Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Non-Human, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining idioms of animacy in an age of planetary unmaking

Catherine Price[1] & Sophie Chao[2]

[1]School of Geography, University of Nottingham, UK; [2]Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, Australia
Correspondence: [1]catherine.price@nottingham.ac.uk; [2]sophie.chao@sydney.edu.au
Twitter: [1]@catherinejprice; [2]@Sophie_MH_Chao
ORCID: [1]0000-0003-1846-5407; [2]0000-0002-5434-9238

Funding: See Acknowledgements.

Editorial review: This article has been subject to an editorial review process.

Abstract

Life on Earth is sustained by interconnected more-than-human entanglements. In the era of the Anthropocene, many of these webs are unravelling due to climate change, biodiversity loss, toxicity and pollution, natural resource extraction, and water and soil depletion. In order to help address these challenges, The Anthropocene and More-Than-Human Writing Workshop Series, funded by the British Academy, brought together early career researchers from different disciplines to share ideas and knowledges. As part of The Anthropocene and More-Than-Human World Writing Workshop Series, Sophie Chao, presented her collaborative research project, The Promise of Multispecies Justice. Following this presentation, Catherine Price and Sophie Chao took the opportunity to discuss the terms multispecies, non-human, and more-than-human, amongst others. These terms are increasingly appearing in interdisciplinary scholarship in the space of multispecies studies, posthumanism, the environmental humanities and others. The epistemological assumptions and ethical stakes involved in using these terms are also considered. The conversation illustrates that in trying to define terms such as multispecies or the more-than-human, complexities are not explained away. Instead, these terms reveal how incredibly – and generatively – messy beyond-human worlds really are. The terms discussed are also fundamental to understanding and addressing the Anthropocene as an epoch of planetary unmaking.

Keywords: multispecies; more-than-human; non-human; other-than-human; assemblages; posthuman; relationality

Introduction

In the age of the Anthropocene, industrial processes are increasingly uncoupling life from death, diminishing death's capacity to channel vitality back to the living. Colonial-capitalist logics continue to naturalize the exploitation of natural resources for human ends and the subjection of humans to racialized hierarchies of worth. Against this backdrop, emerging posthumanist currents such as the environmental humanities, multispecies studies, and new materialisms have foregrounded the entanglements of humans with plants, animals, microbes, and fungi, whose meaningful lives and deaths are thoroughly, if unevenly, intertwined with human social worlds. In doing so, these currents invite us to reframe other-than-human entities as matters of concern and care within a broader epoch of eco-social unravelling.

In this conversation with , we problematize the empirical and conceptual strengths and limitations of some key terms deployed within posthumanist scholarship to characterize planetary lifeforms. These terms include multispecies, more-than-human, other-than-human, and non-human. We also offer alternative or complementary idioms of animacy that can help us grapple with the ontology of planetary lifeforms as world-dwellers and world-makers. In doing so, we seek to reflect critically upon, and generatively expand, the ways in which we characterize, represent, and relate to the diverse beings who together compose the more-than-human world.

This conversation follows from a seminar delivered by Dr. Chao within The *Anthropocene and More-Than-Human World Writing Workshop Series* (**Price & Dennis, 2021**), funded by the British Academy and bringing together early career researchers from different disciplines to share ideas and knowledges. In her seminar, Dr. Chao presented key findings from *The Promise of Multispecies Justice* (**Chao et al., 2022**), a collaborative research project that seeks to transform the scope and subject of justice beyond the individual and the human. In the conversation that follows, Dr. Catherine Price and Dr. Sophie Chao draw on their respective areas of existing and emergent research to critically reassess central concepts within posthumanist scholarship and their relative usefulness in understanding humans' situated embeddedness within more-than-human landscapes.

Dr. Chao is Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) Fellow and Lecturer at the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney. Her research investigates the intersections of Indigeneity, ecology, capitalism, health, and justice in the Pacific. Dr. Chao is author of *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Duke University Press, 2022), which received the Duke University Press Scholars of Color

First Book Award in 2021. She is also co-editor, with Karin Bolender and Eben Kirksey, of *The Promise of Multispecies Justice* (Duke University Press, 2022). Dr. Chao previously worked for the human rights organization Forest Peoples Programme in Indonesia, supporting the rights of forest-dwelling Indigenous peoples to their customary lands, resources, and livelihoods. For more information, please visit www.morethanhumanworlds.com.

Dr. Price is a Research Fellow in the School of Geography, University of Nottingham. Her research interests include climate change and just transitions to low carbon societies, the social and ethical impacts of agricultural technologies, and relationships between humans and more-than-human worlds. She leads the British Academy funded project *The Anthropocene and More-Than-Human World Writing Workshop Series*.

Thinking with Different Terms

Catherine Price: Hello Sophie and thank you for joining me. First question, are the terms multispecies, non-human and more-than-human useful in grappling with matter and agency in beyond-human worlds?

Sophie Chao: Thank you for being in conversation with me, Catherine. The terms you've invoked are prominent within interdisciplinary currents such as multispecies studies, posthumanism, and the environmental humanities, that attend to the situated relationships of humans to plants, animals, microbes, fungi, and other kinds of lifeforms.

Before I share some thoughts on these idioms, allow me to offer a few important caveats. First of all, I don't think these terms are in any way mutually exclusive, let alone exhaustive in characterizing beyond-human worlds or processes. For this reason, I think it's important to bear in mind the context within, and the audiences for whom, we deploy these idioms as scholars, as this can help us decide which might be more pertinent, accurate, generative, or simply intelligible in any given setting.

Secondly, it's worth bearing in mind that these terms each derive from particular intellectual genealogies, disciplines, and theorists. In using one idiom over another, one can sometime tether oneself to a particular trajectory of thinking. There's nothing wrong with that – but it's important to understand where and how the terms we use came into being.

And finally, while words and language certainly matter in the way they inflect or direct attention to particular objects of inquiry, I think it's important not to get too caught up in terminology. What matters more is the difference these differences make – in other words, what light they shed on beyond-human realities, and what they might silence or obscure

in the process. With that, let's start by thinking about the term multispecies.

The term multispecies was coined by feminist theorist and Science and Technology Studies scholar Donna Haraway in her seminal book, *When Species Meet* (**2008**). Multispecies is helpful in that it does not centre or take the human as its primary referent in the way 'non-human' or 'more-than-human' do. In that regard, the term could be said to push against notions of human exceptionalism or anthropocentrism that are central within many dominant Western epistemologies. Instead, and as the term implies, multispecies draws attention to the 'species' as a potentially more generative unit of analysis – including the human as a species. It foregrounds the diversity or multiplicity of organisms that humans become-with and, who also themselves have biological, cultural, historical, and political lives (**Van Dooren et al., 2016**). We're talking animals, plants, microbes, viruses, and fungi – the diverse array of critters that humans unevenly share the planet with.

The term more-than-human has a rather different point of origin – namely, a science fiction novel by American writer Theodore Sturgeon (**1953**), titled *More Than Human*. It has since been widely picked up by scholars in the social sciences and humanities. For me, more-than-human is generative in the way it engages with the idea of 'more than'. Why is that generative? Well, because one of the central drives of multispecies or posthumanist literature is to move away from the paradigm of human exceptionalism, or the idea that humans are somehow superior to or more worthy than other kinds of lifeforms. More-than-human, on the other hand, invokes a counter-ethos of humility – one that challenged the primacy of superior human worth or value. Rather, it acknowledges the existence of a diversity of beings that together participate in the making of our multiplicitous and ongoingly transforming worlds (**Tsing, 2014**). In other words, there are always *more than* (just) human actors and agencies involved in the production of landscapes and communities. The term more-than-human thus invites an ethical or reflexive reckoning with our relative positionality within a broader spectrum of life that I've always found quite attractive as a theoretical stance, and also as a philosophy of life and co-existence (**Chao & Enari, 2021**).

The term non-human is still widely used in the social sciences and humanities, as a kind of blanket term for all organismic lifeforms situated outside the human category. But I think many scholars are turning away from this framing and towards multispecies or more-than-human because of the problematic dichotomy at the heart of non-human. To describe someone as non-human is a bit like describing a woman as non-man, or black as non-white, or nature as non-culture. We're creating a binary that

replicates precisely the kind of dichotomies of nature/culture, body/mind etc., that posthumanist scholarship is trying to push against. Binaries are problematic in that they often tend to flatten the multiplicity or the diversity internal to any particular construct or category. The human, for instance, is a diverse composite of cultures, societies, bodies, relations norms and practices. And the non-human encompasses a whole array of different plants, animals and other kinds of organisms. Each of these beings are equipped with their own specific affordances, attributes and agencies. It is often these specific differences that matter most – and a blanket term like 'non-human' struggles to capture such complexities.

Price: I completely agree with you on all counts. The difficulty I have with the term multispecies is how to consider the non-living. For example, soil consists of minerals as well as living organisms. I struggle with the idea of multispecies for soil, rivers or water. If you bring in technologies, algorithms and artificial intelligence into the mix as I have with my work, you've got additional non-biological connections to consider. For me, I find more-than-human easier to think with.

Chao: Although the titles of some my recent publications might suggest otherwise, I too am very much shifting away from multispecies to more-than-human idioms in part for precisely the reason that you've invoked. Even as a multispecies framing seeks to expand the scope of subjects beyond the human, it still restricts itself to what dominant secular scientific frameworks consider as *bios* or the biological. More-than-human invites us to think *beyond bios* and to incorporate and accommodate exactly the sort of range of actors that you're describing – actors that don't fit within the boxes and boundaries of *bios* per se, but that are nonetheless animate, agentive, and consequential in their own kinds of ways. These entities include soils, water, fire, mountains, glaciers, technologies and data, but also all kinds of transcendent entities, who also matter in Indigenous and other non-Western cosmologies, including spirits, ancestors, ghosts, ghouls and the deceased. All of these other entities are also co-shapers of our situated worlds. When approached from this angle, the range of actors who participate in making worldly stories and storied worlds multiplies. I'm totally on the same page as you on this point.

Another thing to be aware of in using multispecies – and part of the reason why I myself don't use the term much anymore – is the notion of 'species' inherent to this framing. The construct of species draws from a very particular genealogy and epistemology – that of dominant secular scientific traditions and frameworks. Linnean taxonomies and systems of classification are themselves very much tethered to colonial and imperial practices of ordering the world, that were driven by a desire to better understand this world in order to better exploit it. I think it's really

important to be conscious of this colonial past and its legacies, as they manifest in the classificatory schemes we have inherited and that we often take for granted rather than question. For me, the move away from 'multispecies' is in large part driven by the fact that I work with Indigenous Peoples in Papua who do not speak of, or story, lifeforms through the notion of species as categories, but rather through lifeforms' distinctive relations to *other* kinds of lifeforms, as well as with elements and ecosystems (**Chao, 2022a**). These Indigenous epistemologies, for me, offer far more capacious and relational ways of thinking about life than a species-specific, taxonomic framing. I'm not suggesting that these two ways of understanding other-than-human beings are necessarily mutually exclusive or incompatible. But I think it matters that we reflect critically on the premises, assumptions, and histories that undergird the systems of classification and identification we choose to rely upon and deploy in our analyses.

Price: What other terms do you think we could use instead?

Chao: That's a great question. It reminds me of Anna Tsing, Marisol de la Cadena, and others' invitation to play with unruly grammars in this epoch of planetary undoing – to creatively use words in the wrong context in order to generate surprise and the unexpected. Anna Tsing (**2013**) describes this as *catachresis*. While I don't think all of our intellectual energies should be invested in debates over terminology or the coining of neologisms, experimenting with language can play an important part in generating alternative ways of understanding our identities and relationships to beyond-human lifeforms in this age of 'self-devouring growth'.

One term I increasingly use myself is other-than-human – including, notably, in lieu of more-than-human. As critical race scholars have pointed out, to invoke the hierarchizing idiom of *more*-than-human when talking about plants and animals can problematically obscure the fact that many human communities across the world, historically and in the present, continue to be treated as *sub*-human, *less*-than-human, or even *non*-human under entrenched racializing assemblages (**Weheliye, 2014**). I use other-than-human rather than more-than-human to avoid replicating these hierarchies of worth – hierarchies that find root in imperial-colonial logics and that operate not just across species lines, but also within the very construct of the human, determining who is deemed killable, disposable, or non-grievable (**Butler, 2010; Wynter, 2003**).

Another term that is good to think with is multi-being. This term was coined by my colleague Sue Reid at the University of Sydney (**Celermajer et al., 2020**). The reasons I find it useful hark back to your earlier comment about the exclusions of certain kinds of actors, animacies and agencies in

the multispecies framing. Multi-being is a more encompassing way of thinking about elements, infrastructure and technologies as things that are, that become and that belong, in different ways across space and time. Multi-being, as such, expands ontology and epistemology beyond a biocentric angle and makes space for all these other kinds of protagonists.

The term multi-world, articulated by my collaborator Michael Marder – a philosopher of plants at the University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz – offers another generative pathway for grappling with beyond-human realities (**Chao, Bolender, and Kirksey, 2022)**. Thinking with worlds invites us to think not just with entities, but with relations. This includes relations within worlds, but also relations across worlds and the plurality of worlds that humans and other-than-human beings inhabit. The world angle is really fascinating because it brings up all kinds of questions about whose world counts, or who counts in the world (**Chao, 2022b**). Where do different worlds rub up against each other, and what kinds of frictions arise between these different worlds? Can we ever really claim to be able to enter the perceptual lifeworld of a plant or an animal? All kinds of interesting ethical, methodological, and political questions come into the mix when we start to think with worlds and worldings, and more broadly, with this spatio-temporal epoch of planetary *un*worlding that has come to be known as the Anthropocene.

As for other terms, a lot of my research has centred on understanding the idioms, perspectives and experiences of the people who are themselves living at the very heart of ecological devastation. Over the course of long-term immersive participant-observation and ethnographic fieldwork on the West Papuan plantation frontier, I've had the privilege to think with and learn from the Indigenous Marind Peoples, who have their own, incredibly rich, grammars for describing or storying what we might call a plant, an animal, a species, or an ecosystem. Marind talk about shared skin or wetness. They speak about a shared vitality or animacy or energy that binds different lifeforms across their different skins and bodies. One of my go-to moves as an anthropologist has been to stick to emic terms, or terms that are used by people themselves in the field and in everyday life. I try to bring those terms into conversation with conceptual or theoretical idioms that are used in the scholarly space. Bringing these diversely situated terminologies and grammars into the mix can help push against the colonial and extractive approach to knowledge production that continues to dominate in much of the academic world – by this I mean an approach that assumes that theory is produced by and for the Global North, based on realities that somehow just 'happen' in the Global South (**Stewart-Harawira, 2013**). It's also an approach that speaks to my own sense of accountability and responsibility towards the people whose worlds I'm trying to understand and whom I've had the gift to learn from.

Who or what we see ourselves as responsible towards, of course, will differ according to one's field site, interlocutors, and objects of inquiry. But I think it's an important question to ask ourselves in deciding which idioms we deploy in our analyses.

Price: Yes, that's very important. We should be using terms that are used by our interlocutors – including in your case, by Indigenous peoples.

The other term I've used is assemblage. In my article, *Covid-19: When Species and Data Meet* (**Price, 2020**), I examined human-virus-data relations. I used the example of contact-tracing apps to examine how species meet and intra-act. In this article, I argued that when we have intra-actions between humans, other biological entities, and the digital, the concept, postdigital hybrid assemblage could be usefully adopted. I wanted to show that technologies are becoming more prevalent in society, and this often occurs before debates and conversations have taken place concerning their introduction. I discussed how these debates and conversations are needed in order to ensure social justice and multispecies ecojustice are implemented. This enables a fair and just world for all.

Chao: Yes, assemblages are really good to think-with because they open space for analyzing constellations of persons, practices, ideas, movements, things, commodities, and affects. For me, the question of assemblages has always been following Marilyn Strathern (**1996**), where do you cut the network? There is a rhizomatic tendency with assemblage-thinking to travel down countless capillaries of connections, in ways that can end up making you feel somewhat overwhelmed. In a world where everything is entangled, where do you stop with the connections and with the connecting, and why? These are all important questions to ask ourselves.

Price: Yes, that's something I have trouble with. As you're discussing connections, this brings me on to the next question. Can we actually define multispecies, non-human, more-than-human, or any other terms that we wish to use, or is the world just too entangled and complex?

Chao: For many of us working in the posthumanist space, the ethical drive to centre multispecies, non-human, or more-than-human idioms stems from the fact that countless lifeforms are deeply and interestingly vulnerable to and threatened by anthropogenic industrial activities across the planet. There's an ethical urgency to attend to the situated lifeways and deathways of these diverse beings and the implications of our actions on their flourishing and continuity, both in the present and in the future. That's one side of the story.

For me, uncovering and understanding the complex entanglements of humans and other-than-humans is not an attempt to explain those complexities away. Instead, it is an invitation to stay with the trouble of

living and dying in incredibly messy worlds – worlds of unevenly distributed justice and injustice and worlds that continue to be profoundly governed by the dominant logic of anthropocentricism and human exceptionalism. One way I've tried to work around the issues of complexity and entanglement is to think with situatedness. This is a concept that Donna Haraway (**1988**) and many other feminist theorists have brought to the conversation. Situatedness draws attention to the specificity of ways in which different people become-with and understand other-than-human beings in particular places, at particular times, in the context of particular material and ideological assemblages. Situatedness is therefore a wonderful optic for an anthropologist and ethnographer like myself who is interested in the nitty gritty and the granularity of the field, within specific locales, where relations of interspecies care and violence are integral to everyday life.

Another concept that is good to think with is relationality – although I should say that relationality is by no means a way out of the complexity we're discussing! If anything, it's an invitation to dig deeper into that complexity. Alongside the work of many influential Indigenous scholars who continue to inspire my thinking (**Kimmerer 2013; Todd 2017; Winter 2022**), I find science and technology studies expert Karen Barad's (**2007**) concept of intra-action is helpful in working through questions of relationality. Barad offers the concept of intra-action to examine relations between space, time and matter. Intra-action differs from interaction in the sense that it assumes that things or entities don't exist before they come into relation with one another. We're very much pushing against a static, objectifying logic here. Instead, we're fully delving into the relation *itself* as what matters, and as what needs to be healed or transformed in some way to counter assumptions of human individuality and autonomy from the more-than-human world. That's why thinking through relations is also a great place to start – even if one never knows where exactly one will end up!

Another way of working through the complexity is to follow the life of beings or commodities across time and space. This is something I've done a lot with palm oil, which is a plant, a cash crop, and also a global commodity (**Chao, 2022b**). What I try to do in my research is to trace how this entity transforms from seed to plant to product to commodity, to trace the imaginaries and discourses that surround it, and to identify the ethical, environmental, and economic stakes involved in its cultivation and commodification. Thinking through dispersion as much as through diffraction and refraction helps me approach this complexity from different angles. Often, the results can be inconclusive - and by necessity, in the sense that they refuse to reduce complex, situated processes to any single reality. This way of thinking can be very useful in staying with the

messiness of what it means to live well with others, both human and other-than-human.

Price: Yes, I'm trying to use Karen Barad's work currently to think through connections with my research on biochar. Biochar looks a lot like charcoal although it is very different. Biochar is produced by heating organic material such as wood or straw to a very high temperature with limited oxygen. The material produced (biochar) locks away any carbon that was present in the organic material it was produced from. Biochar can be applied to soil where it is stores carbon for hundreds, possibly thousands of years. There are lots of intra-actions between the biochar, minerals present in soils, micro-organisms, earthworms, bacteria, and viruses. I find Barad's work very helpful for thinking through intra-actions but it can become very entangled and messy. And it can be difficult to decide where and when to stop following the intra-actions.

Chao: It's exhilarating to start a new project and follow all these different connections. In part it's exciting because you discover unexpected links between your research and your own everyday life and consumer practices, all of which are important to reckon with and part of the story.

The question of where to cut the network is, to some extent, a practical decision in that it depends on the time and resources available to you. But it's also a political and ethical question. Where one draws the boundaries and why also merits discussion and critical reflection. On a related note, whilst Karen Barad's work on intra-actions was very helpful for me in thinking with relations, I also had to constantly remind myself that even as everything might come into being through relations, not all relations are good (**Govindrajan, 2018; TallBear, 2022**). This fact can sometimes get a little bit lost in multispecies scholarship that shrouds intra-species emergence in a warming aura of generativity, love, or care. Whilst love and care are certainly part of the picture, they are often not the *whole* story. We have to remind ourselves that not all relations are life-sustaining for everyone involved. Instead, we might follow Susan Leigh Star (**1991**) and ask ourselves: who benefits from more-than-human entanglements?

Price: Yes, I definitely agree with you. Who benefits or loses from more-than-human entanglements is vitally important. This leads on to my next question. How can we talk or write about multispecies, the non-human, or more-than-human without favouring humans?

Chao: There are multiple ways I could answer this question. The first thing I want to say is that when we talk about favouring humans it's important to distinguish between anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. These two terms often get glossed over, and there's a lot of slippage between them in the literature. Anthropocentrism comes with an assumption of

hierarchies of worth and value, wherein everything is calculated with the human as the central and primordial reference point. Anthropomorphism is different as it speaks to a projection or identification of sameness with other-than-human beings. This can be in morphological terms or in terms of agencies or desires and so forth. Many Indigenous and other non-Western cultures do engage in anthropomorphization in the sense that there is often an identification of shared traits across humans, animals, and plants, but, importantly, *without* the hierarchies of consequent worth or value that tend to accompany anthropocentrism. I think it's important to start by figuring out which dynamic is at play in the settings we are researching, and to avoid the dangerous equation of anthropocentrism with anthropomorphization.

The second question for me is whether it is even possible – or desirable – to attempt to write about other-than-humans without favouring human perspectives from the outset. How, for instance, can we every really know other-than-human lifeworlds given our particular affordances and capacities as human beings? Can we even begin to imagine empathy with animals when their perceptual bubbles are often beyond our sensory and cognitive grasp? These questions become even more tricky in the context of plants as beings who embody a really quite radical alterity when compared to humans and animals. Embracing humility, relinquishing epistemic mastery, and accepting the unknowability of other-than-human beings is thus a central dimension of storying more-than-human entanglements. By this I mean we need to acknowledge the limits of our capacity to know our other others. This constitutes a form of respect for alterity and for differences that can sometimes be insurmountable or incommensurable (**Chatterjee & Neimanis 2020**).

The third thing I'd say is that this question of how to write without favouring humans cannot be dissociated from the question of *which humans we are favouring*. Here, we're going back to the question of race, of cultural difference, of the sorts of entrenched regimes of discrimination that continue to plague our world. In exploring more-than-human worlds, we need to ask ourselves: which human stories are we backgrounding or foregrounding in our narratives? Whose voices get obscured or silenced in the process? What kinds of hierarchies of power are our stories either pushing against, or unwittingly replicating? And how do we position ourselves reflexively as scholars within these existing power dynamics?

Another important thing to bear in mind is to avoid reducing or flattening any particular human society or culture or groups' understanding of the more-than-human world. For instance, to essentialize Indigenous epistemologies as singular and static is to do immense violence to the complex heterogeneity and internal differences that operate within these

societies across gender divides, across class divides, across rural and urban divides, and more. These internal differences may profoundly shape the ways in which particular individuals and groups within any community understand and engage with more-than-human worlds and relations.

The final thing I want to offer here goes back to the question of connections and relations. One productive way to avoid recreating hierarchies of favouritism in the stories we tell is to adopt more-than-human, multi-sited and multi-actor approaches to whatever entity or relation we are studying. But of course, that's also a political decision. The stories I've told, for instance, primarily centre Indigenous perspectives and experiences, and there are political and ethical reasons why I do that. Donna Haraway (**2016**) talks about stories storying stories and worlds worlding worlds. She reminds us that storying is always an ethical and political choice. Choices are shaped by all kinds of different factors – personal, intellectual, institutional, and political. To engage with that question of the choices we make in the stories we tell is of fundamental importance. It shouldn't take the form of a tokenistic paragraph on positionality, buried somewhere in a footnote. Rather, it should be a recurring motif or tenet that runs across and throughout our analysis. This allows the reader to stay with the kind of troubles and questions that the answers one offers often inevitably – and generatively – raise.

Price: What you've just been discussing makes me think about objects. Noortje Marres work on material participation examines engagement with everyday objects. In *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*, Marres (**2015**) discusses carbon accounting devices, and eco-homes. This work shows how everyday items, devices, and environments have the capacity to engage and to mediate involvement with public affairs. I think centring on the object being investigated is a useful approach to think through connections, and to bring those connections into discussions.

Chao: Yes, absolutely. Jane Bennett's (**2010**) work on vibrant matter has certainly been influential to my own thinking with and about everyday objects. The everydayness you're invoking really matters for those of us working on questions of climate change or the planetary crisis – both of which constitute what Timothy Morton (**2013**) calls hyperobjects. In many ways, climate change and planetary unravelling exceed the scales of human perception and understanding. How, then, do we avoid the paralysing politics of despair that can arise in these times of seemingly insurmountable crisis? One way is to take as one's starting point the everyday and the seemingly mundane. Doing so opens space for tracing the roots or the rhizomes of our situated connections to seemingly out-of-the-way places, and to plants, animals, and ecosystems inhabiting these

seemingly remote places, whose fates and futures we are all more or less implicated in through our everyday practices as consumers and as dwellers of an increasingly vulnerable planet.

Alongside everyday objects and practices, one can take as one's starting point one's own body. This is something I was enskilled in through the mentorship of my Indigenous companions in West Papua, who taught me how to harness my senses to become aware of, to attune to, or to simply notice everything that's going on around us in this richly diverse more-than-human world. Cultivating this kind of bodily and kinesthetic attunement or engagement is central to the ethos of passionate immersion invoked by Anna Tsing (**2011**) and others (**e.g., Manulani Aluli-Meyer, 2001**). It is also something that Karen Barad has articulated in describing justice as something 'one must ask over and over again with one's body' (**Barad, 2017: 85**). I love the idea of starting from the everyday – including from one's own corporeality and the multiple, entangled realities that this corporeality is always already part of and ongoingly producing.

Price: Yes, I think if we all thought with our bodies more maybe we would be in a better position than we are now with the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis. We should all be paying more attention to the worlds around us.

Chao: Absolutely. As my Papuan friends would consistently exhort me, stop writing, start walking, stop thinking, start listening!

Price: Good advice! My final question is how can we take our work forward with the terms multispecies, more-than-human, or other-than-human?

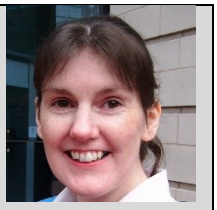
Chao: I think we urgently need interdisciplinary approaches to better grapple with the kinds of complex linguistic, epistemological, ontological, ethical, methodological, and representational questions that we've discussed today. More specifically, I think we need an interdisciplinary approach that is synthetic and transformative, rather than purely additive or complementary. By this I mean a kind of interdisciplinarity that engages with other fields in order to rethink the premises and assumptions underlying the diverse ways we ourselves approach, understand, and act upon the more-than-human world based on our own disciplinary trainings. Such an interdisciplinary practice might encourage us to reconsider the questions we believe matter – why, in whose interests, and with what intended or contingent effects. In addition, I think interdisciplinary conversations can be further enriched through iterative dialogue *beyond* the realm of academia – for instance, with activists, practitioners, and artists. For me, these kinds of engagements are key to imagining and enacting a different commons – or rather, to commoning otherwise. This

is exactly what I've been trying to do with my *More-Than-Human World* website which showcases the voices, knowledges, stories, and practices of activists, artists, and academics who are all trying to work in one way or another in reimagining more-than-human relations on this wounded planet.[i] Participating in and creating space for these kinds of interdisciplinary conversations is immensely rewarding because it fosters a vital sense of community and companionship in the midst of increasingly troubled times.

Acknowledgements

The Anthropocene and More-Than-Human World Writing Workshop Series was generously funded by the British Academy (Grant number KFSSFKNAW\100008). Thank you to Dr Gareth Johnson, Editor-in-Chief at *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal,* for his insightful and helpful comments.

Catherine Price is a Research Fellow in the School of Geography, University of Nottingham. Her research interests include climate change and just transitions to low carbon societies, the social and ethical impacts of agricultural technologies, and relationships between humans and more-than-human worlds. She leads the British Academy funded project *The Anthropocene and More-Than-Human World Writing Workshop Series*.



Sophie Chao is Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) Fellow and Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Sydney. Her research investigates the intersections of Indigeneity, ecology, capitalism, health, and justice in the Pacific. Sophie is author of *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Duke University Press, 2022) and co-editor of *The Promise of Multispecies Justice* (Duke University Press, 2022) with Karin Bolender and Eben Kirksey. Sophie previously worked for the human rights organization Forest Peoples Programme in Indonesia, supporting the rights of forest-dwelling Indigenous peoples to their customary lands, resources, and livelihoods. For more information, visit www.morethanhumanworlds.com.

References

Barad, K., 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Barad, K., 2017. Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-turning, Re-membering, and Facing the Incalculable. *New Formations*, 92, pp. 56–86. DOI: 10.3898/NEWF:92.05.2017 [Accessed: 3 May 2022].

Bennett, J., 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Celermajer, D., Chatterjee, S., Cochrane, A., Fishel, S., Neimanis, A., O'Brien, A., Reid, S., Srinivasan, K., Schlosberg, D., and Waldow, A., 2020. Justice Through a Multispecies Lens. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 19 (3), pp. 475–512. DOI: 10.1057/s41296-020-00386-5 [Accessed 3 May 2022].

Chao, S., 2022a. *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Chao, S., 2022b. (Un)Worlding the Plantationocene: Extraction, Extinction, Emergence. *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics,* 21 (1), pp. 165–191. DOI: 10.25120/etropic.21.1.2022.3838 [Accessed: 3 May 2022].

Chao, S., and Enari, E. 2021. Decolonising Climate Change: A Call for Beyond-Human Imaginaries and Knowledge Generation. *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 20 (2): pp. 32–54. DOI: 10.25120/etropic.20.2.2021.3796 [Accessed: 3 May 2022]..

Chao, S., Bolender, K. and Kirksey, E. (eds) 2022. *The Promise of Multispecies Justice*. Durham, NC Duke University Press.

Govindrajan, R. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Haraway, D., 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3), pp. 575–599.

Haraway, D., 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press.

Haraway, D., 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Haraway, D., 2018. *Modest_Witness @Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ishiyama, Noriko, and Kim TallBear., 2022. "Nuclear Waste and Relational Accountability in Indian Country." In: *The Promise of Multispecies Justice*, edited by Sophie Chao, Karin Bolender, and Eben S. Kirksey, 185–203. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kimmerer, Robin W. 2014. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Press.

Marres, N., 2015. *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morton, T., 2013. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Price, C. and Dennis, M., 2021. *The Workshops*. Available at: https://anthropoceneandthemorethanhumanworldwritingworkshop.com/call-for-papers/ [Accessed: 8 May 2022].

Price, C., 2020. Covid-19: When Species and Data Meet. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2, pp. 772–790. DOI: 10.1007/s42438-020-00180-x [Accessed: 3 May 2022].

Star, S. L., 1991. Power, Technologies and the Phenomenology of Conventions: On Being Allergic to Onions. *In* Law, J., ed., *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*. London: Routledge, pp. 26–56.

Stewart-Harawira, M., 2013. "Challenging Knowledge Capitalism: Indigenous Research in the 21st Century." *Socialist Studies,* 9 (1): 39–51.

Strathern, Marilyn. 1996. "Cutting the Network." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2 (3): 517–35.

Sturgeon, T., 1953. *More Than Human*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young

Todd, Zoe. 2017. "Fish, Kin, and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in Amiskwaciwâskahikan and Treaty Six Territory." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, 43: 102 – 107.

Tsing, A. L. 2011. Arts of Inclusion, or, How to Love a Mushroom. *Australian Humanities Review* 50: pp. 5–22.

Tsing, A., 2013. Catachresis for the Anthropocene: Three Papers on Productive Misplacements. *In* AURA Working Papers, *More Than Human: AURA's Openings*. Højbjerg: Aahrus University, Volume 1, pp. 2–10.

Tsing, A., 2014. More-Than-Human Sociality: A Call for Critical Description. *In* Hastrup, K., ed., *Anthropology and Nature*. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 27–42.

Van Dooren, T., Kirksey, E. and Münster, U., 2016. Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness. *Environmental Humanities*, 8 (1), pp. 1–23.

Weheliye, A. G., 2014. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Winter, Christine. 2022. *Subjects of Intergenerational Justice Indigenous Philosophy, the Environment and Relationships*. New York: Routledge.

Wynter, S. 2003. Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, AfterMan, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument. *CR: The Centennial Review* 3 (3): pp. 257–337.

To cite this article:

Price, C., & Chao, S., 2023. Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Non-Human, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining idioms of animacy in an age of planetary unmaking. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 10(2), 177-193. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v10i2.1166.

Endnotes

[i] See Dr Chao's website here: https://www.morethanhumanworlds.com/