

Horizon Manifesto Edition N°2  
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# Belongings and Ownership

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### Horizon Manifestos

There are some imperative moments in time when it is clear that humans, more than usual, need to redefine themselves, expand their horizons and develop new perspectives. As we enter 2023 we hit one of those junctures. Human life seems lost and somewhat painful with no clear common belief in mind.

These manifestos are tranquil and humble responses to common hardships and global ordeal. Short in form, they aim to spread micro declarations easy to embrace. By expanding public ethos, we can curiously consider new ways of living, breathing and being. Ideas and knowledge, radical thoughts or peaceful perspectives, they can all facilitate dynamic and constantly changing viewpoints to redefine current human existence in the context we live in and live by.

## The Dilemma of the Mug

What are our belongings and what does it mean to own them? From a superficial perspective, belongings are things or objects someone has found, made, bought, or been given. They are connected to us and we have legal rights to possess and do almost whatever we please with them. Yet, we often seem to forget that our lives are finite. And so, with our deaths and endings, comes the ending of our personal belongings. Things may have been owned by someone before us, and may be owned by something after us. In other words, to state that you own something needs to be clarified. We own things during our lifetime. Not before and not after. Therefore, in order to take account of longer arcs of time, it might be more reasonable to talk about things as owning themselves, or one another. Humans might be just one of the temporary holders or caretakers.

We could take a coffee mug as an example. This specific mug was bought with money by someone who sees themselves as its owner. Or perhaps they gave it away to a second person who in their turn sees themselves as the owner. In any case, the mug is seen as a belonging to a person. No one can come along and walk away with the mug without being labelled a thief. Yet once, the mug was made in clay – a material coming from Earth. Someone dug up a piece of muddy soil and claimed it theirs. They later sold it to a ceramicist who by handing over money claimed the clay as now being transformed the clay into a mug and the material was sold once again.

Products, objects and materials are being transformed and moved around in our systems. We can call it capitalism. We can call it trade. We can call it economic welfare. In the end, all of these things

produced by humans are made from materials coming from Earth.

So who owns Earth? Most would argue no particular humans own the deeper inner parts of our shared planet. But when we reach the surface, the crust, things become enormously more complex. Heavily impacted by colonialism, war and dreadful abuse of power, surface area and land is owned by humans. And some humans only. To backtrack and fully understand how specific stretches of land sit in the hands of few, is an almost impossible task. No one can deny that land has been brutally taken, stolen, bought, sold, given away and handed around over centuries. Just as land connects us all, so do these awful stories.

If we look at the mug in relation to land ownership, it becomes clear that this is indeed a complex dilemma. A thing or material that no one owned, was pulled into the matrix of ownership and looked upon as private capital. It is not far-fetched to think of this in moral terms; to consider why it is or is not harmful, or greedy.

And to push our thinking even further. What about our own bodies? Our flesh is made up of materials from Earth, but that is a notion we seem to rather have forgotten. Our mothers generously gave away from their own bodies to create the very first parts that would become us. Through food, minerals, vitamins and water, we developed and grew into the constitutions that we are. All of my body is made from Earth. And all of my body will go back to Earth whatever way I may be handled after my death. My body will become soil. And, to follow the earlier logic, I might become a mug.

There is one “belonging” that entirely resists ownership, which we might call the soul. No one can

rightly buy anyone else's soul, because no one has authority (or possibility) to sell it, even their own. If a mug may be partly owned, a soul may not be owned at all.

If we start to understand belongings along such a spectrum, we might be able to look at our usage of finite materials in different ways. If we start to see that private capital and ownership is actually more stolen than we think it is, it might help us become more generous. If we start to express and discuss belongings and ownerships in an honest way, we might be able to shift sturdy beliefs that hold our systems back and start new dialogues and transformative governance built on trust, love and generosity.

In what follows, we explore how ownership establishes power relationships between things. What justifies these relationships? To the extent they are not justified, can we develop new notions of ownership that would unlock better relations?

# Objects Have Layers

A mug is made of clay. But it is not the same as any other lump of clay – it has been shaped, baked, and transformed.

Some theorists have supposed that these acts of transformation are what justify ownership. Even if it is wrong to pry up clay from the Earth and claim it as property, it seems less wrong for a potter to claim the difference in value between a lump of clay and a beautiful mug. Yet, if one cannot own clay, this leaves a fly in the ointment for the potter – an incompleteness in her rightful ownership of the mug, even though she shaped it.

A better theory would make allowance for a kind of “partial” ownership. The potter can take credit for the mug’s specific form. But she is really only renting the underlying clay. Looking at things this way, objects start to appear “layered”. Their ownability varies depending on the distance of observation. From a few feet away, a mug is a mug, owned by a potter. Put your eye a millimetre away: it’s clay, part of the Earth, owned by no one. Or, zoom out two kilometres: now the mug is part of a large set of equipment at a coffee shop, owned by some investor. Keep zooming out: eventually, it’s part of the Earth once again, a tiny atom in the huge orb. Again owned by no one.

A theory of ownership that doesn’t do violence to whatever it touches needs to help different layers coexist, instead of “picking favourites” and helping some layers dominate others.

## Layers in Time

Objects reveal their layers not only when we adjust the distance of observation, but also when we adjust the time of observation. A mug was once only clay, and it will again be only clay. Observed for a million years, it dissolves completely into its material. Only when we narrow our time-aperture, focusing on a few years or decades, does a mug come into focus.

It is only these more temporary layers that we can meaningfully “own” – the kind of layers that arise during our lives, and don’t greatly outlive us. When we think we “own” the longer-term layers, we’re making a big mistake.

Ownership, then, works like a spectrum, with some layers more ownable than others. One way of locating layers along this spectrum is to consider a ratio of two lifespans: How long does a particular layer persist, and how long does its owner persist? A long-lived thing, like a forest, can’t be owned very much by a short-lived thing, like a mayfly. But perhaps a human being can, for most intents and purposes, own a paper aeroplane.



# Souls Don't Own Things. Things Own Things.

Sometimes we seem to think that our souls own our things. We suppose that the immaterial and permanent part of “me” is what owns a mug, or a house, or whatever else.

But it doesn't make any more sense for the soul to own things than for the soul to be owned. The reality of ownership is much more prosaic. After all, when a court of law says that a particular mug belongs to a particular man, it isn't talking about that man's soul. It's talking about his material body. When that body ceases to be, the ownership relation ends, leaving it up to the court to decide whether to reattach the mug to some other body, such as his heir.

Suppose we think about owned things like mugs as occupying “layers” within a big, onion-like ontology – atoms, molecules, clay, mugs, coffee shops, cities, continents, planets, solar systems. We might then think of owners occupying the same layered ontology.

Layer	Onion 1	Onion 2
1	Atoms	Atoms
2	Molecules	Molecules
3	Clay	Biomass
4	Mug	Person
5	Coffee Shop	Business Organisation
6	City	City
7	Planet	Planet
8	Solar System	Solar System

It's normal enough for a person to own a mug. But if we pull apart these two things – a person and a mug – we notice that each of them are actually part of the same broader ontology. Beyond layers 3-5, Onion 1

and Onion 2 are one and the same thing. And if ownership relations overflow their adjacent layers – letting corporations own continents, or letting people own molecules – ownership becomes absurd.

As we've said, an ownership interest in a mug is too strong if it lets a person permanently own the clay it's made out of. This is equally true if owning a mug means you own a coffee shop, like Charlie's Golden Ticket in Willy Wonka. Too-strong ownership lets some layers – like the layer of people and their mugs – interfere with the operation of other layers, like cities and the Earth.

Notice, too, that the lowest layers have a kind of congruence with the highest. Molecules are stuff of the planet; atoms are stuff of the solar system. This congruence reaches perfection when we get to the soul. It's off the map – both lower and higher than anything described in our material onion. The soul is too small and too big, too ethereal and too permanent, to have anything to do with ownership. Ownership is just a kind of limited and temporary tying-together of related material things, and even then, only certain aspects of the material things. It goes wrong when it oversteps.

# Information

Many of the most important forms of ownership concern information. There is traditional intellectual property – patents, copyrights, trademarks. But there are many further puzzles relating, for example, to secrets and non-secrets.

A diploma is basically a piece of information. It serves as evidence that you were trained in some subject. And you may have paid a lot of money for that diploma. But did you “buy” it? And in what sense do you “own” it? It is, after all, not a secret what degree you have. Can non-secrets be “owned”, and if not, why do you pay for them?

Another puzzle. Many technology companies have become powerful by having access to information that is not intellectual property, but is instead simply secret. For example, Amazon knows “what shoes you’re likely to buy”, and Spotify knows “whether you have listened to Leonard Cohen a lot in the last year.” (In fact, Spotify knows better than you do how much you listened to Leonard Cohen in the last year. And Amazon knows better than you what shoes you’re likely to buy – even if you’ve never bought shoes there – because it has lots of secret information about what other, similar people are buying.)

Intellectual property is like unfenced private land. By default, anyone can walk onto such land, or write a song that has the same melody as “Eleanor Rigby”. Yet the government warns non-landowners, and non-copyright owners, off of this territory.

Secret information, on the other hand, is more like physically fenced land. If Amazon made its databases public, everyone could know what kinds of shoes middle-class Canadians were buying last week. But because those databases are private, only

Amazon can use that information to suggest practical shoes to middle-class Canadians. To change this situation, the government would have to tear down Amazon's fences and make it share or use that information differently.

Intellectual property and secret information thus both present problems analogous to the problems of owning a mug, or owning a bit of land. It doesn't make sense to be able to own it forever, or for any purpose, or without regard for its sources. (The connection between material and information isn't too surprising. After all, some physicists like John Wheeler have argued that information is the fundamental stuff of the universe, and that matter is merely a special sort of information.)

What are patents and copyrights for anyway? They are intended to be public rewards to private citizens – almost like bounties – for assembling information in a certain way and delivering it unto the public. The traditional rules of intellectual property law reflect this. For example, the public has no reason to reward anyone for producing information it already has, like the design of Bell's telephone, or the melody to Eleanor Rigby. That's why old inventions can't be patented, and unoriginal art can't be copyrighted. Intellectual work builds on old stuff, but the older layers are not ownable, just as the clay in the mug shouldn't be ownable. The new layers become owned by the people who brought them forth – though not forever, only for the term of the patent or copyright. It's deeply questionable, of course, whether the amounts of time our legal systems provided here are reasonable.

This means that whether intellectual property makes sense – whether the public is getting a good deal in the bargain – depends on how long the legal

monopoly lasts, and whether in the meantime it either (a) distorts use of the older, already-public layers of information (e.g., letting the inventor of the latest phone capture all of the profits in the telecoms industry, even though most of that value was unlocked by Bell more than a century ago); or (b) gums up the newer, still-to-be-discovered layers of information (e.g., a patent scaring inventors off of a subject area and thus preventing new discoveries from happening).

It also depends on whether the protected information is helpful to the public. An interesting situation arises when a harmful invention comes along. Consider dynamite. Alfred Nobel profited from this patent, and felt dreadful about it for much of his life because it accelerated the destructiveness of war. If the public had been wiser, perhaps it wouldn't have so richly rewarded that particular invention. Instead of only inquiring into inventions' originality, why don't patent offices evaluate them morally, the same way policies are evaluated, and decline to reward the inventor if the work seems unlikely to benefit the public?

What about personal information? Governments don't protect information about, for example, your favourite ice cream flavour, as property. The reasons why make a certain amount of sense. First, it's not a secret. All your friends know you like chocolate ice cream. Second, such information isn't the primary object of individuals' labour, like art or invention. It feels like a passive by-product of ordinary life. Third, it feels non-unique, like a repetition of old patterns. You assemble a telephone. You hum the melody of Eleanor Rigby. You eat ice cream. It's all happened millions of times before.

But while your ice cream preference isn't new or interesting on an individual basis, it actually is

interesting, new, and powerful when combined with the preferences of millions of other people. What the law ignores as worthless, tech companies build billion-dollar fortifications around. Should the public permit that?

In Roman law, there was a notion of *terra nullius*, or nobody's land. No one could stake a claim there. Strict privacy laws that make data hard for technology companies to use are trying, in a way, to make data *terra nullius*. This protects against a lot of exploitation, but it is an open question whether we really want no one to be able to use such data for any purpose.

Another approach is to figure out who should own which layers of the data, and build governance systems reflecting that. The "owners" in this vision would have to be collective, rather than individual – remember, the ice cream preference information is only valuable in aggregate. And these collective owners are going to need a way of influencing how the information is used without either losing control of it downstream (letting tech companies again build fortifications around it), or exerting too much control over it upstream (making it *terra nullius*). This is not simple – it requires new kinds of institutions to represent these non-state collective interests. It's an important problem to work through if we hope to avoid the information economy indefinitely distorting the power dynamics of human society.

## (Mis)aligning power and responsibility

It's interesting to think about property as a means of delegating power. Imagine you were the absolute monarch of a country. Everything in it is yours. That's a lot of power and responsibility. How would you rule?

As monarch, you are only one person: you can only be in one place at a time, and you cannot know everything. You will therefore quickly lose control over things if you do not delegate power. Historical monarchs dealt with this by a particular kind of delegation: empowering a class of so-called nobles. They gave those people land and titles – bite-sized chunks of the monarch's absolute power, basically – and then expected them to keep those chunks of the kingdom in order while still bowing to the monarch's ultimate authority.

You could replace “the monarch” with “the state”, and “land and titles” with “real estate, stocks, currencies, and bonds”, and the picture doesn't change all that much. Modern property, too, is a way of delegating the sovereign power and thus maintaining order.

Notice that this strategy of maintaining order is all about maintaining a coincidence of power and responsibility. Consider a modern version of the old tragedy-of-the-commons idea: a team collaborating on a work project. Most team members would like to have more power over it – at least while things are going well. But those very same people would like to have less responsibility for it, especially when the going gets rough. This is a huge problem – and the single best argument for autocratic governance, whether in the form of a CEO or a monarch. By putting all the power and responsibility in one person, you remove all traces of dysfunctional ambiguity. Because of how their roles are defined,

CEOs and monarchs have difficulty wielding power without also taking responsibility. As unquestioned final authorities, they have no grey area to hide in. And this structure can be extruded into a hierarchy: When the monarch gives land to a duke, the duke has almost absolute power and responsibility within the duchy – everything required to enforce order, and no excuses for disorder.

This same logic provides important justification to modern private property, whether it is ownership of a lot on a suburban cul-de-sac, a share in Apple Computer, or a new pharmaceutical patent. By delegating a little slice of autocratic dominion to an owner, the state keeps power and responsibility in alignment, without having to manage everything itself. The state defends property interests with police and courts, so that owners – mindful of their asset values – will do things like keep the lawns mowed, vote in the best interests of the corporation, and bring the pharmaceuticals to market.

Consider what would happen without any notion of property whatsoever. In a monarchy, it would simply mean collapse due to insufficient power delegation. The monarch would be unable to govern the whole country without strongly invested allies and helpers, and things would fall into chaos. This is similar to what happens in Soviet-style single-institution or single-party systems that try to govern without a meaningful notion of devolved property. The party hoards all the power, and is therefore unable to adequately fulfil the corresponding responsibility.

Interestingly, however, a mirror image of the same problem also plagues societies with too-strong and over-extensive property rights. The malady only arises in a different and more diffuse way. In Western societies no single Politburo is failing its responsibility



to the whole nation. Instead, a thousand Walmarts are failing their responsibilities to their small towns, a million landowners are failing their responsibility to renters, and nameless passive shareholders are ignoring their responsibilities to countless companies' employees. We need to start recognizing these symptoms, and addressing them not only with regulations and redistributions that try to sweep up such messes, but by recalibrating the property entitlements that enable the depredations in the first place.

## Concentric Property Rights

How exactly do property entitlements fail? Cory Doctorow has usefully coined the term “chokepoint capitalism” to draw attention to how the most valuable property rights confer unjustified power over shared infrastructure, or chokepoints. This is close to the heart of the issue. Another way of thinking about the same thing is that over-extensive property entitlements, preoccupied with the attempt to align power and responsibility in a simplistic way, ignore the equally important question of whether the people impacted by the use of a particular asset hold power over it.

Consider again the metaphor of the workplace team. It might be dysfunctional because of a dearth of responsibility within the group; and concentrating power in a property-like way might address that. But that is only one way it might be dysfunctional. It also might have a bad leader. Or it might lack information needed to make good decisions. Or the members of the team might have too little diversity (group think) or too much (Tower of Babel). Autocracy (i.e., traditional property) thus addresses only one big structural problem – there could be many others.

To address the whole range of such coordination problems, we need property entitlements that can be flexibly “unbundled” into their constituent components.

New licensing systems could help us do that. For example, using a licensing system called SALSA, based on the idea of Harberger taxation, the right to use property (the “usus”) is cleanly separated from the rights to extract rent from it (the “fructus”). In this system, the “usus” can sit lightly with an individual, and dynamically flow toward the most willing individual in repeated auctions, while the “fructus”

sits with a community. Meanwhile the “abusus”, or the right to destroy or waste the property, can sit with an even broader community which might, for example, set rules about what constitutes environmental destruction.

In theory, SALSA-style property management could be more efficient than traditional property in strictly economic terms. This is remarkable – and perhaps counterintuitive, because SALSA is also more redistributive of wealth and power. Because it promises to be a more egalitarian and more efficient property system, it is almost a moral imperative to experiment with it – to see how it functions in various real-world contexts. Long term, it points toward a vision of “concentric” property entitlements, with more fundamental and long-lasting aspects of property entitlements sitting with progressively broader democratic communities, pointing toward a new and more flexible synthesis of individual, community, and state power.

## Punishment

A just state is more than a mere population control apparatus. It is an expression of the common concerns of a political community. However, real states are always less than completely just – and it is thus instructive to see states as, in part, crowd control apparatuses. As such, they have two kinds of levers at their disposal – carrots and sticks. In other words, states – again if we look at them in an unflattering light for the sake of argument – are in the human training business. Punishment happens through incarceration and criminal law; and reward happens through grants and defences of property.

Using these carrots and sticks, the state makes its power felt in everyday private life. In both cases, the sting of coercion is felt only in exceptional cases, but always threatened. Both property and punishment depend on the police. Punishment is an application of force against a citizen, while protection of property is an application of force on her behalf.

The two institutions are in important ways mirror images. Yet, while we clearly understand punishment to be a negative expression of the state's values, we do not generally see property as a positive expression of the state's values. To some extent, this asymmetry reflects the fact that punishments are directly meted out by public authorities, while property rights are acquired on private markets. However, we cannot let the existence of the market launder the deeper question about the origination of property entitlements. They always begin with law, and state action. The state's instantiation of a property interest is the positive equivalent of the enactment of a criminal law; the defence of a property right is the positive twin of criminal enforcement. In both cases, the application

of force is promised to discourage or encourage behaviour. Where a criminal law says “the state shall use force against you, in such and such way, if you do the forbidden act”, a property entitlement says “the state shall use force against others, in such and such way, if you acquire the property entitlement”.

Thus, just as we must as citizens ask whether the forbidden act in a criminal law is really blameworthy (and condemn the government’s application of force when it is not), we should also ask whether the acquisition of particular property entitlements is praiseworthy. If it is not, the government’s protection of those property entitlements should be viewed as, at best, unfortunate – an arrangement from which the state ought to look to extricate itself. And the government can indeed rectify its conduct without betraying promises to owners who reasonably relied on them. This could include the invocation of eminent domain, or simply “buybacks” of private entitlements on the private market using public funds.

Moreover, recall that in the preceding paragraphs we took a sceptical view, where the state is a punishment/reward apparatus, with society as its Skinner Box. Reality is, fortunately, less completely grim than that. So if we instead view the state as a partly-legitimate organ of the political community, it becomes clear that carrot-and-stick operations should be more of a last resort than a primary modus operandi. This is especially clear in the case of punishment: a just state will stand willing to punish if necessary, but will take pains to avoid matters coming to that. Exactly the same should be true with property. Our initial presumption should be against its legitimacy; as with a punishment, we should always ask what circumstance necessitates or justifies a private property entitlement. Private property is not a positive good, and certainly not something to be “maximised”.

## Excessive Property And Excessive Punishment Create Each Other

If a stranger broke into my home while I was present, I would be afraid for my own safety. The reasons for this are less obvious than they seem. After all, it is overwhelmingly likely that the intruder wishes not to hurt me physically, but rather to steal something. Yet even if I were 100% sure that this was the intruder's intention, I would still be afraid for my safety. Why? Because I know that the intruder knows that whether or not I react to his intrusion violently, the state certainly will. If it learns of his crime, it will forcibly imprison him. This means that upon intrusion, bodily violence is already "on the table", whether or not I or the burglar desire it.

There is nothing I can really do to ensure the safety of the burglar. No matter how I behave, the burglar has good reason to be afraid. This intensifies the danger to me, starting a feedback loop that makes me more likely to react violently to the burglar; etc.

It is possible to imagine a different society in which burglary were punished only by restitution and a minuscule fine; and consequently rarely descended into physical menace or violence. This society would probably have much more burglary. It may, or may not, be a better society than ours.

Conversely, we can also imagine a society in which burglary was punished with execution – not only of the burglar, but of the burglar's entire extended family. This society would probably have very little burglary. Again, it may not be a better society than ours, though for different reasons.

These two hypothetical societies, respectively, punish burglary extremely insufficiently, and extremely excessively. Neither appeals. However, some people will be attracted to one or the other.

Here are the arguments for each extreme society.

The first society, of under-punishment, holds a certain pacifist or anarchist attraction. People there might place less value on material things, and hold their wealth instead in other ways. When a burglar climbed through the window in this society, it would be less scary, and easier for everyone to bear in mind that the life of a human being is far more precious than any diamond ring or gold bracelet. We might treat burglars more as people who need loving correction, not as existential threats to life and limb. From a certain angle, it might be a kinder and more humane society.

The second society, of over-punishment, would probably be extremely peaceful and orderly. Burglary would almost never happen, and the awful punishment for burglary would almost never be carried out. Would-be burglars would focus on better ways of securing a livelihood; and everyone could spend less energy securing their own safety and possessions. You could leave your door unlocked.

Here are the counterarguments:

The first society would probably be so dysfunctional that people would resort to self-help, exercising individual coercion in the void left by the state. Violence might return through that more chaotic avenue. People would fortify their houses.

The second society would be poisoned by the unconscionable punishments it threatened or enacted. Every property entitlement would be morally tainted by the subsidy it received from that wicked threat. Especially wherever entitlements of property themselves were excessive, badly-tailored, or ill-gotten, the penalties issued for their protection would be so oppressive as to cloud the legitimacy of

the entire regime. Suppressed violence would return to this seemingly orderly society not as everyday crime, but as an eventual eruption of revolution.

Ideal punishments must, then, lie somewhere in the middle. This is common sense: we must strive to keep punishments proportional to crimes, reflecting a reasonable moral sensibility.

This also reveals the way that punishments and property entitlements are not only mirror images, but actually connected. If property is radically excessive – as with a king who owns everything – even the mildest punishment for trespass becomes radically oppressive. And where punishments are severe, property entitlements must be exceedingly modest. Otherwise minimally-blameworthy behaviour will result in draconian punishment.



# Belongings and ownership

For a long time, we've seen property ownership as a simple, received, and unproblematic institution. If it creates any distortions, we try to clean them up later, with money redistribution, with regulation or even ignorance.

But property isn't straightforward. Ownership is a fearsome privilege that the state directs carelessly and thoughtlessly. And the distortions of ill-considered ownership privileges cannot always be "cleaned up" with redistribution or regulation. One only needs to consider slavery to see this problem in its most extreme form. We need to move beyond the notion of property as a personal reward in the state system and more deeply understand the fundamental structures of metaphysical concepts in relation to ownership.

British economist Guy Standing published in 2022 'The blue commons', a book about how oceans, up until recently have been disconnected from our ideas of personal ownership. However, giant corporations are now plundering the world's waters aided by global finance and powerful states, destroying communities, intensifying inequalities and driving ocean life towards extinction. We seem to yet again be making the same disastrous mistakes as we did with land, hundreds, or even thousands, of years ago. The mistakes of dividing our common Earth into private property without taking a common decision of doing so.

What are the possibilities we might see moving forward? 'The right to roam' is a Swedish law from the 1940s yet with a long history from mediaeval times, and which is based on the idea that anyone is free to travel over private land in nature, to stay there temporarily and for example pick berries, mushrooms and certain other plants. The right to

roam is a public law that invites people to spend time in nature while preserving it. With the right comes demands for consideration and caution towards nature and wildlife, towards landowners and towards other people. Swedish children are taught early in school how the right to roam is a privilege and how to properly follow the law. Similar ideas are found in Swedish (and many other global) indigenous communities where land is not a property but part of a human liability towards nature. Land is deeply intertwined with life, it is gratefully part of essential cycles of care and shared between all living things.

It seems that humans over the last few millennia have lost a logical relationship with belongings and ownership. We've focused on the personal benefits, the rational processes of how gaining material possessions increase our general happiness and sense of meaning. A deeper logic though, might be a completely different story, if we by logic mean to lean on science for human behaviour patterns. We are oblivious and driven by our relic and biological collecting force – the dopamine system, and have lost contact with notions of larger and more profound perspectives. Too many of us don't truly think about why we want to own things, how the lack of that philosophical thought has an impact on our day to day lives, and what the impacts might be in a global perspective. How absurd it may seem, the larger meaning of life, the intangible sensations that make up our existence, is well worth discussing when talking about something so categorical as land ownership.

It seems like a dialogue about property and ownership needs to start at the base of how we find ourselves in this world. What is temporality and material bodies in relation to time and ethereality? Can a soul own a thing, or can a thing own a soul? What is a soul anyway? What does it mean to be

emotional, complex and thoughtful within prevailing work of law and justice, economy and equality?

Moving forward we have to unravel these somewhat vulnerable nuances of what it means to be human in relation to materia and their subsequent layers. It will need us to talk about time, temporality and death – topics usually disregarded when discussing land, property, profit and urban development. But most importantly, it will need us to be open to new viewpoints that might seem too far stretched, possibly even quixotic or abstract. Only by evolving our often too stagnated ideas, can we try to generously understand what it means to belong to this world and to each other.

[Notes]

Typeface – ALT MariaClara  
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Type designer – Alli Cunanan

ALT MariaClara is dedicated to the strong, confident, brave Filipina women who are breaking away from stereotypes and owning their identities. Named after Maria Clara, a fictional Filipina character who became a colonial figure—an embodiment of submissive, conservative demureness, a myth that allowed Spanish colonisers to continue to subjugate Filipina women—ALT MariaClara flips the narrative.

Drawing inspiration from the visual history of the Philippines, incorporating sharp, intricate details and joining a collection of powerful modern serif typefaces we've seen grow in popularity, ALT MariaClara is a refined, striking display font built on a story of reclamation and empowerment.

[Alli Cunanan]

“Modern Filipina women of today are stronger and braver than ever. They oppose restrictions set by society that cages them within the expectations of what a woman should be or how she should behave.”

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The mark of  
responsible forestry



From a superficial perspective, belongings are things or objects someone has found, made, bought or been given. They are connected to us and we have legal rights to possess and do almost whatever we please with them. Yet, we often seem to forget that our lives are finite. And so, with our deaths and endings, comes the ending of our personal belongings.

'Belongings and Ownership' is a brief discourse about how we relate to things, property and materials in a world where new sustainable understandings of life are fundamental.