

# 8

## Climate Guardian Angels: Feminist Ecology and the Activist Tradition

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Traces of feminist environmental activism date back to Romanticism but are diverse, intermittent, and less well known than other streams of feminist thought. Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man*, published in 1826, in which the author imagines a catastrophic future blighted by deadly diseases, earthquakes, storms, and floods, all attributable to human neglect, is an early literary intervention into environmental concerns about the future. In the twentieth century, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a book said to have 'substantially altered the course of history', exposed the damaging effects of pesticides, especially DDT, on the biosphere (Griswold 2012). In the 1970s, feminists brought the peace movement together with protection of the environment at two well-known sites: Greenham Common Royal Air Force base in Berkshire, United Kingdom, where women held an anti-nuclear missile activist camp, and at Pine Gap near Alice Springs, Australia, where the Women's Peace Camp of 1983 targeted a US-Australian military installation. Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the

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term ecofeminism in 1974 to describe the feminist ecological project as having two aims: the abolition of patriarchy and the establishment of a relationship with the environment (see Rigby 2001: 27). Australian feminist philosophers Freya Mathews, Val Plumwood, and Ariel Salleh advanced critiques of the unacceptable anthropocentrism and androcentrism of capitalist patriarchal systems in the West. Here traditional feminist exposure of the domination of Women in patriarchal societies extends to the domination of Nature with both having their roots in entrenched cultural practices underpinned by philosophical and theological traditions.

This chapter updates the scholarship on feminist environmentalist activism with a study of the Australian-based Climate Guardians, whose performance-based protests take the form of silent public vigils for a safe climate. Whereas the all-female groups Guerrilla Girls, Pussy Riot, and Femen, for example, are the subjects of studies in activism against the patriarchal basis of art institutions, religion, and neoliberalism (Rosenberg 2016; Diamond et al. 2017), ecofeminist performance remains a minority form of both feminist and environmental activism. The Climate Guardians' stated aim is to place the environment centre stage in the interests of highlighting 'the vital role of guardianship of precious natural resources, both human and non-human, in addressing the global threat from climate change'.<sup>1</sup> The group's activism points to a reinvigorated environmental protest movement that, while attracting mainstream media attention, allows for a type of political 'infecting' that slips around authoritarian obstacles to conventional protest.

Their most compelling strategy of slippage is that this multi-age, volunteer ensemble of women and some men, numbering at times over 100, perform actions dressed as angels. They include cultural feminists, peace and harmony advocates, Greens activists, artists, academic feminists, historians, scientists, psychologists, and teachers in an assemblage of mixed ideologies, occupations, and backgrounds. They intercede in contested environmental spaces and prominent scenes of international climate diplomacy, gathering in mainly outdoor, site-specific spaces to enact techniques of durational passive resistance to climate change inaction. The aim is to create the kind of public spectacle that shames corporations and lawmakers for their ongoing failure to address pending ecological crisis, and incite public criticism. At their blockade of the G20 2014

Leaders' Summit in Brisbane, for example, they declared: 'our Prime Minister turned his back on the future by declaring his loyalty to coal' (ClimActs 2014). Performances might typically end with the arrest of individual angels, captured on film and then circulated as a further call to arms on social media. The Climate Guardians' appropriation of the angel figure and their live presence means they stand out in the modern cityscape and do much to reverse the diminution of women and nature in the public sphere while highlighting human dependence on 'biospheric processes' (Plumwood 2003: 21).

To analyze the Climate Guardians' actions, I turn to Plumwood and Salleh to discuss the radical feminist underpinnings of the Climate Guardians, and the question of woman, nature, and environment, to explore both the symmetry and differences between the feminist and environmentalist movements. The history of the angel as a religious figure raises further questions about harnessing spirituality to address environmental issues endemic to modern life, and for guidance on this matter I turn to Rigby's essay 'Women and Nature Revisited' (1998). From Mathews I consider the ecofeminist elements of the Climate Guardians' performances focusing on their appearances at the United Nations' conference on climate change in Paris in November 2015. I conclude by noting how the Climate Guardians offer a powerful mode of environmental activism based in techniques of silence and presence that express solidarity with human and non-human nature.

## Ecology Environment Nature

Feminists have pointed to the oppressions inherent in binary value systems that divide the human from the non-human, humanity from nature, culture from nature, and man from woman, where the non-human, nature, and woman are tied to each other as secondary terms. As Rigby points out, Simone de Beauvoir argued that 'the association of woman and nature was a key element in patriarchal ideology that served to legitimate women's exclusion from the public sphere and their confinement to the home' (2001: 28). If as feminists argue Woman is a

construct, Nature, as a proper noun, is similarly a construct with a history and a relationship to cultural tradition and knowledge formations.<sup>2</sup> Ariel Salleh's early work drew on the writings of Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich to critique 'the embeddedness of western sex stereotypes in the nature-culture dichotomy' in which Woman is an 'alleged natural being' inferior to and exploited by capitalist life processes (Salleh 1981: 8). In her theoretically masterful book *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* published in 1997, Salleh established a mode of transdisciplinary scholarship that sought to destabilize the Western construct of humanity and nature as separate spheres. In her critique of Marxism and Frankfurt School social theory, she wrote, 'Nature remains the passive, unspoken substrate of theoretical subsumption, an exercise legitimated by the hardheaded patriarchal dichotomies of fact and value, nature and culture' (4). Here nature provided the resources that fueled the Industrial Revolution, but its materiality or agency was not to be recognized until much later. Yet second-wave feminism was at best ambivalent about nature and primarily concerned with women's rights. In her influential book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, first published in 1993, Val Plumwood identified this Marxist and second-wave feminist blind spot when she wrote:

A feminist account of the domination of nature presents an essential but difficult further frontier for feminist theory, all the more testing and controversial because the problematic of nature has been so closely interwoven with that of gender. (2003: 1)

The interweaving of woman and nature as jointly subjugated under capitalism, socialism, and patriarchy found itself caught up in a negative bind in some early accounts of ecofeminism. The following critical proposition is one such example:

Ecofeminism has developed, and continues to focus on developing, a body of complex theory in its attempts to explain and act upon the interconnected subjugations of women, other humans, and nonhuman nature. (Mack Canty 2004: 175)

Plumwood's more enabling solution was to offer an affirmative formulation that opened up a space for ecofeminism within the project of liberation. Here she posits that gender, race, class, and nature are 'the four tectonic plates of liberation theory', which if they acted in unison could 'shake the foundations of our conceptual structures' (2003: 1). For Plumwood, nature is 'a political category' marked by contested values and practices and includes the rights of nature, which was a groundbreaking assertion in the 1980s. On this view, ecofeminism is the movement in which feminists bring their friend nature to the political table.

Since Plumwood's death in 2008, the frameworks for thinking about climate change and its impact on human and non-human life have had to expand to respond to the increasing urgency of critical levels of global warming, rising sea levels, and the increasing frequency and intensity of fatal bush and forest fires, and floods and storms. Science confirms that global warming is the result of anthropogenic greenhouse gas or carbon emissions, the overuse of fossil fuels, and deforestation. But at the political level, inaction on climate change in Australia, as Robyn Eckersley points out, is at a 'political impasse arising from deep political polarization', which puts 'a bipartisan response to climate change out of the political reach of the legislature' (2015: 140). Hence the conditions are in place for extra-parliamentary ecofeminist activism.

## Climate Guardians

Tasmanian environmentalist Allana Beltran initiated the first 'documented' intervention in Australian politics by an 'angel' in a performance installation known as the Weld Angel. Protesting the logging of old growth forest, she appeared in the Weld Valley, Tasmania, in 2007 harnessed to vertical and crossed saplings in a durational performance utilizing presence and silence that lasted 10 hours. The photographs show a woman in white face with red lipstick dressed in a long white dress with large handmade feathered wings against a background of forest and sky

(Beltran 2017). The performance became widely known when Beltran was sued by Forestry Tasmania and the Tasmanian Police for police time and wages costs in a case that ran for six months before being dismissed. Consulting closely with Beltran, Liz Conor, and Deborah Hart in Melbourne adopted the angel iconography in 2013 for climate change action, extending Beltran's concept of solo action to call for a multitude of angels, who would gather at predetermined sites and become known as the Climate Guardians.

Conor is an academic, writer, and activist whose previous campaigns included *The Mothers of Intervention*, who campaigned for maternity leave, and the John Howard Ladies Auxiliary Fanclub, which consisted of four 1950s housewives who popped up at public events to cheer then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, in order to protest his outdated social and moral values. Hart, also a writer and activist with a background in arts management and fundraising, co-founded CLIMARTE: Arts for a Safe Climate in 2010 and remains on its board. She and Conor founded the independent network ClimActs: Acting for Climate Justice, of which the Climate Guardians was the founding act. ClimActs' website hosts a living archive of actions from 2013 to the present (ClimActs). Activists who join Climate Guardian actions might also join other troupes including the Coal Diggers, a billionaire coal miner's fan club, the medievalists of the Flat Earth Institute, the Frackers' Guild, or the recently formed Hackers Guild that specializes 'in mining and psychoanalyzing unsuspecting peoples' personal data and social media profiles in order to manipulate their minds and votes' (ClimActs 2017a).

Conor and Hart as experienced, well-networked, and inventive activists developed smart ecopolitics for the contemporary era, playing humorously with the signifiers of historic oppression and subjugation of women and the environment without succumbing to an enervating paralysis or hard-edged didacticism. Each performance is documented and underpinned by extensive writings, which are archived on the ClimActs' website, that discuss the climate politics at stake in each chosen location.

The first Climate Guardian actions in early 2013 involved what they referred to as visitations wherein they visited the headquarters of BHP Billiton and the big four Australian Banks—CommBank, ANZ, NAB, and Westpac—during peak hour lunchtimes to stencil the Climate Guardian logo onto the buildings' glass doors and marble walls. They communicated through the action of being present in the space, acting in unison, and through the words and image of the logo, while remaining silent. The logo incorporated the words Climate Justice encircled by baroque-style angel wings, which remained, until workmen were sent to erase it, as a stigmata on the corporations' public interface drawing attention to its body politics. In the time-honored tradition of activist and avant-garde movements, the logo was an important materialization of the Climate Guardians' manifesto, entitled *Our Safe Climate Demands*. It states:

1. The paramount duty of government is to protect its citizens from grave threats;
2. Rapidly accelerating anthropogenic climate change places the very future of human civilization and the ecosystems upon which it depends at dire risk;
3. Urgent action is required to avoid further damage and to restore a safe climate;
4. The necessary action will require society-wide mobilization of resources at a scale and speed never before seen in peacetime, failure is not an option (*ClimActs 2017b: 'Safe Climate Demands'*).

Since then, the ensemble's mode of performance has drawn on angel iconography, bodies in space, and textual signage. Actions include visitations, which consist of hosting, gathering, and manifesting en masse, or in small assemblies, in public spaces, and scenes of climate politics. A typical Climate Guardian performance consists of arriving at a location, gathering, harnessing the wings to the body, and then silently standing or walking, sometimes carrying placards. A key tactic is for the ensemble to assemble for a publicity shot in proximity to an iconic symbol of the capitalist-industrial-carbon producing order such as

banks, mining companies, and politicians' offices. In 2014, seven Climate Guardian Angels performed a spectacular living sculpture, entitled 'Coal Requiem', at the Lorne Sculpture Biennale on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. Commissioned for the opening of the three-week festival, the work was performed on the foreshore with angels elevated against the evening sky, accompanied by a female singer backed by two young brothers playing cello and violin. The words 'Coal Requiem' were written on the sand with burnt wood (resembling coal) and seaweed. In addition to the haunting songs, the classical musicians performed a nature-honoring piece they had specially composed for the occasion. The performance concluded with the angels igniting rescue flares to draw attention to the effects of carbon emissions on rising sea levels, especially in the Pacific region (Hart 2015: 68). Among their many appearances since then, the Climate Guardians have blockaded the entrances of corporate mining headquarters, Parliament House of Australia, political party buildings, and politicians' offices.

Regional visitations have included the dusty road into mining company Santos' Leewood's wastewater treatment facility in the Pilliga Forest. There the arrest of a Climate Guardian created a stunning ironic media image, which is archived on the ClimActs' website, that depicts a policewoman arresting an angel. The intersection of the sitting female angel figure, a vision of white robes and ethereal presence, and a standing female police officer upholding the laws of the state makes a powerful Brechtian *gestus*—a theatrical term for physical action, mode of speaking or facial expression that reveals a 'highly complicated and contradictory' relationship between characters in a play (Brecht 1984: 198). Here it exposes the relationship between the mining, fracking, carbon-producing economy, and the government that serves and protects it. The image of the Climate Guardian pleading with the policewoman for the right to make a peaceful protest amply displays the limits of the democratic state. The placating hand of the well-drilled female policewoman, who (literally) stands for the collusion of mining and the conservative government of New South Wales, is the gestic signifier of its entwined interests. Here the Guardians modernize feminist traditions of peaceful environmental



activism honed at Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp and Greenham Common for the era of global media (see Chap. 8).

The Guardians are also aware of the combined effects of performativity and theatricality. Gathering in New South Wales in May 2016, during a mass civilian blockade against the export of coal to China and India, the Climate Guardians joined more than 2000 protestors to stage an Australian action in collaboration with the global #Breakfree from fossil fuel movement. Dressed in their customary white robes and angel wings, several Climate Guardians lay on the tracks of a railway bridge where they were arrested with 66 others for effectively disabling the coal trains passage to Newcastle Harbor, Australia, which is considered one of Australia's largest coal export ports (Hart 2017; *Newcastle Herald* 2016).

While Climate Guardian performances are visually striking interventions in the politics of climate change, their quiet evocation of the angel figure offers an intriguing constellation of cultural and religious iconography. Deploying elements of mimesis and parody, they offer complex interpretive conundrums. They appear pious and compliant at the same time as they are warriors for climate change, claiming agency as activists and extending this agency to environmental sites such as oceans, forests, and city buildings. Each of these physical actions symbolically speaks back to the power of corporate interests. And while the spectacle of women representing angels in long white dresses harnessed to massive organza wings appears to reinstate an idealized female figuration, the appropriation of the traditionally masculine identity of the angel, as warrior and harbinger, is self-reflexively performative. Designed for optimum media exposure, the actions of the passive-resistant angels manipulate the multiple signifiers they evoke.

## COP 21 Paris

The Paris Climate Change Conference in December 2015, known as COP 21, was an important international platform for the Climate Guardians and involved, of necessity, navigating the links between hard

politics and politically motivated art. The Paris conference was the twenty-first meeting of the nation-based Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, an internationally binding agreement reached in Japan in 1997 to set carbon emission reduction targets, although a number of governments had not signed it. Australia under the conservative Government of John Howard refused to be a party to the agreement, and it was not until the Labor Government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd came to power in 2007 that it signed onto the agreement in line with the new Prime Minister's earlier declaration that climate change was 'the great moral challenge of our generation' (Rudd 2007). The politics of climate change came to a head in 2012 with a major electoral loss for the Labor Government and the return of a far right-wing coalition under Prime Minister Tony Abbott, which quickly repealed laws designed to reduce carbon emissions. The Climate Guardians flocked to Canberra to hold a press conference at Parliament House to mark the occasion and to remind politicians—as their banner stated—that it was 'Five Minutes to Midnight' on the Doomsday Clock. Since then Australia has arrived, as Eckersley puts it, at the 'political impasse' that the Climate Guardians would seek to remedy in Paris (2015: 140). Attended by 150 Heads of State and over 25,000 accredited delegates, the United Nations conference also held A Global Festival of Cultural Activity on Climate Change, an extensive multi-arts event that ran from September to December 2015 involving artists from all around the world. This structure enabled seven Australian Climate Guardians to attend the conference as artists engaged in the cultural festival.

COP 21 would take place in the wake of the Paris terror attacks of 13 November, in which 130 people were massacred and hundreds wounded. As a consequence of raised security, a State of Emergency was in force in the city banning public gatherings and street protests for the duration of the conference and after. This ban was potentially disastrous for the Climate Guardians' outdoor site-specific actions. However, by identifying as artists engaged in cultural activity, they were permitted to perform visitations at the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre (Fig. 8.1).

The Guardians' actions were political in the context of the Australian Government's inaction on global warming. They mounted a blockade outside the offices of the French multinational energy company Engie, owner of the high-polluting, brown coal-fueled Hazelwood Power Station



**Fig. 8.1** Climate Guardians at the Eiffel Tower, Paris, 2015 (Courtesy of the photographer: Maggie Miles)

in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria and its adjoining opencut mine. A Climate Guardian Press Release, intended for its Australian followers but available to a global audience, announced that 'A Flock of Climate

Guardian Angels from Australia descended on Engie's global head office in Paris to decry the corporation's appalling treatment of Victoria's Latrobe Valley community and their environment' (ClimActs 2015). (Since decommissioned, the power station closed in March 2017, but site remediation will take many years at costs of nearly three quarters of a billion dollars.) The Climate Guardians' Paris schedule included the delivery of primary school children's letters and art works to Laurence Tubiana, French Ambassador for COP 21. Unable to make contact with Tubiana, the letters were delivered instead to Australian Greens' Senator Larissa Waters, posted online, and read out to delegates as they arrived at the conference centre at Le Bourget on the opening day of the UN COP 21 climate talks (ClimActs 2015).

Liz Conor, one of the two conveners of the Climate Guardians, told the author that the performances in Paris, so soon after the terror attacks in the city, took on a wider significance than they had anticipated and for which they were unprepared (Conor 2016). Their first outing was to Place de la République on 29 November to visit the Marching Shoes Installation, organized by Avaaz (a global activist network). The installation consisted of thousands of pairs of shoes that had been placed in the square by Parisians and visitors in lieu of the Climate Change March that was canceled due to the State of Emergency (Hart 2017). An image of the Climate Guardians walking among the shoes appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* online, after which they were widely recognized as they passed through the streets. Hart also recalls that 'the response was more powerful than we had envisaged' (2017). Here religion, climate politics, terrorism, and grief came together in ways that showed how interconnected issues can be as they flow around pivotal points such as the appearance of the Climate Guardians and their silent empathetic presence in the city. The Climate Guardians' final appearance at COP 21 was to hold the Red Line, which involved angels walking in a horizontal line holding a length of red cloth to signify 'the boundary, the limits beyond which both the climate and the biosphere as well as our social systems collapse' (Hart 2017). On this twelfth and final day of the conference, they participated in a march, despite the restrictions, in a more militant mode of activism and were joined by other groups.

## Angels in Religion and the Arts

The response of Parisians reveals the final conundrum of the relationship between the Climate Guardians' contemporary embodiment of the angel figure and the angel whose origins traverse the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In these patriarchal traditions, in which the angel is an emissary of God, a warrior, and spiritual being, he is unquestionably a masculine figure, whose capacity for transcendence is central to the role of mediator between the exalted deity and the human world. However, when Biblical and New Testament versions of the angel were transformed into visual imagery by Christian artists in Rome around the fourth century, artisans drew on Hellenistic representations of the Winged Goddess of Samothrace (Nike), which takes a feminine form (Jones 2011: 16). (The Winged Goddess is on display in the Louvre outside which the Climate Guardians assembled at one of their daily appearances.) Thereafter, the Christian angel had wings and a certain gender ambiguity that remains today. Central to the Christian tradition is the story of the Annunciation in which God sends the Angel Gabriel to persuade the Virgin Mary to submit to the Holy Ghost, who would 'cover' her womb after which she would give birth to Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1: 26–38). The angel facilitated the central miracle of the virgin birth, in which the Christian God would assert moral superiority over the pagan Zeus, for example, who took on the form of a swan with beating wings to rape the maiden Leda, as in the myth of Leda and the Swan. Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Annunciation', painted 1472–1475, represents the angel as a young Renaissance man, civilized and brilliantly robed, kneeling in an attitude of respect before the Virgin Mary, who is seated in blue robes. His feathered wings rise from his shoulder blades like two Nike arrows. This painting gives the angel a humanist form that is aristocratically beautiful, and persuasive, as befits his role as God's messenger, while Mary remains passive in the form of the vessel she will embody.

Angels were feminized in Western European visual arts in the nineteenth century when they came to be associated in the late Romantic imagination with the non-rational. As Michelle Le Doeuff notes drolly, once a category is feminized, then it is devalued, and so by the time

angels appear as women, they have lost most of their theological, philosophical, and intellectual associations: 'at best the relationship to knowledge proposed for women is precisely the one some men no longer want' (2003: 7). Victorian England gave rise to Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' (1854–1863), which represented an idealized femininity associated with servile roles as carers, nurturers, and attendants. As Jeannette King writes, the angel in the house was a 'sexless angel' who crossed into 'domestic ideology, embodying all the Christian virtues of love, purity and self-sacrifice so as to act as moral centre of the family' (2005: 11). At the same time, a more assertive representation of the female angel emerged in female aerialists in theatre and in the circus, who, as Peta Tait explains, commonly used angel motifs in their acts (2005: 19).

Angels have returned as potent symbols in twentieth-century literature, theatre, and film. Benjamin's much quoted reading of Paul Klee's 'Angelus Novus', painted in 1920, is of a male Angel of History caught in the storm of modernity's destructive force. His 'eyes are staring, [his] mouth is open, his wings are spread' in a gesture that looks back at catastrophe in a way that we might interpret today as impending ecological disaster (1999: 249). Wim Wenders brought melancholic angels to Berlin to oversee the dying days of socialism in the 1980s' film *Wings of Desire*, where they are, according to tradition, gendered male with orderly white wings protruding from dark overcoats. Here they watch over epochal political change aligning the angel entity with ruptures in modern history, as witnesses, notetakers, and as a counterforce of calm, meditation, and silence. Tait reminds us too that Bruno Ganz's angel 'loves a female aerialist who wears white (chicken) wings' (146). Drawing on the nineteenth-century female aerialists' uses of the angel motif, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), a novel set in a traveling circus, gave angel wings to the athletic and daring Sophie Fevers, who used them to forge a career as a famous aerialist. Her winged victory over other aerialists elevated her to celebrity status. Unlike Wenders' invisible to the human eye melancholic angels, flamboyant wings are also crucial to the female Climate Guardian Angels because they help to constitute performative figurations of a human, non-human, animal hybrid, a spectacular materialization of climate change critique, and a compelling

manifestation of the judgments of history. Tony Kushner's spectacular theatrical work, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (2017), was first performed in 1991. Lara Stevens draws attention to the role of the 'glittering angels' both male and female who crashed 'through New York apartment and hospital ceilings to deliver messages to sick mortals' on political and philosophical matters to do with the American legal and political system (2016: 51).

In modern terms angels can be said to occupy a theological, extra-judicial, extra-political, and more-than-human world that accords them the possibility of a degree of impunity from human juridical and political interventions. Their more-than-human form, their capacity to appear, to be selectively visible to both victims and the blessed, and to fly and swoop places them symbolically within the heavens, and within the natural world of landscapes, waterways, and clouds, and in ancient and modern cities. Like metaphysical and mythical beings, and figures from folktale, in the visual arts they are also depicted in interstitial spaces such as stairways, patios, entrances, and dungeons signifying the mediating role they play as messengers rather than protagonists.

## Ecofeminist Performance Activism

Embodying the simultaneous domestication of the angel as a passive female and its expression of female autonomy, the Climate Guardians appear graceful, even passive, but their techniques are designed to wield maximum power across contemporary live and digital platforms. Beltran's powerful and overtly feminine Weld Angel defied the angel figure's masculinist and religious past reassigning it as an ecofeminist warrior, a messenger, and a more-than-human figure with feathered wings and wooden poles attached to a body. The Climate Guardians, like Beltran, draw on feminine traditions not to reactivate them in a conservative way but to dissolve the divisions between the human and non-human worlds, to reject dualisms even as they evoke them. They counter that which Sherilyn MacGregor refers to critically as the 'masculinization of environmentalism' (MacGregor 2010: 230) and use strategically

designed iconography to make powerful points about the global fossil fuel economy.

The modes of performance favored by the Climate Guardians are to perform in unison, adopt angel-like behavior such as mediation, and perform a non-individuated embodied self. The host of angels offers an alternative to the dangerous individuation of the post-Enlightenment world. By performatively rejecting individuation, their collective action discards both leftist identity politics and neoliberal individualism. Their humans-with-wings appearance unsettles the dualism of the human and non-human, aligning with Plumwood and others who called for actions that promote the coexistence of the human, non-human, and object or material world. Their appropriation of the angel figure and their live presence means they stand out in the modern cityscape and do much to reverse what Plumwood refers to as 'backgrounding', a process that denies presence to the actions of women and nature in the public sphere (21).

They also activate the hallmarks of ecofeminism that Freya Mathews associates with the portrayal of humans in the natural world as a community of beings, related in the manner of a family, but nevertheless distinct. She goes on to argue that ecofeminist encounters between beings are 'open-minded and attentive', characterized by an attitude of care or compassion which can provide the grounds for an ecological ethic in an open field of enquiry (1994: 162). Mathews continues that 'concern for Nature is the product of a re-awakening to our kinship with our individual non-human relatives; ... and it springs not from a "cosmic identification" with Nature but a sense of solidarity with our fellow beings' (162). This aspect of ecofeminism is evident in how, for example, rather than acting solely on their own behalf in Paris, the Climate Guardians delivered children's letters, having first engaged with teachers and schools in Australia. And in a further instance of solidarity, and an apparent departure from environmental interests, Parisian citizens recovering from recent terrorist attacks in Paris responded emotionally and politically to the seven Climate Guardians standing silently in public spaces at the Louvre and at the Eiffel Tower. The contemporary version of ecofeminism, as exemplified in this example, points to a convergence of feminism



and ecology with new threats to do with terrorism and, by extension, advanced forms of chemical and fossil fuel biowarfare doing harm to humans, animals, lands, and the atmosphere.

There is a compelling logic to the Climate Guardian Angels' activism. Their demeanor is dignified, restrained, heavily codified, and disciplined. It is mostly not engaged in overt dissent or conflict. They assemble, stand, and walk mostly in silence. Their impact lies in their unexpected appearance in the modern secular world and the way they turn traditional gender associations of woman and nature into ecological activism and radical guardianship. Their effectiveness, if we accept the thesis of the post-political present, is to be ineffective politically. They trouble politicians and corporations by highlighting the contradictions of political inaction over climate change without resorting to a 'message based' didactic ecological art. Here the idea of guardianship of land and resources is placed in contradistinction to modern democratic systems that fail to find the means to deal with climate change. I hesitate to say this but their Gandhian style of peaceful protest carries the suggestion of the transcendent—given that their power also works through proximity, presence, and silence.

## Notes

1. All references to the Climate Guardians' statements, press releases, and commentaries are from the ClimActs website: [www.climacts.org.au](http://www.climacts.org.au). Discussion of the Climate Guardians' protests draws on photographic documentation of activist interventions that are also available at the same address. Where possible I have added titles to guide readers to the source. Elsewhere the site hosts an online archive where actions can be located by month and date.
2. Nature with a small 'n' refers to the 'the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, and the landscape, as opposed to humans or human creations' (OED 2017). Yet this innocuous definition reproduces uncritically the dualism of human and non-human beings and objects.

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