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## Shade<sup>i</sup>

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In a warming world, shade can be considered a social good with multiple political and affective dimensions. Here I explore the more than semantic relationship between shade and ‘shadow places’.

Plumwood’s ‘shadow places’<sup>1</sup> are denuded, expansive, toxic and monocultural. They are places denied, put beyond the ken of responsibility but that nonetheless connect or ‘shadow’ all other places. When I read Plumwood, I think of places that are politically and physically uncomfortable, but more specifically, and perhaps ironically, places that are exposed, unshaded.<sup>2</sup>

What is shade? Shade is not the absence of light, it is not darkness.<sup>3</sup> Shade is an affordance. Shade arises from a particular arrangement of objects, light, climatic conditions and bodies; shade is relational. A desire for cooling is what makes a shadow shade. Perhaps this is why we feel a kind of gratitude mixed into the relief, the whole-of-body relief, on entering shade in the heat of the day. I don’t think we’re the only species to feel this.

Some colleagues and I became interested in the social distribution of green shade in Melbourne’s western and northern suburbs. These suburbs have in many ways, and over many years, functioned as a kind of shadow place for Melbourne’s eastern and south-eastern suburbs. The western and north-western suburbs host the city’s manufacturing and heavy industry. Here too, are military spaces, toxic landfills, prisons and remand centres. Since they once promised work close to home for many, and because housing has remained cheaper in these areas, migrants have moved here since the mid-twentieth century: including southern European, Asian, African and Middle Eastern migrant groups. While there are important soil and climate differences between Melbourne’s west and east, this does not fully explain the lack of green shade – now known as ‘urban forest canopy cover’ – in these shadow suburbs.

Our research used a data set that matched the ecological features of the urban forest canopy with social and economic features of the same areas, finding that high unemployment rates and high population turnover correlated negatively and significantly with tree cover, especially in public space.<sup>4</sup> We also found that local councils were especially active green shade champions, but that they were often looking to fill the physical gaps in the canopy,

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<sup>1</sup> Plumwood, “Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling.”

<sup>2</sup> Wood, “Warning over ‘heat island’ effect in cities as tree coverage declines.”

<sup>3</sup> Edensor, “Introduction to geographies of darkness.”; Edensor, *From light to dark: daylight, illumination and gloom*.

<sup>4</sup> Cook et al., *Shading Liveable Cities*.

rather than the gaps in the socio-ecological fabric of and between places – the places where those most vulnerable to extreme heat events lived and moved.<sup>5</sup> Encouraged by ‘ecosystem services’ thinking, this approach erred on the side of technical and physical intervention at the expense of social context, especially economic disadvantage.

There are many reasons why large old trees that give deep shade are co-located with privilege and economic power, including planning and property regimes, the historical provision of high streets and pedestrian thoroughfares, urban water and waste management, and persistent aesthetic preferences themselves embedded in class and race politics (including colonial simulations of metropole leisure spaces such as parks and botanic gardens). This co-location of wealth and shade is found not only in Sydney and Melbourne, but in many places around the world.<sup>6</sup> But this appears to have licensed a specific form of environmental racism towards residents of more socially diverse areas: the perception that, because these areas are not already or ‘naturally’ green, that ‘they’ ‘there’ don’t appreciate green shade, and so wouldn’t want trees, for example, as part of their freeway upgrade, new public park or housing development.

The retention and provision of shade in Australia is, as for other parts of the world, an environmental justice issue. People are differently exposed to the urban heat island effect, extreme heat events,<sup>7</sup> glare and risk of heat exhaustion and heat isolation. Green and built (physical structures) shade might help address this injustice, but considerations of the additional benefits of green shade over built shade shouldn’t be far behind. Green shade cools locally<sup>8</sup> and at larger scales, potentially ameliorating heat effects at the suburb- and even city-scale.

Shade is a ‘to-hand’ kind of provision that can be enacted through plant species choice or even by the angling of an overhead batten.<sup>9</sup> An air-conditioner, by contrast, is ‘the ultimate [in] remoteness, [a] put-it-somewhere-else machine’.<sup>10</sup> And while the components and by-products of the electricity generation that powers air-conditioners might be ‘remote’, the ‘waste’ air they belch can exacerbate local heat islands. Air-conditioners make *us* remote too, hiding us away in private cooled spaces.<sup>11</sup>

It has long been recognised that economic dead zones can be ecologically rich: forgotten roadsides, railways culverts and reservoir edges. Perhaps these spaces could also be recognised as cooling places? If one overlays a map of forest cover with a map of Crown Land in my home state of Victoria, Australia, large areas coincide. Places currently set aside for future logging and mining – future shadow places – are major areas of green and green

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Byrne and Matthews, “Out in the heat: why poorer suburbs are more at risk in warming cities.”; Arango, “Turn Off the Sunshine: Why Shade is a Mark of Privilege in Los Angeles.”; Bloch, “Shade.”; Nevarez, “Burned feet, parched throats: Arizona homeless desperate to escape heatwave.”

<sup>7</sup> Bolitho and Miller, “Heat as emergency, heat as chronic stress: policy and institutional responses to vulnerability to extreme heat.”

<sup>8</sup> Ossola, Staas and Leishman, “A solution to cut extreme heat by up to 6 degrees is in our own backyards.”; Amin, “These two Western Sydney streets are completely different temperatures — here's why.”; Clement, “Green space in every schoolyard: the radical plan to cool Paris.”; Visentin, “Sydney to be cooled by an extra five million trees by 2030.”

<sup>9</sup> Share shade stories and shading practices here! <https://shademelbourne.tumblr.com/>

<sup>10</sup> Plumwood, “Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling.”

<sup>11</sup> Mellick Lopes, et al., “Infrastructures of Care: Opening up ‘Home’ as Commons in a Hot City.”

shade. If these places can be wrested away from a capitalist story-so-far<sup>12</sup> they can continue to be available for shading and cooling.

Shade isn't always welcome, as setback regulations for new city buildings have long made clear. In everyday speech, 'shade' can be a term for disrespect. If someone 'shades' you, they're standing over you, blocking your limelight. Sunlight is necessary for photosynthesis, and for human chemical processes and well-being too. But sun and light appreciation is also culturally contingent, and we must live differently with the sun in a warming world.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the aim is a variegated pattern of shade and light that is conducive to multi-species thriving in all places. A *chiaroscuro* for the Anthropocene, with more shade than sun.

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<sup>12</sup> Massey, *For Space*.

<sup>13</sup> Edensor and Hughes, "Moving through a dappled world: the aesthetics of shade and shadow in place."

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<sup>i</sup> Hughes, Rachel. "Shade." *An A to Z of Shadow Places Concepts* (2023), doi: <https://www.shadowplaces.net/concepts>

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