

## STATEMENT FROM THE EDITORS : *ART AND EXTINCTION*

The call for this edition emerged from a conversation over a lunchtime walk, a regular tradition and necessity to break up the humdrum of another day in the office. It was oddly cool for late spring in the Riverina, but the sun's keen bite and crisped dry grassland on the Yindyamarra Reconciliation Reserve told a story of trauma and drought. A tractor raked the earth through a field opposite, sending a plume of dust into the wind. Watching that dust disperse into hazy air around us, we both acknowledged an unspoken thought... it is going to be a hard summer.

The walk continued and as it often does, the conversation turned to our practice as artists. We both feel the need for our practices to play some part in processing the underlying tension inherent in living in the grips of a climate emergency. Of particular interest that day was the suite of actions being explored through the global week of rebellion, our local council's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency (and subsequent rescinding of the declaration a week later), and the approaching Remembrance Day for Lost Species. A festival perhaps, or an exhibition? How could we bring community together to return some agency to beings who have had theirs taken, to species that no longer exist? We were both looking for a place to begin (again) and felt that it was an important time to find means to dialogue and discuss more broadly the intersections of *Art and Extinction*.

Still walking, we discussed the way Timothy Morton introduced the idea of the hyper-object; something so massively distributed through time and space that it is near impossible for humans to comprehend in its entirety. We often see climate change used as a key example of hyper-objects. This makes sense... on a planetary scale, it is difficult to comprehend the scope of this unfolding emergency, more difficult still to comprehend ourselves as individuals deeply implicated in its advancement. We are, and we come up against the local manifestations of this hyper-object every day. The Sixth Mass Extinction and events like the fish kills in the Darling/Baaka River are one example, the unseasonal bushfires raging across New South Wales in Australia and decimating the koala population is another.

When thinking hyper-objects through the lens of decolonisation, it feels that climate change is itself a symptomatic manifestation of other more established hyper-objects; the colonial project and capitalism. Both deeply rooted in Western Dualism and the exploitation of the many to benefit the few. The combined impacts have already devastated cultures across the world and continue to drive the economic machine at the heart of the current climate emergency. We workshopped a number of possible options on our walk, fretting that these themes feel too big for any individual action to adequately address. Although the individual consideration of these themes would tide us over until 2021 when we reconvene the Land Dialogues conference, the urgency felt at this time was too great to ignore. The idea for a journal edition eventually

emerged... a small action to seek the input of other voices and connect with a community of like-minded scholars. We were buoyed to find the authors in this edited edition making similar observations and seeking out communities in various forms of philosophical critique and inquiry. Authors navigating their own responses through shared, but variable existential threat.

Another day, another walk. This time it is HOT. Moving on from our discussion that jeans are inappropriate attire for this kind of activity and time of year, we discussed possible actions for 2019's Remembrance Day for Lost Species. Through the global call, participants were being invited to join in personal acts of decolonisation and reinhabitation by researching the languages indigenous to their region. We have both lived for the majority of our lives, and currently live and work on Wiradjuri Country. The days provocation was to consider the recorded names of now-extinct and endangered species. To understand that these names were often given to them as part of the extractive colonial processes. Processes that are most often directly, though also indirectly responsible for ecological crises worldwide. In understanding the names of lost species, we are asked to consider that animals and plants would have held names pre-colonisation. That these names may have formed part of complex totemic systems or have existed with other cultural (alongside ecological) importance to Indigenous communities. The aim, the organisers say was to "offer participants paths to restorative knowledge and place-based practice through exploration of the local names, stories and knowledge of extinct and endangered species". There are many papers within this edition of the International Journal of Practice Based Humanities that interrogate similar pathways through interspecies and decolonisation dialogues to a type of restorative knowledge.

Over another of our frequent walks, we discussed how it feels to tread the grounds of recent marsupial extinction. In 1912, the last known Greater Bilby in NSW, the ngundawang, was killed by local shooters on the grounds of the Wagga Experiment Farm. The experimental farm was one of the precursor institutions to Charles Sturt University on Wiradjuri Country where we are both employed, and in fact, the animal was shot on the ground we walk each day. The ngundawang was considered a nuisance to farmers through the habit in forming a patchwork of small burrows that created a hazard for stock and work horses. The ngundawang was hunted to regional extinction as part of a colonial farming process and while populations exist elsewhere in Australia their ongoing status is threatened and their role in the local ecosystems has them considered functionally extinct.

Similarly, just north of the universities Wagga Wagga Campus a small crayfish, the morongla, a kind of quarter-sized yabbie, was made extinct by cattle fouling their waters. North of that still, the booroon, a striped house-cat sized marsupial, was hunted to extinction. In the case of both the morongla and the booroon, neither ever received a colonial name and their existence is only recorded in settler diaries and given to the names of localities. This of course needs to be

negotiated carefully as another deeply contestable colonial space, understanding the limits to knowing that come with disinterested transcultural interpretation and the conversion of indigenous word-forms to english, particularly here given the ‘o’ and ‘oo’ sounds and their varied and problematic translations. To the best of the colonial diary accounts, the ngundawang, morongla and booroon are local examples for us of sharing and naming space/place with disappearance. For us as editors that through sharing names and in discussion of loss and absence we might address critical dialogues in the way that many of the authors of this edited edition explore similar varying modalities of interspecies and transcultural exchange in vanishing and/or invisibility.

Each of these collated papers presents a particular purview across an intersection of *Art and Extinction*. Through critical assessment of individual creative practice, deep engagement in literary practices, exploration of new embodied and critical practices of place, with reflection on interspecies dialogues (amongst many other interrogations). Each paper presents a unique invitation to read and reflect on this critical nexus as we approach, or cross tipping-points and global thresholds.

As editors, we are determined in our conviction that there has never been a more critical point for serious scholarly research of the kind that each of the authors present here. There are many other thoughts that have gone unpublished in the production of this journal edition, which we deeply respect will rise to the surface in other spaces where and when the timing is right. We hope you get a great deal out of the papers featured here, and we are incredibly humbled by the response that we have already received.

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Guest Editors  
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