Escaping the Anthropo Art Scene in Aotearoa

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Pēpeha

Ko Karioi te maunga
Ko Whaingaroa te moana
Ko Pākehā te iwi
Ko Castlefranc-Allen te hapū
Ko Ruapuke te papakainga
Ko Joe Citizen ahau

Attempting to be Māori-centric

Te Kōpū Mānia o Kirikiriroa, Wintec

Locating myself at the intercultural hyphen

**Being Pākehā is about being relational**

A useful way to understand these relationships can be explained by what Michelle Fine (1994) describes as an intercultural hyphen, which is that little grammatical dash that exists within the conjoined word 'Māori-Pākehā'

Meeting, but different – the line that "joins as well as separates" (Jones, 2017, p.187)

As a Pākehā attempting to work with Māori in spaces where Māori ways of being and doing are the norm, then my ways of being and doing have to be *being-with* and *doing-with*

What does this mean in practice?

- Regularly meeting with kaumātua
- Recognising that I am not 'leading' the project
- Listening as an active practice
- Not interrupting
- Face to face, not email
- Time is as long as it takes and when it happens
- Attending hui with tangata whenua/ mana whenua where my credibility is established when others talk for me
- Attempting to be guided by existing kaupapa – values based, not task-orientated
- Being my authentic self
- Not assuming that there is a one-to-one correspondence between concepts
- Sometimes having parallel conversations in different worlds

Parallel timelines, in Citizen, 2019, p. 37
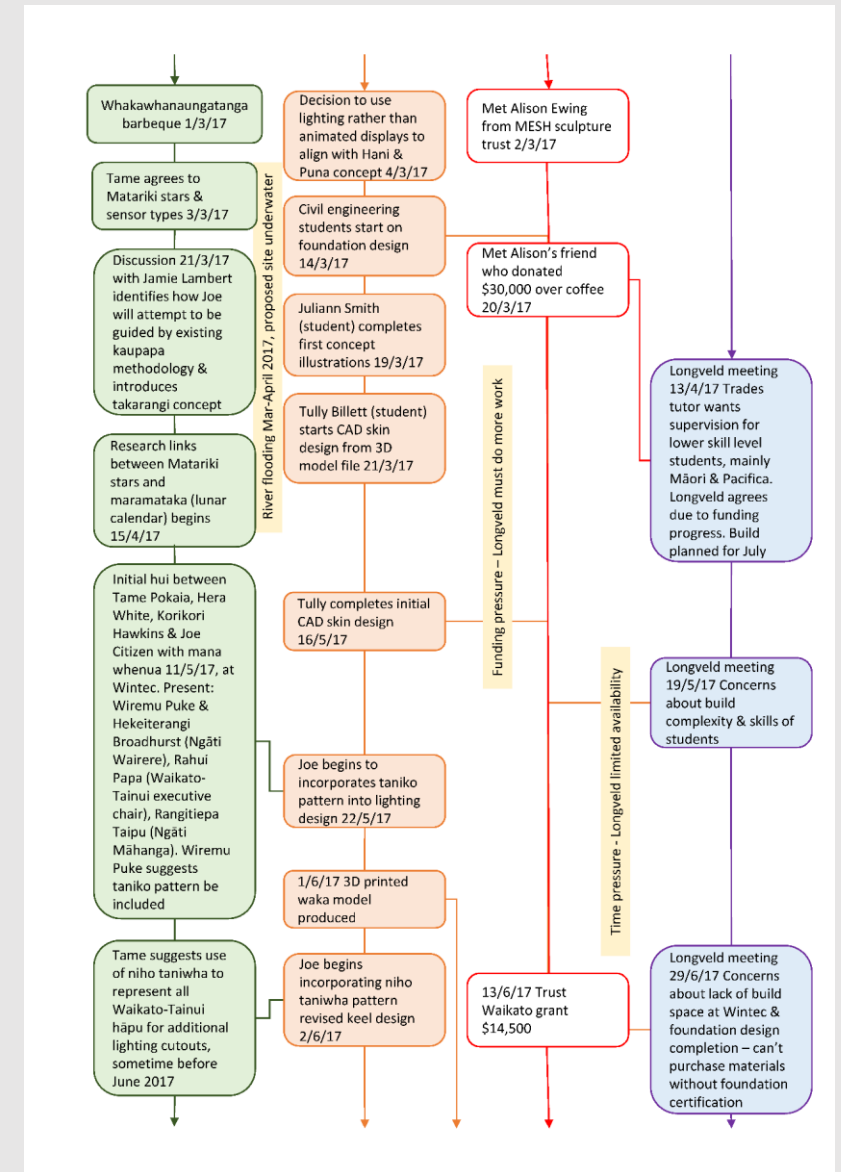
Attempting to work in partnership

Pre-trades students at Longveld contemplate their prototype waka. It was the first ever attempt at considering how the public art sculpture that would become known as *Tōia Mai,* might actually be built

Anthropocene?

"the Anthropocene is not simply a geologic epoch; it is an opportunity to embrace a new ontology. In it, we can reconfigure our orientation to the material world."

Benson, 2019, p. 252

Calls from posthumanist/new materialist/speculative realist/material vitalist etc writers to depart from the causal and deterministic models of the Western Enlightenment project, in favour of more non-humancentric ontological understandings of how the universe operates

More relational approaches that emphasise the agencies of nonhumans within phenomena

e.g. Barad (2008), Bennett (2010), Booth (2014), Delanda (2016), Gratton (2014), Meillassoux (2008), Salter (2010), Shaviro (2014), Stern (2013) et al.

Typically framed within Western realist traditions that claim superiority of knowledge through rationalist and positivist modes of knowing the world

Why reach for…

Deleuze (2004) instead of Deloria (1999b),
Bennett (2010) rather than Bungee (1984),
Guattari (2005) rather than Garroutte (2003),
Massumi (2002) rather than Marker (2018),
Alaimo (2016) rather than Atleo (2007), and so on

Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt, 2019, p.2

Multiple Māori indigenous understandings of the universe as being interwoven, interfused, and interrelational, and without assuming human exceptionalism with regards to who or what is capable of knowledge, agency or volition

For example: Durie (2017), Hēnare (2015), Hoskins & Jones (2017), Jones (2013), Marsden (1965/2003), Matamua (2017), Mika (2018), Royal (2017), Salmond (1985), Stewart (2016), and Smith (2017), just to name a few

Western Realism

Usually based on what it can measure in terms of the abstraction of numbers and their logical relations. There's a tendency within Western philosophical trajectories to consider these logics as being universally applicable and yet somehow without influence of their own
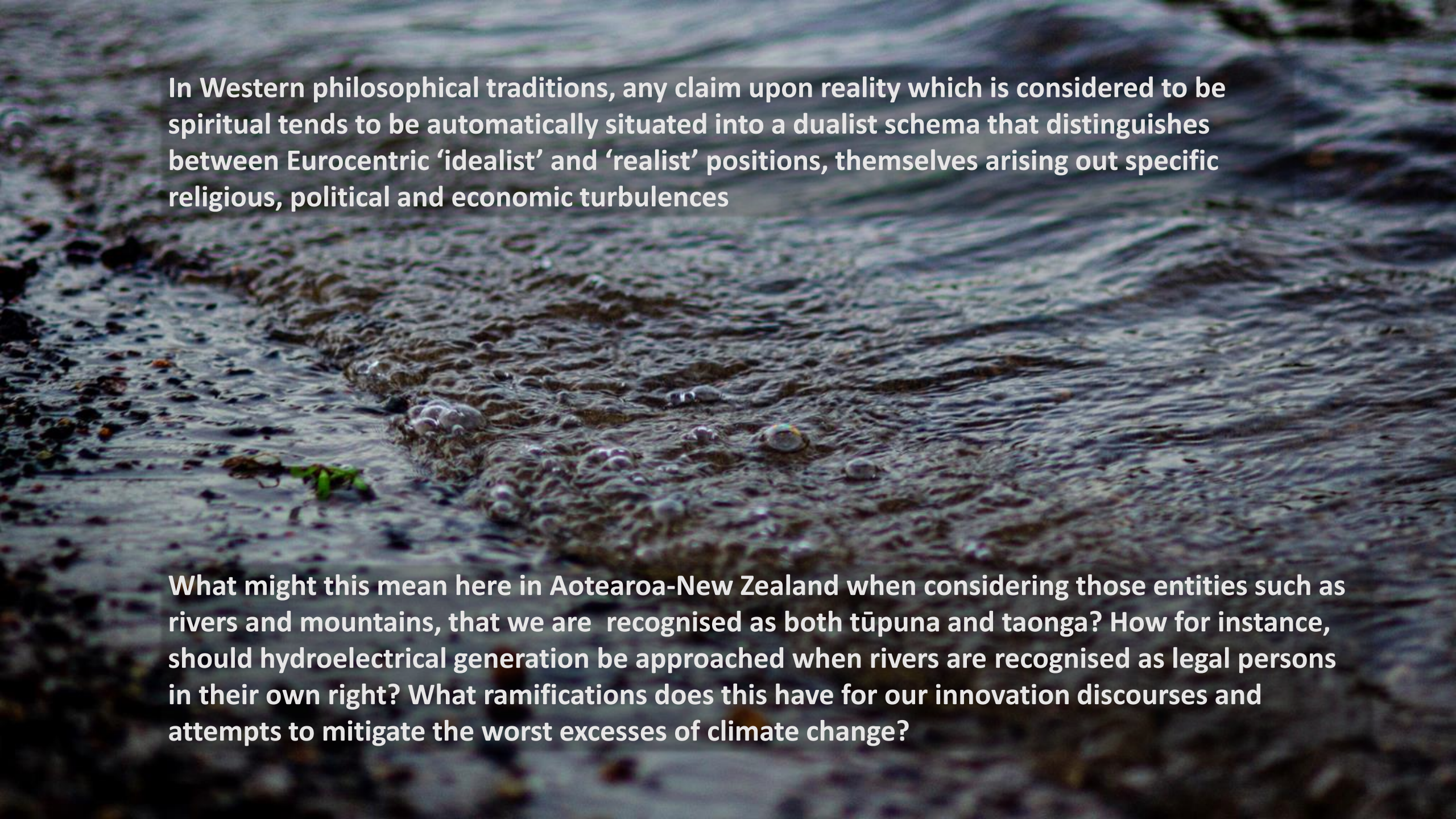
Western Enlightenment Project typically positioned technology as continually 'advancing' but without its own agency

Matter traditionally considered as being atomistic, dumb and inert - Nature an an infinite and passive resource
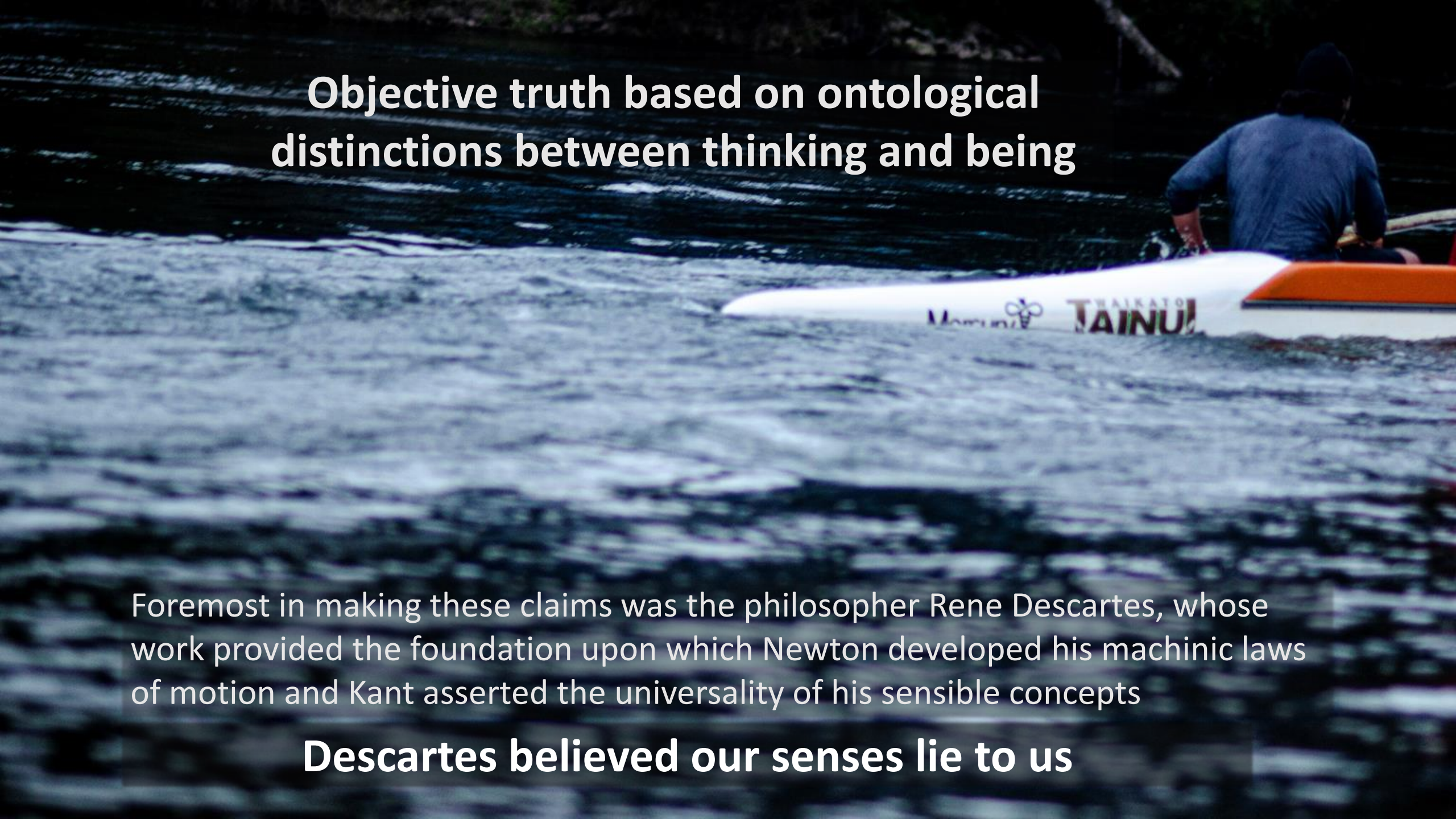
Bennett (2010) identifies how technologies such as electrical power grids have agency within what she and others describe as assemblages. But her material vitalism is limited to Western conceptions of both realism and an Othered understanding of animism

Anthropological bias: Māori Indigenous claims of the interwoven nature of reality historically invalidated through simplistic binary understandings of animate and inanimate. Western anthropologists failed to understand distinctions between mauri (life force) and hau or hā (the breath of life), because they assumed that Māori "regarded all material objects as being indwelt by spirits" (Marsden, 1965/2003, p.44)

In Western philosophical traditions, any claim upon reality which is considered to be spiritual tends to be automatically situated into a dualist schema that distinguishes between Eurocentric 'idealist' and 'realist' positions, themselves arising out specific religious, political and economic turbulences

What might this mean here in Aotearoa-New Zealand when considering those entities such as rivers and mountains, that we are recognised as both tūpuna and taonga? How for instance, should hydroelectrical generation be approached when rivers are recognised as legal persons in their own right? What ramifications does this have for our innovation discourses and attempts to mitigate the worst excesses of climate change?

Objective truth based on ontological distinctions between thinking and being

Foremost in making these claims was the philosopher Rene Descartes, whose work provided the foundation upon which Newton developed his machinic laws of motion and Kant asserted the universality of his sensible concepts
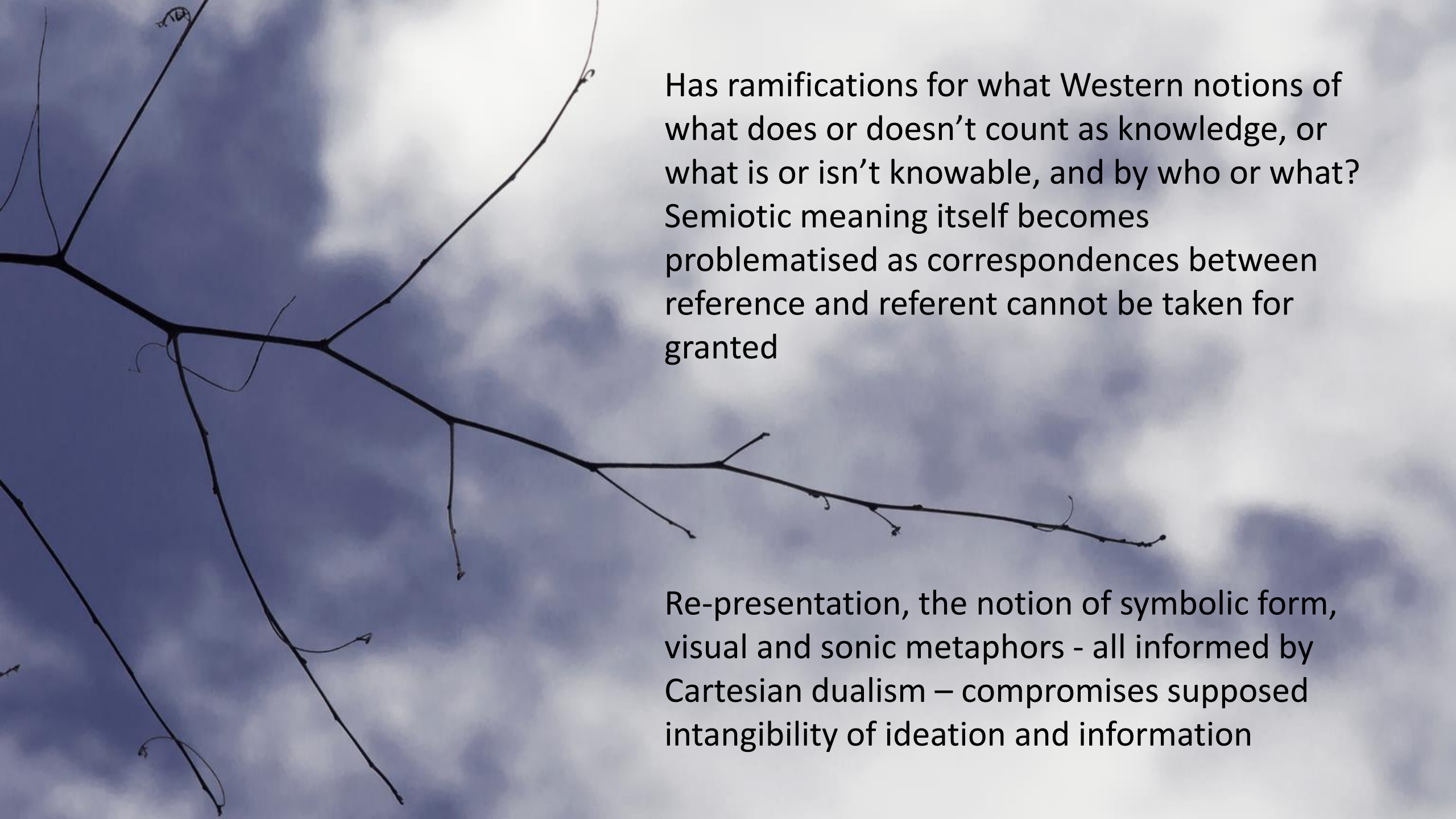
Descartes believed our senses lie to us

- Writing in 1641, Descartes was enculturated by older Christian conceptions of heaven and spirituality being informed by Plato's cave and Aristotle's Ideas, both of which position 'true' reality as existing elsewhere in a nonmaterial form. Humans also have "have dominion over the natural world" (Genesis, 1: 26). Only humans can be rational. Animals are "unthinking automata" (Shaviro, 2014, p.87).

- Recent inventions like the telescope and microscope revealed parts of the universe that human senses alone couldn't perceive

- Plagued by doubt that he existed, could no longer rely on perception alone. Only rational thought remained, therefore: "I think, I am"

- Only through "an intuition of the mind". (Descartes 1641, in Haldane 1911, p.11) could he be sure he existed

- Ideas are therefore "clear and distinct", for if they were not, then his claim that his ability to think these clear and distinct ideas, could be doubted. As his claim ""I think, I am" cannot be doubted, all clear and distinct ideas must be true." (Retrieved 16th September 2020, from: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rene-Descartes/Meditations)

- Sounds like a circular argument? It is! Welcome to the birth of Cartesian dualism between nature and culture!

In a Māori indigenous worldview,
"humans are inseparable from all that exists"
(Mika, 2017, p.39)

**No ontological bifurcation
between thinking and being**

"Philosophically, Māori do not see themselves as separate from nature, humanity, and
the natural world, being direct descendants of Earth Mother. Thus, the resources of
the earth do not belong to humankind; rather, humans belong to the earth"
(Hēnare, 2015, p. 82)

Has ramifications for what Western notions of what does or doesn't count as knowledge, or what is or isn't knowable, and by who or what? Semiotic meaning itself becomes problematised as correspondences between reference and referent cannot be taken for granted

Re-presentation, the notion of symbolic form, visual and sonic metaphors - all informed by Cartesian dualism – compromises supposed intangibility of ideation and information

In practice this looks like:

- Not taking my own cultural beliefs about what knowledge is, or who creates it, as universally true

- Being critical of claims that position thinking and spirituality as lacking substance, and materiality as more tangible and without agency

- Questioning my tendency to privilege knowledge that is measurable

- Trying to remember that three dimensional Cartesian spatiality is co-constituted by an imaginary origin point known as zero

- Trying not to recreate Cartesian frameworks whilst trying to avoid them!
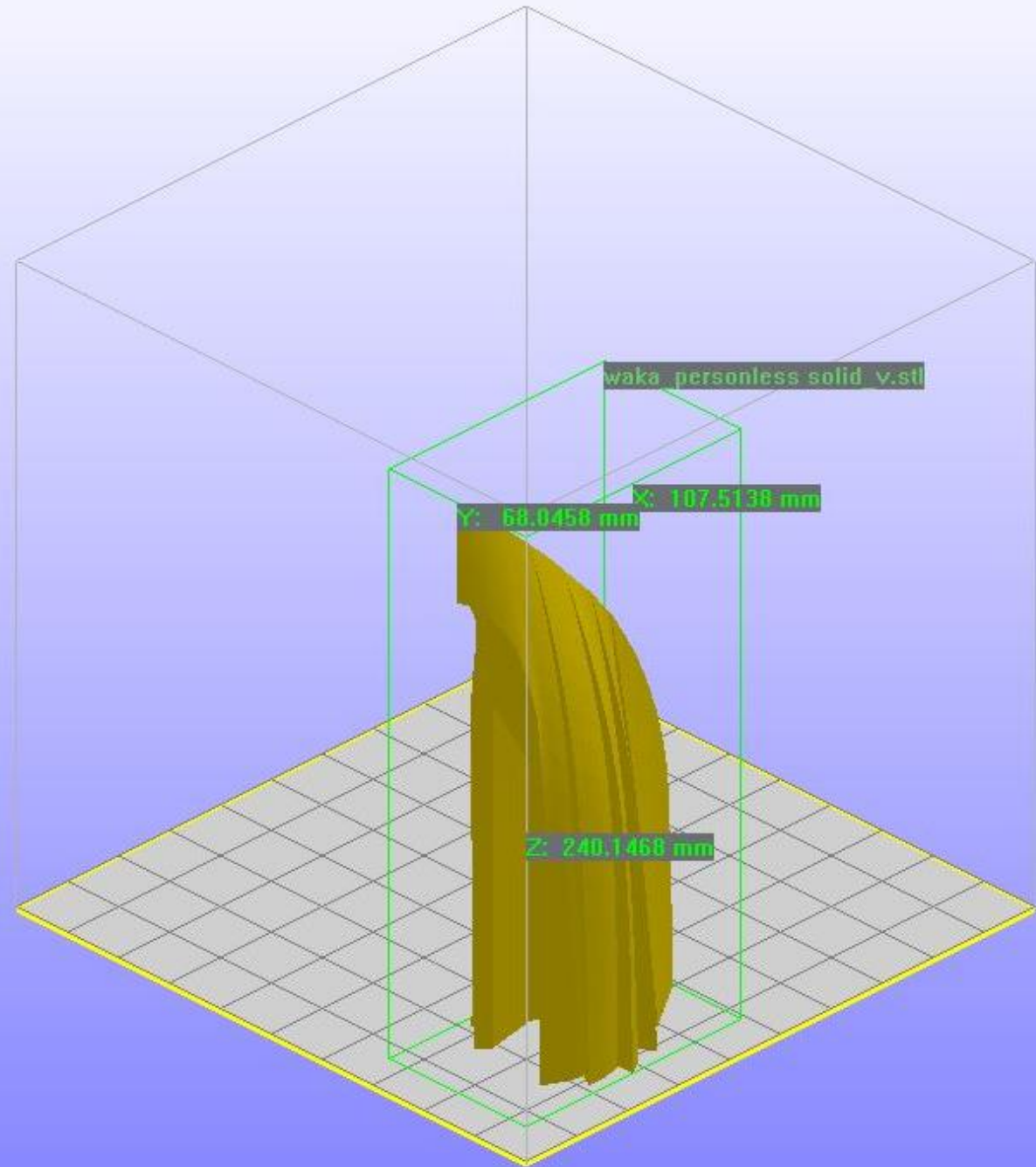
Worldedness

A term used by Carl Mika (2017) to refer to a common premise amongst Indigenous writers, which is "the confluence of all things in the world, such as there is an underlying driving move of all things to be in conversation with each other."

Mika, 2017, p. 38

Inter-relationality with place:
"One's personality, indeed one's self formation, ultimately depends on one's tribal identity. Landscapes have the capacity to shape how we think. Tau (2001) argues here, in line with Maori epistemology, that Maori knowledge reflected the self onto the landscape. In that act, place and self are inseparable, being immediately informed by each other"

Mika, 2017, p. 41

In practice, what could this mean for this Pākehā?

- Attempting to consider Matariki as a doorway concept to an interconnected world

- Attempting to let go of my Cartesian predispositions when kaumātua Tame Pokaia described the stars of Matariki as having "a domain and a function" and are "doorways to information" (Pokaia, in Citizen, 2019, p. 77)

- Being open to ways of being and knowing the world that don't automatically 'make sense'

Illustration by Juliann Smith, used with permission
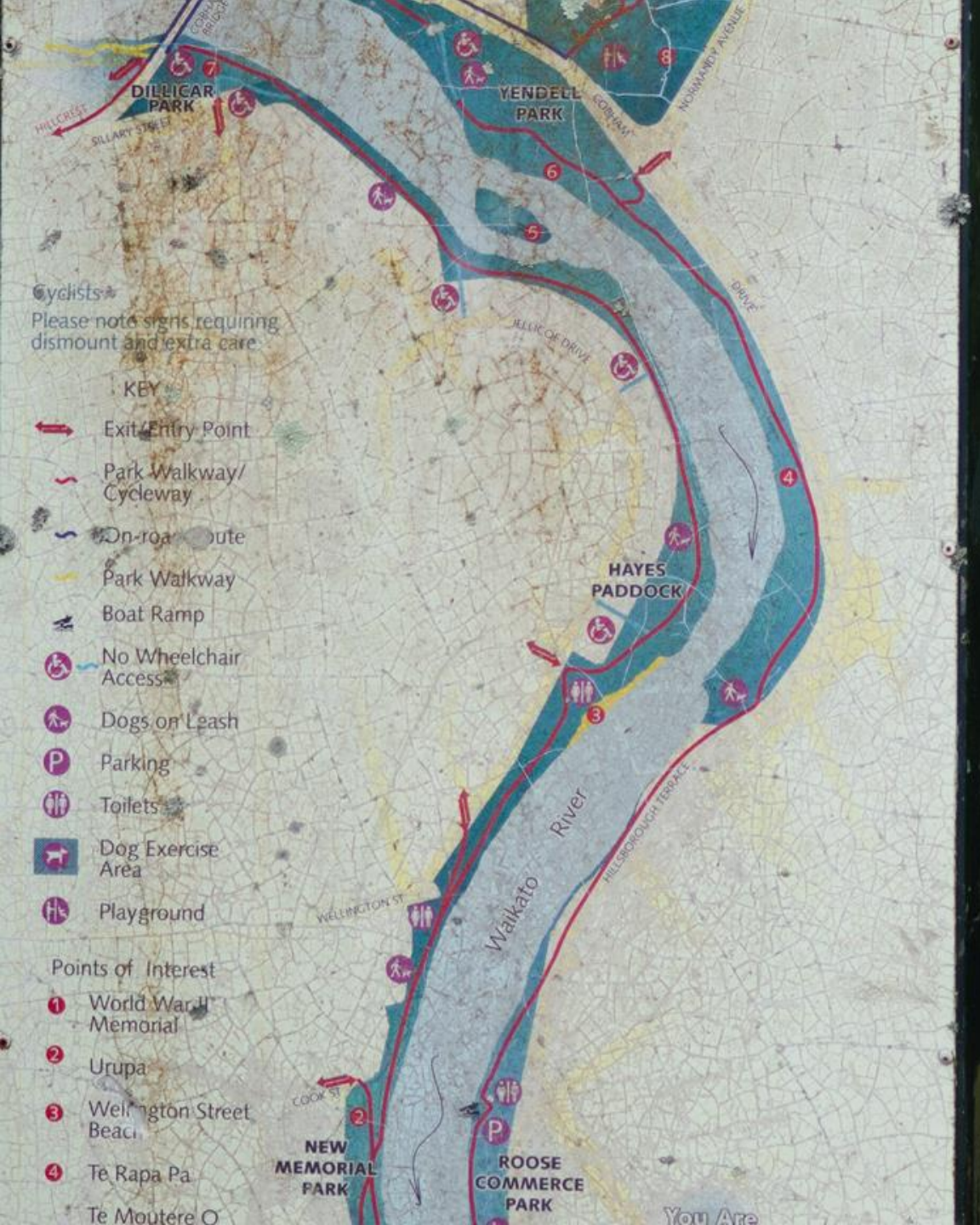
If the Anthropocene is to be engaged with by collaborations between artists and scientists here in Aotearoa, it becomes vitally important that domain practitioners recognise the cultural traditions that co-constitute their practice

Just because Western post-humanism now admits Nature as possessing agency in an interrelated world, does not mean that it is particularly aware of, or willing to, relinquish all of its modernist infrastructure

'Mapping the Anthropocene', for instance, is cartographic – when the supposed neutrality of Cartesian representation cannot be taken for granted

Innovation discourse

- Typically relies on technological progress and informed by traditional Western division between human agencies of intangible information, and 'inert' matter

- e.g. Digitality and virtuality often staged as being 'better' for the environment due to an assumed lack of tangibility – but they need electricity and conductive metals, use space, make heat and often generate microwaves

- e.g. claims around big data and how it is positioned as a potential saviour in the management of resources requires better understanding of material, digital and spiritual agencies
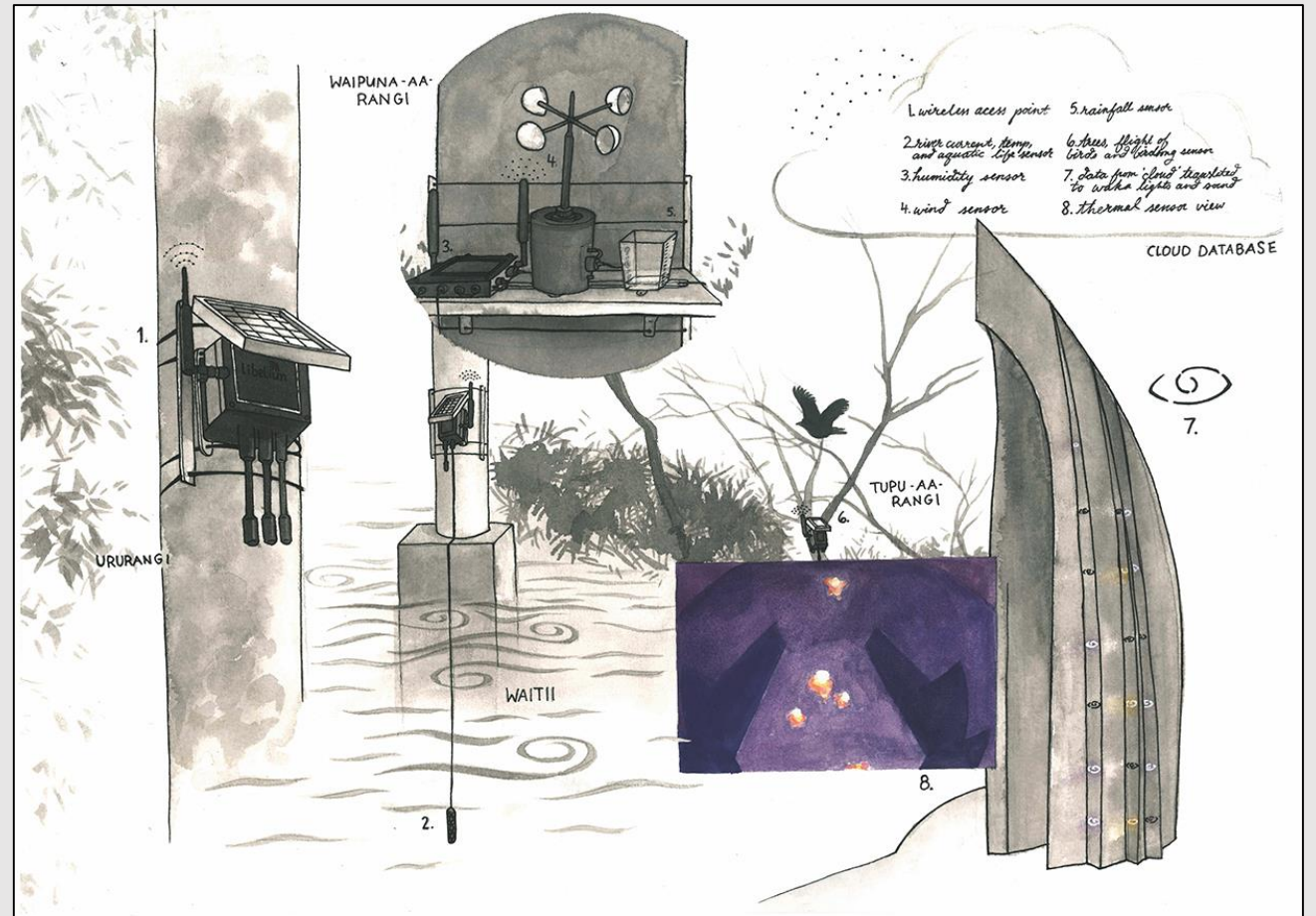
Illustrative strategy to promote an Internet of Things network to a wider public unfamiliar with the individual stars of Matariki
Illustration by Juliann Smith. Image used with permission

Beyond Western realist understandings of data

Example of live data values for *Tōia Mai* informing sound and lighting interactions

Who or what a person or living thing is, cannot be ascribed to Eurocentric epistemological categories when "indigenous thought places the human and the nonhuman on equal footing and attributes a mysterious activity of the external world"

Mika, 2017, p. 52

Common to encounter in te Ao Māori the idea that all humans and nonhumans have a mauri, and be "understood as determining events, as exerting forces, as volitional, or as instructing people"

Hoskins & Jones, 2017, p. 52

"because data originated from a person, people or other living thing in the Māori world, the data [...] has a mauri."

Taiuru, 2018, p. 7
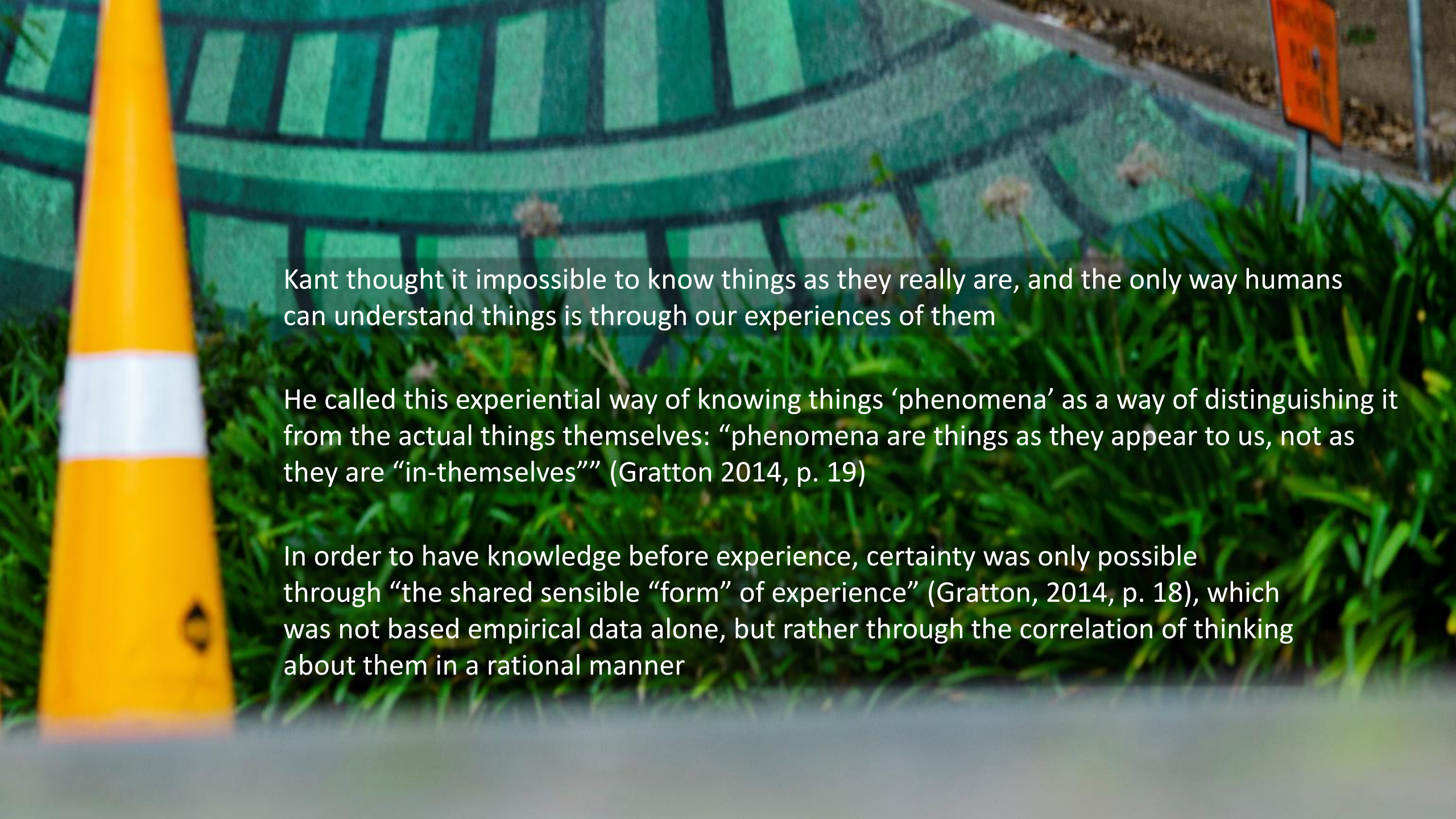
The idea that data has agency is highly disruptive to Western metaphysics as Eurocentric notions of scientific objectivity are destabilised

Objective truth about things in the world beyond 'human finitude', which is to say, the limits of human sensory perception, is based on the precept that quantitative data and the logical consistency of mathematical operations provide access to constants that have always existed

These claims are what Kant (1781) called a priori knowledge of the world – which is to say, 'prior givens' – or truths that exist without human experience of them

Informed by Descartes, Kant took for granted an ontological division between subjects and objects

Kant thought it impossible to know things as they really are, and the only way humans can understand things is through our experiences of them

He called this experiential way of knowing things 'phenomena' as a way of distinguishing it from the actual things themselves: "phenomena are things as they appear to us, not as they are "in-themselves"" (Gratton 2014, p. 19)

In order to have knowledge before experience, certainty was only possible through "the shared sensible "form" of experience" (Gratton, 2014, p. 18), which was not based empirical data alone, but rather through the correlation of thinking about them in a rational manner

Kant was making the claim that "there are some universal forms of the subjective knowledge of things" (Gratton, 2014, p. 18)

To put that another way, because humans are incapable of knowing the world except through our own experience, then there are shared sensible 'forms' by which this experience can occur: "our very experience of the world can take place only under certain conditions of our own making" (Shaviro, 2014, p. 6)

It was through accessing these universally known constants that rational thinking could now deduce all manner of scientific knowledge in subjects such as geometry, mathematics, physics etc., so that the hidden laws of the universe could be revealed in order to exert mastery over it

As he was a European writing in 1781, his 'sensible concepts' perhaps no longer seem as self-evident as they once did, particularly when they relate to the **supposedly universal truths known about time, space, and other abstractions, like numbers**

If posthumanism can generally be defined as the search "to develop a new philosophy of science and a way to move away from Kant" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 72), then why are Western-informed realist claims to truth so hard to relinquish?

Perhaps it is because by calling for a greater recognition of the agentic capacities of nonhumans, human exceptionalism as a predeterminate of objective knowledge is revealed to be both culturally constructed and not exclusive to humans

Whilst this presents something of a crisis for Western science, which has long enjoyed its pre-eminent authority on truth and has a vested interest in maintaining this position, it presents no such threat to worldviews where "Being is not foremost a human attitude." (Mika 2013, in Mika 2017, p. 38)

Karen Barad's Agential Realism

Drawing on the quantum mechanics of Niels Bohr, phenomena is not 'inter'- active, but 'intra-active' – agencies are entangled *within* phenomena: "distinct agencies do not precede their interaction" (Barad 2007, p. 33)

Things-in-the-world are not atomistic or discrete – they do not occur prior to their engagement with each other

Agential realism is founded on the idea that:

"Intra-actions always entail particular exclusions, and exclusions foreclose the possibility of determinism, providing the conditions of an open future."

Barad 2007, p. 234

Technologies of measurement used in scientific practices are not in themselves neutral and have effect on what is being observed, because:

"our knowledge-making practices, including the use and testing of scientific concepts, are material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe"

Barad 2007, p. 32

How things are done are is important as *what* is done

The idea that scientific practices are not in themselves neutral, challenges both Western scientific prerogative to impartial objective truth, but also its humancentric claim on who or what can possess knowledge, or agency within, the universe:

"There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part"
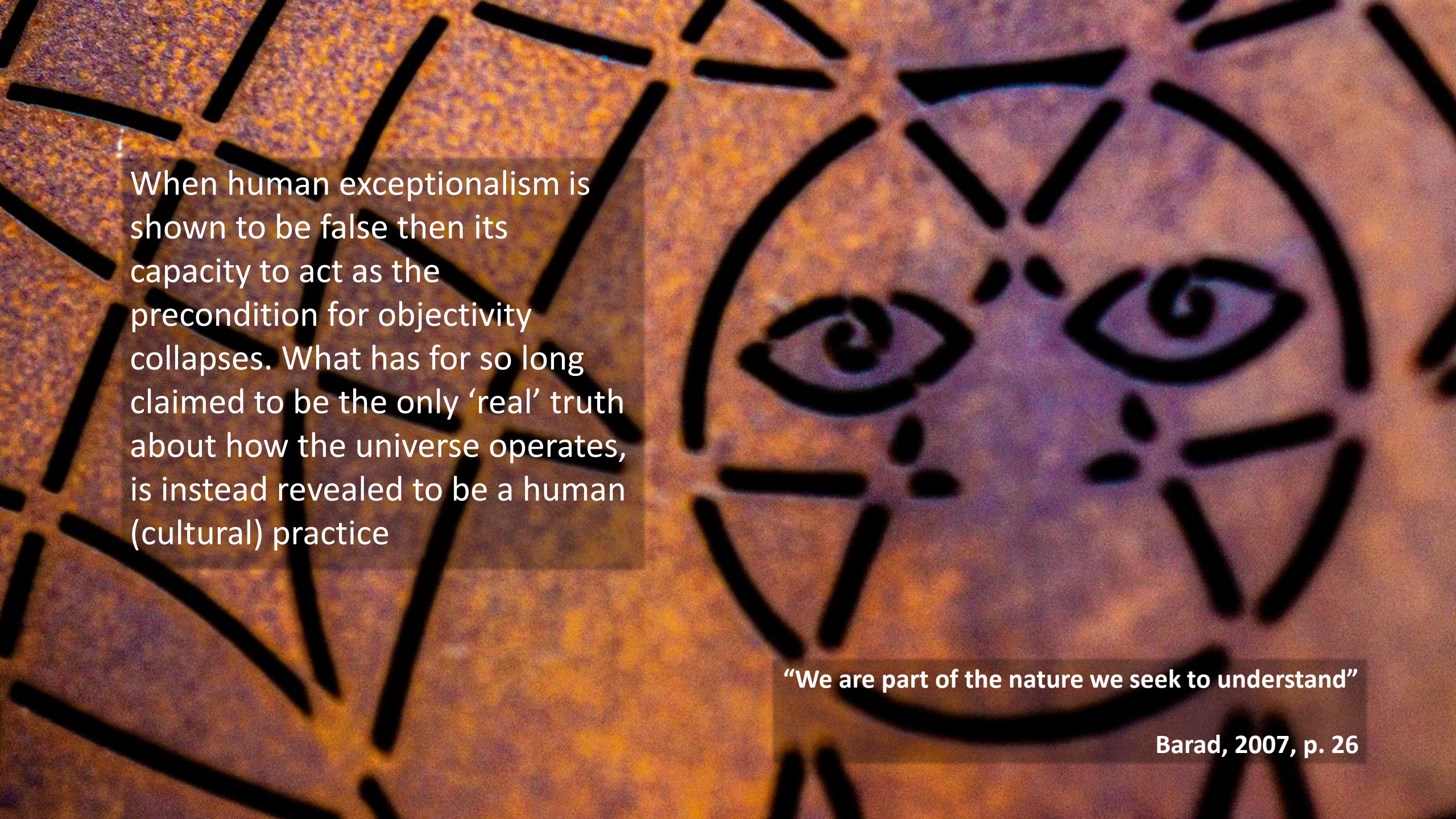
Barad, 2007, p. 185

Barad, is still a realist .It would be unconscionable to consider a universe without objectivity, so she simply reconfigures its definition: Objectivity is the means by which the replicability of material phenomena can be achieved

Despite her material emphasis, 'mattering' (how matter happens) is an ongoing process, where acts of measurement have discursive effect:

"discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which the determination of boundaries, properties, and meanings is differentially enacted

Barad, 2007, p. 148

When human exceptionalism is shown to be false then its capacity to act as the precondition for objectivity collapses. What has for so long claimed to be the only 'real' truth about how the universe operates, is instead revealed to be a human (cultural) practice
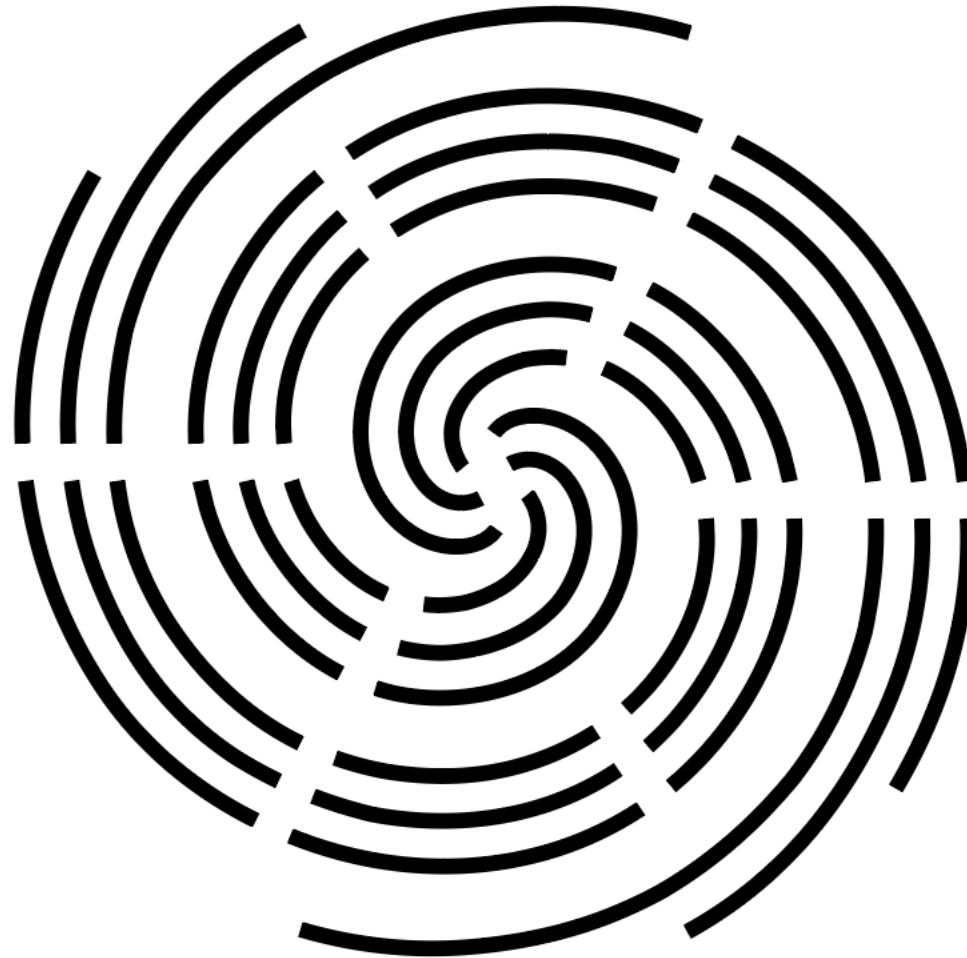
"We are part of the nature we seek to understand"

Barad, 2007, p. 26

Time and Space

"Space, time, and matter are intra-actively produced in the ongoing differential articulation of the world. Time is not a succession of evenly spaced intervals available as a reference for all bodies and space is not a collection of pre-existing points set out as a container for matter to inhabit"
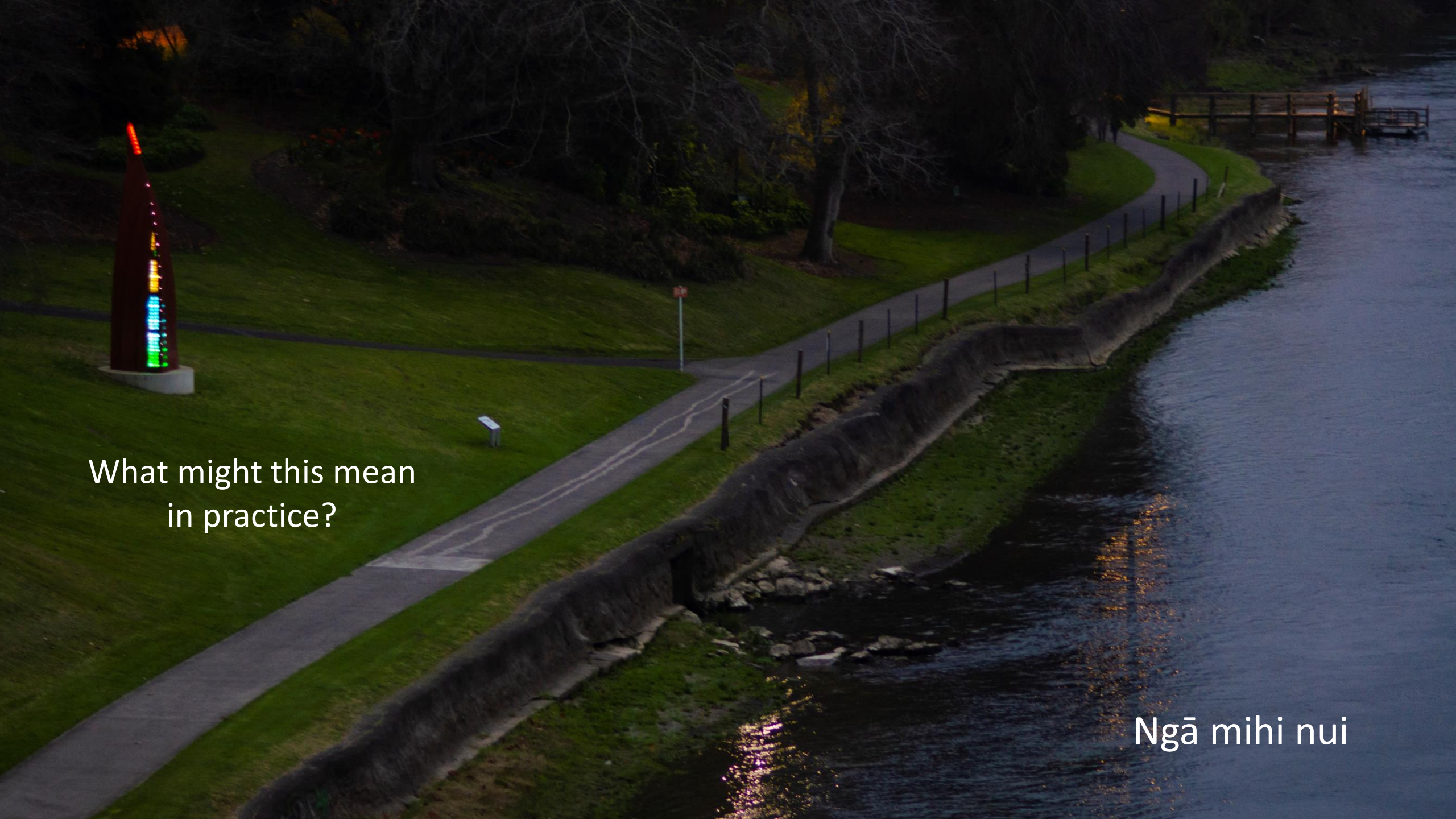
Barad, 2007, p. 234

"The temporal is subordinated under the cosmic process and denotes not time but sequences in processes and events which occur in the cosmic process."

Marsden, 2003, p. 23

"Indigenous holistic thought does indeed suggest that apparently different stages of time are, in fact, co-instantaneous"

Mika, 2017, p. 45

Takarangi pattern cut into top of *Tōia Mai*

What might this mean
in practice?

Ngā mihi nui