

THRIVING IS A MULTI-SPECIES RIGHT

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As we are living up to the realization that our human existence could not be taken for granted we finally grasp that we are part of a greater web of being, connecting us gently to the lives of butterflies, trees, worms in the soil and the water running through us all. Even though people have been speaking about it for centuries, only now can I see that political change is happening. We, the people, have changed. In the past two decades, two values became widely accepted: multi-species urbanism and the multiplicity of the other.

Multi-species urbanism means everything has a voice. The river, the tree, the worm, you and I, we all have a voice and thus we have rights. Through multiplicity of the other, we learned how to communicate across all this otherness that once set us on a path towards mutual destruction.

When I communicate with a river or with you or your neighbor, whether you're older or younger, whether you're on a different continent or not, or whether you have migrated it does not matter. We have all been in the same place for all our lives. We have so many things we share and we have so many things that keep us apart. So we needed a new language to talk about this.

The methodologies we developed, vertical observation by Debra Solomon (who also coined the term multi-species urbanism) and the spatial dialogues of Afaina de Jong, all contributed to finding new ways of living together in our respective complexities. Our cities have become complex systems, systems of systems, and we have to live in them, while causality is something different than what we thought it was. It's confusing. The nice thing is that now we share this confusion between all of us, through the methodologies that we developed and also my own work. I work on rhythm, how to share rhythm, how to move in rhythm and how to match rhythms. Rhythm creates a basic understanding in which you can start to trust each other.

The term multi-species urbanism means that in a city, in a society even the soil has a voice. It was too easy to pour concrete to make streets. We built houses and roads by doing that, but then water couldn't go anywhere. Birds can't find food. When we lose our flowers we lose the bees and without bees, we lose our food.

The solution to this total loss brought people together to think about the creation of legal entities for natural living forms that are not human. For example, in Ecuador there is a river which has legal rights. In New Zealand, pieces of forest have legal rights. In the previous century we invented the creative commons in order to share intellectual property. Now people try to invent legal forms for nature. The difficulty, of course, is that you can invent legal forms, but if people don't understand their value, no one acts upon them. So education was incredibly important in the last ten years. In order to teach the next generation about the value of nature, we spent time to educate students across every discipline in schools, academies, universities.

When you embrace concepts like multi-species urbanism or multiplicity of the other, you're advocating for the voice of trees or rivers or bees. In our century and in the centuries before, ownership was

everything. Legal entities were the ones negotiating who could own what and do what with that existence that they owned. In an illustration by Debra Solomon and Aida de Jong worms were living and growing in one mold where they made golden, very rich earth. Next to this was a Bitcoin machine of the same size. One had a lot of value and the other one had none. No one would pay even five cents for the earth. So if you took a square meter in a city and put stones on it, it gained a huge value. If you planted a tree, it had no value, in economic terms but also in legal terms.

No one needs to rule the world, not even science. We are aware we don't need to rule, and that messy cities don't need blueprints. What we need are small steps which everybody can take, and to understand cities as concepts. That also changes how we live and tell stories. It changes where we work and how we commute. It changes how we build our cities, and how we use technologies. About ten or twenty years ago, big companies became increasingly greedy. I'm happy to see that more and more people, both within and outside of companies are aware that you cannot own everybody's data in one database as it's very unhealthy and not good for the future. So we are at a turning point now. Things are changing because people are changing. So it's the people who make the change, not the politicians. They have to create commissions. They should. But it's the people, for the people, by the people.

Much like no one owns everybody's data anymore, blockchain helped us to legalize different entities. International forums like the UN Commission, helped to secure the rights for nature, i.e. all rivers, the rain forest has the strongest rights of all because we finally have acknowledged that we can't exist without it. After a decade of hard-fought advocacy, the companies still haven't given up their greed. We're currently fighting them at the North Pole over minerals. In Greenland (which has recently gone completely green) companies still try to get their hands on all the oil and gold they can find. So the fight is not over. Not at all. We're just lucky that some of the fundamental, natural elements that are essential for the survival of our planet have gotten rights, so they can no longer be exploited and destroyed as if their existence is not tied inextricably to our own.