

PRINCIPLE

GIVE VOICE TO THOSE THAT CAN'T SPEAK

Trees can't speak, right? Wrong! There are many creative ways to give voice to those that can't speak — be it trees, animals, or archeological artifacts — so humans can hear their plight loud and clear.

CONTRIBUTED BY

Desmond Alugnoa

Desmond Alugnoa is a passionate advocate for environmental sustainability, rural innovation, and youth empowerment. As an entrepreneur and a landscape governance enthusiast, Desmond is focused on protecting the environment in order to protect indigenous and local occupations from a world enthused by capitalism.

"IN PURSUIT OF PROFIT, CAPITALISM RENDERS NON-HUMAN LIVING BEINGS INVISIBLE AND DISPENSABLE."

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

—Iroquois Confederacy maxim

If we were to truly follow the moral demand that those most affected by an issue should get to shape the laws and policies surrounding it (see: PRINCIPLE: Follow the lead of the most impacted), trees should basically be running all human governments right now! But, that's not going to happen any time soon. So, our next best bet is to find creative ways to bring their voices into the halls of power.

In 2017-18, forest defenders in Ghana used this principle to great effect in their efforts to protect the Atewa Forest, one of the most diverse ecosystems in West Africa. Along all major paths in the forest, trees were hung with placards as if they were speaking for themselves: "I absorb 30 tons of CO2 a day" and "Your children may never know I existed." By personifying these trees, activists made them the leading face of the campaign (see: PRINCIPLE: Lead with sympathetic characters).

In pursuit of profit, capitalism renders non-human living beings invisible and dispensable. They have no voice in decisions that lead to their own annihilation. By giving them a voice, we can create a paradigm shift in our human-centrism.

However, speaking on behalf of anyone or anything is a potentially arrogant act of power which should be approached with great

POTENTIAL RISKS

The responsibility of speaking on behalf of those that have no voice must not be taken lightly. The biggest risk when exercising this principle is arrogance. We could easily fall into the trap of simplifying or assuming to know well, what trees, animals, rivers, artifacts, or others need.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Battle in Seattle
- Earth First!
- PARK(ing) Day
- Stolen Gas Campaign

Tactics

- Artistic vigil
- Banner hang
- Culture jamming
- Infiltration
- Lamentation
- Legislative theatre

responsibility and humility. To transform this power into an opportunity, we must engage our empathy and moral imagination. We must step into the “shoes” of non-humans and attempt to form an intimate understanding of what their needs may be.

We may immediately think of the most basic and apparent needs such as water, sunlight, and survival. But, we need to dig deeper . . . Trees have been around for literally a billion years. Science has only recently learned that trees communicate, share resources, and warn each other of approaching dangers. What should we do when speaking on their behalf to respect their cosmic uniqueness, intelligence, and emotions that we have shun?

To promote respect for all life, as well as our own historical treasures, we must give those that can't speak for themselves not just a voice, but even rights. In 2008, Ecuador enshrined nature rights in its constitution, the first country to do so. Others soon followed suit. In 2012, New Zealand granted legal personhood to the Whanganui river, and in 2019, voters in Toledo, Ohio granted “irrevocable rights” to Lake Erie. Now, these critical bodies of water have actual legal rights in human forums.

Indigenous societies regard the natural world as a sacred source of wisdom. They have long understood that we humans are but one strand in an interconnected web of life. We moderns must walk out of our ego, re-learn to revere our fellow beings, and bring their voices (and rights) into our halls of power. Not doing so is not just killing them, but will eventually kill us, too.

LEARN MORE

Creating Legal Rights for Rivers: Lessons from Australia, New Zealand, and India

Ecology and Society Journal, 2018

<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol23/iss1/art7/>

Environmental Personhood

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_personhood

- Public filibuster

Principles

- Change a name to change the game
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Know your cultural terrain
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Make the invisible visible
- Use your cultural assets

Theories

- Capitalism
- Commodity fetishism
- Comunalidad (communality)
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Memes

Methodologies

- Artstorm
- Battle of the story

TAGS

Capitalism, Climate justice, Environment, Land use, Privatization, Language