptance of the dominance of these same structures. I am suggesting the former interpretation gives Māori greater potential for agency and provocation for incrementally more ‘radical’ rethinking of governance structures in Aotearoa. See Winter, 2019a, 2019b.

10 New Zealand Government, 2014: 13.

11 New Zealand Government, 2016. Italics added.

12 New Zealand Government, 2014, 11(1); New Zealand Government, 2017, 14(1).

13 UN Environment, 2019. UN Environment 2018 Annual Report. Accessed 23 July 2019, [Access Here](#)

14 UN Environment, 2019. *Frontiers 2018/19: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*. Accessed 23 July 2019, [Access Here](#)

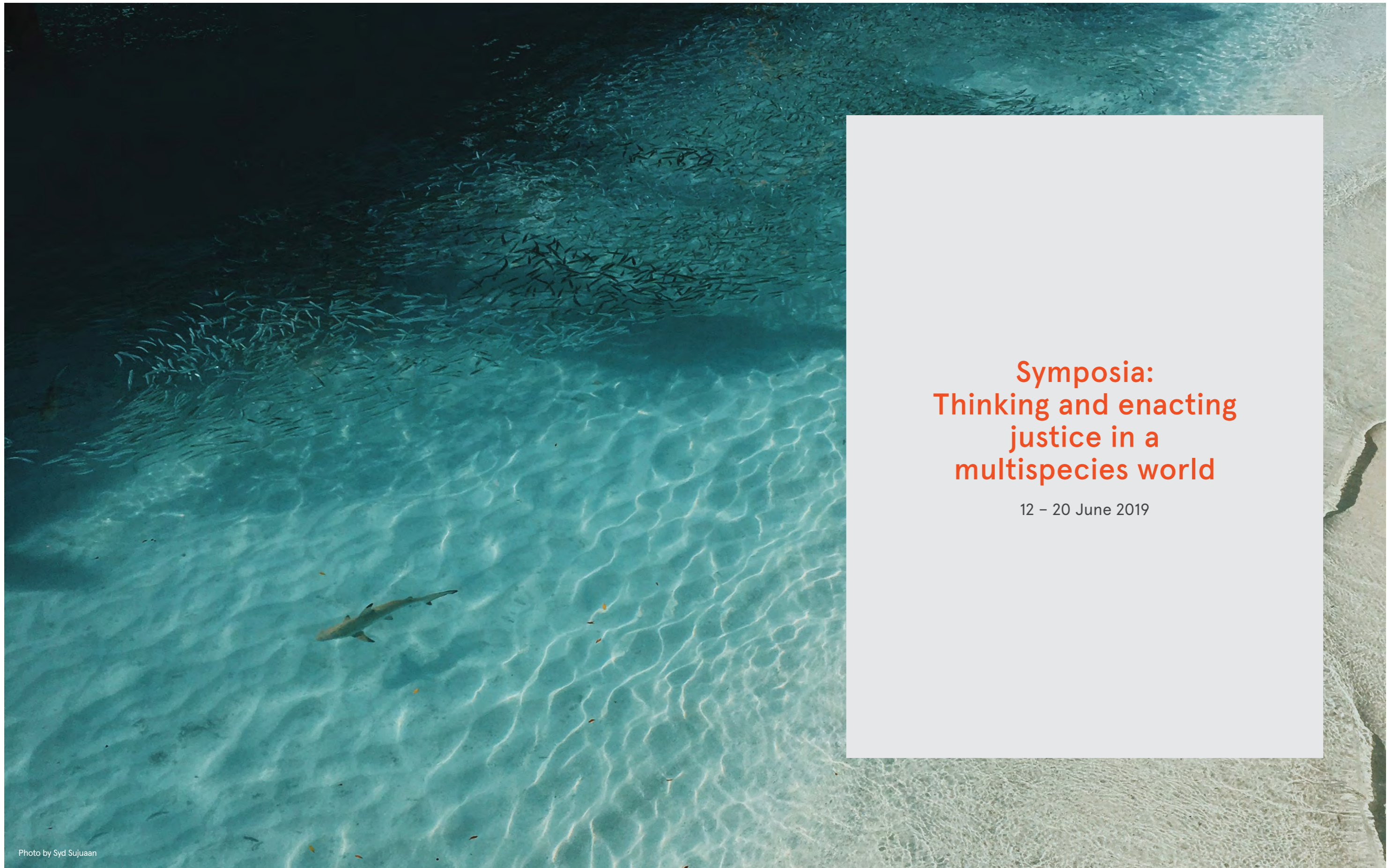


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12 – 20 June 2019

A series of four symposia exploring what justice means in a multispecies context.

In June 2019, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney hosted a series of four symposia featuring University of Sydney and international academics and experts to work in a focused and exploratory way on the question of what justice means in a multispecies context. The four linked symposia each comprise a set of formal presentations and an extended roundtable for informal reflection, discussion and project planning.

Participants were invited to present new and exploratory research to be collected into an edited volume or special journal issue in the hope that the conversations commenced during the symposia will enable future collaborations. The series is proudly supported by the Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC) and the Sydney Environment Institute.

1

Moral, legal and political status of humans, animals and the environment

Speakers

Ravi Agarwal, artist, photographer, environmental campaigner, writer and curator, India
Sria Chatterjee, PhD Candidate, Princeton University
Associate Professor Mel Y Chen, University of California, Berkeley
Dr Alasdair Cochrane, University of Sheffield
Assistant Professor Stefanie Fishel, University of Alabama
Dr Daniel Ruiz-Serna, McGill University

[View video recording](#)

2

Climate change, non-humans and relational impacts

Speakers

Professor Makere Stewart-Harawira, University of Alberta
Associate Professor Lauren Rickards, RMIT University
Professor Petra Tschakert, University of Western Australia

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3

Economic justice, human and non-human

Speakers

Dr Maan Barua, University of Cambridge
Dr Krithika Srinivasan, The University of Edinburgh

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4

Extinction and biocultural conservation

Speakers

Professor Marisol de la Cadena, University of California, Davis
Dr Matthew Chrulew, Senior Research Fellow, Curtin University

[View video recording](#)

Sydney Ideas: Economic and Social Justice

Thursday 13 June 2019

Global debates about human-caused climate change have largely focused on wide-ranging discussions about the impact on our social and economic futures. However, thinking outside the square means questioning our fundamental relationships to animals and environments, as well as considering histories of dispossession and colonialism, and deepening forms of wealth, resource and income inequality.

This event brought together four internationally renowned scholars to explore climate justice and economic justice within the context of a climate changed world and their broader implications for the wider world.

Speakers

Dr Maan Barua, University of Cambridge
Professor Petra Tschakert, University of Western Australia
Professor Makere Stewart-Harawira, University of Alberta
Dr Krithika Srinivasan, University of Edinburgh
Chair: Professor David Schlosberg, University of Sydney

[Listen to podcast here](#)

Sydney Ideas: Biodiversity

Wednesday 19 June 2019

Transformative action is not only about new and better science. We need to reimagine how we understand ourselves, the beings with whom we share the planet and our relationships. It is about the stories we tell, the art we produce, the way that we live, and reconceiving fundamental concepts such as justice and value. Increasingly, scholars – working alongside artists and activists – are recognising the critical role that they play in bringing about these transformations. At this Sydney Ideas event, a panel of experts in the humanities and social sciences reflected on how we can powerfully represent and recast the reality and the meaning of species loss and cultural loss, and what we can do and are doing to transform ourselves and our world.

Speakers

Professor Marisol de la Cadena, University of California, Davis
Ravi Agarwal, independent artist
Associate Professor Thom van Dooren, University of Sydney
Dr Sophie Chao, University of Sydney
Chair: Professor Danielle Celermajer, University of Sydney

[Listen to podcast here](#)



SEI Magazine

The SEI Magazine is produced by the Sydney Environment Institute, at the University of Sydney, on the Gadigal lands of the Eora Nation. We pay our deepest respects to elders, caretakers and custodians past, present and emerging, here in Eora and beyond.

The magazine collates cross disciplinary responses to the critical environmental issues facing us today.

Contributions come from students, artists, scholars and activists, working locally and across the globe, to investigate the physical, social and cultural dimensions of climate change impacts.

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