



**Conference hosted by the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and  
Language Studies and Challenging Precarity: A Global Network.**

**University of Wollongong, Sydney Campus, Circular Quay, Sydney, Australia**

**29 November – 1 December 2023**

**Organisation websites:**

**<https://challengingprecarity.network>**

**<https://southpacificaclals.wixsite.com/website>**

**Conference website: <https://southpacificaclals.wixsite.com/website/about-1>**

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **Precarious Planet: Disability, Rights and Justice**

Many contemporary societies have reached a crisis point in the wake of intensifying neoliberal extractive processes, the blurring of the democratic ethos, and the weakening of networks of social care and health care following the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, measures addressing the habitability of the planet and sustainability of its environment are increasingly founded in forms of privilege or acts of exceptionalism. The roots of many of these dilemmas are at least in part vested in the legacies of Empire and imperialism. While conditions of life in these times continue to be determined by the rhetoric of the state-capitalist nexus, the entire planet faces threats that are outcomes of extractive capitalism's voracious appetites. We overlook at our peril that nature, as well as social goods — including housing,

education, health care, accessible spaces, clean water, political rights and justice — are non-commodity categories, crucial to maintaining the habitability of life on planet earth. Thinking through the experience of the most vulnerable in this context is the remit of this conference.

Forgetting, even effacing, the particular rights and entitlements of planetary life forms and life forces due to the powers of accumulation or commodification results in the creation of a ‘burnout society’ characterised by disabling conditions. Humans and other species, along with the environments that sustain them, are at risk of being considered disposable. The urgent need to address these issues of planetary precarity and survival have induced responses across all humanities and social science disciplines, and catalysed new and revised theories of social justice, inclusion, and human/environmental rights. As well as this general sense of the disabling, we aim to consider how the phenomena of climatic catastrophe (such as climate change and the recent pandemic) are differently experienced by populations on the basis of disability, race, gender and class. Nonetheless, we are mindful that disability also bespeaks differential forms of ability that suggest not only vulnerability but even at times empowerment. As David Mitchell and Sharyn Webb Snyder suggest, disability is impacted as an experience by neoliberalism as much as by physical and mental capacities and experience undergone by the subjects of disability themselves.

Many scholars, including Amitav Ghosh, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Imre Szeman, and Achille Mbembe, ask us to reconsider our relationship with the planet, to become more cognizant of the lurking threat of destruction or extinction that awaits us if we remain inactive. They advance the need to think more collectively, and to create modes of care and repair of what Wai Chee Dimock (2020) terms the “weak planet”, where the “baseline condition” of humans and other forms of life is vulnerability and susceptibility to harm. Dimock advocates human agency in initiating interactions and collaborations for resilience building, because “these precarious mediations release us from paralysis, sustaining hope in a future still unforeclosed, weakly but meaningfully open to our efforts” (12). However, while Martha Albertson Fineman (2021) likewise advocates the strengthening of social infrastructures as a turn towards cultures of care for vulnerable lives, Judith Butler (2016, 2020) and others argue that vulnerability can be a form of human/environmental resourcefulness, able to build resistance. Similarly, critical disability scholars point to the resourcefulness and capacities of disabled people in negotiating and reconfiguring built and social environments. As the era of the Anthropocene comes under new scrutiny, cultural critics like Ana Fraile-Marcos (2020) and Sarah Ahmed assess new paradigms of othering, resistance and resilience. Concepts like

decolonial environmentalism and eco-materialism frame contemporary debates on climate change and planetary habitability; and precarity as “a theoretical concept of literary and cultural analysis” appears in “critical discourses on literary and visual texts in relation to their social conditions of production” (Wilson, Dwivedi, Gámez-Fernández 2020).

The conference is being convened by Challenging Precarity: A Global Network (CPGN) and the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SPACLALS). The organisers invite scholars and experts from disciplines in the humanities, especially in literary, visual and cultural studies, as well as those working in the social sciences, to examine multiple frameworks, methodological approaches, and critical lenses in contextualising the theme “Precarious Planet: Disability, Rights and Justice”, and to provide interventions into the pressing concerns of our present times and future lives. Papers considering the relation between the conference theme and the situation(s) of precarity in the Global South are strongly encouraged. Global and local indigenous Pacific, Aotearoa New Zealand, and First Nations Australian perspectives will be particularly considered.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

human rights and global inequality

the emancipatory politics of disability

critical disability studies: private accounts vs public issues

Pacific/First Nations/Indigenous knowledges as resistance to precarity

vulnerability vs resilience

reading, writing and imaging the environment

affect/emotions, ecology and subjectivity

environmental catastrophe and planetary crisis

food and shelter security

precaritisation of academia

migration, refugees and xenophobia

planetary ethics and aesthetics

queer ecology: non-human queerness as planetary perspective

citizenship, and cultural difference

neoliberalism and (post)colonial precaritisation

Pacific regionalism vs the ‘blue Pacific continent’

Oceanic studies and Pacific precarity

pandemics: science vs ritual and folklore

We invite abstracts of no more than 300 words together with a 50-word bio-note. Proposed panels of 3-5 scholars from different university affiliations are also welcome. These should include a 300-word topic introduction together with each of the abstracts, underlining how these relate to each other and/or the panel topic.

### **Timelines**

Submission of abstracts: 1 July 2023

Acceptance email: 18 August 2023

### **Contact**

Please submit abstracts and any queries to the conference organisers:

Om Prakash Dwivedi, University of Bennett, India (CP): [om.dwivedi@bennett.edu.in](mailto:om.dwivedi@bennett.edu.in)

Michael Griffiths, University of Wollongong, Australia (SPACLALS): [mickg@uow.edu.au](mailto:mickg@uow.edu.au)

Janet M. Wilson, University of Northampton, UK (CP): [janet.wilson@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:janet.wilson@northampton.ac.uk)

### **Keynote speakers**

Graham Akhurst, Australian Indigenous Studies, University of Technology, Sydney.

Author of *Borderland* (2023), “This Country” (2022); *Clutching the Void* (2016)

Lisa E Bloom, Gender and Women’s Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

Author of *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* (2022); *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (1993)

Elizabeth Humphrys, School of Communication, University of Technology, Sydney.

Author of: “‘To prove I’m not incapable, I overcompensate’: Disability, ideal workers, the academy” (2022); “Ableism in higher education: the negation of crip temporalities within the neoliberal academy” (2022)

Grace Moore, English and Linguistics Programme, University of Otago, New Zealand.

Author of: *Fire Stories* (2022); *Victorian Environments* (2018).