

Critical Theory for the Anthropocene Future

INTRODUCTION BY GARANCE MALIVEL

How might critical theorists disrupt the universalizing understanding of “humanity” manifested in mainstream conceptualizations of the “Anthropocene”—the proposed denomination for a geological era in which human activity has become the main agent of environmental change? When will policy-makers reckon with the interlocking systems of inequality and oppression embedded in the production and distribution of environmental harms? How could critical theory be incorporated within existing legal and scientific infrastructures? These are some of the questions raised during the Critical Theory for the Anthropocene Future conference, held on June 6, 2018 at the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto, Canada. Convened by Dayna Nadine Scott, York Research Chair in Environmental Law and Justice in the Green Economy, in collaboration with Sonia Lawrence, Director of the Institute for Feminist Legal Studies at Osgoode Hall Law School, the event offered to explore a range of epistemological and legal tools to work toward socially and environmentally just futures. Drawn from the presentations of the four feminist scholars invited for this conversation, the following contributions address prospects and challenges that come along with efforts to conceptualize alternative environmental governance models.

Present through a video recording, Métis researcher Zoe Todd elaborated on the Cree legal principle of *wahkohtowin*, which describes the fundamental interconnectedness of all living and nonliving beings. Todd shared with the audience a reading of her poem “Tenderness Manifesto” [not



(L to R) Sonia Lawrence, Dayna Nadine Scott, Usha Natarajan, Michelle Murphy, Angela P. Harris. Photograph by Graham Reeder.

included in this volume, but available at zoestodd.com/tenderness-manifesto/], which outlines what an ethics of kindness and reciprocity might feel like. Legal scholar Angela P. Harris followed with an investigation on the commonalities between “x” justice movements (environmental justice, reproductive justice, food justice, et cetera) and on possible ways to model decolonial futures in a society governed by white settler law. Usha Natarajan went on to question the effectiveness of the liberal legal system in tackling environmental changes when its building blocks—sovereign states—have been founded on the premise of “master[ing] nature” (44, this volume). Closing the presentations, Métis scholar Michelle Murphy presented the work of the Technoscience Research Unit on the intersecting forms of colonial violence perpetrated by the Imperial Oil refinery in Sarnia, Ontar-

io. Highlighting how this violence has been manifested through territorial dispossession, but also through the ways in which industrial chemicals have been studied and enabled in the airsheds and bodily systems of fenceline communities, Murphy offered insights on possible paths toward decolonial sciences and regulatory infrastructures.

We are deeply grateful to the authors for allowing us to share their reflections with a broader audience, and to *UnderCurrents'* editorial team for offering to publish them in this timely volume bridging past and future modes of living and relating. Grounded on the principles of inter-national, inter-species, and inter-generational equity, the following essays ultimately remind us of our responsibilities towards those we have shared and will continue to share this world with.