

Deep Time, Slow Violence, Haunted Lands

Helen Gilbert

This presentation aims to set up a dialogue between philosophical debates informing the concept of the anthropocene (loosely defined as the age of unprecedented human disturbance of the earth's ecosystems) and recent indigenous performances concerned with the effects of climate change, not just on indigenous lands and lifeways, but also in global terms. My case examples are *Cut the Sky* (2015), Marrugeku's poetic dance and spoken word critique of environmental degradation in northwestern Australia; *Pacific Washup* (2003), a durational performance by Maori and Pacific Islanders cast upon Sydney's shores as climate-change refugees; and Alison Aku-Matu Warden's *Calling all Polar Bears*, which offers an Inupiaq perspective on the fate of animals affected by the melting of polar icecaps. These works are informed by indigenous epistemologies that offer synaesthetic understandings of temporality, spatiality and ecology. I am particularly interested in the ways in which they bring geological time scales into the social time of human history and how they use the embodied arts of performance to figure interspecies connections as well as relationships between humans and their environments. Concepts of 'deep time', and especially of 'deep listening' as developed by Marrugeku through kinaesthetic choreographic practice, inform this presentation, along with Rob Nixon's work on the 'slow violence' of incremental destruction dispersed across time and space.

Bio

Educated in Australia and Canada, Helen Gilbert is Professor of Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, and co/author of several books, notably *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia* (2007) and *Postcolonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996). From 2009–14, she led a transnational ERC project focusing on indigenous performance across the Americas, the Pacific, Australia and South Africa. She has curated experimental performance work in universities and museums and also dabbled in animal studies, coauthoring *Wild Man From Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orangutan* with Robert Cribb and Helen Tiffin (2014). Her recent co-edited books include *In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance, Globalization* (forthcoming 2017) and *Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas* (2014). In 2015, she won a Humboldt Prize for accumulated achievements in international theatre and performance studies and is currently visiting fellow at the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society in Munich.