

## Proving Grounds - Earth Lab

**Saturday September 30**

Fyvie Hall, University of Westminster

University of Westminster

309 Regent St, Marylebone

London W1B 2HT

This colloquium brings together a number of artists, inventors and thinkers who re-imagine the earth, sea and sky from a bottom-up, post-anthropocene position, in a wide-ranging, broad-brushtroke survey of current thinking about Earth as a living laboratory. The speakers consider the sky, the oceans and the land to pursue a number of themes that investigate social and artistic approaches to scientific knowledge in a rapidly changing world.

**John Beck**, Director of The Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture and part of Proving Grounds, describes the aims of 'Earth Lab': 'Unless the grand schemes of aspiring space colonists turn out to be achievable, whatever work there is to be done remains here on Earth, where, for now, the limits of the atmosphere mark the limits of our habitable world. Earth is the first, and perhaps the last, laboratory, the object, material and context for experiment, for trying out ways of living and knowing. Earth is our proving ground and the site of our contested survival'.

Chair: **Lucy Reynolds**, artist, writer and lecturer in the moving image at Westminster University

Speakers:

**Bronislaw Szerszynski**, Reader in Sociology at Lancaster University, who has published widely in environmental sociology and humanities, will discuss his research on geoengineering and his ongoing work on 'planetary mobilities' that treats all kinds of mobility occurring in the Earth as achievements of a planet that is far from equilibrium, self-organising over deep, geological time. In particular he will discuss 'the Drift Economy', an imagined alternative mobility system inspired by Tomas Saraceno's work, in which moving things are powered solely by ambient energy – the energy that surrounds an object due to its specific location in the flows occurring in a dynamic Earth system.

**Tomas Saraceno**, artist, will join by skype to discuss Aerocene: a multi-disciplinary project that foregrounds the artistic and scientific exploration of environmental issues. In the wake of the Anthropocene, the project promotes common links between social, mental, and environmental ecologies – inflated only by air, lifted only by the sun, carried only by the wind, towards a sustainable future.

**Nicola Triscott**, cultural producer, curator, writer and researcher, specializing in the intersections between art, science, technology and society, founder and director of Arts Catalyst and Principal Research Fellow in interdisciplinary art and science at the University of Westminster, will respond to the above, drawing on her experience of Saraceno's Aerocene human flight in White Sands desert.

**Naveen Rabelli**, in his Project Tejas, attracted worldwide attention last year when he drove a Solar tuk tuk overland from Bangalore, India to London, in an attempt to create awareness of alternative mobility solutions for passenger vehicles in Asian and European countries using renewable energy in a mix of solar and electric power, stopping en-route in a 10,000 km route across Asia, the Middle East and Europe to inspire local communities with his journey.

**Rob La Frenais**, independent curator, writer and organiser of the 'Earth Lab' colloquium, will respond to Naveen Rabelli, drawing on his involvement with the Future of Transportation project. His recent

exhibitions include 'Exoplanet Lot' and 'No Such Thing As Gravity', recently showing at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art.

**Jennifer Gabrys**, Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Principal Investigator on the ERC-funded 'Citizen Sense' research project, will discuss her book *Program Earth: Environmental Sensing Technology and the Making of a Computational Planet*, which examines how sensor technologies are programming our environments as new 'technogeographies'.

**Lise Autogena**, Professor of Cross Disciplinary Art at Sheffield Hallam University and **Joshua Portway**, an artist, will discuss 'Foghorn Requiem', a musical performance to mark the disappearance of the foghorn from the UK's coastal landscape with three brass bands and an armada of vessels at sea, sounding their horns in a requiem for the de-commissioning of foghorns, a melancholic and very human sound that connects the land with the sea.

**Carlos López Galviz**, Lecturer in the Theories and Methods of Social Futures at Lancaster University, looks at futures thinking and future forming through the lens of cities, ruins and infrastructure and discusses his co-authored book *Global Undergrounds* which charts the global reach of urban underground spaces, collecting 80 stories of subterranean sites around the world to reveal the profound – but often unseen – ways they have changed our lives.

**Uta Kogelsberger**, artist and Lecturer at Newcastle University, works with specific sites where human interactions with landscape become physical and visual manifestations of a society's ideology and belief structures. Her 'Off Road' documents a Californian landscape of sand dunes regularly covered in a heavy fog where thousands arrive with their trailers, SUVs, self-built cars, quads and bikes living out a fantasy of autonomy and freedom – instrumental in sustaining the political system that houses it.

**John Beck** is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Westminster and Director of the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture. He is the author of *Dirty Wars: Landscape, Power, and Waste in Western American Literature* and co-editor of *Cold War Legacies: Systems, Theory, Aesthetics*.

**Christine Handte** is Expedition Leader of the RV *Heraclitus*, a floating platform for scientific studies, ecological understanding, and multicultural, multidisciplinary projects, inspired by Heraclitus's saying: "You cannot step in the same river twice. Neither the river nor the human, is the same." The ship has sailed over 270,000 nautical miles through six oceans for 42 years, continuously exploring traditions of those who have lived on the sea, with the aim to create an onboard cadre of contemporary sea people and stewards of the oceans.

**Neal White** is an artist, director of the Office of Experiments and Professor of Art and Science at the University of Westminster. He will discuss the Office of Experiments work in exploring issues such as time, scale, control, power, cooperation and ownership, highlighting and navigating the spaces between complex bodies, organisations and events that form part of the industrial, military, scientific and technological complex.

10.15 AM. Introductions by John Beck and Neal White, Proving Grounds, Chair Lucy Reynolds.

10.30 AM . Traversing the Earth – Keynotes The Aerocene and the Drift Economy Bronislaw Szerszynski and Tomas Saraceno (by Skype).

11.30 AM Response, Nicola Triscott.

12.00 PM Naveen Rabelli: Solar Tuk Tuk.

12.40 PM Response Rob La Frenais.

Q and A for all keynotes and respondents, chaired by Lucy Reynolds.

13.10 PM Lunch Break. We will give you a list of lunch places in the area.

14.10 PM Pecha Kucha moderated by Jol Thoms with Rocio Von Jungenfeld, Emilia Izquierdo, Benek Çinçik , Sam Hertz, Sasha Engelmann

14.40 PM Oceans and Rivers as Laboratory  
Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway, Christine Handte, Neal White

15.50 PM Q and A

16.00 Short break.

16.10 Earth as Laboratory – Fictions and Utopias  
Jennifer Gabrys, Carlos Lopez-Galviz, Uta Kogelsberger, John Beck

17.30 PM Q and A.

17.40 PM Whole panel wind-up discussion – all speakers plus Chair's summing up (20 mins)

18.00 PM Closing Drinks

19.00 PM Close