



Danielle Burford, *Sand Goanna*.

Writing Place, Writing Laws: Laws & the Humanities in the 'Anthropocene'

Friday 10 May 2019 | Melbourne Law School
Room 920, Level 9 | 185 Pelham St, Carlton

9:15 - 9:30 AM **Welcome**

Acknowledgment of country & introduction with Kathleen Birrell

9:30 - 10:30 AM **Keynote address** Chair Kathleen Birrell

- Professor Alexis Wright, *The Ancient Library and a self-governing Literature*

10:30 - 11 AM **Morning tea**

11 AM - 12 PM **Morning session** Chair Jeremy Baskin

- Kathleen Birrell, *Emplacement in the 'Anthropocene': Encountering Laws in Place*
- Francine Rochford, *The Land that God Forgot: Fact and Fancy and the Australian Environment*
refreshments available

12 PM - 1 PM **Midday session** Chair Alice Palmer

- Alda Balthrop-Lewis, *Active and Contemplative Lives in a Changing Climate: The Emersonian Roots of Thoreau's Political Asceticism*
- Dan Sherrell, *"The World to Come": A Creative Writing Reading*

1 PM - 2 PM **Lunch**

2 PM- 3 PM **Afternoon session** Chair Julia Dehm

- Georgia Snowball, *Encountering the More-than-Human in Site Specific Performance*
- Loren Kronemyer, *Epoch Wars: Artistic Interventions into Chronostratigraphy*

3 PM - 3:30 PM **Afternoon tea**

3:30 - 4:30 PM **Final session** Chair Kathleen Birrell

- Kate Wright, *Community Gardening in Silver City: Unearthing Radical Alterity and Decolonial Lines of Flight*
- Guest Speaker Panel: Kate Wright in conversation with Alexis Wright

4:30 - 5 PM **Concluding comments & discussion**

5:30PM **Drinks**

Keynote Presentation: Professor Alexis Wright - *The Ancient Library and a Self-Governing Literature*

Alexis Wright is a member of the Waanyi nation of the southern highlands of the Gulf of Carpentaria. She is the author of award winning novels *Carpentaria* (2006), which won the Miles Franklin Award, and *The Swan Book* (2013), and has also published three works of non-fiction: *Take Power*, an oral history of the Central Land Council; *Grog War*, a study of alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory; and most recently, *Tracker* (2017), which won the Stella Prize, a collective memoir of Aboriginal leader, Tracker Tilmouth. Her writing has also appeared in a variety of magazines, journals and other print media, including *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *HEAT* magazine, and *The Guardian*. Her books have been published widely outside of Australia, including in China, the US, the UK, Italy, France and Poland. She is presently Boisbouvier Chair in Australian Literature at The University of Melbourne.

Guest Speaker & Panellist: Kate Wright - *Community Gardening in Silver City: Unearthing Radical Alterity and Decolonial Lines of Flight*

Since 2014 I have been working with Anaiwan, Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti and Gamilaroi people to create a community garden on the fringes of my hometown of Armidale. The Armidale Aboriginal Community Garden is sited on land that was designated as the East Armidale Aboriginal Reserve in 1958, home to approximately 150 people who were forced to live on the old town rubbish dump. Known colloquially as ‘Silver City’ in reference to the tin humpies built from scavenged tip materials to create shelter from Armidale’s bitterly cold winters, the soils of the community garden carry biomineral and geosocial traumas that remain largely unrecognised in official histories, but are enunciated in the survivor of Elders who remember the ‘good old bad days’.

The emergence of the Anthropocene has been linked to the spread of colonialism, and scholars have argued that living Indigenous peoples can be considered post-apocalyptic, having already faced the end of worlds. This paper explores the experimental multispecies research, cultural resurgence and activism that has been taking place in the community garden as forms of ‘worlding’ that manifest embodied lines of flight from the toxic territorialisations of ongoing settler-colonial occupation of Aboriginal lands. Thinking beyond the ontological machine of settler-colonial capitalism that continues to produce a particular kind of planet, this paper explores how narrative, encounter and imagination in multispecies ecologies can re-presence radically alternate worlds. This emergent decolonial alterity is irrecoverable to the temporal and spatial laws that underlie petro-capitalist economies.

Kate Wright is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of New England, Armidale. The focus of her research is the important role played by more-than-human communities in working toward social and environmental justice, with a particular emphasis on decolonisation in Australia. Her current project is a collaboration with Armidale’s Aboriginal community to develop and maintain a community garden at the old East Armidale Aboriginal Reserve site as an activist platform for Aboriginal reclamation and cultural revival. Kate recently published her first monograph, focused on decolonising philosophy and writing through intimate, embodied and situated encounters with the more-than-human world, titled *Transdisciplinary Journeys in the Anthropocene: More-than-human Encounters* (2017). Kate is co-editor of the Living Lexicon section of the *Environmental Humanities* journal.

Kathleen Birrell - *Emplacement in the ‘Anthropocene’: Encountering Laws in Place*

As scientific enquiry appraises the scale of human impact upon the earth, the themes of this workshop – narrative, encounter, imagination – provide an apt frame for reflection upon the abstractions and erasures produced by the ‘Anthropocene’ within the global imaginary, and our emplacement and displacement in place. In this paper, I expand upon each of these themes, and consider ways in which the relationships between writing and place, and writing and law, might be thought and rethought in the context of the ‘Anthropocene’. I critically examine the use of this term and consider whether this linguistic appellation might delimit or expand our understanding of the geological and earth systems changes to which it refers. I consider the relatively recent emergence of a global imaginary that preceded the naming of the Anthropocene, and the globalising narratives that emplace and displace us through spatial abstraction and temporal erasure. Responding to the suggestion that climate change represents a crisis of culture and imagination, I canvas possible ways in which the imperatives of climate change might be disentangled from global rhetoric and understood from within imaginaries in place. This includes an engagement with emergent critical thought on the occlusion and recuperation of ‘vernacular landscapes’, the ethics of encounter and obligation, and different forms of lawful relation and responsibility articulated in Indigenous jurisprudences.

Kathleen Birrell is a McKenzie Postdoctoral Fellow at Melbourne Law School. Her research is strongly interdisciplinary, encompassing critical legal theory, philosophy of law, and law and literature, as well as environmental and climate change law, human rights law, Indigenous peoples and the law, property law, and native title. Her postdoctoral project investigates encounters between competing narratives and laws in the context of the 'Anthropocene'. She completed a PhD (Law) at Birkbeck, University of London, and has taught at Birkbeck and The University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Indigeneity: Before and Beyond the Law* (Routledge, 2016).

Francine Rochford - *The Land that God Forgot: Fact and Fancy and the Australian Environment*

Writing in the years of the Federation drought and during the Australian Constitutional Conventions, Henry Lawson brought a bleak perspective on the Australian 'Bush' to an urban population. Rivers in their natural state sang 'dirge'-like; farmers sons went to 'battle' against 'Drought, the red marauder', the eldest son spent himself on 'barren soil' and farmers' wives watched withered crops and dying milkers but were 'past carin'. Lawson brought this perspective to agitation for conservation of Australian rivers to enable irrigation of land beyond the river. His perspective aligned with the mission of the 'social Christians' to create the 'Kingdom of God on earth' in the new millennium, and legislation facilitating both water diversion and land settlement were grounded in this view. However, Lawson's narratives were both geographically and temporally grounded. Lawson's poetry represented nature to an urban audience, and his poetry acted as a mechanism of transmission of cultural views of the environment – a mentifact. Lawson's poetry, however, depended heavily on the editorial views of newspapers. As a more optimistic representation of the environment was preferred, Lawson fell into disfavour. This paper considers Lawson's poetic representations of the environment from the perspective of cultural semiotics, and in particular considers the process by which journalistic selection and validation of the environment achieve a semiotic mapping and transmission of environmental views over time. It considers the process of environmental communication over time, and the creation of dominant discourses or representation of 'the environment'.

Francine Rochford is Director of Teaching and Learning and Director of Regional and Online Programs in the School of Law and an Associate Professor in the Law School at La Trobe University Australia. She has researched and written extensively on civil law matters, particularly in relation to the law of torts and the law of contracts. Her particular contextual interests are the law and policy relating to irrigation and water allocation and the law of higher education.

Alda Balthrop-Lewis - *Active and Contemplative Lives in a Changing Climate: The Emersonian Roots of Thoreau's Political Asceticism*

This paper addresses an existential quandary for scholars of the humanities in an age of climate change. Given climate problems, it might seem like we ought to spend our lives doing something more civically productive than reading and writing books. Yet, we continue in our professions. I address this by examining the US author Henry David Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond. A classic naturalist author, Thoreau drew on a variety of religious traditions and texts in his thinking about religious asceticism and coincident questions about the value of active and contemplative life. In this paper, I focus especially on a portion of the Mahābhārata that Thoreau translated and a very quiet controversy that arose between Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thoreau about the value of practical effect. Thoreau's investment in ascetic life, both active and contemplative, shows one way in which the writing life itself sometimes aims to resist the drive for growth that powers contemporary climate change.

Alda Balthrop-Lewis is a Research Fellow in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at Australian Catholic University. She holds a Ph.D. in Religion, Ethics, and Politics from Princeton University. She has published in the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, and online in *Religion Dispatches* and *The Revealer*. Her current work, *Thoreau's Religion: Walden Woods, Social Justice, and the Politics of Asceticism* (under review at Cambridge University Press), treats Henry David Thoreau as an inheritor of traditional ascetic practices, and argues that his asceticism is politically relevant – both in his period and for contemporary environmental ethics.

Dan Sherrell - "The World to Come": A Creative Writing Reading

"The World to Come" is an excerpt from an epistolary book addressed to my hypothetical future child. The book inhabits the hybrid genre increasingly referred to as 'auto-theory', weaving together personal essay and cultural criticism in order to find new affective purchase in the problem of climate change. This particular excerpt begins with the recent self-immolation of a Brooklyn climate activist, and continues on into synagogues, subway tunnels, and my own email inbox to explore themes of numbness, speculative eschatology, and our changing relationship to time in the Anthropocene. The letters making up the piece afford an opportunity to experiment with structure—layering narrative, description, and criticism—while searching for an elusive emotional clarity, "how it might feel to wait a lifetime for something immense and uncertain to finally run its course." Though it addresses a problem of global concern, the writing arises from a specific time and place—post-Sandy New York—and is informed by the Jewish ontological tradition in which I grew up. Addressing myself to Judaism's matrilineal custom, the excerpt is built around remembered conversations with my mother and grandmother about the prospect of having children in the Anthropocene. It concludes with a passage on the ambivalent nature of oil itself as an instrument of self-immolation and a machine for translating past into future. It is my hope that creative work of this kind can contribute an experiential dimension to academic discussions of writing practices and obligations under climate change.

Daniel Sherrell is a Fulbright Scholar in creative writing, currently in residence at the University of Adelaide. He has spent the past six years organizing campus, municipal, and statewide campaigns to combat climate change, transition to clean energy, and secure adaptation resources for vulnerable communities. Most recently he coordinated a coalition of labor unions, environmental organizations, and community groups campaigning to pass equitable carbon pricing legislation in the state of New York. His writing has appeared in the Colorado Review, Wag's Revue, and The Best American Sports Writing. He earned a BS in Environmental Studies from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

Georgia Snowball - Encountering the More-than-Human in Site Specific Performance

Climate change facilitates productive and generative encounters between human and more-than-human species. Our responsibility inside such encounters is to listen more attentively to the fine details of what is communicated. Tuning in to hear these vital encounters is a pathway to understanding the growing human impact on more-than-human worlds, in an age of rapid climate change. The task therefore becomes an exercise in de-centring the human as the most important player in the diverse ecosystems we share. Through a practice as research framework, the author discusses several site-specific entanglements for performance making. These performance works aim to shed light on a rich and evolving relationship with the more-than-human, through varied processes of listening with the whole body. The specific performance practiced detailed in the paper, puts forward methods gathered from the author's background in a Body Weather practice. Within this practice the senses are finely tuned to that other than the self. The moving body works to reflect on, and respond with, the diverse worlds of the more-than-human. In an attempt to hear the more-than-human experience of climate change more clearly, I ascertain that a process of becoming-with is the space to linger in. Productive encounters are achieved when the human learns, through physical and spatial practices, to become aware of the negotiations and adaptations required in providing the space of living with the more-than-human, which is the specific yet fragile practice of paying attention.

In 2018 Georgia Snowball completed her PhD entitled Ecological Practice: Performance Making in the Age of the Anthropocene at Federation University Australia. Her research lies at the intersection of body and place and is informed by a long seeded practice in Body Weather. Georgia is a performer and scholar and has been involved in many solo and collaborative projects both nationally and internationally. In 2018 Georgia was a member of the Embodied Research Working Group at the International Federation for Theatre Research Conference in Belgrade, Serbia. In November 2018 Georgia presented her most recent research at the University of Otago 'Performing Ecologies Conference,' forthcoming publication in Performance of the Real eJournal, 2019.

Loren Kronemyer - Epoch Wars: Artistic Interventions into Chronostratigraphy

Adoption of the word "Anthropocene" has accelerated outside of geological and academic circles, diffusing into pop culture through numerous trans-disciplinary channels, including prominent artworks that adopt the name as shorthand for our era of ecological upheaval. Members of the Anthropocene Working Group, the stratigraphic subcommittee concerned with formalizing the name "Anthropocene" within the geological record, are aware of this trend, and are currently conducting studies that analyse the broader cultural adoption of this name and the utility of artists in disseminating it. Protestations from diverse voices argue that this name is both inadequate and dangerous: it simultaneously obfuscates the specific causes of environmental degradation, while saddling immediate future generations with the foregone conclusion that human permanence is irreparable. If artists can be agents for disseminating the "Anthropocene", then they can also be agents in destabilizing and decentralizing the word and its cultural capital. This paper will present an arsenal of artistic tools that can be used to undermine the normalization of the word "Anthropocene". These tools can also be put towards the task of honing a more ethical, adaptive, inclusive epoch naming process that confronts the inherited colonial and patriarchal violence of our chronostratigraphic status quo.

Loren Kronemyer is an experimental artist working solo and collaboratively as co-founder of Pony Express, a duo that creates immersive alternate realities that reflect ecological futures. Kronemyer's work tangles with themes of adaptation, apocalypse, and queer ecologies, often created in conversation with scientific researchers. She holds the first Master of Biological Arts Degree awarded by SymbioticA Lab, and is currently a PhD Candidate at the University of Tasmania's School of Creative Arts and Media. Kronemyer and Pony Express's work has been featured across contexts including: The Perth Institute for Contemporary Art (Perth), the Australian Centre for Photography (Syd), The Perth International Arts Festival (Perth), Liveworks Festival (Syd), Next Wave Festival (Melb) Dark MOFO (Hob), School of Visual Arts (New York), Forum of the Future (Portugal), Santarcangelo Festival (Italy).