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## A manifesto for planning after the coronavirus: Towards planning of care

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis upended the status quo of our everyday life. The rising discourse in the midst of this pandemic is ‘human guilt’ (e.g., ‘we are the virus!’), reviving the dark side of neo-Malthusian environmentalist ideology. While the pandemic should be considered a wake-up call for us to drastically rethink our relationship with nature, planning discipline cannot resign itself from its power and responsibility to make a difference in human and nonhuman lives. So, here I ask: How can we carefully reposition ‘human intervention’ in the aftermath of this ‘human guilt’, without nullifying the hopeful spirit and our belief in the power of planning? Inspired by Tronto/ Lawson’s geographies of care and Dewey-an pragmatism, this essay calls for the rise of ‘planning of care’. Planning of care not only recognises humans’ interdependency on one another, but also acknowledges cities’ on-going, dialectic relationship with their natural surroundings.

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The world has been stricken with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Like the smoke haze that flooded the streets of Melbourne during the bushfire season a few months back, the coronavirus penetrates our everyday decisions. The rising discourse in the midst of this global pandemic is ‘human guilt’ – how humans have inflicted this problem on themselves by causing unnatural encounters between humans and wild animals ([Carrington, 2020](#)).<sup>1</sup> ‘We are the virus’, some argue, pointing out some positive environmental impacts of the pandemic as our economy has been put on hold ([Garcia, 2020](#)). ‘The planet is better off now’, others add,

posting pictures of animals that have supposedly come back in cities, although many of these claims remain unverified ([Daly, 2020](#)). Such remarks are reviving the ‘dark side’ of neo-Malthusian<sup>2</sup>environmentalist ideology, which shrugs off the human suffering as long as the environment benefits from it.

Of course, no one can argue against the disastrous environmental footprints of human interventions. The time has truly come for us to drastically change the ways in which our societies and economies should function – finally being held accountable for the catastrophic impacts that the maintenance of our ‘status quo’ has produced. When Anthropocene knocks on our door with its invisible legions – through the molecules in the air we breathe, the water we drink and the surfaces we touch – it becomes clear that there is not much time left for a ‘radical shift’ in restructuring our relationship with nature.

While many people agree with this urgent need for a more dramatic path to redemption, what’s concerning in this discourse on ‘human guilt’ is its critical attitude towards affirmative environment politics. Affirmative politics in the Anthropocene have been proposed by ‘more-than-human’ ecology writers and philosophers ([Bargués-Pedreny and Schmidt, 2019](#); [Bignall and Braidotti, 2019](#); [Braidotti, 2017](#); [Chandler, 2019](#); [Tsing, 2015](#)). These authors suggest a more hopeful approach to navigating the climate crisis, as an alternative to wallowing in despair. They emphasise the element of uncertainty and complexity in today’s challenges. We simply do not know, at this present moment in time, what will actually happen in the future. In this perspective, the definitive claim of ‘apocalypse is coming’ is no different from the modernist assertion of ‘we can fix everything’, because in both accounts, we are *too sure* of our present knowledge (which can easily be challenged by future dynamics to come). When we embrace uncertainty as a part of living reality, we might find more pragmatic possibilities for actions that are possible here and now.<sup>3</sup> According to this vein of thoughts, humans could still reunite on the basis of hope and a shared understanding that we all are material beings inevitably interdependent on one another – and that we can, as collectives, weather through crises *together*. An extreme take on ‘human guilt’ seems to smirk at such idea of hope, implying that we have now reached an infinite impasse, between ‘withdrawal’ and ‘affirmation’ of humanist ethics in this eco-apocalyptic world.<sup>4</sup>

Providing a trenchant critique on the status quo of the world is indeed the main job of academia. At the same time, I am afraid of how often some critical scholars are *too sure* that the extractive logics of today's world would surely prevail, leaving us no room for continuing to hope for and imagine a better future. Should we be robbed of our rights to remain hopeful and projective just because we exist in a world ruled by capitalism? Hundreds of thousands of babies are brought into this world every day without their choice. Are we telling them, in any way, that they should not have existed in the first place, as our human existence itself is 'guilty' of the consequences it brings to other species? To be honest, in the midst of this health crisis where our friends and families are at the risk of losing their lives, losing their jobs and forced eviction from homes, the idea of 'making kin' with nonhuman species does not attract passion, because in the end, we all are, only human.

Especially for the urban planning discipline, which is fundamentally based on the projective spirit of making our communities a better place, this robbing of our agency feels particularly brutal. Negating a future, or the potential of collective human agency in crafting a better future, is *not* an option for planning theorists and practitioners. Even when we talk about the implications of 'more-than-human' ecology ([Beauregard, 2015](#); [Houston et al., 2018](#); [Jon, 2020a](#)), what we are truly interested in is how the practice of planning – which is, ultimately, human action – can project a more sustainable, co-constitutive human/nature relationship. Although the planning discipline can embrace the fact that we should now act in concert with the agencies of nonhumans,<sup>5</sup> the inescapable reality is that our experiences, thought processes and, therefore, the logics behind the way we exercise agency are confined to our human body and the material conditions that sustain it ([Lake, 2017](#)).

In this manifesto for planning in the post-COVID-19 world, I would like to talk about what the coronavirus reveals to us, particularly to planning theorists and practitioners for whom the possibility of collective human agency is an indispensable baseline. *How can we carefully reposition 'human intervention' in the aftermath of this 'human guilt', without nullifying the hopeful spirit and our belief in the power of planning?* In other words, how can we still aspire to more affirmative environment planning, which would not only propose a more inclusive future for human societies but also be respectful of nonhuman species and agencies that have been on this Earth long before us? Here, I present four threads of thoughts on what the coronavirus inspires planning to become.

*Towards planning that practices the 'veil of ignorance'*

The unpredictability and uncontrollability of the virus that seep through our everyday life – literally like the Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of a 'poison that spreads through [one's] body' or a 'drop of wine [that] falls into water' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 86) – press us to put the 'veil of ignorance' into practice. Rawl's 'veil of ignorance' asks us to return to our 'original position' *prior to* our artificial categorisations (e.g. race, gender, culture) or the accidental socioeconomic status, talents and abilities that we happen to be born with.<sup>6</sup> If we can partake in policy decisions *without* knowing anything about what social class or capacities each of us are to have – assuming anyone could be subject to marginalised social conditions – we would all be committed to creating a society that takes care of the weak. The climate crisis or the global health crisis, whose abruptness and ungovernability often catch us off-guard, urges each of us to recognise the shared human vulnerability. And with our collective will, we could turn this recognition into a moment to practice the veil of ignorance at a societal level.

The virus is completely oblivious of the artificial categories that people often use to exercise exclusive politics. Perhaps, that is why it may also trigger more inclusive politics that brings us back to the fundamentals of what it means to be human. In fact, the political power of COVID-19 has become evident. With the effective seizure of the global economy, different national governments are now considering the deployment of universal income and other progressive policies to reinstate basic human rights – which we often neglect during the 'ordinary' days of maintaining the capitalist status quo. As Rutenberg (2020: A10) reports, It was only a few weeks ago that centrist Democrats were openly fretting that Senator Bernie Sanders's Medicare for All plan and Andrew Yang's call for a universal basic income would hurt the entire party with swing voters by feeding the Republicans' 'socialism' theme. Now, with the swift bipartisan passage of the \$2 trillion stimulus, perhaps only the first of its kind, those fears are subsiding. 'It makes it harder to label your opponent a socialist', said Howard Wolfson, a top strategist for former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York, who ended his presidential bid last month.

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With a 'Yangwasright' hashtag trending on Twitter, a Marquette University Law School poll of Wisconsin voters found nearly 80 percent generally approved of the government's direct payments to individuals.

With universal income now becoming more widely accepted as a viable policy agenda – as compared to the mainstream politics’ dismissal of it as a ‘socialist’ turn<sup>7</sup> – *can cities also harness this new condition as a momentum to validate and proclaim the importance of creating more inclusive and just urban futures?* Crisis moments often reveal the existing cracks in the system more effectively so than any other events. Cape Town’s ‘Day Zero’ water crisis in 2018 laid bare the kinds of everyday conditions that mushrooming settlement communities have been going through even before the water crisis, which only became visible because water scarcity started affecting everyone in the city. As Rodina (2019) asks,

Is it possible that the experience of wealthier communities in having to live on 50L per person per day (for those that did try) will engender the sense of empathy and deeper acknowledgement of the water inequality that is otherwise often unseen? (p. 4)

As such, the coronavirus may help our *collective consciousness* to practice the veil of ignorance in a more tangible and real-time way. The media coverage of the current crisis is definitely conjuring ‘the mood’ in our society to think more progressively about social welfare systems and safety nets (Levin, 2020). As ‘quarantining’ or ‘staying home’ becomes the social norm or even a moral obligation to protect oneself and others, what becomes clear is the brutality of today’s unequal world that normalises the existence of houseless populations. Recently, in attempts to slow the spread of COVID-19, cities in Australia (Perth, Adelaide) and around the world (New Orleans, San Antonio, Philadelphia in the United States, Paris and Lille in France) have embarked on providing emergency accommodations to houseless peoples by utilising existing vacancies in hotels. In response to that, advocates argued how such government’s swift move testifies to the fact that ‘homelessness is not the intractable social problem many believe it to be – and governments have the power to make an immediate impact’ (Siebert, 2020). Can this health crisis serve as an impetus to reaffirm cities’ commitment to ensuring the basic human rights of their people, starting from providing safe shelter for all? I certainly hope so.

### *Towards planning of care I – within our (human) kin*

The coronavirus presents us with an occasion for planning to more sincerely engage with care ethics and the politics of care. The virus instigates new conversations on the *fragility* of individuals and our material interdependency on one another. It tangibly reminds us of the

fact that our own well-being can never be independent from that of others; your privileged position may grant your own health care coverage, but unless *everyone* has equal access to health care, you will never be free from the risk of contracting the virus. This circular aspect of the virus has been particularly well-exhibited in Singapore, where a lack of care for migrant workers (living in cramped dormitories) has begun to directly affect the lives of the most affluent (Beech, 2020; Griffiths, 2020).<sup>8</sup> As Edgar Morin (2020), a French philosopher and sociologist, eloquently states,

The virus reveals to us what was hidden in the compartmentalised minds formed in our education systems, dominant minds in the techno-economic-financial elites: the complexity of our human world in the interdependence and the intersolidarity of the sanitary, the economic, the social, and all that is human and planetary. This interdependence manifests itself through innumerable interactions and feedbacks between the various components of societies and individuals. . . The virus tells us that this interdependence should stir up human solidarity in the awareness of our collective destiny. (p. 23)

Similarly, care ethics (Lawson, 2007; Tronto, 1993, 1995, 2005) challenge the neoliberal discourse on individualism and its overestimation of self-sufficiency by compelling each of us to recognise the weakness in ourselves. Their point of entry is embracing the vulnerabilities that we all share as individuals, communities, cities, countries or as humans entirely. This leads us to think about our interdependency and mutual responsibilities with one another – my action, my possession and my privilege can have consequences to you, and yours to me (Butler, 2004). As Michael Brown (2003) notes,

Foremost [starting point to recognize care in the world] is a rejection of the assumption of autonomy for the political subject. We must recognize the interdependence of people throughout their social worlds. In other words, dependency or heteronomy is more often the norm than autonomy. Akin to this point is the argument that, whether emotion or action, care is always already a social relation. (p. 835)

By shattering the myth of ‘individual autonomy’, care ethics shed light on how ‘poverty’ is *not* ‘a self-contained problem that can only be managed through the reform of flawed individuals’ (Lawson and Elwood, 2013: 211). Rather, poverty is a relative positionality that arises out of systemic political-economic relations (Lawson, 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic renews the relevance of care ethics which highlight the *relational condition* of human existence. Although the virus has helped us realise our shared vulnerability as mortal

human bodies, the actual health impacts of the virus have been highly discriminatory. Minority communities are bearing the brunt of the virus due to pre-existing health conditions caused by chronic societal inequities (Booth, 2020; Butcher and Massey, 2020; Croxford, 2020; Eligon et al., 2020; Fansten and Laïreche, 2020; Mays and Newman, 2020; Wallace-Wells, 2020). Having asthma may be positively correlated with living in areas with high air pollution (e.g. suburbs near highways); obesity could often be a result of a lack of access to affordable good nutrition; and one's overall health can be significantly influenced by whether they can take sick days without losing income or their health insurance. But these pandemic conditions also elucidate something else: the callous reality of how my everyday privilege affects your everyday risk of contracting the virus.

You might be confined to your home, but who do you think is picking the produce you still enjoy at dinner and unpacking the latest shipment at your local pharmacy? Who is working in all those nursing homes? Who is driving the buses and garbage trucks? (Norris, 2020: A21)

People may have different philosophies and viewpoints surrounding 'the way the world works'. But if one pays a little more attention to their everyday encounters and experiences of urban life (e.g. streets and neighbourhoods characterised by socioeconomic disparities), one can easily be reminded of the omnipresence of inequality that our current system produces. However, we have consciously or subconsciously chosen to disengage with these thoughts, until eventually, many of us have become so numb to inequities. *The coronavirus tears down the status quo of numbness; it makes our bodies appear at the centre of politics/policy making.*<sup>2</sup> In the midst of this pandemic, most now agree, more unequivocally so than at other times, how much society relies on the services of people working in grocery/food provision, the delivery/transportation sectors and electricity, water and waste-management operations. This certainly points to a shared responsibility to care for essential workers to whom we owe our health and our access to the conveniences of modern life. This responsibility becomes more evident and tangible in the context of neighbourhoods, local districts and cities where these everyday transactions and the movement of goods are a palpable reality, rather than an abstract illustration of facts and figures.

What would cities steered by care ethics look like? Above all, cities and local governments should actively look out for the needs of community members who are falling

through the cracks of the existing system (Jon, 2020b: 18). In fact, this is profoundly intertwined with assuring the continuity of *city functions*. The poor and vulnerable are more likely to be at the front line of city operations:

75 percent of front-line workers in the city [of New York] – grocery clerks, bus and train operators, janitors and child care staff – are minorities. More than 60 percent of people who work as cleaners are Latino, and more than 40 percent of transit employees are black. (Mays and Newman, 2020: A16)

The situation in other cities is not too different from this landscape. In today's era of a globalised economy and workforce, the very metabolism of cities is often powered by immigrant and other minority workers (Del Real, 2020). In this context, a 'caring' city would mobilise its political power and resources to especially assist those whose rights and interests are not being represented by the dominant system (e.g. the national government policies). In Chicago, where immigrants make up more than one-fifth of the population (City of Chicago, 2018), Mayor Lori Lightfoot signed an executive order to ensure that refugee and immigrant communities have equal access to the city benefits and services, including COVID-19 special housing grants and economic assistance programmes (City of Chicago, 2020). In Melbourne, which is home to 200,000 overseas students, city councillors put together a city-wide motion to provide financial and career support to international students who have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging the fact that the city *relies upon* the labour and economic vibrancy injected into it by the students, on 8 April 2020, the Melbourne City Council became the first local government in Australia to pledge financial support for international students as they are not eligible for government welfare (Topsfield, 2020).<sup>10</sup> If this health crisis can remind us of how one's individual well-being is intricately coalesced with the well-being of 'the other', perhaps it also suggests an opportunity for cities and neighbourhoods to further care for and support those who are marginalised. Caring for the other can become a more achievable project in localised politics (such as that of cities), where our interdependency on one another feels more evident (as compared to national-scale politics).

### *Towards planning of care II – extending our care to 'other' beings*

The Anthropocene moments, such as extreme weather events or the global health crisis, constantly remind us that we humans are often not in complete control of our own destiny.

Such renewed sense of our vulnerability (as beings confined to human bodies) can be extended to recognising our entanglements or the co-destiny that we share with other material beings. As Karen Barad (2007) notes,

Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish. Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. (p. 306)

Such an understanding can inspire the kinds of planning approaches that respect the agency of nonhumans. Those approaches can include respecting the original paths of waterways (instead of trying to control them), or weaving through human–nature relationships via more sustainable urban utility configurations. Indeed, at this moment in time where we are now proclaiming ‘a war against virus’, with thousands of our own kin withering away helplessly conquered by COVID-19, it may be a bit too early to think beyond the destiny of our own species. However, the fact that we can so easily be submitted to these micro-beings effectively leaves us in awe of the power of any ‘being’ that proves its existence through formless functioning.

In addition to extreme climate events, the coronavirus helps us formulate a collective dialogue around the limits of the ‘soul-full’ will of human agency, as well as the fragility of our dependency on our nonhuman surroundings. This realisation has the capacity to bring forward the pro-environmental initiatives that are not just for the sake of ‘nature’, but also for the sake of our own survival. Since after all, ‘the life that is worth preserving, even when considered exclusively human, is connected to nonhuman life in essential ways’ (Butler, 2011). Inspired by the pioneering works of other planning theorists (Hillier, 2015; Houston et al., 2018; Metzger, 2016), I have argued elsewhere (Jon, 2020a) how acknowledging our material dependency on nature directs us to engage with a more radical environment planning agenda. Such agenda not only considers nonhuman species as minority voices/positionings that require advocacy work, but also activates political mobilisation based on our empirical experience of the consequences of the climate crisis.

However, I would like to newly propose here that the affirmative environment politics and planning may not *have to* draw its motivations from ‘the world is ending’ discourse.

From where I stand, acknowledging our utter reliance on nature (for our bodily survival) is different from a nihilistic account on human agency. The former can still project our continuing interaction and on-going relationship with nature (see the next section for my use of Dewey's work on that regard), while the latter boastfully rejects any kind of possibility in the unknown of what is to come.<sup>11</sup> While the apocalyptic discourse can trigger an instant response driven by fear and panic, the prolongation of this logic can exude an almost anti-human ('make not babies[?]'<sup>12</sup>) nuance that negates the very existence of us. This could potentially lead to a dangerous sentiment that disregards our love and relational ties that are undeniably deeper within our own (human) kin, if it ever proposes the idea that some human lives are expendable in the support of 'the way nature works'. We do not know, and perhaps we will never know, why we are here in the first place. Condemning us for trying to sustain our bodily needs – or different kinds of aspirations that we possess as beings subjected to bodily needs – is not only cruel, it is also a heartless denial of the rights of our future generation that will arrive on this Earth without having chosen to be born. Hence, what I propose here as 'planning of care II', which is essentially about environment planning that recognises our dependency on nonhuman surroundings, wishes to be articulated within our intentional efforts to devise a more sustainable, co-constitutive relationship with nature. This would only be possible within our underlying belief in human agency and the kinds of differences we can make together as collectives with a shared destiny in sight.

*The end of urban density? Rethinking and rebuilding the relationship between nature and human intervention*

While there have been encouraging debates on considering this global health crisis as a springboard to garner wider attention to the global climate crisis ([Latour, 2020a](#), [2020b](#)), there have also been reactions where environmental issues are being further put on the back burner in the name of 'economic development' ([Erlanger, 2020](#)).<sup>13</sup> In fact, some of today's politicians may utilise this moment to return to reinstating the car-driven urban form and infrastructure:

What I want to do is two things: real infrastructure, not a green new deal, you know, the carbon footprint. I'm not looking for the carbon footprint, we want to put people to work. . . We want to have an infrastructure bill, a real one, like, in the vicinity of two trillion dollars to completely rebuild our roads, our bridges, our highways, our tunnels, everything.<sup>14</sup>

Such a benighted turn would fundamentally negate and permanently damage the history of what New Urbanism movements have achieved since the 1970s. New Urbanism made a successful articulation on the economic and environmental benefits of walkable, pedestrian/bike-friendly cities where people's mobility is no longer impaired by their access to private vehicles (Ellis, 2002).

In the world of post-COVID-19, would cities need to choose between 'sustainability' and 'economic development'?<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the coronavirus inflicts on us a culture of social distancing. In this 'new normal' condition, would sustainable development's anthem of 'urban density' suddenly become obsolete?

These questions urge us to rethink and rebuild the relationship between 'nature' and 'human intervention'. Dewey (1925: 204–206), in his work *Experience and Nature*, criticised 'pure' scientists' objectification of 'nature' – by highlighting how nature and our intellectual process of creating knowledge are deeply intertwined with one another. Dewey suggested that we should consider nature as a continuously evolving, breathing body-entity that is always in conversation with (and will never be ultimately captured/controlled by) humans' efforts to generate intellectual knowledge. Darkness calls for light, and deficiency breeds the desire for invention (Dewey, 1925: 163). The 'organic' quality of nature and the resulting uncertainty or ungraspability of its functions is what eventually drives us to interact with the natural world. As Dewey (1925) states, 'Without the uniformities, science would be impossible. But if they alone existed, thought and knowledge would be impossible and meaningless. The incomplete and uncertain gives point and application to ascertainment of regular relations and orders' (p. 206).

Hence, according to Dewey (1925), the 'application' of knowledge – or devising human interventions based on our learning – is not application 'to', but application 'in' the process of the on-going relationship between nature and human's understanding/appropriation of it. In other words, any kind of human intervention is never a finite solution that dissolves our relationship with nature once and for all (as in we 'conquered' nature). Rather, it is always engaged in a constant cycle of giving and receiving feedback to/from nature. In short, we might study nature and implement interventions according to our needs, but we are ultimately a part of nature *with whom* we are constantly in

the mode of interacting (Aren't we breathing air in and out at this very moment?). If we did something wrong, and nature sent us signals that there was something wrong, it is only natural that we *respond* to that feedback.

In fact, cultivating such 'response'-ability to our surroundings is located at the heart of care ethics. Care is 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web' (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40). If it has become clear, thanks to our zealous quest for knowledge, that the kinds of interventions that we have been making – especially since the Industrial Revolution – have caused significant damage to the environmental systems,<sup>16</sup>it is very 'human' to have the desire to collectively remedy that damage. We do not defend nature; we are nature that protects itself.<sup>17</sup>

This was a long way of saying that pursuing 'environmental friendliness' is not opposed to, or in competition with, the betterment of human conditions, which are often represented by or measured through economic development. The inseparable destiny that we have always shared (and will always share) with nature throughout the history of human civilisation, I believe, would guide us towards inventing new and creative ways to care for the future health of environmental systems. Taking a cue from Turner's (2000, 2007) work on how built environments are the 'extended organisms' of how our bodies function and strive to adapt in the given climate, Downton (2008) argues that cities should also be considered our 'adaptive modification' of the environment at the (human) species level – which is subject to its surrounding conditions rendered by the feedback from nature:

The way we envision, design, and fabricate our built environment can be theorised as our efforts to survive and extend our physiology as human species; then, it is logical to derive a conclusion that cities and architecture should be sensitive and responsive to the feedback from nature. (p. 370)

Like the intensity of bushfire and smoke haze in 2020 that finally triggered more heightened action on climate crisis in Australia, or the Cuyahoga fire in 1969 in Cleveland that catalysed nationwide environmental activism in the United States, it is only natural that we protect what we are part of; it is now time to embrace that of our 'true nature'. Take Amsterdam, for example: in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the city is presenting new plans to halve

material use by 2030 and achieve a full circular economy by 2050. Fully embracing the fact that there are not only environmental but also economic costs to a 'disposable society' (e.g. it will become costlier to export waste to China, for instance), the city aims to start looking at its economy 'in a fundamentally different way, examining how we consume, produce and process materials' (Pieters, 2020). Amsterdam's initiative professes how it is a logical or 'life-saving' choice that we produce food and energy closer to the places we inhabit, lowering our energy consumption and predation on ecosystem resources – which will eventually render them more resilient in the face of catastrophic events.

Thinking this way, I do not believe that, in the post-COVID-19 world, cities would disdain their half-century-long commitment to creating more walkable, pedestrian-friendly and compact urban spaces that function in a way that reduces our carbon footprints. Density *can* be a problem in times of a pandemic, *but* it also proposes a solution in such a crisis. In my neighbourhood in Melbourne, and other neighbourhoods in cities all around the world, there has been an increase in mutual help and care networks through free grocery deliveries and reaching out to those in need. If we all lived far apart from one another, the spread of the virus might have been slower, but the vulnerable could have been left even more vulnerable with total social invisibility, isolation and abandonment (Badger, 2020). The question is *not* whether urban density itself is valuable; rather, each city should ask themselves *what degree of density* would be adequate for each of their local contexts, taking account of different considerations including the anticipation of future pandemics or other abrupt environmental hazards. In doing so, however, the social values of the community should permeate through every path it takes, which ultimately depends on the historical and cultural software of the concerned neighbourhood/district.

What the coronavirus crisis tells us is *not* the need to return to the car-dependent urban form, but the need to ask ourselves what we truly value, what we are willing to preserve and what we are willing to forgo. That can include enhanced appreciation of our access to urban oases/public green spaces *or* further support for local businesses (groceries/eateries) that communities can count on in times of crisis. In the end, the coronavirus asks us to engage in collective dialogues and efforts to decide what is indispensably essential to us, not only with regard to our short-term survival but also with regard to our long-term vision of concocting sustainable urban landscapes in the era of Anthropocene.

### *Concluding thoughts*

Personally, as an academic who has been working mostly in the space of environment planning, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an influence on my research agenda. If the pre-coronavirus version of me has proudly claimed that we can, with the power of our logical thinking and imagination, make ‘kin’ with the nonhuman other, the post-coronavirus version of me admits the limits of our spirit confined to a human body – which, in its default setting, dictates how we feel, how we move and how we act. In that sense, the coronavirus, which quietly whispers in our ears that humans are in no way invincible, brings us down to the world of materiality where we have to succumb to our bodily needs. At the same time, however, it also triggers our outpouring of empathy towards ‘the other’ – as we witness the power of a virus that transcends all artificial categories. In fact, this renewed sense of shared vulnerability and intersolidarity – the palpable feeling of self-*insufficiency* that ‘I’ cannot exist without ‘you’ – can offer an occasion to actualise perhaps the most progressive version of planning that we have long been waiting. Such initiative can entail: (1) inclusive planning that exercises the veil of ignorance, (2) planning of care that chases out neoliberal individualism and, in the long-term, (3) another version of planning of care that redirects human interventions to become kinder to the nonhuman others with whom we also share our destiny on this planet. In pursuing these agendas, post-COVID-19 planning would need to (4) rethink and rebuild the relationship between nature and human interventions through collective questioning of what’s most essential and valuable to each of our local communities. What the coronavirus reveals to us, in the end, is that we are all too human. But what makes us human – that is, our physical vulnerability as material beings as well as our belief in collective agency – seems to be what will enable more inclusive, just *and* ecologically conscious cities that we hope to pledge to the next generation.

### Footnotes

1.

Indeed, this ‘guilt’ should not be deemed to befall equally on everyone, since some entities (e.g. large corporations or government leaders who have been ignoring the long-term

socioeconomic costs of environmental degradation) and territories (e.g. the countries classified as the Global North) should be held more accountable than the others.

2.

Neo-Malthusian environmentalist ideology is a resurgence of the Malthusian thesis proposed in the 18th century, which argued that population increase would need to be checked by disasters (such as disease, war or famine) for the sustainability of our planet's environmental functions. Today, this thesis is used to highlight the resource scarcity aspect of the current climate crisis. However, there are multiple layers of ethical concerns on the logic of such thinking, as it may lead to considering some human lives to be expendable for the betterment of nature or to urging people not to have children.

3.

Schmidt (2015) draws from Deweyan pragmatism in attempts to dissect the origin of more hopeful framing of human agency in responding to climate change. In the ontological space of pragmatism that considers life as a continuous cycle of experiencing and learning, one can finally move from the neoliberal impasse of 'never getting it right' to the pragmatic strategy of 'always having to adapt' (Schmidt, 2015: 416). See also Wills and Lake (2020): 3-51) for the wisdom of pragmatism that not only provides guidance for dealing with uncertainty, but also views uncertainty as a possibility for our continuous trial and improvement.

4.

While there has not been a peer-reviewed publication on such extreme take on 'human guilt' (that dismisses affirmative environment politics), some similar discussions have been undertaken in academic blog postings (See Pospisil, 2020).

5.

For example, buildings, technological gadgets, rivers, the weather.

6.

I acknowledge that there has been a long tradition of planning theorists' engaging with Rawls's veil of ignorance thesis – see Roy (2001), Moroni (2004) and Stein and Harper (2005). In this piece, I step aside from the existing debates on the empirical viability of Rawlsian ethics in planning. Here, my focus is to elucidate how this unprecedented global health crisis may provide an opportunity for us to think more favourably of social welfare and safety nets – inspiring cities to normalise their social justice agenda in a way that garners more extensive support from the public.

7.

See also [Tharoor \(2020\)](#), who notes: ‘Once seen as a fringe theory, universal basic income is now picking up steam’ (p. A13).

8.

As [Beech \(2020\)](#) reports:

Packed with up to 20 laborers in a single stifling room, these foreign-worker dormitories have been the sites of previous outbreaks of disease, like tuberculosis. Residents complain of insect infestations and plumbing woes. Three workers said their rooms had not been disinfected in the wake of the coronavirus, despite promises that conditions would improve.

(p. A5)

9.

Here, I am proposing that this contagious disease is making the physical chains of our existence (as mortal bodies) ever more visible/discernible – to the extent where we can no longer ignore the sacrifices being made by essential workers (whose bodies are placed at the risk of disappearing, much more so than the bodies of those who get to benefit from their service).

10.

It is worth noting that Scott Morrison, the current Prime Minister of Australia, has used deeply problematic rhetoric in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis against international students and temporary working-visa holders, all of whom significantly contribute to the Australian economy. On 3 April 2020, arguing that Australia now needs to spend its resources only on its citizens/residents, the prime minister stated, ‘If you’re a visitor in this country, it is time, as it has been now for a while, and I know many visitors have, to make your way home’. In response, on 7 April 2020, the Melbourne City Council voted in favour of the city’s active advocacy for international students. One of the city councillors asserts that ‘contrary to reports from other levels of government, not only do we welcome international students to our city, but we hope that they remain here with us in our comparatively safe country during these dangerous times’ (see [Topsfield, 2020](#)).

11.

See [Solnit \(2016\)](#) for her cogent articulation of why ‘hope is an embrace of the unknown’.

12.

This rhetoric originates from [Haraway’s \(2015, 2016\)](#) work, which proposes ‘make kin, not babies!’ as a new mode of human existence in facing the era of Anthropocene. Although Haraway’s work has been hopeful and affirmative at its core, which has been an anchoring inspiration for feminist geography/ecopolitics, this particular slogan remains

controversial. Hester (2018: 59), in her work *Xenofeminism*, posits her concerns about such a proposition on the grounds that it is often a first-world-driven sentiment that disregards the history of colonialist violence (or coercive histories of population management as well as racist practices of sterilisation/population control). Quoting Lewis (2017), Hester notes, Even ‘if universal flourishing is easier to imagine when fewer humans are in the picture, desiring fewer humans is a terrible starting-point for any politics that hopes to include, let alone centre, those of us for whom making babies has often represented a real form of resistance’.

13.

It has been reported that the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, has rolled back some of its major environmental regulations, including clean car rules (e.g. fuel efficiency rules) that aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (*The Washington Post*, 2020). The main rationale behind the rollback concerned the US car manufacturers’ competitiveness against foreign manufacturers. Erlanger (2020: 8) also reports the re-emergence of die-hard industrialists (in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic), who argue that economic recovery should become the priority above all things and that the implementation of stricter environmental regulations should be postponed.

14.

This comment was made by the current US president, Donald J. Trump, during the Coronavirus Task Force Media Briefing at the White house (on 6 April 2020, 5 p.m. EDT) in response to a reporter’s question about the need for a fourth coronavirus relief package bill.

15.

This would be a giant step back from the recent mainstreamisation of sustainability, where we finally thought that the capitalist capturing of green agenda (e.g. ‘green washing’) is the new problem (as opposed to the problem of green agendas being completely rejected by economic development discourses).

16.

Such significant damage to the environment systems is no longer merely the matters of the environment, since it can also perturb our own socioeconomic functioning (via climate irregularities, fires, epidemics).

17.

This is a slogan of the Zadist (in French, *Zadiste*) movement, led by militant environment groups in France occupying *ZAD* (*zone à défendre*, translated as the ‘zone to defend’ – areas

of ecological importance) to oppose a proposed development that would damage the environment.

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