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Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Mae Hamilton

Pine Avenue is a small side street in the Sydney suburb of Earlwood. It terminates abruptly at the Cooks River, a tidal estuary that defines the contours of Sydney's inner south-west and reifies colonial exploration. While engineered from asphalt, Pine Avenue is also shaped by waters both slow and spectacular: every King Tide, the road floods with brackish water seeping up from underground; during storm surges, an excess of storm water from neighbouring areas can cause the Cooks to breach its banks, pouring itself out onto Pine. Due to the creep of the tide or the inundation of storm water, city-planning regulations dictate that any house constructed on Pine Avenue must match the elevation of the runway at Kingsford Smith Airport, some two kilometres to the east. In this, the tiny thoroughfare becomes a repetition of that larger thoroughfare—one that gives Sydney access to globalisation, mobility and myriad fossil-fuelled desires, and one that, like the microcosm of Pine Avenue, is also built on stolen indigenous land and engineered to mute the whims of the water (Figure 1).

Those living on Pine Avenue are especially exposed to the rising sea levels and stronger storm surges of climate change, but each of these Pine Avenue bodies also weathers climate change differently. While the inhabitants of some houses attempt to fortify properties by investing in higher foundations and subfloor ventilation systems, neighbours with homes built before the elevation regulations weather the rising damp. Cyclists and drivers avoid wheeling through the 'nuisance' floodwaters lest the Cooks' brackish excess prematurely corrode their vehicles, while other animals face different navigational challenges: turtles displaced by tides will have to plot a course through new mangroves and bitumen roads, while bats seek out the toxic waters to avoid death during heatwaves. Weeds and other non-humans persevere through tides and floods, despite (and sometimes because of) the ubiquity of pollution in the river—even though weed spraying by local government keeps trying to engineer their existence. If we were to follow the Cooks back in time, we would find that the Bedigal people were likely weathering in the area well after the British seized Port Jackson; middens and cave paintings mark this history of life with tide, bank, storm, shellfish. Today, few Bedigal live on Country. A settler invasion gives way to skyrocketing property prices to continue a history of dispossession. Nonetheless, many aboriginal people displaced from rural locations still live with and care for this river, sometimes in solidarity with local school groups, families and organisations seeking to help communities around Pine Avenue and the Cooks weather differently.

Weathering, then, is a particular way of understanding how bodies, places and the weather are all inter-implicated in our climate-changing world. Weathering describes socially, culturally, politically and materially differentiated bodies in relation to the materiality of place, across a

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Figure 1 King Tide on Pine Ave, 13 January 2017
Source: Photograph by Jennifer Mae Hamilton

thickness of historical, geological and climatological time. As that part of speech known as a gerund (an *-ing* word that functions as a noun), weathering also names a practice or a tactic: to weather means to pay attention to how bodies and places respond to weather-worlds which they are also making; to weather responsively means to consider how we might weather differently—better—and act in ways that can move towards such change. Importantly, as suggested by its provenance in an essay by Neimanis and Walker (2014) in the feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia*, weathering as a concept learns from a feminist politics of difference and intersectionality: not all bodies weather the same; weathering is a situated phenomenon embedded in social and political worlds.

This understanding of weathering also asks that we expand how we understand 'the weather'. Weather is pervasive in ways that makes distinctions between the meteorological and the social rather leaky, not unlike the much-critiqued nature/culture divide. While climate change certainly affects us all, challenges related to sea level rise, food insecurity, and increasing naturalcultural disasters always cut along gendered, raced, classed and colonial lines, in well-documented ways.[1] This mix of sociopolitical inheritances and structures intra-acting with more-than-human conditions is what critical race scholar Christina Sharpe (2016, p. 104) calls 'the total climate'; weather is the totality of our environments—naturalcultural, all the way down. As Sharpe argues, in the wake of slavery (which persists in various mutated forms to this day), black bodies must continue surviving, or *weathering*, the total climate that

[1]Many works on environment and climate justice substantiate this claim. Two texts that focus specifically on Hurricane Katrina, for example, include Bullard and Wright's Race, Place and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina (2009), and David and Enarson's co-edited The Women of Katrina: How Gender, Race and Class Matter in an American Disaster (2012). See also Gunaratnam and Clark (2012) on the question of race and vulnerability to climate change in the context of critical race studies in 'Pre-race post-race: climate change and planetary humanism'.

is anti-blackness. Again, weathering here is neither metaphor nor analogy (anti-blackness is not only *like* bad weather and surviving it is not only *like* surviving bad weather); in a climate-changing world, climatological phenomena are themselves imbricated in these embodied lifeworlds. In the face of the greatest climatic transformation that human bodies have ever known, weathering means learning to live with the changing conditions of rainfall, drought, heat, thaw and storm *as never separable from* the 'total climate' of social, political and cultural existence of bodies. This includes anti-blackness, but also, we suggest, coloniality, misogyny and the resourcing and thingafication of other bodies—poor, queer, non-human, disabled.

Moreover, as Sharpe reminds us, weathers gather. Over time, new weathers emerge. Weather is not ahistorical, but nor is it facilely 'made'; it is rather wrought from a specific set of conditions. This makes weather both predictable and changeable: bodies that weather also respond. So, when Sharpe (*ibid.*, p. 106) insists that black bodies 'produce out of the weather their own ecologies' as a means of resisting (while being incapable of completely escaping) the total climate, we draw a direct connection to Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's (2009) concept of survivance—Indigenous persistence and resistance—as a kin concept for weathering. As Vizenor (*ibid.*, p. 85) describes it, 'survivance creates a sense of native presence and actuality over absence, nihility and victimry'.

Survivance, like Sharpe's (2016) conception of being 'in the wake', has its own vital history. It is therefore not ours to wrench from its context, but it can teach us about the importance of articulating a mode of being that can acknowledge injustice, damage done, and the impossibility of the neo-liberal imperative, while also seeing the need for bodies and places to persevere. Weathermarked, new ecologies are built. Weathering in the face of violent structures cannot be romanticised, nor can it provide an alibi for colonialism and white supremacy. At the same time, the remarkable persistence of these labours must be acknowledged. Weathering reminds white settler colonial bodies that learning to weather better cannot be about fortifying our own havens; weathering better requires interrupting our existing patterns of weathermaking, broadly construed.

Weathering on Pine Avenue may appear utterly banal alongside the total climate of contemporary forms of slavery or coloniality that Sharpe and Vizenor describe. Yet, Sharpe's explication of what counts as 'total climate' makes us more attentive to the subtle structures of power that also shape Pine Avenue and the bodies that belong there: an ideology of private property that too often trumps community and solidarity; a pervasive speciesism that prioritises the well-being of humans and their objects over more-than-human flourishing; and a settler colonial violent displacement that is so normalised that it has literally become part of the air we breathe—in Sydney, settler colonialism is the total climate. In other words, to consider how 'climate' affects life on Pine Avenue again demands an understanding of weather as more-than-meteorological.[2]

Given this attention to structural violence, what we call weathering might evoke different concepts by others—for example, in their critique of 'resilience' as a key concept in the 'Living lexicon for

[2]In a short piece for the journal *Environmental Humanities*, Mike Hulme (2015, pp. 176, 177) expands the term 'climate' to include more direct thinking about the weather, because just as the weather has a complex role in sociocultural life, so too does climate. While we agree, we seek an even more capacious, naturalcultural understanding of both weather and climate.

environmental humanities',[3] Vardy and Smith (2017) suggest the word 'vulnerability'. We agree with Vardy and Smith's rejection of a totalising discourse of resilience as a form of biopolitics. We also recognise how 'vulnerability' can be helpful in challenging, for example, the idea that Pine Avenue might be made 'resilient' (in a neo-liberal sense) through more engineering so that the business of living might continue as usual.[4] Indeed, vulnerability can situate people and places in a more capacious relationship with the encroaching tide, and can recognise an inevitable need to find ways of living in relation to weather and climate change. To speak only of vulnerability, however, does not enable the related discussion of the vexed historical, social, embodied and proprietorial relationships that hold the street's residents *in situ*; it does not account for stubborn attachment to place or the bodily and economic barriers to movement (or to coming home). *To ask a poor person, or woman, or refugee to be 'vulnerable' is as troubling as it is to demand self-determined 'resilience'.*

Weathering, however, insists that the need for a particular kind of relation with the more-than-human–environment must also stake a claim for a different kind of sociality and (interhuman) politics. Weathering is thus between the neo-liberal heroics of resilience and the victim politics of vulnerability; with its specific feminist, antiracist and decolonial intersectional attentiveness, it also recommits to the need for an analysis of structural and systemic violence as essential to thinking through life in a changing climate. Weathering enables us to talk about the ethics of exposure, necessarily in relation to the political economies of place. It recognises the need for shelter while remaining critically attentive to the politics of shelter, always textured by gender, race, class, accessibility, species and other embodied markers. Demonstrating responsibility to place, history, difference, justice and more-than-human earth others, weathering is a critical response concept and practice for our time.

author biographies

Astrida Neimanis writes mostly about bodies, water and weather, in an intersectional feminist mode. Her most recent monograph is *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). She is also Associate Editor of the journal *Environmental Humanities*, and scientific director of the 'Deep Waters' cluster of The Seed Box: Environmental Humanities Collaboratory based in Linköping University, Sweden (www.theseedbox.se/research-clusters/deep-time-deep-earthdeep-waters/deep-waters/). Currently, Astrida is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, on Gadigal land, in Australia.

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[3] Emily O'Gorman and Kate Wright, eds., 'Living lexicon for the environmental humanities', http://environmentalhumanities.org/lexicon/ [last accessed 19 January 2018].

[4] Multiple studies explore how resilience rhetoric works to maintain dominant and unequal power relations across gender, race and class lines. See Bracke's 'Bouncing back: vulnerability and resistance in times of resilience' (2016) and Robin James' *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism* (2015). For a specific uptake of the sociological and ecological in resilience discourse see Ashley Dawson's *Extreme Cities* (2017).

Culture and Society at Western Sydney University in Australia. Her current project is called *Weathering the City* (weatheringthecity.wordpress.com). Her first book is *This Contentious Storm: An Ecocritical and Performance History of King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

Together, Jennifer and Astrida initiated the COMPOSTING Feminisms and the Environmental Humanities (compostingfeminisms.wordpress.com) reading and research group in 2015, and are founding members of The Weathering Collective (weatheringstation.net), with Tessa Zettel, Rebecca Giggs and Kate Wright. Since 2015, they have also jointly hosted the *Feminist, Queer and Anticolonial Propositions for Hacking the Anthropocene!* (hackingtheanthropocene.wordpress.com) event series, which is now being rearticulated as a living book, in collaboration with Susan Reid and Sigi Jottkandt.

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