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On

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Time: 10.50 AM (IST)

ABSTRACT VOLUME OF RESOURCE PERSONS

The Humanities in (A) Crisis

Prof. David Higgins, Professor of Environmental Humanities, University of Leeds, UK

Abstract:

Academia is in crisis across the world. Freedoms are being curtailed; funding is being cut; jobs are being lost. Economic austerity, political populism, and new technologies such as generative AI are eroding the foundations of scholarly work. While all fields are threatened, the humanities are often treated as most easily dispensable. This paper argues for the contrary position. In the face of intersecting social, cultural, and environmental crises, we need humanities work more than ever. Without knowledge of, and critical thinking about, the past and present, we have no hope of building more equitable and sustainable futures. However, this does not mean that humanities researchers should take a 'business as usual' approach. We need to adapt to a rapidly-changing environment and to find new and creative ways of working. This paper makes three modest proposals for moving forward, based on projects in which I have been involved: (1) community engagement through the creative arts; (2) interdisciplinary collaboration; and (3) autoethnographic approaches to the value of our work in a world in crisis.

Bio-note:

David Higgins is Professor of Environmental Humanities in the School of English at the University of Leeds. He has published widely on British Romanticism and, more recently,

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literature and environmental crisis. He is both a researcher and a practitioner of nature writing, and works with cultural organisations to develop impactful research. His most recent book is the co-authored *Land Lines: A History of Modern British Nature Writing, 1789–2020* (Cambridge University Press, 2022; paperback forthcoming). With Julia Hoydis (Graz), he co-leads the European-funded collaborative project *Just Futures? An Interdisciplinary Approach to Cultural Climate Models*. His current book project – a mix of memoir, ecology, and cultural history – is entitled *The Butter Bump: In Search of the Eurasian Bittern*.

The Role of Literary Journal: A Case Study of *Bamboo Ridge*'s Endeavor to Create the Narrative Space for the Future Generations

Prof. Kaori Mori Want, Department of English, Konan Women's University, Japan

Abstract:

Bamboo Ridge: The Hawaii Writers' Quarterly is a literary journal launched in 1978 by Eric Chok and Darrell Lum in Hawaii, US. They started the journal in an effort to “foster the appreciation, understanding, and creation of literary, visual, audio-visual and performing arts by and about Hawaii's people” (Vol.1, 1978, p.iv). Till then, the US mainlanders regarded Hawaii's literature written by local people as non-existent. Against the assumption, Chuck and Lum started *Bamboo Ridge* to prove that local people in Hawaii can write.

Bamboo Ridge contributors have dealt with various issues in their works such as ethnic relations, gender issues, and environmental issues of Hawaii. The journal has offered a democratic narrative space where people can share their concerns freely. Another interesting point of *Bamboo Ridge* is that it used to publish works by young people such as elementary school students. The journal aims to nurture the future writers by giving them opportunities to engage in the journal.

Through introducing *Bamboo Ridge*'s various literary activities, this presentation will discuss how literary journals could contribute to reimagining the just, inclusive, and democratic future.

Bio-note:

Kaori Mori Want received her Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is a professor of English at Konan Women's University, Kobe, Japan. She teaches Asian American literature, gender theory, and critical race theory. She serves as an editorial board member of *New Literaria*. She is now a visiting scholar at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and researching Hawaii's local literature from gender perspectives. She has published



many articles and attended numerous international conferences. She authored the monograph *Hapa America: The History and Culture of Multiracial Asian Pacific Americans* (Ochanomizu Shobo, 2017) and has written refereed articles and book chapters relating to gender and race issues.

Towards the Myco-Humanities? Fungi and the Transformation of Language

Dr. John Charles Ryan, University of Notre Dame, Australia

Abstract:

Essential to people, plants, and ecosystems globally, fungi underpin life on Earth. These ubiquitous creatures decompose natural matter, remediate pollution, supply biodegradable materials, provide therapeutic compounds, influence world cuisines, and inspire creative expressions. Although there are 155,000 species known to science, mycologists postulate the existence of 2.5 million species of which 95 percent remain unknown. On the whole, nonetheless, fungi lead covert and misunderstood lives. In contrast to *mycophilia*- the love of fungi- Western society suffers from *mycophobia*, a deep-seated antipathy towards this eminently complex yet grossly underappreciated kingdom.

In this presentation, I will postulate the emergence of the myco-humanities- the study of fungi within the environmental humanities—through a focus the historical, literary, and scientific language(s) of fungi. The writings of Aristotle, Theophrastus, Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, Galen and John Gerard offer examples of the discourses surrounding these historically maligned creatures. As cultural materials reveal, the vernacular language of fungi is replete with myriad negative associations, evident in the terms *mushroom* (an unstructured mass), *smut* (a morally corrupting agent) and *toadstool* (a malevolent figure).

The pejorative language that humankind imposes on fungi, however, lies in stark contrast to the comparatively unexamined language of fungi themselves. In rendering this crucial distinction, I will delineate the concepts of human-fungi sensory communication, mycosemiotics, and fungal cognition. These ideas foreground the capacity of fungi for language, memory, learning, communication, behaviour, decision-making, and temporal consciousness. Engaging with fungi as intelligent beings, the myco-humanities aims to call attention to the diverse capacities of the mycological world including language.

Bio-note:

John Charles Ryan is an international researcher in literary studies, creative writing, and environmental humanities. He is Associate Professor and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia, as well as Visiting Researcher at the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland. Funded by the Kone Foundation, his current research examines possibilities for human-tree collaboration in Northern Finland. Ryan's books include *Environment, Media and Popular Culture in Southeast Asia* (Springer, co-edited) and *Introduction to the Environmental Humanities* (Routledge, co-authored). He is Chief Editor of the journal *Plant Perspectives* and Managing Co-Editor of *The Trumpeter*. For further information, see www.johncharlesryan.com.

Post-Neoliberal Story-Telling: Youth Climate Justice versus the Mendacious Liberal Imagination

**Prof. Sudhir Chella Rajan, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
IIT Madras, India**

Abstract:

This paper examines how the youth climate justice movement articulates fundamentally new narratives, breaking with neoliberalism's premise that only market mechanisms and individual choices can resolve collective crises. Unlike liberal environmentalism's focus on consumer responsibility and behavioural shifts, these movements expose psychoanalytic dimensions of climate denial embedded within family structures that serve to reproduce capitalist desire across generations.

Based on a three-act structure, Act I establishes how cultural formations like automobility and digitality embody liberal individualism, sustaining climate crisis through habitual bodily practices. Figures like Greta Thunberg break with conventional political imagination, challenging their “formative context” against intense psycho-familial and corporate pressures.

Act II deploys Žižek's “parallax view”, exposing irreconcilable contradictions between family ideology (protecting children through consumption) and planetary survival. The movement faces systematic opposition from the family-capital nexus operating through Lacan's symbolic order.

Act III explores systemic transformation through challenging elite financial networks, revolutionising spatial design, developing collective care systems, and pursuing post-territorial entities. The critical question remains whether such forms of rupture can occur before ecological collapse, if youth refuse temporal constraints by acting as if transformation has already occurred.



Bio-note:

Sudhir Chella Rajan is a professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras, where he has taught for nearly two decades. He is the author of *The Enigma of Automobility* (1994) and *A Social Theory of Corruption* (2020). He has a background in engineering and political philosophy and is currently working with the [periurban](#) initiative.

To plant or to Build – Rethinking the Landscape

Prof. Smriti Singh, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Patna, India

Abstract:

The most common phrases we hear on a daily basis - This is the world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) – train yourself in AI to survive. And then we have news of farmers committing suicides, droughts and floods that are uncontrollable. One can confidently say that from the survival of the fittest as said by Darwin to surviving with AI, human kind has travelled a long way. The last 200 years have brought to light numerous discoveries and inventions; yet, the humankind remain struggling. With the temperature rising every year and the farmers committing suicides, countries like India are forced to think of alternatives. These alternatives range from using electrical vehicles to making houses that are environment friendly. But what about food and water? One is then forced to ponder – Are the changes real? If not, are the changes and the way we deal with these changes politically and economically motivated. The climate apartheid is affecting one and all environmental refugees exist across the country – without any clear accounting. People are at a loss whether they should build a system paralleling the enticing systems of the western hemisphere or should governments protect the traditional ecological system that existed centuries ago. The loss due to environmental crisis is not just economic; it touches the social and cultural capital as well. This paper looks at these critical issues of communities becoming vulnerable due to environmental crisis.

Bio-note:

Prof. Smriti Singh is a faculty in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Patna. She teaches English language and literature. Her areas of research are ELT and Diasporic writings. She also works on the interface of literature and Animal Studies. She has guided 11 PhD thesis. She has written and edited books and has published numerous journal papers. She has been awarded with a Fulbright fellowship and other awards.