

# Facing the Anthropocene with Alexander von Humboldt's Views of Nature

*Colloquium to celebrate Alexander von Humboldt's 250th anniversary at the University of Victoria  
Friday, Sept 13th & Saturday, Sept 14th  
Lecture Theatre 105 / Harry Hickman Building*

It is daily becoming increasingly evident that our societies urgently need to confront the challenges posed by the Anthropocene by putting to work all the sophistication that our civilizations can bring to bear. This Colloquium envisages the occasion of Alexander von Humboldt's 250th anniversary as an opportunity to bring together scholars who can mobilize methodological insights arising from his approach to research and help to motivate our academic community at the University of Victoria in the endeavour to face the Anthropocene together with our students.

Alexander von Humboldt's life's work and his approach to research constitute a magnificent opportunity to celebrate the essence of the idea of the 'university' as a confluence and inter-lacing of research strands and disciplinary approaches. This 250th anniversary of von Humboldt's birth may serve the community of faculty and students at the University of Victoria as an occasion to re-envisage ways of teaching and researching in increasingly cross- and trans-disciplinary ways, thereby advancing research excellence and impact.

This celebration will also support UVic's commitment to community-based engagement by following von Humboldt's example of grounding research in local knowledge and making research results accessible to the broader public. Ultimately, von Humboldt's insistence in supplementing laboratory work with travel to sites that would allow him to directly engage with local phenomena and diverse people and institutions constitutes a great example of experiential learning.

Foremost among von Humboldt's outstanding achievements is his demonstration of the integration of the sciences, ranging from geology and botany to anthropology and political science. His endeavour was guided by a sophisticated measurement-driven empiricism aligned with the principles of 18th century Enlightenment, transformed by the personal, experiential engagement called for by German Romanticism. Alexander von Humboldt is credited with the invention of physical geography and ecology because he amply demonstrated the value of viewing natural phenomena as inter-acting, inter-dependent wholes. His observations concerning the possible contributions of human action in generating local climatic changes, and consequent transformations in ecological functioning, moreover, anticipate contemporary conclusions regarding anthropogenic climate change.



# Colloquium Programme

Lecture Theatre 105 / Harry Hickman Building

## Friday, 13 September

**19:00-19:30** | *INTRODUCTION, OPENING REMARKS, FIRST NATIONS WELCOME*

Introduction: **Thomas Heyd**, Philosophy

Opening remarks: **Chris Goto-Jones**, Dean of Humanities

First Nations welcome by Knowledge Keeper

**19:30-20:15** | *ON HUMBOLDT'S PLANET: COSMOS, GAIA, AND THE COMING OF THE ANTHROPOCENE*

Lansdowne Speaker **Prof. Laura Dassow Walls**, Graduate Program in History and Philosophy of Science, Notre Dame University, USA

**20:15-20:30** | Questions from the floor

**20:30-21:30** | Reception

**21:30** | Closing

## Saturday, 14 September

**8:30-9:00** | Coffee

**9:00-9:15** | *FURTHER WORDS OF WELCOME*

**Michael Masson**, Associate Vice President Research

**Rosaline Canessa**, Acting Dean of Social Sciences

**9:15-9:45** | *FACING NO-ANALOGUE EARTH: A HUMBOLDTIAN PROGRAMME FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE*

**Prof. Wolfgang Lucht**, Potsdam Institute for Climate Change (PIK), and Humboldt University Berlin, Germany

**9:45-10:00** | Questions from the floor

**10:00-10:30** | Coffee break

**10:30-11:00** | *HUMBOLDT AND THE ANTHROPOCENE: A BOTANICAL PERSPECTIVE*

**Asst. Prof. Naia Morueta-Holme**, Center of Macroecology, Evolution and Climate, GLOBE Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

**11:00-11:15** | Questions from the floor



**11:15-12:00** | *HUMBOLDT AND HIS TIME: BOOKS FROM SPECIAL COLLECTIONS*

Guided Visit by **Lara Wilson**, Director Special Collections & University Archivist

ATTENTION: The display is in Special Collections & University Archives, Lower Level, Mearns Centre for Learning/McPherson Library (Room A005)

**12:00-13:00** | Lunch break

**13:00-14:00** | *HUMBOLDT AND THE INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE*

Moderator: **Oliver Schmidtke**, Centre for Global Studies

- **Jason Colby**, History: “Integration of science and humanist research”
- **Eric Hochstein**, Philosophy: “Humboldt and Philosophy of Science”
- **Elena Pnevmonidou**, Germanic and Slavic Studies: “Humboldt and the transformative power of literature”
- **Jutta Gutberlet**, Geography: “The need for transdisciplinarity and Humboldt’s approach to Geography in addressing research on global change and the Anthropocene”

**14:00-14:30** | Questions from the floor

**14:30-15:00** | Coffee break

**15:00-16:00** | *HUMBOLDT’S LEGACY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE*

Moderator: **Astrid Brousselle**, Faculty of Public Administration

- **Trevor Hancock**, Uvic in the Anthropocene / Public Health: “Humboldt, planetary health and the Anthropocene”
- **Kristy Faccor**, Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS): “Seeking Solutions in the Anthropocene: the Role of Engaged Research”
- **Johan Feddema**, Geography: “Perspectives on future directions in the Anthropocene”
- **Nick Claxton**, School of Child and Youth Care, “Indigenous knowledges and the Anthropocene”

**16:00-16:30** | Questions from the floor

**16:30-17:00** | Closing

**BOTH THE LANSDOWNE LECTURE AND THE OTHER COLLOQUIUM EVENTS ARE  
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**



## **Please register with EventBrite:**

For the Lansdowne Lecture on Friday:

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/on-humboldts-planet-cosmos-gaia-and-the-coming-of-the-anthropocene-tickets-70022979617>

For the remainder of the Colloquium:

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/facing-the-anthropocene-with-alexander-von-humboldts-views-of-nature-tickets-69957744497?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

## **Territorial Acknowledgement**

We respectfully acknowledge that this event takes place on the traditional territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples.

## **Acknowledgement of contributions**

We are grateful for the financial and other support of the Faculty of Humanities, the Vice President Research, the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS), the Department of Geography, the Department of Philosophy, the School of Environmental Studies, the Centre for Global Studies, and the Faculty of Public Administration. We are also would like to thank the staff of the Faculty of Humanities, the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Geography for their help, as well as the Uvic in the Anthropocene group, Conversations for a One Planet Region, and all speakers and participants.



*Voyage of Humboldt and Bonpland, Chimborazo seen from the Tapia Plateau by Jean-Thomas Thibaut*



## Keynote speakers

Laura Dassow Walls



Wolfgang Lucht



Naia Morueta-Holme



**Prof. Laura Dassow Walls** | <https://tinyurl.com/y3sv5oy9>

William P. and Hazel B. White Professor of English, Graduate Program in History and Philosophy of Science, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA.  
Specialty: American Transcendentalism; literature and science; environmental literature

Professor Walls works in the field of literature and science, with a special concentration on Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and on American Transcendentalism more generally. Her quest to understand 19th-century American literature in its broad political, historical, and philosophical contexts has led to a continuing interest in British and German writers, philosophers, and scientists as well, particularly the German natural scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt.

Publications relating to Humboldt or the Anthropocene:

Her book *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago 2009) traces the Humboldt network from Germany to the Americas in science, politics, literature, and the arts; it earned the Merle Curti Award for intellectual history by the Organization of American Historians, the James Russell Lowell Prize for literary studies by the Modern Language Association, and the Kendrick Prize for literature and science by SLSA, the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts. ...

She is planning a new work, *Earthrise*, on how the 19th-century concept of Earth as a living, self-making planet sent out shock waves that still, in this era of global warming, have not subsided. Her work has been supported by the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the ACLS, the Center for Humans and Nature, and the William P. and Hazel B. White Foundation.

**Prof. Wolfgang Lucht** | <https://tinyurl.com/y4xenlrc>

Co-Chair of PIK (Potsdam Institut for Climate Change) Earth System Analysis; Alexander von Humboldt Chair in Sustainability Science, Institute of Geography, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany; Member of the German Federal Government's Advisory Council on the Environment.

Recent talks related to Humboldt or the Anthropocene:

Lucht, W., "Die Zukunft der Erde - Chaos und Kollaps oder doch Nachhaltigkeit?", lecture in a series at Weesenstein Castle near Dresden, 3 February 2019.

Lucht, W., "Das Anthropozän - Hier bin ich Mensch, hier greif ich ein", Invited opening lecture, Ringvorlesung Nachhaltigkeit, University of Halle, Halle, 10 April 2019.

Lucht, W., "Humboldts revolutionärer Blick auf die Erde: Eine Chance für das Anthropozän", KOSMOS lecture series at Humboldt University Berlin marking the 250th year since birth of Alexander von Humboldt, 25 April 2019.

Papers related to climate change or the Anthropocene:

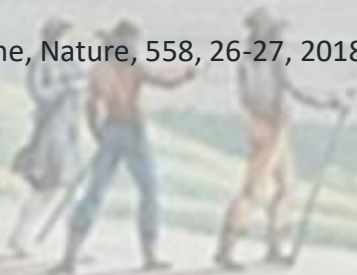
Hagedorn, G., T. Loew, S.I. Seneviratne, W. Lucht, M.-L. Beck, J. Hesse, R. Knutti, V. Quaschnig, J.-H. Schleimer, L. Mattauch, C. Breyer, H. Hübener, G. Kirchengast, A. Chodura, J. Clausen, F. Creutzig, M. Darbi, C.-H. Daub, F. Ekaradt, M. Göpel, J. N. Hardt, J. Hertin, T. Hickler, A. Köhncke, S. Köster, J. Krohmer, H. Kromp-Kolb, R. Leinfelder, L. Mederake, M. Neuhaus, S. Rahmstorf, C. Schmidt, C. Schneider, G. Schneider, R. Seppelt, U. Spindler, M. Springmann, K. Staab, T. Stocker, K. Steininger, E. von Hirschhausen, S. Winter, M. Wittau, J. Zens, The concerns of the young protesters are justified. A statement by Scientists for Future concerning the protests for more climate protection, *GAIA* 28/2, 79-87, 2019.

Heinke, J., C. Müller, M. Lannerstad, D. Gerten, and W. Lucht, Freshwater resources under success and failure of the Paris climate agreement, *Earth System Dynamics*, in press (as of January, 2019).

Ostberg, S., L.R. Boysen, S. Schaphoff, W. Lucht, and D. Gerten, The biosphere under potential Paris outcomes, *Earth's Future*, 5. doi: 10.1002/2017EF000628b, 2018.

Lucht, W., Verwüstung oder Sicherheit: Die Erde im Anthropozän, in: Bertelmann, B., und K. Heide (eds.), *Leben im Anthropozän, Christliche Perspektiven für eine Kultur der Nachhaltigkeit*, oekom Verlag, München, 2018.

Lucht, W., Seeking the Anthropocene, *Nature*, 558, 26-27, 2018.





**Prof. Naia Morueta-Holme** | <https://tinyurl.com/yy6mlr9f>

Macroecologist interested in what drives the diversity and distribution of species, and how environmental changes have and will impact the natural world. Assistant Professor at the Center of Macroecology, Evolution and Climate, GLOBE Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Her research program focuses on Macroecology of the Anthropocene, trying to quantify the impact of humans on the distribution of life on Earth from local to global scales – relative to “natural” processes. Her expectation is that this research will help improve predictions of how nature will respond to environmental change over the next decades. She is very interested in how we can apply this knowledge to decision-making in conservation of biodiversity.

Recent publications related to Humboldt include:

Morueta-Holme N & Svenning J-C., Geography of plants in the New World: Humboldt’s relevance in the age of Big Data, *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* 103: 315-329 (2018).

Morueta-Holme, Naia, Kristine Engemann, Pablo Sandoval-Acuña, Jeremy D. Jonas, R. Max Segnitz, and Jens-Christian Svenning, Strong upslope shifts in Chimborazo's vegetation over two centuries since Humboldt, *PNAS* October 13, 2015 112 (41) 12741-12745.



*View of Cajambe by Pierre Antoine Marchais*