

EEE Research Seminar

Date: January 30, 2024, at 10:30 AM

Location: POTR 234 (Fu Room)

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Professor

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Inhabitancy: A New Political and Philosophical Narrative for Reconnecting Humans with Biodiversity

Abstract

In the last century, humans have accelerated their colonization of the planet resulting in the erasure of ecosystems and the extinction of thousands of million-year-old species. Since 1970, overall monitored species populations have plummeted by 69%. Additionally, 1978 marked the year when the human use of ecosystems began to exceed the Earth's sustainable capacity, due largely to land development practices. The origins of this reality are rarely explored. I locate the origins of today's biodiversity loss in a series of political, agricultural, and philosophical developments that unfolded in the West and North during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A key event was "Gateward's Case," which saw the political and cultural conception of humans as "inhabitants" struck from the legal system in England and Europe. This event occurred in conjunction with the "Enclosure of the Commons," which became the new paradigm for agricultural development in England and Europe and was subsequently spread around the globe during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries of settler colonialism. The erasure of the commons became the basis for the planetary system of monocropping that defines today's global supply chain of food production. Contrary to Hardin's thesis, the commons system was a well-engineered cultural system that proved sustainable for over a thousand years. I argue that the engineering of our current agricultural, suburban, and urban ecosystems depends on a rethinking of the narrative of what it means to be human by leveraging a conception and empirical, cultural practice of "inhabitancy."

Bio

Robert Marzec is professor of environmental and postcolonial studies in the Department of English at Purdue University. He is the coordinator for the campus-wide Environmental and Sustainability Studies Certificate Program and Lead for Purdue's Institute for a Sustainable Future's Imagining Sustainable Futures Special Initiative. He is the author of *Militarizing the Environment: Climate Change and the Security Society* (2015), *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature* (2007) and is working on a documentary about the 2021 UN Climate Summit COP26.