**The Unalienable Right of Life:**

**Multispecies Democracy and Speculative Writing**

*Exposé*

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# Abstract

How is life narrated? Declared as an unalienable right in the Declaration of Independence, the security of life is one of the natural rights on which democracy is firmly grounded. How is this connection between life and rights narrated? Arguing that the literary imagination partakes in shaping the political and legal public discourse, this project explores contemporary speculative writing in order to investigate the conceptual changes in the intricate relation between *life* and *rights*. With a growing sense of environmental awareness, and then particularly with the rise of theories of the Anthropocene, a paradigmatic shift becomes apparent: our understanding of life moves from an anthropocentric towards an ecocentric perspective. Located at the nexus between American Studies and the Environmental Humanities, this project looks at speculative stories of entangled human and other-than-human lives, which offer a testing ground for the idea of a multispecies democracy. Disclosing the connections between human rights, environmental history, earth jurisprudence, and speculative writing, I assess cultural narratives about the inalienable rights we associate with life, and the literary representations of life itself.

# Key Words

Environmental Humanities, American Studies, Declaration of Independence, speculative writing, ecocriticism, narratology, human rights, critical posthumanism, Anthropocene, multispecies justice, environmentalism, applied Digital Humanities

# Project Overview

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

Declaration of Independence

Life was declared an “unalienable right”[[1]](#footnote-2) in the Declaration of Independence. Not only was the Declaration a fundamental document for the genesis of U. S. nationhood as it performatively enacted secession from Great Britain. It was also fundamental in that its proclamation of the unalienable rights of man paved the way for a **universal framework of democratic justice**. Though the Declaration never had legal validity, it still served as an inspirational model for ensuing international human rights law that prioritized “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as inalienable rights[[2]](#footnote-3). More to the point, the Declaration has played a crucial role in shaping the nature of modern democracy.

In this project, I foreground the **role the literary imagination plays in shaping our understanding of *life* and *rights* in a democratic society**. Literature, equipped with the freedom of imagination, offers us yet a different approach to *life* and *rights[[3]](#footnote-4)* than historians, political or legal scholars would do. Nonetheless, literary writers and various scholarly disciplines have a common denominator: they always present a narrative. The study of **narrative** consequently serves as a methodological linking element in this study.

In general, this project will take the shape of **discourse analysis**, assessing notions of a **multispecies democracy** that secures certain rights not only to human but also to other-than-human lives. This study is particularly informed by Bruno Latour’s theoretical model of political ecology and Donna Haraway’s contributions and observations in the field of multispecies worlding-practices. Based on Ursula Heise’s approach in *Imagining Extinction* (2016) that links multispecies studies (cf. van Dooren, Kirksey, Münster) with environmental justice, I explore literary and cultural narratives of **multispecies justice**, which I understand as the premise of a multispecies democracy.

Overall, this study addresses **two major societal challenges of our contemporary times:** **the state of democracy and the ecological crisis**. The main focus of this project lies in the way *life* and its associated *rights* – in the multifaceted nature of these terms – are being narrated in the realm of **speculative writing**. With this term (that I choose as it is more encompassing than speculative fiction) I do not aim to label a group of texts that follows certain generic regulations. Rather, speculative writing is to refer to texts that display **the speculative as a mode of thinking**, or, in the manner of Haraway’s explanation of “SF,” texts that employ the speculative as “a model for worlding.” I call speculative writing, then, all writing that is “opening up what is yet-to-come in protean entangled times’ pasts, presents, and futures.” (Haraway “SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far.”)

Yet, I deem it necessary to embed the analysis of speculative tales in a broader socio-cultural context.

* Therefore, in a **first step, I examine the historic foundational documents** that have been essential for modelling our Western democratic society.
* **Secondly**, I will focus on the **enmeshed legal narratives of human rights and environmental protection.**
* Eventually, these cultural narratives about democracy in legal and environmental history will inform my **ecocritical readings of contemporary speculative writing.**
* The general aim is to showcase the **conceptual change that the terms *life* and *rights* have undergone in our cultural imagination.**

The fields of **ecology** and **environmental history** make an essential contribution to the discussion of *life* and *rights*: the understanding of the two terms becomes radically different if we take the environment into consideration. Environmentalism has always addressed major threats to life (and rights) on earth such as the loss of biodiversity. Since the early 2000s, when theories about the cause and effects of the **Anthropocene**[[4]](#footnote-5) began to proliferate, climate change has become an integral part of public discourse. The Anthropocene, as the current geological epoch has come to be called, highlights homo sapiens’ harmful influence on the environment. Ironically, it is the growing awareness about human’s complicity in the destruction of our planetary ecosystems that in turn reinforces our heightened environmental consciousness. As a result, a major shift in our understanding of what we mean by life becomes more apparent: more and more people’s perspectives move from an anthropocentric to amore encompassing **ecocentric understanding of life on this planet**. This **paradigmatic shift** emphasizes the interdependency of human and other-than-human lives and our shared environments.

Naturally, this increased environmental awareness has also become manifest in political and legal discourse. Especially when industrialization began to threaten natural areas, early movements of **environmentalism** have already pointed out that humans need to protect nature from the usurpation of mankind[[5]](#footnote-6). They inspired the instalment of what we now call “wild law.”[[6]](#footnote-7) Over time, environmentalism not only fought for landscape conservation. It also fostered the debates about the necessity to change our understanding of what we consider as lifeworth protecting. A recent and probably the most prominent example of such **earth jurisprudence** is the “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth,”[[7]](#footnote-8) of which the first article declares Mother Earth itself as a living being in need of legal protection.

These legal endeavors, which aim at balancing human-nature interaction, also find a counterpart in the social sciences. Especially the interdisciplinary field of the **Environmental Humanities**[[8]](#footnote-9) is dedicated to exploring the entangled relations of the Anthropos and the environment. This larger research area encompasses several academic research strands that are relevant for this project’s focus on multispecies justice. Most notably, findings from human-animal-studies (D. Haraway) and critical plant-studies (M. Marder), as well as critical posthumanism (C. Wolfe), partly with a focus on indigenous cultures (E. DeLoughrey et al., Justice), and the aforementioned multispecies ethnography will further feed into the framework of the study.

# Corpus and Research Questions

*It was what man had sought so long and never found, never could find on earth: a rational happiness.
Down there, all they had ever had was life, liberty, and the pursuit.*

Ursula K. Le Guin: “Newton’s Sleep”

In the speculative scenario of Ursula Le Guin’s short story “Newton’s Sleep,” planet earth has become a barely inhabitable environment for humankind due to raging war and health hazards caused by a fungal plague. Le Guin depicts an artificially built society that secures future life in space by prioritizing *reason* in every possible circumstance. Metaphors of blindness and seeing echo the Enlightenment spirit that we are familiar with from the Declaration of Independence’s formula of “life, liberty and the pursuit” and the equal rights of man. “Newton’s Sleep” evokes a number of questions: What defines our human identity? What is the value of (human) life? Can humanity survive without our “natural environment,” planet earth? How can we create equality in an artificially assembled society? Le Guin’s short story is an example for **speculative writing’s capacity to pose intriguing questions about the future of (human) life and its environment**.[[9]](#footnote-10) The research questions of this project are derived either directly from the speculative scenarios invoked by the texts themselves, or from the relation of these scenarios to a historical sociocultural context study.

The **first part of the corpus** consists of what I consider as the basis for a **historical sociocultural context** study that I deem necessary for an investigation of the connection between *life* and *rights*. I revisit the founding documents of modern democracy and human rights law, starting with the Declaration of Independence (1776) and moving on to the Bill of Rights (1789) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) to further “Declarations of Rights” written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries[[10]](#footnote-11).

A diverse range of **speculative writing builds the second part of my corpus**. I understand the rising amount of speculative writing that demonstrates affinities to the concept of multispecies justice in the past few decades as a persuasive argument in itself: the quantity is proof of an increasing interest in the discussion of legal affairs in the field of other-than-human entities and/or multispecies co-existence[[11]](#footnote-12).

The preliminary corpus consists of texts that open the floor for a discussion of the human condition *and* the other-than-human condition. The overarching question that leads through the corpus of this study is:

* **How are life and rights imagined and narrated**?

Further questions, next to the ones already stated above, arise:

* Which forms of life have rights at all? Whose life is regarded and thus protected as an inalienable right?
* What is the political or legal status of other-than-human life forms and the environment?
* What is the necessary environment for multispecies justice?
* What could the rules and regulations of a democratic multispecies society be, and are there any laws that citizen of such a society do abide by?

I propose to divide the corpus of speculative writing into **three different categories**, sorting the texts according to their thematic proximity:

1. The first group encompasses speculative writing that I caption **agential alterity**, starring other-than-human actors and/or actors with non-human traits, e. g. cyborgs, chimaera, robots, androids, genetically modified or artificially constructed beings, or alien forms of life. Classic sci-fi novels like Philipp K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989), but also more recent novels such as Ann Leckie’s *Imperial Radch* series (2013-2015) and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Binti* sequence (2015-2018) belong into this group. Stories narrated through the perspective of plants and animals (as in Le Guin’s short story “Direction of the Road”) build a subcategory of its own, still belonging to this category of agential alterity.
2. The second group encompasses speculative scenarios where the protagonists are (mainly) human. Though we find ourselves in a **speculative** realm – in an imagined alternate past, present or future) –, we can still locate the narrative setting in a **human-world**. The texts in this group question the human as a species, contesting what “we” mean when we refer to “us.” I will conduct a case study of the dystopian novel *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) by Chang-rea Lee. Writers that deal explicitly with (themes from) indigenous cultures represent a subcategory. Gerald Vizenor’s *Dead Voices* and Ursula Le Guin’*s Always Coming Home* are among the examples I want to discuss.
3. The third and final category consists of texts that one may call ***speculative non-fiction***[[12]](#footnote-13). This group consists of non-fictional texts, or fiction with strong non-fiction elements. This category poses yet a further set of research questions that address the interdependence of political and legal discourse and the sphere of the speculative: What role does the speculative play in the specific genre of non-fiction? Could this genre be better equipped for tackling the question about the relation between *life* and *rights* through its intertwinement of factual and realist situations and speculative scenarios? In which ways does the depiction of life and rights differ from the fictional texts? Examples are Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Eating Animals* (2009) and *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (2019) and J. M. Coetzee’s *Lives of Animals* (1999).

# State of Research

This project revolves first and foremost around theories of “multispecies democracy.” Though the term has sporadically appeared in several publications[[13]](#footnote-14), no clear-cut definition can yet be found in relevant literature. I contribute to the growing discourse about multispecies communities by providing an encompassing study that focuses explicitly on the concept of a **multispecies democracy**. There are **three key research areas** that I use as conceptual frameworks. The most significant of these areas is **multispecies theories**. This interdisciplinary research area in itself already connects to the disciplines of **environmental history**, and the study of **modern democracy.** The following overview lists the corresponding research areas and explains their relevance for this project. Besides, it displays their evident interconnectedness.

1. **Modern Democracy and (Other-Than-)Human Rights**

The first area is to provide the basis for a historical sociocultural context that is necessary to understand the conceptual changes that the terms *life* and *rights* have undergone in the past few centuries. I revisit the founding documents of the American republic in order to trace the rationale of modern democracy, starting with the **Declaration of Independence** in 1776.[[14]](#footnote-15)Following its proclamation that “all men are created equal,” the American Constitution[[15]](#footnote-16) and the Bill of Rights paved the way for a universal understanding of justice and the security of human rights.

How does the struggle for non-human rights come together with democracy if we consider that *demos*, after all, refers to the people? Though multispecies democracy calls for a reconceptualization of legality and governance inclusive of other-than-human life forms, it is self-evident that ideas of multispecies democracy do not exclude the category of the human. Rather, they highlight that a functioning “true” democracy must be polyvocal, and, therefore it must ultimately grant representations of other-than-human entities, too. Looking at the history of modern democracy in connection to multispecies justice, one can also find connective avenues to other prominent rights discourses as e. g. Rob Nixon’s “slow violence” and environmentalism of the poor.

1. **Environmental History and the Anthropocene**

Not only in the genesis of (international) human rights did U.S. history play a leading role, but also in the emergence of environmentalism as a social movement. While it is true that the master narrative of America as “nature’s nation” has long dominated the American mindset with its view that nature is an inexhaustible resource for economic growth and prosperity, the U. S. nonetheless brought forth a number of key figures of environmental activism such as Aldo Leopold[[16]](#footnote-17), or Rachel Carson. Literature partook in the shaping of the American environmental imagination, as we know from Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1996), which reads classics of American nature writing from colonial times to the present (among them iconic writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, or Leslie Silko) to explore the place of nature in the history of western thought. Buell’s seminal study makes clear that the interdependency between the human and nature is a trope that looks back onto a long tradition in (American) nature writing and literary criticism.

Since the millennium, the emergence of a “new” concept has significantly shaped the environmental discourse and ecocritical literary studies: The Anthropocene[[17]](#footnote-18). *Anthropocene* is to describe an epoch, in which the Anthropos’ influence on all activities of the planet has become pervasive and has caused irreversible environmental damage. What is the benefit of the Anthropocene concept for cultural studies? The *Anthropocene* and the term’s own “multidisciplinary genesis” led to recognizing the necessity and fruitfulness of interdisciplinary thinking. One finds proof for this in the thriving of interdisciplinary research field of the Environmental Humanities[[18]](#footnote-19). In line with this, certain schools of thought and reading practices have been flourishing in the last few years, such as the New Materialisms (including material ecocriticism), (feminist) science and technology studies (STS), Actor Network Theory, or multispecies ethnographies. These approaches are inspired by many notions outlined by Latour and Haraway. A shared belief connects their individual methods: especially now, in times of the Anthropocene, it is vital to acknowledge and consider the agency of non-human actors and (trans)corporeal dimensions of life on earth. Even though there is scientific agreement about the state of crisis that this geological epoch implies, the articulated Anthropocene concept can nonetheless be a source of hope and a catalyst for change: it can be understood as a chance to follow Latour’s and Haraways’ call to rethink the relation of the Anthropos to its environment[[19]](#footnote-20). Theories of the Anthropocene therefore are an integral part of the discursive framework of this project.

1. **Multispecies Theories**

According to Helmreich and Kirksey, “**multispecies ethnography** centers on how a multitude of organisms’ livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces.” (545) In their oft-cited essay “The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography,” they summarize the development of multispecies ethnography within anthropology. Especially Donna Haraway’s contribution in *When Species Meet* is considered “one key starting point for the ‘species turn’ in anthropology.” (552) The discipline of multispecies ethnography is an essential framework for this project as it reassesses the concept of *species* and questions what it means to be human in a shared world of entangled human and other-than-human lives. Kirksey and Helmreich state that “ethnographic studies of biocapital, biodiversity, and biosociality must all grapple with problems of representation. How can or should or do anthropologists speak with and for nonhuman others?” (554) I will address these questions concerning **aspects of representation** not from the perspective of anthropology but from a literary studies’ perspective, conducting an analysis of the narrative voices that the different individuals and parties of a multispecies democracy might have.

**Multispecies justice** is the premise of a multispecies democracy as it is a way of thinking the political dimensions of human and non-human simultaneously. Ursula Heise’s *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* elaborates on the concept of multispecies justice through an explorative convergence of biodiversity, environmental justice and multispecies community. This study falls in line with Heise’s argument that questions about biodiversity, and the study of life, are at their core not only questions posed by the life sciences and natural sciences. In *Imagining Extinction*, she argues that such questions are at bottom stories about cultural identity. While Heise’s seminal study about extinction narratives puts a strong focus on legal and literary case studies about conservation in the sense of preservation, my reading of narratives of multispecies justice does not prioritize issues of conservationism. Instead, I want to focus on how certain narratives openly embrace ideas of **multispecies-becoming-with**, and **science art worlding**. These concepts mainly build on the writings of Gilles **Deleuze**, Donna **Haraway**, and Anna **Tsing**. Besides, Bruno **Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory** also deems pertinent for this study as it highlights the agential capacities of the nonhuman world. Much of what we currently call the other-than-human-world remains to be discovered – by our scientific curiosity, or by our imagination, or even more likely, by a combination of both – and is hence likely located in the sphere of the speculative.

More to the point, I locate the idea of a multispecies democracy in line with Bruno Latour’s plea for a **collective***[[20]](#footnote-21)*, envisioning a parliament where spokespersons for nonhumans (represented through natural scientists) partake in the governing of society alongside human spokespersons. Latour argues that it is “time to house [the collective] … by building it a definitive dwelling place and offering it not the simple slogan of the early democracies – No taxation without representation’ – but a riskier and more ambitious maxim: ‘No reality without representation!’” (127) As we have seen with the enactment of the secession from Great Britain through the Declaration of Independence: representation does create reality. Or to put it more provocatively: *fiction does create facts*. Hence, in this project, I seek the to examine the agential capacities of the representational spokespersons of a multispecies democracy in the realm of the speculative.

What is the relation between speculative writing and theories of multispecies democracy? The latter contests human semiotic exceptionalism and aims at an understanding that the human voice represents only one of several voices between articulations from the other-than-human world. Thus, exploring the link between theoretical ideas of a multispecies democracy and literature – in this particular case, speculative writing – appears as an appropriate and promising endeavor insofar as literature is one of the possible ways to give **voices and spaces for representation** of those who cannot speak. Moreover, the concept of a multispecies democracy combines the societal challenges of the state of democracy and the ecological crisis.

To my knowledge, no ecocritical study has of yet assessed the **conceptual change** that the **terms *life* and *rights*** have undergone in our cultural imagination. I address a **gap in research** by exploring how life is narrated through **forging the connections** between the history of **human rights** that focus on life as an inalienable right, the **environmental justice** movement in the context of the Anthropocene, and contemporary **speculative writing.**

# Methodology and Institutional Framing

The project is rooted in the disciplines of the **Environmental Humanities** and **American Studies**. As both these research fields share a **multidisciplinary** character, I will draw from different schools of thought (outlined above) and methodological approaches. The examination of my primary readings will be a combination of **distant and close reading**. I conduct the **ecocritical readings** through the lens of **a narratological approach** that is informed by strategies taken, among others, from David Herman’s *Narratology Beyond the Human,* and Erin James’ concept of “econarratology.” With the **aid of applied Digital Humanities** I employ techniques of distant reading that allow me to broaden my corpus. Besides, Digital Humanities practices also allow for a computerized context study that can enrich the close reading.

 I am enrolled as PhD candidate at the Graduate School for Humanities at the University of Würzburg, which offers a variety of extra-curricular qualification measures for a successful doctorate (e. g. writing workshops, project management). My first supervisor, Prof. Dr. Catrin Gersdorf, who holds the chair of American Studies at the University of Würzburg, and my second supervisors, Prof. Dr. MaryAnn Snyder-Körber and Prof. Dr. Ursula Heise, provide me with professional support. Prof. Dr. Ursula Heise is one of the world’s most renowned scholars in the field of Environmental Humanities. In addition, I benefit from a scientific network that I have built up since the beginning of my Master studies. I am a member of the two most important scientific associations in my research area: 1. The German Association of American Studies/GAAS (since 2017, I have been working as assistant to the executive director of the GAAS) 2. The European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment/EASLCE (where I volunteered as co-coordinator and moderator of international webinars for postgraduates from 2017-2019). For several years now, I have also been taking part in a regular doctoral colloquium of the American Chairs of the Universities of Bamberg, Würzburg and Bayreuth as a listener, most recently also as a presenter.

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**Zeit- und Arbeitsplan für das Dissertationsprojekt**

1. **Bisher geleistete Arbeiten**
* Sammeln, Lesen und Selektion von Forschungs- und Primärtexten für ein vorläufiges Textkorpus.
* Ausarbeitung der theoretischen Grundlagen, dazu bislang:
* Recherche Bereich „(American) Environmentalism“ und Theorien des Anthropozäns
* Recherche Bereich „Multispecies Ethnography“
* Wissenschaftliche Vorträge im thematischen Rahmen des Projektes:
	+ "Writing ‘Life’ in Science and Fiction: (No) Tropes of Hope in North American SF" Ecocritical Life Writing in the Dystopic Present - International Workshop. Uni Augsburg, Dez. 2019.
	+ “Life in Science Fact and Science Fiction: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy and the Ecopoetry of Stephen Collis” Corroding the Now: Poetry + Science + SF. U of London (Bloomsbury, UK), April 2019.
* Verfassen und Überarbeiten des Exposés.
* Präsentation des Promotionsprojektes auf dem gemeinsamen Doktorandenkolloquium der Lehrstühle für Amerikanistik der JMU Würzburg, Uni Bamberg, Uni Bayreuth, Februar 2020.
1. **Tabellarische Übersicht: Arbeitsplan ab März 2020**

Unter Berücksichtigung der bisher geleisteten Arbeiten werden für das Verfassen der Dissertation 2,5 Jahre veranschlagt.

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| **Projektphasen / Arbeitsschritte** | **Dauer der Arbeitsschritte (Monate)** |
| **ca. März 2020 – März 2021*** Vertiefung des theoretischen Fundaments (Bereiche: Democracy, Human Rights, Multispecies Justice, Earth Jurisprudence), Finalisierung des Korpus
* Erste Fassung der Einleitung
* Verfassen des 1. Teils des 2. Kapitels (Schwerpunkt „Democracy and Human Rights“)
* Verfassen des 2. Teils des 2. Kapitels (Schwerpunkt „Multispecies Justice and Earth Jurisprudence“)
 | 4233 | 12 |
| **ca. März 2021 – März 2022*** Verfassen des 3. Kapitels: Case Studies zu „Agential Alterity“
* Verfassen des 4. Kapitels: Case Studies zu „Non?-Human Worlds“
* Verfassen des 5. Kapitels: Case Studies zu „Speculative Non-Fiction”
 | 444 | 12 |
| **ca. März 2022 – September 2022*** Überarbeitung der Einleitung, Verfassen der „Conclusion“
* Revision, Korrektur, Edieren
 | 33 | 6 |
| **Insgesamt** |  | **30** |

1. In the first printing of the Declaration of Independence, the “Dunlap Declaration” of 1776, the wording “*un*alienable Rights” (my own emphasis) was used. Today, *unalienable* is considered a synonym of the more frequently used adjective *inalienable* (Merriam-Webster). In this project, I will mainly employ *inalienable* and use *unalienable* only for direct references to the “Dunlap Declaration.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The historian Gordon Wood states that the “Declaration of Independence set forth a philosophy of human rights that could be applied not only to Americans but to peoples everywhere. It was essential in giving the American Revolution a universal appeal”. (57) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. If *italicized*, I refer to the level of the signifier; otherwise, I refer to life and rights as broader cultural concepts. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen is widely regarded as the “name giver” of the Anthropocene. However, the term was already used by the ecologist Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s. In 2000, Stoermer published an article together with Crutzen that first officially named the Anthropocene and linked it to carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion. Most well-known in the Anthropocene debate became Crutzen’s by now oft-cited seminal essay “Geology of Mankind” (2002). For a more detailed discussion of the political dimensions in the Anthropocene discourse see Bonneuil and Fressoz’s *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (2017), or Jedediah Purdy’s *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. George Perkins Marsh’s *Man and Nature*, first published in 1864, is the most prominent example of early environmentalist thinking in America. Marsh warned about the destructiveness of the Anthropos and highlighted that “[m]an has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste.” (35) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Wild laws, or theories of Earth Jurisprudence, aim at strengthening the roles and rights of non-human members of the Earth community in legality and governance. For a more detailed overview see *Wild Law—In Practice* (ed. Maloney, Burdon), or the essay collection *Exploring Wild Law: The Philosophy of Earth Jurisprudence*, edited by Peter Burdon (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. In 2010, this Declaration was proposed at the “World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth,” held in Bolivia. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. In her introduction of the *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, Ursula Heise provides an overview of the development of the interdisciplinary research area of the Environmental Humanities and highlights how the Environmental Humanities put emphasis on the exploration of the historical and sociocultural dimensions of the ecological crises instead of mostly focusing on their (techno-)scientific aspects as environmental studies have done since the 1960s. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. However, these questions are not only related to possible futures. Very often, speculative writing reads as a commentary on the present and an invitation to reflect upon what alternative stories of the past, present, or the future may look like. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Armitage’s study *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* outlines how the American Declaration of Independence inspired and influenced further Declarations in the 20th and 21st century. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. As Heise explains, “species fiction, […] as we might call them, plunge their readers head-on into questions of multispecies assemblies and multispecies justice.” (*Imagining Extinction* 227) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. In their “Manifesto of Speculative Nonfiction,” published in their eponymous journal, Robin Hemley and Leila Philip call for establishing speculative nonfiction as a genre: “While formal speculation is often conflated with the lyric essay, the lyric essay does not own speculation. Essays that tilt more towards metaphor than fact exist in a crack between genres that has as yet remained unclassifiable. Nonfiction narratives that use speculation as methodology and content are equally hard to classify under the current semantics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *The* *Atlantic* conducted an interview with J. Purdy, who elaborates on the concept of multispecies democracy: “The idea of something like multi-species democracy shows a failure to understand what is at stake in democracy: joint participation in creating a common world, culminating in an authoritative decision about its shape (which of course can be revisited and contested).” In publications related to multispecies ethnography, we can often find slight variations of the term, as e. g. in Heise’s *Imagining Extinction*, where she reads Scott O. Card’s Ender series as an example of a “multispecies society.” (228) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. There is a large body of research that assesses the genesis of the Declaration of Independence. Among these are Carl L. Becker’s *Declaration of Independence* (1958), *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence* (1978) by Gary Wills, *Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence* (1978) by James Munves, or Scott Douglas Gerber’s *To Secure These Rights: The Declaration of Independence and Constitutional Interpretation* (1997), all of which by now have come to be called classic interpretations. Some publications do not exclusively focus on the Declaration but nonetheless make an essential contribution to the discourse about its role as a model for international politics and human rights history, such as Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Erik Slauter’s *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (2009) deems relevant for this project as it examines the nature of the inalienable rights declared in the U. S. Constitution. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. In 1949, Leopold published the influential non-fiction book *A Sand County Almanac* that proposed the idea of a “land ethic,” calling for a respectful and responsible treatment of the environment. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Moore observes that “no concept grounded in historical change has been so influential across the spectrum of Green Thought; no other socio-ecological concept has so gripped popular attention.” (3) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. The international and interdisciplinary journal Environmental Humanities, for instance, was launched in 2012. See *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (2017) for further reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Jedediah Purdy, a political scientist with a focus on Environmental Law, is one of several researchers who claim that the Anthropocene, in this sense, represents “a revolution in ideas,” which marks the “end of the division between people and nature” (3). Christopher Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, scholars in the field of environmental history and the history of science, share this view and declare that “[t]he Anthropocene idea abolishes the break between nature and culture, between human history and the history of life and Earth” (19). One of their main arguments is that the Anthropocene discourse rewrites the master narrative of modern man’s domination over nature: “Instead of ‘masters and possessors of the earth,’ we find ourselves each day a bit more entangled in the immense feedback loops of the Earth system.” (19-21) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour outlines the idea of a parliament that consists of human and non-human agents, which he calls a “collective.” He further elaborates on this model of political ecology in *Politics of Nature*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)