

# Contingent Movements Symposium

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The **Contingent Movements Symposium** forms part of the public program of the **Maldives Pavilion**, and provides critical input for the **Contingent Movements Archive**, a curatorial research project conducted over the period of the 55th Venice Biennale.

[www.contingentmovementsarchive.com](http://www.contingentmovementsarchive.com)

### **Contingent Movements Symposium locations**

**Maldives Pavillion** at Gervasuti Foundation,  
Fondamenta Sant'Anna (the continuation of Via Garibaldi),  
Castello 995, Venice

**Library of Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC)**  
access from Calle del Paludo Sant' Antonio (behind Giardini area),  
Castello, Venice

The disappearance of the Maldives beneath the sea is a speculative hypothesis, though a likely and compelling one. The Earth's average temperature appears set to rise beyond levels considered to have knowable outcomes, and today there is an emphasis on mitigation and adaptation, rather than prevention, in national and international law and policy relating to climate change.

But is dissolution, rather than disappearance, perhaps a more appropriate term to describe the changing state of the Maldives? Already the coral islands are being eroded by rising tides, which take beaches and palm trees with them, while salt water permeates the soil. In a material sense, the islands will not disappear, but they will retreat from human use as the archipelago dissolves into the Indian Ocean.

The former president of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, established a 'sovereign wealth fund' to purchase land abroad in anticipation of the displacement of his constituents, proposing Australia, India, and Sri Lanka as territories for relocation. A nation faces a constitutional crisis if all land is lost, and no sovereign territory can be established on foreign soil. The maintenance of territory is one of the key constituting elements of statehood, and should land not be maintained, the state of the Maldives could be legally dissolved.

The prospect of statelessness in this case is a real one. Under current international law there is no such thing as a 'climate refugee'. Refugee status,

and therefore the protection of human rights by host nations, is not currently afforded to individuals displaced by 'natural' forces. The acceptance of individuals displaced from low-lying islands into other nations as refugees is thus at present problematic.

Speculating on the contingent circumstances Maldivians may face as a permanently displaced population, and exploring these within a global context, the Contingent Movements Symposium addresses the potential humanitarian and cultural consequences of this situation. Contributors from a range of disciplines have been brought together to think through the effects of national and international law on human movements, and consider how mobile technology and the Internet might assist in preserving the culture of Maldives, while helping dispersed communities adapt and connect.

In financial terms, the role of speculators is to absorb excess risk that other participants do not want, and to provide liquidity in the market place. The Contingent Movements Symposium aims to provide liquidity in the market of ideas surrounding an unprecedented scenario with a not-yet-fixed outcome. Hosted in the archives of the Venice Biennale, on another island affected by floods and inundated by tourism, it seeks to open a dialogue on the future of the Maldives, and the complexity of global responsibility in the face of the world's changing climate.

**Saturday 28th September**  
**Maldives Pavilion & Library of Historical Archives of**  
**Contemporary Arts - ASAC**

- 11.00      Guided tour of the Maldives Pavilion
- 12.00      LUNCH
- 13.00      Introduction at ASAC
- 13.30      Mariyam Shiuna
- 14.00      T.J. Demos
- 14.45      BREAK
- 15.00      Screening - Ravi Agarwal, *The Sewage Pond's Memoir*
- 15.10      Discussion - Ravi Agarwal and T.J. Demos
- 15.30      Boat trip with Klaus Schafler and Maren Richter (approximately 2 hours, registration in the morning)



**Sunday 29th September**  
**Library of Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts - ASAC**

- 10.00 Introduction
- 10.15 Screening - Rosa Barba, *Outwardly From Earth's Centre*
- 10.45 Marianne Franklin, *Portable Cultures / Traveling Bodies: The Floating Archive in an Age of Digital Redistribution*
- 11.30 BREAK
- 11.45 Nabil Ahmed, *HIC SVNT (Here are lions)*
- 12.15 Davor Vidas, *The Anthropocene and International Law: Challenges of Sea-level Rise for the 21st century*
- 12.30 Discussion Marianne Franklin, Davor Vidas and Nabil Ahmed, moderated by Maren Richter
- 13.00 LUNCH
- 14.00 Suvendrini Perera, *Ungrit by Sea: Crisis Geographies, Island Futures*
- 14.45 Irit Rogoff, *Exhausted Geographies*
- 15.30 SHORT BREAK
- 15.35 Discussion - Irit Rogoff, Mariyam Shiuna, TJ Demos and Suvendrini Perera, moderated by Alfredo Cramerotti
- 16.05 BREAK
- 16.15 Panel with all presenters, chaired by Alfredo Cramerotti
- 17.00 END



# Contributors

## **Mariyam Shiuna**

is a Maldivian researcher based in the Maldives and London. She is currently a PhD candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her PhD research focuses on democratisation and violence in the Maldives. She currently works as a Senior Project Coordinator at Transparency Maldives. She also works as Director of Projects for Maldives Research – a public policy think tank based in the Maldives and the UK. Her research interests include Maldivian politics, culture and history, violence and conflict.

The political landscape of the Maldives has seen a significant transformation over the past eight years. After decades of political repression and authoritarian rule, the Maldives' first free and fair election was held in 2008 resulting in the first change of leadership and government in 30 years. The people of the Maldives created high expectations of the tangible benefits of democracy and embraced the democratic features introduced with the political transition with great zeal. Tracing the sociocultural landscape of the Maldives, this presentation considers the sociocultural transformations the Maldives has experienced since the onset of democratisation, and engages with questions relating to the preservation of Maldivian culture, history, and sovereignty should the Maldives cease to exist.

**T.J. Demos**

is a critic and Reader in the Department of Art History, University College London. He writes on contemporary art and politics, and is the author, most recently, of *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013), and *Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Sternberg, 2013). He recently guest edited a special issue of *Third Text* (no. 120, 2013) on the subject of "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology," and is currently at work on a book on the subject for Sternberg Press.

His presentation will consider how various environmental crises (distinct but not unrelated) are increasingly bringing about forced displacements of life from various territories - including the Maldives, the Arctic, and Fukushima. These contexts offer ways of approaching the discussion of political ecology, environmental crisis, and artistic/activist aesthetics in the current global moment.

## Ravi Agarwal

is an artist, environmental activist, writer and curator. He has pursued an art practice integrally with his other pursuits. An engineer by training, he writes extensively on ecological issues, and is also founder of the leading Indian environmental NGO Toxics Link. His earlier work, in the documentary oeuvre, encompasses 'nature', 'work,' 'labor,' and the 'street,' while more recent work has been traversing questions of the self and ecological sustainability based on explorations of 'personal ecologies.' He now works with photography, video and installation. Agarwal has shown in several international shows including Documenta XI (2002), *Horn Please* (Berne 2007), *Indian Highway* (Serpentine Gallery, London and MAXXI, Rome) *After the Crash* (part of the ISWA European Project, Rome 2011) and *Where Three Dreams Cross* (Whitechapel Gallery, London 2010).

### ***The Sewage Pond's Memoir***

We seem to know nature as something outside us, as a deep experience. The separation makes us know nature as an 'other', a duality. But we all also know nature through our myths and memories. Post enlightenment nature has been understood as a set of scientific laws and theories, as an absolute. But as Bruno Latour says, we as social beings co-create ideas of nature. Sadly though today we increasingly know nature as a 'resource' to be exploited and plundered. The film is a reflection of all these, as a personal myth about water turning to sewage in a forest I helped protect.

In this symposium I would like to raise the issue of institutions. I have engaged with urban ecology for over twenty years and I am often engaged with large institutions. The constant battle has been how to recover the idea of the self, of what I believe or what you might believe as an individual about something, be it trees, rivers or forest or about anything which you might consider of value. How does that become a battle of trying to change institutional space to retain that value?

**Rosa Barba**

takes a sculptural approach to film, often taking apart its elements to create new mobile objects or directing the camera at objects and landscapes with a particular attention to form. Her work considers the situation of cinema, whether it be the physical characteristics of celluloid light, projector and sound, the structures of narrative, or its often improbable people, places or stories.

***Outwardly from Earth's Center***

is a fictitious narrative about a society on an unstable piece of land that is in danger of disappearance. The situation requires the population's collective initiative in order to secure individual survival and to allow the society to remain. The concept's background is somewhat realistic since Sandön moves approximately one meter per year. The fictitious reports from experts strengthens the surrealistic atmosphere that creepily offsets the experience of what is first considered a beautiful documentary, and second a more abstract, absurd picture of a people's struggle and vulnerability.

## Marianne Franklin

is Reader in Global Media and Transnational Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Co-Chair of the Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition at the UN Internet Governance Forum ([www.internetrightsandprinciples.org](http://www.internetrightsandprinciples.org)). Her academic background spans the Humanities (Double Major in History and Music) and Social Sciences (Politics/International Relations) alongside a number of years experience as a communications consultant in the private sector in Europe and her current advocacy work around human rights and the internet. A recipient of research funding from the Social Science Research Council (USA) and Ford Foundation, she has held teaching and research positions in Humanities, Social Science, and Engineering faculties in New Zealand, the Netherlands, USA, and the UK. Her latest book is *Digital Dilemmas: Power, Resistance and the Internet* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

### **Portable Cultures/Traveling Bodies: The Floating Archive in an Age of Digital Redistribution**

As the political economic fallout of debates about the veracity of climate change/global warming divide national legislatures and international bodies island nations do not have the luxury of waiting to see who gets to be right. Digital technologies, the internet in particular, provide both means and medium for preserving and regenerating cultural heritage, e.g. language acquisition, visualizing cultural artefacts and art forms, and storing encyclopedic knowledge. Digital archiving in libraries, museums, art galleries and other public institutions in the internet's heartlands are big business and labours of love whilst the many uses of simple internet access, mobile phones and nowadays social media for island peoples and their diasporas date from the early days of the internet. These online traversals are integral to the larger global online archive that is the web, as we know it, even as the digital footprints non-western peoples leave online remain relatively under-estimated. Both accidental and engineered archives work with the hardware and software of the day, but what about in the future? For island nations, like the Maldives, as rising sea levels already pose a threat to the economy, traditional ways of life, and physical homeland, the solution that (cloud) computing offers is a compelling one. For a legacy project on this scale however, the techno-economic and cultural politics of content



selection, technical sustainability, terms of access and use, and location for this floating digital archive can overlook the fact that like the planet, like culture itself, technologies are also in flux.

The presentation, with visuals from Jochen Jacoby ([www.jarcarte.de](http://www.jarcarte.de)), will be in the form of a speculative Wikipedia page for considering some of the “unavoidable truths” that murmur between the lines of this agenda. Themes under consideration, open to audience input, include: offline/online traversals, reimagined communities, enhanced embodiments, homeland and diaspora after the internet, 3-D cultures, the accidental archive and geopolitics of data-storage.

## Nabil Ahmed

is an artist, writer and curator. His works have been presented internationally including at the 2012 Taipei Biennale, Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, the Serpentine Gallery's Centre for Possible Studies, and South Asian Visual Arts Centre (SAVAC) in Toronto. He has written for *Third Text*, *Media Field Journal* and the forthcoming book *Architecture and the paradox of Dissidence*. He is co-curator at *Call & Response*, an artist run sound art project based in London. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London where he also teaches. He lives and works in London.

### HIC SVNT LEONES (Here are lions)

The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol remain the main legal instruments for defining refugees, their rights and the legal obligation of states. Persons displaced by climate change are not protected. There is both a policy and operational protection gap for environmental refugees. Yet the distinctions between conflicts and environmental violence are complicated. In terms of loss of land to the sea, the earth is itself a direct cause of forced displacement. Historically laws of war and the sea have been developed to facilitate antagonistic struggles, trade, and colonial expansions by European nation states. While north-south asymmetries continue to be illustrated by the militarization of borders, 'unintended consequences' of climate change are a potential instrument of violence. The phrase 'unintended consequences' must be questioned as it can render matters of environmental concern apolitical while short-circuiting their legal possibilities. This brings into tension the linear line of causality of conflict with more complex and diffused causalities of environmental violence. The question is whether existing normative frameworks to protect displaced persons found in Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law are enough? Or do entirely new laws need to be imagined in the Anthropocene? As territories shift, how do they redefine legal and political definitions and boundaries?

## Davor Vidas

is Research Professor and Director of the Law of the Sea Programme at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway. He is the Chair of the International Committee on International Law and Sea-level Rise of the International Law Association, and a member of the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy. He is the author or editor of ten books, including *The World Ocean in Globalisation* (Brill, 2011), *Law, Technology and Science for Oceans in Globalisation* (Brill, 2010), *Protecting the Adriatic Sea* (Školska knjiga, 2007), *Protecting the Polar Marine Environment* (Cambridge University Press, 2000/2006), *Order for the Oceans at the Turn of the Century* (Kluwer, 1999) and *Governing the Antarctic* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

### **The Anthropocene and International Law: Challenges of Sea-level Rise for the 21st Century**

With the onset of the Anthropocene, fundamental challenges for international law may be on the horizon. Core aspects of international law rely on the stability of Holocene conditions: geographical features, due to their perceived stability, are taken as a key objective circumstance in determining the rights of states to maritime zones, as well as in resolving maritime delimitation disputes. A defined territory is a constituent element of statehood under international law. In some of its key aspects, international law today is a system of rules resting on foundations that evolved under the understanding of ever-valid circumstances of the Holocene.

In not too distant future, important questions may arise about the sustainability of those aspects of international law, while other aspects, such as the population of the state – and, accordingly, human rights – may gain in prominence and acquire new dimensions, all likely to require profound re-examination of currently-accepted paradigms of international law. The perspective of sea-level rise may be among key factors prompting a thorough re-examination of some aspects of international law. The International Law Association recently (in November 2012) decided to establish a new International Committee – on International Law and Sea Level Rise – to initiate an analysis of the issues involved

## Suvendrini Perera

has lived on islands almost all her life. Born in Sri Lanka, she completed her PhD at Columbia University, New York, and now lives in the port city of Fremantle, Australia. She is Professor of Cultural Studies in the School of Media Culture & Creative Arts and Deputy Director of the Australia-Asia-Pacific Institute at Curtin University. Perera is the author/editor of six books, including *Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats and Bodies* (2009). Her research interests include histories of coexistence, state violence, and diaspora cultural studies. She is working on a book on trophy war images titled *Old Atrocities, New Media*.

### **Ungirt by sea: Crisis Geographies, Island Futures**

As a political and imaginative figure, the island projects wholeness in Western epistemologies. An island is a world apart. Against temporal asymmetries and anxieties (who came when? who was here before?) the island is a sign of spatial completeness and collectivity. The self-enclosed world of the island implies affective and imaginative bonds among inhabitants held together within naturally given limits. Amid flux and fracture, the island signifies as an unbroken, bounded, self-sufficient, even organic, entity: a nation.

This discussion considers three island-states – the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Australia – as artefacts of colonial history that are now cast into states of ontological, political and environmental crisis. These are understood as an undoing or dissolution of their core identities. In mapping these new crisis geographies of islands, the paper marks the racial and economic asymmetries by which they are characterised, even as it also seeks to trace the contingent and fleeting interconnections between them.

**Irit Rogoff**

is a writer, curator, and organizer working at the intersection of contemporary art, critical theory, and emergent political manifestations. She is Professor of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London where she heads the PhD in Curatorial/Knowledge program, the MA in Global Arts program and the new Geo-Cultures Research Center. Rogoff has written extensively on geography, globalization, and contemporary participatory practices in the expanded field of art. A collection of recent essays, *Unbounded - Limits' Possibilities*, is published in 2012 with e-flux journal/ Sternberg and her new book, *Looking Away - Participating Singularities, Ontological Communities*, comes out in 2013. Rogoff lives and works in London.

**Exhausted Geographies**

are those that cannot sustain the claims they have been mobilised for - territorial, national, regional, ethnic, cultural, economic, ideological. In particular I am interested in how geography in crisis, whether political, economic or climatic can or cannot sustain its identity. And so I have been thinking of exhaustion in relation to political conflict, not a mode of opting out and withdrawing, but as one of recognising the limits of a logic that has dominated that conflict for most of its duration. I suspect that this exhaustion takes the form of an act of treason - for in the realm of living out long term political conflict, treason and exhaustion are not unrelated to one another. Treason, in Deleuze's sense of treachery, as the refusal to support and sustain that which demands it of you because it claims to support and sustain you. The exhausted geographies of which I speak are the material manifestations of what I am trying to describe, territorialities and territorial claims that cannot sustain themselves. It is of great interest to bring this form of largely political exhaustion into contact with the geographical limit lines enacted by extreme climate change, as foregrounded in this conference.

Part of the public program of the **Maldives Pavilion**, the **Contingent Movements Symposium** and **Archive** are curated by **Hanna Husberg** and **Laura McLean**, and developed with **Kalliopi Tsipni-Kolaza**.

The **Maldives Pavilion** is curated by **Chamber of Public Secrets**, a critical production unit of art and culture. **Alfredo Cramerotti** and **Maren Richter**, both curators of the Maldives Pavilion, are moderating discussions at the Contingent Movements Symposium.

Also in association with the Maldives Pavilion, Richter and artist **Klaus Schafler** and will take symposium participants on a boat trip to the lagoons of Venice, where they will discuss with Venetian urbanist and activist **Stefano Boato** and scientist **Luca Zaggia** the recent effects of the rising sea level in the region.

Curator and writer **Dorian Batycka** and curator and theorist **Mike Watson**, currently in residence at the **Gervasuti Foundation**, will introduce the project **Joan of Art: Towards a Free Education** and present a course on art, politics and ecology to be delivered in November. For more information visit <http://joanofart.net/the-venice-process/>

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. It is also supported by Frame Visual Art Finland, Arts Promotion Centre Finland, and Svenska Kulturfonden, Finland. It is partnered with Maldives Research.



