

11 What Color Is Citizenship?

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What color is citizenship? Anyone trying to make sense of the mad claim that Britain exemplified nineteenth-century liberal ideals when it specialized at that very moment in imperialism, or that Jefferson was a great democratic theorist and activist at the same time as he owned people. Those issues continue to resonate today, as constitutions wrestle with indigenous and immigrant peoples' rights, whether they are minorities or majorities.

The color we're referring to here is not, however, primarily to do with race, although such identities factor into it in important ways.¹ The color is green (i.e., ecological, environmental or green citizenship). What *does* that modifier mean?

GREEN

In the contemporary world, citizenship is difficult, if not impossible, to describe without reference to its seeming antinomy of consumption. Citizens and consumers shadow each other—*national* subjects versus *rational* ones, altruists versus monads. Under neoliberalism, politics has become artificial and consumption natural, a better means of legitimizing social arrangements.

Adopting the tenets of consumers, citizens are desirous, self-actualizing subjects who conform to general patterns of *controlled* behavior. Adopting the tenets of citizens, consumers are self-limiting, self-controlling subjects who conform to general patterns of *purchasing* behavior. Sometimes, both sides fail to see what is “good” for them (as when citizens resist financial globalization, or consumers borrow ill-advisedly).

In ecological and democratic terms, such tendencies lead to plutocratic arrangements—for example, if green activism is ordered around consumption, those who do not consume, or barely do so, are *ipso facto* excluded from the exercise of power in the same way as they are marginal to decisions made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, where voting is decided by financial contribution. And ontologically, we must reject the timeless, spaceless, subject-free monadic selfishness envisioned in

defining works such as the “Tragedy of the Commons” (Hardin 1968). The evidence does not support its powerful conceits of corporate beneficence and consumer selflessness as solutions to environmental despoliation (Humphreys 2009; Seyfang 2005).

Where and how did such bizarre attitudes find a home in the first place? Prior to emerging from this definitional detour onto the floor of the museum, some excavation is necessary if we are to find our way through its labyrinths. We shall see that both untrammelled consumption and unfettered “progress” have been undermined and buttressed by established and emergent philosophical attitudes toward nature and citizenship. Following those remarks, we’ll examine some foundational myths of natural history museums and the way that contemporary polluters seek social licenses to operate through their association with art museums.

Humanity is seen by many in philosophy as a “rapacious race, more brutal than any previous beasts of prey; he [*sic*] preserves himself at the expense of the rest of nature, since he is so poorly outfitted by nature in many respects” and must survive through violence (Horkheimer 1996, 32). Hobbes argues that as part of “the war of all against all,” it is right for people to domesticate or destroy nature (1998, 105–106), their brute state legitimized via the physiocratic transformation or destruction of subjects and objects.

Hegel maintains that a person can put his or her “will into everything.” An object or place thereby “becomes *mine*” because humanity “has the right of absolute proprietorship.” People are unique in their desire and capacity to conserve objects and represent them in museums, and a strange dialectical process affords them a special right to destroy as well. Willpower is independent of simple survival, setting people apart from other living things. Semiotic production confers the right to brutal destruction, and “[s]acred respect for . . . unused land cannot be guaranteed” (1954, 242–243, 248–250). The relationship between humans and nature is a struggle for people to achieve freedom from risk and want. Nature’s “tedious chronicle,” where “nothing [*is*] new under the sun,” is rightly disrespected and disobeyed by the progress that comes with human domination (1988, 61, 154). The capacity to restrain oneself and master one’s “spontaneity and natural constitution” distinguishes us from animals (1988, 50).

Such arguments also work with more applied philosophizing: the industrialist Henry Ford argues that “unused forces of nature” must be “put into action . . . to make them mankind’s slaves” (1929, 71), while Vannevar Bush, US Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II, celebrates the drive to release humanity “from the bondage of bare existence” (1945).

Museums essentially stand in for humans in this schema. Towering entities, they conserve naturally occurring objects and creatures outside their original environments, reconstructing them as memorabilia in a superior being’s cabinet of treasures that classifies and orders objects as a means of

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putting their domination on display. Hence the anti-indigenous, anti-flora, anti-fauna doctrine of *terra nullius* (www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime/bourketerra/).

But does this opposition of semiotic richness versus natural primitiveness work? Simmel thinks not:

When we designate a part of reality as nature, we mean one of two things . . . an inner quality marking it off from art and artifice, from something intellectual or historical. Or . . . a representation and symbol of that wholeness of Being whose flux is audible within them. (2007, 21)

The very concept of nature as something to be molded, discarded, or preserved forgets the principles of unity that animate the sign “nature” as an idea and a representation. They have long been touchstones of the philosophy of art and hence, have semiotic and financial value.

Charles Babbage, the mythic founder of programmable computation, noted the partial and ultimately limited ability of humanity to bend and control natural forces without unforeseen consequences:

The operations of man . . . are diminutive, but energetic during the short period of their existence: whilst those of nature, acting over vast spaces, and unlimited by time, are ever pursuing their silent and resistless career. (1832)

Even among reactionary voices, an appreciation of nature and a mistrust of people can lead to more careful thinking. Plato refers to the power of natural disasters to destroy social and technological advances as “crafty devices.” When “tools [a]re destroyed,” this allows room for new inventions and a pacific society that is based on restraint rather than excess (1972, 119–122). Francis Bacon (1620) recognizes that we must “wait upon nature instead of vainly affecting to overrule her.” Edmund Burke’s cautionary words against the popular will and democracy’s presentism endorse a rule of law that acknowledges each generation as “temporary possessors and life-renters” of the natural and social world. People must maintain “chain and continuity” rather than act ephemerally as if they were “flies of a summer,” thus ensuring “a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” This will sustain “the great primeval contract of eternal society” (1986, 192–195). Feelings of national patrimony can persuade people to see beyond their consuming desires and consider questions of heritage and legacy, as per citizens who think backwards and forwards rather than just contemporaneously (de-Shalit 2006, 76).

From a more progressive position, David Hume maintains that even if rights are only accorded to those with semiotic abilities, animals deserve them, too, because they “learn many things from experience” and develop “knowledge of the nature of fire, water, earth, stones, heights, depths, etc.”

Far than being merely sensate, our fellow creatures infer material truths (1955, 112–113): “the reason of animals” is real (1739).

William Morris’s call for the art world to recognize its links to everyday life, as per ethnological museum artifacts, and to problematize Romantic fetishes that separate work from creativity, takes as its lodestone the need to recreate beautiful surroundings as a precondition for beautiful creations:

Those who are to make beautiful things must live in a beautiful place. Some people may be inclined to say . . . that the very opposition between the serenity and purity of art and the turmoil and squalor of a great modern city stimulates the invention of artists, and produces special life in the art of today. (1884)

In other words, the semiotic marks so prized by Hegel are, ironically, only sustainable in a state of nature—provided that people can “abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty” (Morris 1884).

Nature is simultaneously self-generating and sustaining, yet vulnerable to despoliation. Its reaction to human interference will strike back sooner or later in mutually assured destruction: no more nature, no more humanity, no more art. As a consequence, sacred and secular human norms alike conflict as often as they converge in accounting for changes in the material world and the rights of humanity—its most skillful and willful, productive and destructive inhabitant (Marx 2008). Latour explains:

From the time the term “politics” was invented, every type of politics has been defined by its relation to nature, whose every feature, property, and function depends on the polemical will to limit, reform, establish, short-circuit, or enlighten public life. (2004, 1)

This necessitates allocating equal and semi-autonomous significance to natural phenomena, social forces, and cultural meaning in order to understand contemporary life. Just as objects of scientific knowledge come to us in hybrid forms that are coevally subject to social power and textual meaning, so the latter two domains are themselves affected by the natural world (Latour 1993, 5–6).

That natural world is always already laden with meaning. Take “green.” A disturbingly polysemic word, it can signify displeasure, even disgust. For example, “he turned green” or “it’s ludicrous to have green lawns in LA.” But the meaning of the term is more complex than that. It is simultaneously serene, beneficial, disturbing, corrupt, radical and conservative: green consumption, green certification, new (green) deal and greenwashing.

In the late 1960s and early ’70s, the word “pollution” was in vogue to explain environmental hazards. It was about corporate malfeasance, governmental neglect, and public ignorance, and how to remedy their malign impact. Both a ubiquitous and a local sign, pollution seemed to be

everywhere, yet isolable. The problems it described occurred when particular waterways, neighborhoods or fields suffered negative externalities from mining, farming or manufacturing. The issue was how to restore these places to their prior state: pristine, unspoiled, enduring. Pollution could be cleaned up if governments compelled companies to do so—and would soon be over, once those involved understood the problem.

But when greenhouse gases, environmental racism, global warming and environmental imperialism appeared on the agenda, “pollution” reached beyond national boundaries and became ontological, threatening the very earth that gives and sustains life, and doing so in demographically unequal ways. A word was found to describe the values and forms of life that encompassed a planetary consciousness to counter this disaster, as per the utopias of world government that had animated transnational imaginations for decades: “green” emerged to displace the more negative and limited term “pollution,” signifying both new possibilities and a greater and more global sense of urgency.

This beguilingly simple syntagm was thereby quickly transformed into a *mélange*. Today, “green” can refer to local, devolved, non-corporate empowerment, or to international consciousness and institutional action. “Green” environments are variously promoted as exercise incentives (Gladwell et al. 2013), encouragements for consumers to use quick-response codes (Atkinson 2013), ways of studying whether plants communicate through music (Gagliano 2012), attempts to push criminology toward interrogating planetary harm (Lynch et al. 2013), gimmicks for recruiting desirable employees (Renwick et al. 2012) and techniques for increasing labor productivity (Woo et al. 2013).

The term is invoked by conservatives, who emphasize maintaining the world for future generations, and radicals, who stress anticapitalist, post-colonial, feminist perspectives. “Green” may highlight the disadvantages of technology, as a primary cause of environmental difficulties, or regard such innovations as future saviors, via devices and processes yet to be invented that will alleviate global warming. It can favor state and international regulation, or be skeptical of public policy. It may encourage individual consumer responsibility, or question localism by contrast with collective action. It both reflects left-right axes of politics and argues that they should be transcended, because neither statism nor individualism can fix the dangers we confront. And “green” is inexorably tied to citizenship, despite the latter’s historic roots in artificially delineated space and the former’s commitment to planetary norms.

CITIZENSHIP

The last 200 years of modernity have seen the expansion of citizenship—theoretically, geographically and demographically. It occupies three zones,

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with partially overlapping and partially distinct historicities. These spheres are the political (conferring the right to reside and vote), the economic (the right to work and prosper) and the cultural (the right to know and speak). They correspond to the French Revolutionary cry “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” [liberty, equality, solidarity] and the Argentine left’s contemporary version “*ser ciudadano, tener trabajo, y ser alfabetizado*” [citizenship, employment, literacy] (Martín-Barbero 2001, 9). The first category concerns political rights; the second, material interests; and the third, cultural representation (Miller 2007). Each one has normally operated within national jurisdictions.

But such boundaries and interests are brought into question by the border-crossing impact of environmental despoliation (Dean 2001). More than an addition to the rights and responsibilities of territorially based citizenship, green citizenship is a critique of them, a corrective that seeks to save infrastructure and heritage from capitalist growth. Bypassing localism and contemporaneity to address universal and future obligations, it transcends conventional political-economic space and time, extending rights beyond the *hic et nunc* in search of a globally sustainable ecology. Green citizenship looks centuries ahead, refusing to discount the health and value of future generations and opposing elemental risks created by capitalist growth in the present (Dobson 2003).

Social movements invoke citizenship against economic imperatives by laying claims to public rights to clean air, soil and water that supersede the private needs of industry; a responsibility for the environment that transcends national boundaries and state interests; and the espousal of intergenerational care rather than discounting the value of future generations (Commission of the European Communities 2008, 31; Dobson 2003).

Because these issues transcend state boundaries, short-term priorities and commercial rents, they must be managed by international organizations, both governmental and not. This is neither new nor dissociated from national citizenship. Away from the utopic hopes of world government on a grand scale, international organizations have been working for a very long time, sometimes quietly and sometimes noisily, to manage particular issues. Seafaring, telecommunications, football, accreditation, Catholicism, postage, airways and athletics all come to mind. Their business is sometimes conducted at a state level, sometimes through civil society and sometimes via both. In almost every case, they encounter or create legal and political instruments that make them accountable to the popular will of sovereign states, at least in name. At the same time, it is clear that national and international organizations and accords have not put a stop to environmental destructiveness (Beck and Grande 2010, 410).

This is a consequence of the hegemony of economic citizenship. The most powerful of the three conventional citizenship discourses, it adds to the burden of environmental costs, because its growth ethic is “hollowed out by a misguided vision of unbounded consumer freedoms” (Jackson 2009).

Environmental disasters are classic instances of economic externalities, i.e. costs that are not borne by the companies and governments that create them (Rosen and Sellers 1999, 585–586).

But while environmentalism may be overdetermined or co-opted by technocratic mandarinism or corporate skill, it remains a key site of change via representative government. This has happened for both good and ill in debates over everything from bald eagles to building codes, albeit rarely representing the interests of birds or land. Even the most neoliberally misinformed trade agreements generally provide for the ultimate political exception to *laissez-faire* exchange between borders—namely, standing armies as entities of the sovereign state—and may exempt environmental matters as well.

Membership of environmental groups tripled in the US between 1980 and 2000. During the same twenty-year period, global adherents to the cause more than doubled. Today, such participation “rivals that of political parties, and exceeds the membership levels of other important civil society sectors” (Dalton 2005, 453–454). These are hopeful signs that the industrial era has been a brief, if traumatic and destructive, moment of mismanaging the Earth that is under heavy assault by half a century of ever-stronger environmentalism.

As green governance introduces aspirations into the global public sphere that counter the environmental despoliation threatening human life, it also confronts risks to nonhuman nature posed by the mounting ecological crisis. This allows mainstream environmentalism to embrace diverse environmental politics—from left eco-centrism and eco-feminism to technocratic, anthropocentric forms that privilege human interests (Groves 1995; Pepper 2000; Swanton 2010, 146). For example, an ethico-political commitment to the Earth and its inhabitants is embodied in Articles 71–74 of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution, guaranteeing the rights of nature, or *Pacha Mama*, and the right of citizens to demand that public authorities protect it (Ecuadorian Constitution, 2008).

But mainstream green governance is mostly human-centered, in that it focuses on saving lives, infrastructure, and heritage from environmental risks. This was the framework for sustainable development established by the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development, which the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development enshrined as a human right “to a healthy and productive life.” It accords equivalent value to economic growth, social progress, ecological survival, and, in more recent interpretations, cultural and informational sustainability.

That necessitates a difficult balancing act. Whereas the interpretation of economic, social, and cultural needs is fraught with conflict and requires negotiations at multiple scales of global governance, the “scientific prerequisites for ecological sustainability” are not a matter of political agreement or “individual values”; “nature does not conduct consensus talks” (Schauer 2003, 3–6).

So what should green citizens do? They must develop an ethical orientation to human relationships with nonhuman nature, drawing on anthropocentric or eco-centric ethics, or a midpoint between them. These schools differ over values (which entities qualify for moral consideration and which matter most) rights (the protection of individual and collective entities) and consequences (utilitarian considerations of actions and motives that affect collective well-being). For anthropocentric eco-ethics, nonhuman nature has no moral standing (and hence no rights) other than in relation to how people are affected by changes in nature. Eco-centric ethics, by contrast, holds that nature is the “ultimate source” of value; “some or all natural beings, in the broadest sense, have independent moral status” (Curry 2006, 64). Intermediate ecological ethics accords intrinsic value to nonhuman nature, albeit not as completely as eco-centrism, though it agrees that moral status can be extended to other sentient beings.

For the moment, we can only imagine a time when green citizens prioritize the Earth. Anthropocentric eco-ethics, which dominates mainstream environmentalism and much state and popular discourse, too, both endorses and attacks consumption. It has the virtue of urging green citizens to buy responsibly and recycle. But it invokes a gendered notion of virtue that favors a hegemonic masculinity of self-reliance, embodies a neoliberal focus on individual responsibility rather than collective and state-based action, and rejects participatory, deliberative democracy in favor of a moralistic and plutocratic republicanism (Arias-Maldonado 2007; Barry 2006; Latta 2007; MacGregor 2006). In a stronger model, Anne Schwenkenbecher argues that “citizens of states which have the power to achieve an efficient climate regime” should comply “with the moral duties they have as inhabitants of high emission countries,” not least due to the political power that courses through democracies (2014, 183) (this would not apply, regrettably, in the case of China, the world’s largest contemporary polluter).

At a practical level, parts of Latin America have seen the successful mobilization of citizenship rights for ragpickers, denizens of the informal economy who remove and recycle waste: in 2009, Colombia’s Constitutional Court ruled that they were entrepreneurs, thus permitting them to tender for waste-management concessions from local government. That decision formalized their status, decriminalized their activities, protected their livelihood from shifts in state policy that had shut down dumps, and offered them franchises if they created conventional firms. Cali-based ragpickers were pioneers in establishing cooperatives, and held the world’s first global conference of their colleagues in 2008, including Brazilian ragpickers, whose work is now recognized by the labor ministry (Maxwell and Miller 2012). This represents one of those fascinating transformations of political subjects from social problems to social boons: ragpickers shifted from being regarded as unpleasant, odoriferous embodiments of an abject underclass to model citizens and targets of the contemporary development discourses of microcredit and sustainability.

The Colombian example opens up questions of scale and citizenship. The interdependence of supra-state, inter-state and state governance over environmental matters can be found in numerous policies, laws and agreements. The state must create conditions for decentralized green governance so that small-scale institutions can autonomously design and monitor sustainable practices, particularly where governmental oversight and management are neither feasible nor efficient. Well-organized local institutions have greater success managing resources when external laws provide for their autonomy (“involving users in their choice of regulations so that these are perceived to be legitimate”) and political-economic arrangements encourage organizational relationships between enterprises and communities that share ecosystems. Relationships focused on ecologically sound resource management should involve users across ecosystems, monitoring what works and what doesn’t, eliminating harmful waste, modifying methods of resource acquisition and sharing information (Ostrom 2000, 47).

There are several standard ways of regulating multinational corporations and the trans-territorial challenges they pose for citizen action: “soft law [protocols of international organizations], hard law [nationally based legislation], codes of conduct [transnational norms] and voluntary self-regulation.” The latest critical research suggests that these strategies have not secured a nexus between “the transfer of technology” and the transfer of “practices for using it safely” (Baram 2009). That would necessitate universal standards of health and safety and ecology across sites, from the post-industrial core to the manufacturing periphery, in addition to contractual deals between multinationals and their hosts (Maxwell and Miller 2012).

This does not mean giving all power to the center, but coordination across both natural and human-made frontiers is vital. Research on “enclave deliberation among the disempowered” provides further evidence that decentralized, participatory governance can play a vital role in policy making by involving community members, resource users, experts and elites (Karpowitz et al. 2009, 584). Such models transcend the neoliberal policy framework that has dominated the ideology of growth for three decades, recognizing instead that rational outcomes may derive from stakeholder approaches to managing the commons.

MUSEUMS

Citizenship and environmentalism are central to the heritage of museums. The nineteenth century saw public art museums proliferate as agents of civilizing discipline. They embodied a shift of focus away from the intramural world of the princely museum. Prior to the Enlightenment, royal collections were designed to express monarchical grandeur and induce insignificance in viewers. But the public site of modernity called for identification via a

mutual, municipal ownership that hailed visitors as participants in the collective exercise of power (Bennett 1995, 166). The idea was to produce “symbolic expressions capable of unifying a nation’s regions and classes, to give order to the continuity between past and present, between one’s own and the foreign” (García Canclini 1995, 116).

This openness has developed over time. We see “warehouses of the past” transmogrified via their “insertion in cultural centers [and the] creation of ecomuseums, community, school, and on-site museums” (García Canclini 1995, 116). The United States has over 8,000 museums, half of which have emerged over the past four decades (Cherbo and Wyszomirski 2000, 6). The number of visitors reached 50 million in 1962 and exceeded the overall population of 250 million by 1980 (García Canclini 1995, 115).

Many museums that focus on nature are tightly encased within imperial domination and industrialization as much as scientific knowledge, and just as tightly linked to the Global North’s tendency to colonize and classify peoples and places. A hundred million objects housed in British museums fall into this category (Alberti 2008, 73; Barrett and McManus 2007). Such institutions both record and incarnate imperial knowledge (can it be called wisdom in any sense?). They celebrate history from a frequently pale, male, military, governmental perspective, as per Western Australia’s Fremantle Prison Museum (Miller 1998). Science museums express the doctrine of progress as their *nostrum*, with a sometimes gentle, sometimes forceful teleology unfurled to explain research and technology as human triumphs. This fits the perspectives of political and economic citizenship, as the examples below illustrate.

Carlos IV, the ruler of New Spain (later Mexico) established Latin America’s first Museum of Natural History in 1790 to display the latest scientific technology. It served not only the purposes of the crown, but also the desire of creoles to refute their disparagement by self-aggrandizing Europeans. After Latin America’s independence, its newly formed states invited scientists to “discover” hitherto “unknown” realities. Unlike the missionary work of the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these scientific missions did not aim to convert native peoples. Instead, they showcased Indians as part of history, although artifacts of indigenous culture that could not be assimilated to ideas of grand civilization were closeted (a statue of the Aztec goddess Coatlicue was deemed unworthy of comparison with Greek and Roman statuary). Nevertheless, to the degree that the objects selected for display gave the region a sense of history, they satisfied creole pride and legitimized the state. Moreover, scientific missions produced new knowledge and understanding, consistent with Enlightenment ideas, of this different world, and mapped hitherto unknown resources that might fuel an industrial revolution, charting new routes for extraction and trade.

Argentina’s Museo de Ciencias Naturales de La Plata (www.museo.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/) the continent’s most important natural history museum, was developed in the 1880s. It sought to differentiate a modern,

immigrant-descended population from Native Indian landowners. Francisco P. Moreno, the Museo's founder, reconstructed Darwin's trip to Patagonia to gather most of the objects that became its contents. Moreno drew on the voyage of Darwin's *Beagle* as a model for bringing order to a still fragmented nation, folding Patagonia into Argentina. This incorporation coincided with Argentine president Julio A. Roca undertaking the "Conquest of the Desert." As Indians were decimated, Moreno reestablished a place for them in his museum as relics of the power of nature, reminders of the corrupting effects that civilization had on indigenous peoples. Moreno literally housed Patagonian Indians taken prisoner during the conquest in the Buenos Aires Museum of Anthropology, giving "civilized" city dwellers a window into "humanity in its infancy stage" (quoted in Miller and Yúdice 2004, 110). When one of his Indian guides was killed by "wild" Indians, Moreno had the body exhumed, stuffed, and exhibited in the Museo. The conquest of the wilderness (and the Indians) went hand-in-hand with the nationalization of Patagonia and its incarnation in Moreno's museum, transformed into an act of sovereignty. One is reminded here of Theodore Roosevelt's invocation of the sovereign power of nature once it (i.e., the indigenous population) has been conquered; and Moreno was Roosevelt's host and guide when the latter traveled to Patagonia (Miller and Yúdice 2004).

As Néstor García Canclini notes, "[t]o enter a museum is not simply to go into a building and look at works; rather, it is a ritualized system of social action" (1995, 115). That process of interpellation follows a fairly standard format. First, implied visitors are given a perspective on the site's history and their place in it. And second—here, of course, is the rub, and the place where history and its public munificence really commence—a prior age is made known. For that past is compared, often unfavorably, with the moment when history is written—now. The past represents a transcended and either admirable or regrettable heritage. We can learn from it, but it is definitely over. Visitors are expected to understand that we now live in a better—or at least more knowledgeable—moment. This understanding activates cultural citizenship in reaction to the past, whose commemoration in museum form is a strictly delimited ethical zone, a space that divides worthy from unworthy conduct. Tony Bennett's discussion of punishment instruments turns on the emergence of this ethical zone of the cultural citizen, which sifts out the good, the bad and the sublime in past treatment of the population, noting discontinuities and linearities in a movement toward present, "enlightened," standards (1995).

This style of historical narrative is teleological, with the latest epoch always the most advanced. Successive French *coups* after 1789 saw the Musée du Louvre (www.louvre.fr/en) provided with at least one additional ceiling with each change of regime. These renovations explained past glories as precursors and revised previous rulers' accounts of themselves. In 1793, the revolutionary state nationalized the royal art collection to create the Louvre as a space for public appreciation of the building, the work it

housed, and the polity that made it available to all. What had been a private site for generating regal grandeur and differentiation was turned into a public site for displaying the munificence of the people's government. Signifiers of luxury and aristocratic status became signifiers of a national *Geist* that privileged collective heritage over aristocratic power (Duncan 1995, 22, 27, 29).

The Louvre served as a model for the rest of Western Europe, but not in a truly democratic way. By the end of the nineteenth century, the region had created public art museums as "signs of politically virtuous states." A series of American cities (Lima, Boston, Rio de Janeiro, Cleveland, New York, Chicago, Buenos Aires and Mexico City) followed suit. The Pennsylvania Museum was founded to embody the wisdom of the following precept: "to rob . . . people of the things of the spirit and to supply them with higher wages as a substitute is not good economics, good patriotism, or good policy" (quoted in Fraser 2001, 393). When the British Parliament first debated public art museums, discussion centered on how to prepare the people to appreciate the grandeur of art. An imposing architecture was deemed the best method of instilling awe (Duncan 1995, 11, 21, 32). This kind of fealty to the past, and hence to the nation, maps onto contemporary attempts by environmental criminals (Lynch et al. 2013) to cleave legitimacy to their activities, as we shall see.

Two relatively discrete political rationalities inform museums. The first governs legislative and rhetorical forms. The second determines the internal dynamics of a pedagogic site. Certain difficulties emerge from the different dictates of these rationalities. Museums use democratic rhetoric associated with access, an open space for public debate occasioned by the selection, arrangement and narrativization of artifacts. But as pedagogic sites, they function in disciplinary ways to forge public manners. A contradiction ensues between ideology and control and reciprocity and imposition, such that an opportunity for the public to deliberate on some aspect of cultural history is opposed to an opportunity for museum magisters to give courses of instruction to ethically incomplete citizens.

This binary can be subtler than a very general account suggests. Consider the varied histories that underpin Holocaust memorials in the United States (www.ushmm.org/): to recall the dead, to remember the self as survivor or liberator, to constitute the US as the preserve of freedom *par excellence*, to draw tourists, to be a community center, to stress religious or ideological affiliations, and to obtain votes. And museums may equally provide the preconditions for such institutions as Toronto's artist-run Whippersnapper Gallery, featuring Brazilian street artists who create gigantic urban sculptures from garbage (<http://vimeo.com/26902572>), or protest movements mounting institutional critiques of sponsorship and management (Bain and McLean 2013, 107; Fraser 2001; Lam et al. 2013). This is more progressive cultural citizenship. The Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (www.quaibrnly.fr/en/) is a global indigenous people's museum that seeks to represent the

cultural labor of First Peoples respectfully and in a living way. Washington, DC's National Museum of the American Indian (<http://nmai.si.edu/>) uses the internet to permit long-distance vigilance and visits by native peoples. This newer, critical citizenship can also be stimulated by environmental art and ecocritical art history and theory (Braddock 2009; Cameron et al. 2013; Thornes 2008). And it can confront an agile exploitation of museums' openness by cynically exploitative oligarchs.

THE SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE

The massive, conflictual expansion in meaning of the term “green” that we noted earlier has generated a wide array of instrumental and institutional uses, many of which are relevant to museums. “Green = good” provides an incentive for museums that need dollars to work with polluters who need makeovers. Big polluters make cynical use of these institutions to improve their public image, seeking “a social license to operate” (Sociallicense.com, n.d.) through links with allegedly benign entities (art and heritage) that look far-removed from their own core business—and may even be mildly critical of them. This surprisingly overt term has been adopted with relish by corporations to describe their diplomacy with local, national and international communities, undertaken by sponsoring truth and beauty (Prno and Slocombe 2012; “Special Issue” 2006; Thomson and Boutilier 2011). The International Energy Agency numbers the social license to operate among its ominously titled *Golden Rules for a Golden Age of Gas* (2012), while *Forbes* magazine predicted that 2013 would be *the* year for such virtual acquisitions (Klein 2012).

A classic example is BP. Consider the ideological work it does at Britain's Science Museum, where school pupils are urged, in the words of the corporation's magazine, “to explore and understand how energy powers every aspect of their lives and to question how to meet the planet's growing demands in the future.” A “partnership” between the two virtuous institutions is obvious given their “shared concern over the public lack of awareness of energy-related issues.” The initiative features “an interactive game where visitors play the energy minister and have to efficiently power a make-believe country by balancing economic, environmental and political concerns before the prime minister fires them” (Viney 2010).

This is a clear challenge to environmental science rather than an invitation to dialogue. It positions the firm as a benign intermediary between present and future, science and childhood, truth and innovation—not as one of the worst polluters in history. The game sets up BP and the Science Museum as reasonable people in a world of extremes, capable of a measured and fair-minded engagement with the central issues of sustainability by contrast with hotheaded, green-gaseous, environmentalists. For those on the left, this is a prime instance of greenwashing, a cynical means of deceiving the public.

Vibrant social movements stand against such activities, for example the “Greenwash Guerrillas” (n.d.). They engage the contradictions of cultural institutions that claim to be conservatories animated by green policies, but which rush like orgasmic teenagers towards nocturnal pollution if sponsorship from big oil awaits (“Activistas y artistas” 2010; Lam et al. 2013; Liberate Tate 2014). We might also consider such counter-projects as Platform’s Carbonweb (n.d.), which are akin to the institutional critiques of the 1990s in their outsider/insider status—artists who prize museums also criticizing them (Fraser 2001).

When we ponder such uses of green spectacle, it’s easy to fall into either a critical camp or a celebratory one. The critical camp would say that rationality must be appealed to in discussions of climate change, and competition for emotion will ultimately fail. Why? The silent majority doesn’t like direct action, corporations outspend activists, such occasions preach to a light-skinned, middle-class eco-choir, media coverage is inevitably partial and hostile and crucial decisions are made by elites, not in streets.

Conversely, the celebratory camp would argue that a Cartesian distinction between hearts and minds is not sustainable, a sense of humor is crucial in order to avoid the image of environmentalists as finger-wagging scolds, corporate capital must be opposed in public, the media’s need for vibrant textuality can be twinned with serious discussion as a means of involving people who are not conventional activists and a wave of anti-elite sentiment is cresting.

Absent external evaluation of the social composition of activists, the nature of old, middle-aged and new media coverage, and subsequent shifts in public opinion and reactions from lawmakers, it’s difficult to be sure about the impact of radically green spectacles. We generally incline toward the skeptic’s view of such populist activism—that it’s mildly amusing and disruptive, but is basically pranks without proof.

But we don’t feel that way in these instances, because the lugubrious hyper-rationality associated with environmentalism needs leavening through sophisticated, entertaining, participatory spectacle. As per Latour’s example, green politics must focus on the material, textual and social spheres, and do so blending science and feeling, rigor and play. Otherwise:

in the name of indisputable facts portraying a bleak future for the human race, Green politics has succeeded in depoliticizing political passions to the point of leaving citizens nothing but gloomy asceticism, a terror for trespassing over Nature and a diffidence toward industry, innovation, technology, and science. Everything happens as if Green politics had frozen politics solid. (Latour 2008, 17)

A blend of dark irony, rich sarcasm and cartoonish stereotypes can mock the pretensions of high art’s dalliance with high polluters. Crucially, citizenship must be activated in terms of past, present and future, and not in standard museological ways.

CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, “green” has become maddeningly over-present in our lives. It does *such* contradictory work that motor-racing mavens and messianic eco-martyrs alike invoke the term with equal credibility. This is some measure of both the crisis to which the word refers, and the variety of responses it connotes. We hope that folks who shop via quick-response codes, or visit exhibitions underwritten by polluters, take a critical view of “green” that is alert to its co-optation as well as its value. And that radical users of the concept are as alive to the need for research to test the efficacy of their play as they are to satisfying the desire to act out in public.

The most abiding legacy of green politics and theory must be the development and installation of the Precautionary Principle (n.d.) into museum life and policy making. That principle is opposed to conventional cost-benefit analysis, which looks at the pluses and minuses of consumer satisfaction versus safety. Instead, it places the burden of proof onto proponents of industrial processes to show they are environmentally safe, the idea being to avoid harm rather than deal with risks once they are already in motion: prevention, not cure.

That precept can have meaning for people across multiple subject positions, for they may be simultaneously workers, consumers and citizens. That multi-perspectivism can come from an expansive, integrated citizenship, as per Marcuse’s signal recognition that

the demands of ever more intense exploitation come into conflict with nature itself, since nature is the source and locus of the life-instincts which struggle against the instincts of aggression and destruction. And the demands of exploitation progressively reduce and exhaust resources: the more capitalist productivity increases, the more destructive it becomes. This is one sign of the internal contradictions of capitalism. . . .

[Nature] is a dimension *beyond* labor, a symbol of beauty, of tranquility, of a nonrepressive order. Thanks to these values, nature was the very negation of the market society. (1972)

Citizenship needs to become very green, very quickly. Museums can both reflect and induce that development, provided that they attend to their complicity with polluters and make natural history into a natural present and future.

NOTE

1. African American environmental theorization and activism goes back centuries (Smith, 2007), while environmental racism is a key issue (Cole and Foster, 2001).

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