Home

Journal

PRE-2012 Archive

CFP

Magazine

Gallery

About

TOOLS

Print

Email

Text ↓   Text ↑

ENTER READING VIEW

Paragraph Numbering ON

Scan | Journal of Media Arts Culture

Anthropocene Hospitality: belonging in/to a changing climate

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I was a young stockman of 16 on a cattle station in the Central Highlands of Queensland in 1954 when the great flood occurred in the Fitzroy River catchment. The sky turned black-green and 12 inches of rain fell in the first hour. Fresh out from England then, I was soon caught up in the old Queensland reality that any stranger in trouble is to be met as a friend in need. For days I worked with my boss freeing the neighbours' cattle from entanglements of destroyed wire-fencing and feeding their horses stranded on islands.

Alex Miller

But for the sky there are no fences facing.

Bob Dylan

Introduction

In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida writes that the western legacy of hospitality, incorporating Judeo-Christianity, Pauline Cosmopolitanism and Greco-Roman traditions, ties it in various ways to an ethical concern: "It is always about answering for a dwelling place, for one's identity, one's space, one's limits, for the ethos as abode, habitation, house, hearth, family, home" (2000, 149/151). Taking my cue from this, I situate my analysis within emerging debates around climate change. How do we *answer for a dwelling place* in the context of climate change? Because an answer can be a defence, a gesture toward dialogue, be packaged as a solution or a point of closure or, alternatively, incite responsibility, we need to first think through the sorts of questions posed by this issue. For instance, does global climate change alter the dynamics of belonging to the nation-state, and what potential impact does this have on our understanding of relations between host and guest, self and other, nature and culture, citizen and non-citizen, and human and nonhuman?

In this paper, my interest in the Anthropocene is what I see as its deconstructive potential. As I will demonstrate, the conceptual formulation of the Anthropocene presents us with an example of what Derrida refers to as autoimmunity. The autoimmunity of the Anthropocene opens up the possibility of extending our analysis to examine normative approaches to sustainability and social justice with their respective focus on responsibility as stewardship and commitment to *human* rights in the context of climate change. The Anthropocene as autoimmune calls these approaches into question by exposing the assumptions of human-centricity which underpin them. I will argue that this demands that we reconsider the relationship of the human to the more-than-human and consider an ethics and politic which takes account of the inextricability of our enmeshment in the more-than-human world. Hospitality is a useful way to frame this intervention, with its attention to dwelling and movement, as well as the politics and ethics of being both in and out of place. By drawing on Derrida's work on hospitality I aim, in my larger works, to engage with the aporia of hospitality, the difficulties of decision-making, the contingency of policy platforms and the insistent and varied violence of dwelling and movement in a more-than-human world. This paper sets out the introductory theoretical parameters for these future engagements and raises some initial concerns.

The Anthropocene

Before I move into a discussion of hospitality and its relationship to sustainability and social justice, an overview of the development of the Anthropocene is necessary, as it forms the conceptual and political backdrop for the sorts of issues I introduce in this paper. The Anthropocene and climate change are distinct but related: the former refers most commonly as the period of mass industrialisation resulting in the devastation of human-induced climate change. The Anthropocene, as Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill define it, has three stages. The first stage begins in 1800 and ends in 1945 - "The Industrial Era" in which human impact began to make noticeable changes to the Earth's functioning, in particular its climate. The second stage starts following World War II and is termed "The Great Acceleration". Human expansion, population and progress will continue to speed along until 2015 when stage three will begin. Stage three cannot retain an emphasis on explanatory language and instead must be tentative and posed as a question, an unknown: "Stewards of the Earth?" Steffen et al ask, introducing in the form of a question, the position of the precarious human host, as protector or guarantor, and in turn issues of intergenerational responsibility and justice (2007, 614). This more speculative question reveals an uncertainty about "our" place in this world.

Unlike one-dimensional celebratory declarations of human reason, or the modernist discourse of progress which science has attached itself to in the public imagination, the term Anthropocene alerts us to both the revolutionary and dangerous role humans have had in and on the environment: "[h]uman activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary *terra incognita*" (2007, 614). Humans are a "global geophysical force", shaping the future of the Earth itself in a manner unknown throughout history (2007, 614). In this way, the term highlights what humans have done *to* the environment. But what does the term Anthropocene *do* to the human? Most obviously, it centralises the human agent: it is the human being which has acted upon the world; this is the "age of man". To get to this we need to contextualise the way that the term has been framed. The first thing to note is that the historical narrative is linear. The timeframe provided to mark the shift from Holocene, that dot in the Cenozoic of 10,000 years we are still formally in, to Anthropocene, begins during the Industrial Revolution at a time when the dominant western philosophical understanding of the subject drew upon Enlightenment notions of individualism, reason and autonomy, and discourses of rights (man, citizen, worker and later human) were emerging and aligning very strongly with the sovereign nation-state.

As Nigel Clark has demonstrated, these constructions of the individual reach their critical height in the works of Immanuel Kant. Kant, writing during and after the infamous Lisbon earthquake of 1755, was astonished and unsettled at the ways in which the Earth could, without warning or reason, act upon the world and cause such trouble; unhinging the order imposed by society. Consequently, he developed a separation between humans and the natural, "at pains to prove that thought takes its directive from within, and not from any prompting by, the external world. Nature must comply with our capacity to recognise regularity and order, and not the other way around" (Clark 2011, 90-91). In other words, Kant reacted against the earthly possibility of dislocation by reasserting the supremacy of human reason as possessive. Kant later went on to write out the conditions of a universal right to hospitality, tying a macro approach to relations between host and guest to a project of the subject predicated on reason and autonomy. In this economy, hospitality becomes the procedure (automated), as distinct from decision (open to difference), on welcoming, which has been selectively applied and extraordinarily limited in its reach, asserting that the nation-state with its privileging of citizens dominates international models of

"welcoming". Significantly, this frames hospitality as human-centric, a point I will return to. From this we can read the concept of Anthropocene as drawing attention to the historical relationship between a *particular* political version of the human and social organisation (liberal humanism and advanced capitalism) and Earth Systems.

More than this, and perhaps perversely, the term captures the potential effect of decentring the very qualities that modern philosophy has held as fundamental to the human: rationality, inventiveness and intelligence. I say potential because Steffen et al. are quick to point to innovations in the realms of the academy, culture, law and politics that they see as starting to counter the dominant logics in operation. Even as they attempt to re-coup this subject having outlined its terrifying impact, they must acknowledge an uncertainty about whether or not the human can effectively meet the challenges posed, whether or not we can be called "stewards". For them, three philosophical paths are available: business-as-usual, mitigation, or geo-engineering options. The first and the third option directly reinscribe a narrative of human control over the climate, but with considerable risks of crisis. The second posits technology and more sustainable management alongside changes in social attitudes, such as dematerialisation, as a way to "reduce human modification" of the Earth, but again, human agency is central (2007, 619). Stewardship retains the illusion of human agency in a more-than-human world.

Despite a historically devastating record and the trajectory it appears to be sending us on, the authors remain optimistic:

> Humankind will remain a major geological force for many millennia, maybe millions of years, to come. To develop a universally accepted strategy to ensure the sustainability of Earth's life support system against human-induced stresses is one of the greatest research and policy challenges ever to confront humanity. Can humanity meet this challenge?
>
> (...)
>
> Signs abound to suggest that the intellectual, cultural, legal and political context that permitted the Great Acceleration after 1945 has shifted in ways that could curtail it (2007, 618).

At every turn, humans assert, they control (they are an agent), they are a "force" ("force" as lacking intention in the same sense as "agent"), but at the same time they are vulnerable and beginning to understand their tenuous grip: "Humanity is, in one way or another, becoming a self-conscious, active agent in the operation of its own life support system" (2007, 619). In this passage, the use of medical discourse positions "humanity" as both the possible cure, via mitigation and adaptation techniques, and the disease or parasite, that which is infecting the life support system. What is new, according to this outline, is that "humanity" is "*becoming* a self-conscious, active agent". Thus, we are simultaneously entering into unknown and unknowable terrains and we are uniquely aware through science of our impact and place. The language of the life support system invokes responses which can be characterised as "extraordinary responses" in the medical context: "life" is maintained artificially via mechanical intervention. Interestingly the author's credit the combining factors of science, technology, "free and open societies", and democratic political systems as the political and *social* combination required to solve the crisis (2007, 619; see also Chakrabarty 2009 for a discussion of the commitment to Enlightenment values as a response to climate crisis). In so doing, they may re-centre that which is initially displaced – the Human.

Autoimmune Engagements: Hospitality in a more-than-human world

> To lose itself all by itself, to go down on its own, to *auto-immunize* itself, as I would prefer to say in order to designate this strange illogical logic by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other, to immunize itself against the aggressive intrusion of the other (Derrida 2003, 15).

Is the Anthropocene an "illogical logic", an instance in which, as Derrida puts it in another context, profound "self-contradiction" orders and disorders? (Derrida 2003, 15; Derrida 2000, 5) The term auto-immunity first emerged in Derrida's text "Faith and Knowledge" (2002) but gained greater popularity in the context of his discussion with Habermas and the application of the term to the setting of the War on Terror and the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States (Hillis-Miller 2008). Derrida argued that the United States body-politic was autoimmune, it "works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its "own" immunity" (cited in Borradori 2003, 150). Most obviously, the military training by the US of Osama bin Laden and others in the 1980s turned against them. Autoimmunity in a Derridean sense is not equivalent with its medical usage (though it certainly draws on it metaphorically), but instead takes on a distinctive philosophical tone.

For Michael Naas, autoimmunity is a "trope" and a "rhetorical force" (2006, 19). But most significantly, Naas suggests that it *is* deconstruction ("yet another name" for). In particular, Naas argues that, "autoimmunity appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere, at the heart of every sovereign identity" (2006, 19). This conforms with Derrida's own articulation of auto-immunity as marking the very "self" as at stake:

> ...more seriously still, and through this, in threatening the I (*moi*) or the self (*soi*), the ego or the *autos*, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the autos itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself (*s'auto-entamer*) but in compromising the self, the *autos* – and thus ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising *sui* or *self*-referentiality, the self or sui of suicide itself. Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but, more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning (Derrida 2005, 45).

When Derrida writes that it may "rob suicide itself of its meaning" he is pointing to the loss of all autonomy, of all capacity for decision, all sovereignty, all agency. If we are not cautious we will be, or perhaps we already are, freewheeling in the era of climate change. But autoimmunity in the Derridean sense also refers to *self*-critique (Derrida 2005, 72). Self-critique undoes the foundations of the sovereign body politic, of the self, the home, of the state, of the host. This critique is not the complete destruction of the self but rather its deconstruction. This is the positive and dangerous potential of the autoimmune. However, autoimmunity is more than a trope or rhetorical force. It is also tied up with material processes of power, demise, renewal, life, death, survival. It exposes a central interdependency and compulsory co-existence between things.

The positive and dangerous potential of deconstruction is also evident in Derrida's formulation of hospitality as the "deconstruction of the at-home" (Derrida 2002, 364). Autoimmunity refers to the doubleness of demise and renewal tying it to Derridean hospitality which exposes the conditions of being at-home to necessary scrutiny. Aporetic and impossible, hospitality is only at play when the taken-for-granted categories of belonging, right and authority are in question; when the at-home is open to critique, which it always already is. In other words, what it means to be at-home is always "to come" or "allud[es] to a fullness that's elsewhere and a figure restless on its way" (Bennett 2005, 458). This point is of utmost significance to recall in a world in which the borders of nation-states

and the categorisation of people into citizens and foreigners solidifies relations, and rights of dominion over nature continue as if they are end points (consequently, the dominant discourse of ownership over land/sea/resources precludes the role of the environment in exchanges or questions of hospitality).

Yet deconstructive hospitality must be approached carefully: the "deconstruction of the at-home" is never just a thought-experiment and climate change threatens to leave many without a home, or significantly out-of-place involuntarily. What's more, this displacement is more likely to exacerbate the disadvantage experienced by the most marginal in our society – the poor, women, children, the already homeless, and the socially marginalised, as well as the multitude of vulnerable and endangered animal, insect and plant species. Within this critical framework I will now turn to issues of social justice and sustainability.

Climate change gives new meaning or urgency to the cliché "the sky's the limit". In this instance, the sky moves in on us, its never-ending visual realm does not equate with infinity or excess any longer. Of course, this cliché and Dylan's more poetic uptake, point to a philosophical belief in freedom: there are no "real" barriers to obstruct ambition with the only fence the one we cannot see, a horizon we never reach. Certainly, economic freedom has insisted that the Earth is no obstacle to its growth and expansion. But freedom, both as a philosophical concept and politico-economic practice, is reconfigured as a result of climate change. Unhooked from any simple association with agency as intention and decision, freedom becomes entangled with the force of climate. Instead of opening onto self-identity or intentionality, freedom is exposed to matter understood deconstructively as, for Pheng Cheah citing Derrida, "radical alterity" (Cheah 2010, 72). What does it mean to refer to matter as "radical alterity"?

In Cheah, matter is rearticulated away from its conventional association with "presence", "empiricism", "truth", "objectivity", and its subsequent opposition to "idealism", "text", "absence", and "subjective". This rearticulation of matter results in what Cheah calls "deconstructive materialism", or:

> [T]he thought of the materiality of the reference or relation to the other. This relation to alterity is more material than matter as substance or presence because it is more fundamental or "infrastructural", so to speak, because it constitutes matter as such (2010, 75).

So while matter is usually posited as the stuff of reality, undeniable, tangible and present, matter takes on a different sort of realism in Derrida. It is exposed to the other. It is useful to include a long citation of Derrida cited in Cheah's piece:

> The deconstruction of logocentrism, of linguisticism, of economism (of the proper, of the at-home [*chez-soi*], *oikos,* of the same), etc., as well as the affirmation of the impossible are always put forward in the *name of the real*, of the irreducible reality of the real – not of the real as the attribute of the objective, present, perceptible or intelligible *thing* (res), but of the real as the coming or event of the other, where the other resists all appropriation, be it ana-onto-phenomenological appropriation. The real is this non-negative impossible, this impossible coming or invention of the event the thinking of which is not an onto-phenomenology. It is a thinking of the event (singularity of the other, in its unanticipatible coming, *hic et numc*) that resists reappropriation by an ontology or phenomenology of presence as such...Nothing is more "realist" in this sense, than a deconstruction. It is (what-/who-) ever happens [*(ce) qui arrive*] (2010, 76).

The deconstruction of the at-home as an "affirmation of the impossible" occurs in the "*name of the real"* (2010, 76). The impossible is not unreal, or absent, but extends the notion of realism to permit an acknowledgement that what is "present" or "tangible" is always already conditioned by something outside of itself and as such it is unable to be completely fixed or known; it is "to come". The implication of this for hospitality or the at-home is, for instance, the unfixity of the host/guest relation, evident in the way it must be continually reaffirmed by law, but is also foundationally displaced.

Hospitality as a sort of deconstructive materialism emphasises "a relation to the other" as both irreducible and unable to be known in advance: "It is a force of precipitation that is experienced as an eruption within the order of presence and that in turn forces the experiencing subject to act" (Cheah 2010, 76). Action is then decision and responsibility, both of which we know are contaminated or haunted by "the other". This adds up to a scenario in which action with regards to climate change must understand itself as bound up with – "infrastructural", to all of our foundational categories: freedom, democracy, sovereignty, hospitality and so on. These foundations do operate in the promissory mode, and are thus never settled, *and* this is informed by the force of materiality as infrastructural. Responsibility and decision take place in the context of an autoimmune body-politics – one which is potentially dangerous and unjust, but also – and this is crucial for future politics – open to renewal. Responsibility does not self-evidently fit with a conventional model of stewardship which locates humans as primary.

Recognising this is not just about privileging ethics; through an understanding of the material force of the climate as radical alterity, deconstruction works to negotiate the relationship between humans and the climate as an instance of the impossible. This does not mean that the climate is continually deferring itself and thus never "happening". Like the gift, hospitality and justice, climate change, and the environment more broadly, are figures of unconditionality or impossibility. As this, the climate is the condition of possibility for all exchanges and consequently affects all human economies, including those concerned with sustainability and social justice. However, as the "impossible", climate change haunts responsibility and decision-making in ways that refuse calculation as the only foundation for responding. As a figure of impossibility, the climate works upon sovereignty, hospitality, democracy and so on. The climate is not a marginal thing to be neatly accommodated or managed; rather, in the era of climate change, it is absolutely fundamental. Cheah's description of this as "eruption within the order of presence" makes sense in that climate change displaces reason. It defies calculation and consequently programmatic responses, and as Cheah notes "that in turn forces the experiencing subject to act" (Cheah 2010, 76).

Alongside this disruption to the self-presence of the subject, the materiality of the climate calls for decision-making which situates human "agency" or "freedom" in a context which fundamentally troubles human-centeredness. In fact, it calls into question the model of responsibility, predicated on human-centricity, put forward. I want now to turn to the implications of this for emerging ideas around sustainability and social justice which are, to a great extent, circumscribed by an economic calculable logic: a logic which suggests that checks and balances can fix matter into the demands of contemporary economism.

A turn toward matter, in this instance climate, as alterity or relation to the other, is not particularly evident in the formulation of how we respond to anthropocentric climate change outlined by Steffen et al. From this dominant formulation we can glean a number of avenues for discussion regarding the aims of social justice and sustainability as well as the "place" of the human as decentred and re-centred "stewards". These initiatives cling to discourses of "global environmental management" (Glover 2006, 221; see also Clarke 2010; Chakrabarty 2010; and Cohen 2010). Responsibility is also posited as international in scope, retaining the primacy of nation-states, and remains focused on avoiding tipping points (Clinton 2009). The model of intervention in these issues revolves around reducing greenhouse gas emissions by asking nation-states to commit their political will to developing domestic policy which moves in this direction. In his book *Postmodern Climate Change*, Leigh Glover observes that energy policy has dominated climate change action (2006, 221). This continues with, for instance, a plan detailed in the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, undertaken in late 2011,

with the aim of:

> *Recognizing* that deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required according to science […] with a view to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions so as to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, and that Parties should take urgent action to meet this long-term goal, consistent with science and on the basis of equity; also recognizing the need to consider […] long-term global goal on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge, including in relation to a global average temperature rise of 1.5 °C (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2011, 4-5).

While this goal is both desirable and ambitious, it is adaptable to a late capitalist economy and privileges nationalised cautious calculation. It answers for "our" dwelling place in very specific economic terms, and refuses to engage with the challenges to conventional categories of statehood, sovereignty, growth, and belonging, which climate change presents us with. This economic model retains, albeit in a weak sense, the notion of human stewardship over the environment but within a statist frame. Of course, resistant discourses of sustainability and social justice *qua* human rights do not always coincide with dominant economic models.

Concerns of sustainability and social justice that climate change brings to light include the precarious relationship we have to the environment and the manner in which as differentially positioned human hosts, we are simultaneously guests; subject to the particularities and surprises of the climate. In this sense, the turn toward the "human face" of climate change (away from the purely scientific or economic) requires, as well, a reconsideration of the relationship between humans and non-humans. Addressing a question on the place of the animal in exchanges of hospitality, Derrida turned the question back onto the conceptualisation of the human, and in so doing gestured toward that which is "more than what is human today" (Derrida 2001, 44). This in turn implicates hospitality in the sense that we must negotiate "a new figure, a new shape of what one calls humanity" (2001, 44).

Caught up in the wild weather of Queensland, Australia, in the 1950s Alex Miller's narrative tells us of a figure desperately clinging to order in the middle of disorder. Let's return to Miller:

> I was a young stockman of 16 on a cattle station in the Central Highlands of Queensland in 1954 when the great flood occurred in the Fitzroy River catchment. The sky turned black-green and 12 inches of rain fell in the first hour. Fresh out from England then, I was soon caught up in the old Queensland reality that any stranger in trouble is to be met as a friend in need. For days I worked with my boss freeing the neighbours' cattle from entanglements of destroyed wire-fencing and feeding their horses stranded on islands (2011).

This figure in the more-than-human world can be seen desiring agency in a context which is fundamentally dislocating. This dislocation is twofold. In the first place, it confirms Jane Bennett's argument that "figurations of agency centred on the rational, intentional human subject...understate the ontological diversity of actants" (2005, 454). Secondly, Miller's story highlights the manner in which hospitality occurs in a place which I may call my own, but which may be taken from me or in which I am originally a visitor or guest or even coloniser.

Miller can be accused of romanticising a relationship to strangers in the context of a "racial state" (Goldberg 2001) in which Aboriginal Australians were routinely discriminated against, exploited for their labour and rarely extended a hand when in need. Hospitality in this place is always haunted by the originary violence of colonisation. Indeed, the very framing of hospitality within the Western philosophical and political tradition of sovereignty (by Derrida and others) perhaps cannot account for or do justice to Indigenous relations to places, hospitalities and sovereignties, an issue which requires much more examination and thinking. In the context of Australia, the white "host" is in Miller someone who is involved in dispossession (though this remains unacknowledged in the text), but is also displaced by the climate. Miller advances a problematic settler-centric hospitality, and within this discourse he also reveals some entanglements of human with climate, land, metal and animal. This young stockman seems so small next to a sky turning black-green and while the narrative attempts to recoup human ingenuity, the chaos of the landscape is overwhelming. Human borders in the form of wire-fencing are uprooted. These very structures trap and harm the cattle enclosed within, reinforcing Bennett's claim that "an unstable cascade spills out from every "single" act" (2005, 457). This single act is always more-than-human; it is always a negotiation of place, even as "human" intent attempts to settle it. How different is this to Kant's efforts to retrieve reason in the midst of chaos?

Conclusion

What Derrida, Cheah, Bennett, and Miller enable us to do is to philosophically re-frame climate change. Strange mix, maybe, but in this combination of ideas we can begin to ask different sorts of questions and perhaps get a sense of a dwelling place less designated by human design yet still enmeshed in the power relations of host/guest, coloniser/colonised and human/nature. In Miller's encounter we can see that the formulation of "Anthropocene hospitality", while seemingly placing humans as the agentic force ("stewards") of all exchanges of welcome, refusal, invitation, return, and surprise, reveals all modes of

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