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Weaving the Environmental Humanities: Australian strands, configurations and provocations

On March 28, 2003, environmental historian Tom Griffiths addressed the Australian Commonwealth Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) on the contribution of the Humanities and Social Sciences to the recently announced National Research Priority of securing an 'Environmentally Sustainable Australia'.ⁱ This was one of four new research priorities, comprising also 'Promoting and Maintaining Good Health', encouraging 'Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries', and 'Safeguarding Australia'. Given that funding bids to the Australian Research Council were to be tied to these national objectives, their announcement was greeted with consternation among scholars in the humanities, as they seemed to offer little purchase for their work. With respect to environmental sustainability, however, Griffiths made a strong case, not only for the importance of the humanities, but also for the global significance of Australian research in this area. Having moved to the UK in 2016 to establish Bath Spa University's University-wide Research Centre for Environmental Humanities,ⁱⁱ I have begun to get a clearer sense of the distinctiveness of the Australian variant of the environmental humanities research. As I hope to show in this article, the view from 'down under', informed by Australia's traumatic colonial history, bio-geographical peculiarities, and climatic extremes, as well as by a strongly international outlook and a long history of cross-cutting creative collaboration, has much to contribute to current discussions around the project of the environmental humanities, and its relationship to ecocriticism, in UK and Ireland.ⁱⁱⁱ

'Because of its wide range,' observe Emmett and Nye, 'the field of environmental humanities is difficult to pin down, and it has different profiles depending on the scholarly strengths at the institutions where it has emerged.' (2017, 6) This was also true in Australia, with several variously configured groups emerging at different universities from the 1980s. However, the creation of what we termed the inter- or trans-disciplinary 'ecological humanities' was an inter-institutional affair with a national agenda. The first meeting of the National Working Group on the Ecological Humanities, initiated in the late 1990s by Griffiths and Tim Bonyhady, was hosted by environmental anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose at the Australian National University's Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (founded in 1973 as Australia's first interdisciplinary environmental studies research centre), where she and historian of environmental science and struggles, Libby Robin, had the distinction of being the only non-natural scientists on staff. Other participants were Robin, Griffiths, cultural theorist and ethnographer Stephen Muecke, sociologist Tim Rowse, ecophilosopher Freya Mathews, historian Mike Smith from the National Museum of Australia, ecologist Robert Wasson, the then Director of CRES, and myself (at that time a Senior Lecturer in German and Comparative Literature). Our wide-ranging conversation was superbly minuted by George Main, also of the National Museum, soon to become Robin's PhD student, and now a senior curator with the Museum's People and Environment programme. A subsequent meeting was attended by pioneering cultural studies scholar, Gaye Hawkins, and the new Director of CRES, Will Steffen, one of Australia's preeminent climate scientists. Feminist ecophilosopher Val Plumwood was a frequent participant in smaller CRES workshops in the early 2000s. Since then, internationally-networked environmental humanities (EH) initiatives have proliferated around the country,^{iv} both within and beyond

the academy, public events in galleries, theatres, and museums, and conversations in pubs and around campfires. These endeavours now being carried forward by a second generation of scholars and practitioners, many of them mentored by members of the National Working Group.^v

The deliberations of this group stood Griffiths in good stead when he accepted the invitation to explain how the humanities and social sciences could contribute to advancing environmental sustainability. Recalling, with Rose (2001, 35) that '[m]ajor ecological change, much of it in crisis, is situated across the nature/culture divide' - a divide, Griffiths stresses, that was itself a questionable cultural historical construction - he highlights three 'techniques' of humanities research that he considered particularly valuable in addressing ecological challenges: an attention to 'human-scale geographies' pertaining to time-frames located between the macro (geological) and micro (biological) that predominate in environmental science; a recognition of the importance of the stories people tell in shaping the worlds that they make; and the ability to make science, its methods, assumptions and applications, a subject of critical investigation, disclosing its historicity and exploring other ways of knowing. In addition, Griffiths makes a bold pitch for Australia's 'competitive edge in the ecological humanities: in the practice of philosophy, art history, eco-criticism and environmental history.' This, he explained:

Has to do with our history as a modern settler society with a long, strong indigenous history, our inheritance of a confrontingly different and unique ecology, our inhabitation of an island continent that is also a nation. Australian history is like a giant experiment in ecological crisis and management, sometimes a horrifying concentration of environmental damage and cultural loss, and sometimes a heartening parable of hope and learning [...] Such a roller-coaster of environmental history makes us think differently and more sharply than the rest of the world on many ecological matters. On such a continent, we can never blithely assume the dominance of culture over nature, nor can we believe in the infinite resilience of the land. We are committed by history and circumstance to an intellectually innovative environmental enquiry.

Within the limits of this article, it is not possible to elaborate with adequate complexity on the historical context for the emergence of Australia's ecological humanities initiative. However, I would like to highlight some key aspects. To begin with, at the time of the British invasion in the 1780s, the continent that Cook dubbed 'Australia' was one of only eight biologically 'megadiverse' regions on the planet. This arose from a combination of factors, including geology, climate, and the continent's slow northward drift. Together, these had 'produced a unique, fragile and highly interconnected ecology unlike that of any other continent' (Flannery 1997, 50). Yet it was also, as Bill Gammage has it, the 'biggest estate on Earth': all 7.7 million square kilometres of it had been skilfully crafted and painstakingly maintained by human agency, in felicitous alliance with fire, in accordance with the precepts of 'the Law', 'an ecological philosophy enforced by religious sanction' that 'compelled people to care for the country' (2011, 2). 'Caring for country' relies upon peoples' ability to discern the ancestral Law songs (Dreamings) inherent in land, sky, and for coastal peoples,

sea; to give them voice through the songs and dances that keep the material-spiritual life of country coming up strongly ('singing up country'); and to follow the Law through a host of practical measures intended to foster collective flourishing, with different people holding responsibility for the wellbeing of those species with which they are kin (Rose 1992 and 2002; Muecke 2004; Bradley 2010).

It is impossible to ascertain by what process of bumpy trial and error Australia's First Nations got the hang of living sustainably across the whole range of the continent's diverse ecosystems, from the tropical North through the central deserts, to the temperate South, on what is the most arid inhabited continent on Earth, with nutrient-poor soils, unreliable rainfall, non-annual weather cycles, and frequent extremes, and therefore clearly lacked all of the prerequisites for the invention of agriculture (including beasts of burden: just you try putting a kangaroo behind a plough). Whether or not Aboriginal overhunting contributed to the demise of the continent's ancient megafauna, as controversially claimed by Tim Flannery (1994, 180-86), or whether climatic changes played a more important role, is still hotly debated. However that might be, the fact is that over the 40- to 60,000 years of their inhabitation of the continent, weathering the last Glacial Maximum and its retreat, Australia's First Nations developed a mobile and flexible way of life, well suited to the conditions that set in with the advent of the Holocene and conducive both to their own cultural flourishing and to the maintenance of extremely high levels of biodiversity.

What is also abundantly clear is that the impact of European colonisation on the indigenous peoples and ecologies of Australia has been catastrophic. As Rose starkly states in *Reports from a Wild Country* (whereby 'wild', in Aboriginal English, carries negative connotations of damaged and/or unpeopled country):

Settler societies are built on a dual war: a war against Nature and a war against the natives. Each has been devastating. [In Australia] [d]evastation includes the loss of around 90 per cent of the original Aboriginal population, the loss of all but a small number of Aboriginal languages [of which there once over 300], and the loss of earlier cultural coherence of the continent through Aboriginal networks of cultural exchange. It includes the loss of large numbers of plant and animal species, including the highest rate of mammalian extinctions in the contemporary world. (2004, 34-35)

Yet this is no more a story of Evil White Men than it is of Noble Savages. To be sure, the pursuit of economic gain, generally conjoined with classist, racist, sexist and speciesist ideologies, played a big part; but so too did accidentally introduced biota, not least the microorganisms that caused the diseases that devastated Aboriginal populations. Their limited understanding of, and respect for, indigenous cultures and ecologies also brought considerable adversity to the colonists themselves, whose efforts to make a living from the land in the only ways that they knew how were blighted by drought, fire and flood, along with the spread of sundry 'pests' (most of them exotic). Many Australians have yet to properly acknowledge the devastating impact this had on the country's First Nations, from whom the colonists could have learnt much, had they not arrogantly assumed their own cultural superiority and the inevitability of the march of 'progress.' If, as Rose argues (following Emanuel Levinas), 'the justification of the neighbor's pain is certainly the source

of all immorality' (2014, 7), then this progressivist view of history is surely complicit in the terrible wrong of denying or discounting the suffering wrought by colonisation and its continuing toxic legacies (including appalling rates of Aboriginal alcoholism, ill-health, and suicide).

Griffiths' plug for the achievements of fellow Australian eco-humanities researchers was by no means unfounded. In light of the vastly different cultural prisms through which human-non-human relations had been framed in Australia, with the Aboriginal ethos of 'caring for country' confronted by the settler project of 'battling the land' (Robin 2010), it is little wonder that Australian researchers should have been 'central to defining Environmental Humanities' (Nye 2013, 9; see also Emmett and Nye 2017, 3). Australia had long been especially strong in the field of environmental philosophy, beginning with John Passmore's foundational work of environmental ethics, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974), followed a few years later by the critique of 'human chauvinism' developed by Val and Richard Routley (later Val Plumwood and Richard Sylvan) (V. Routley 1975, R and V Routley 1978), and continuing with diverse inflections in e.g. Warwick Fox's 'transpersonal ecology' (1990), Mathews's neo-Spinozan ecological metaphysics (1991), the Frankfurt-School-inflected ecopolitical theory of Robyn Eckersley (1992) and Pete Hay (2002), and the post-colonial social(ist) ecofeminist critiques of Plumwood (1993) and Ariel Salleh (1997).^{vi}

Environmental history also emerged in the early 1970s in Australia, initially with regional studies, such as George Seddon's on the Swan River coastal plain in Western Australia (1970 and 1972) and Keith Hancock's on the Monaro Plains of New South Wales (1974). Griffiths' work on the Mountain Ash forests of Victoria (2001) continued this regional approach, whilst Libby Robin researched the history of Australian environmental science and environmental struggles (1998, 2001, 2007), Bonyhady, art and environment (2000), and Tim Sherratt (amongst others), climate and culture (2005).^{vii}

In Australia, as elsewhere, literary scholars were rather slower to take the environmental turn, lagging behind eco-cultural studies (e.g. Giblett 1996).^{viii} As far as I have been able to ascertain, the first environmentally-inflected monograph in Australian literary studies was Bruce Bennett's *Australian Compass* (1991). However, it was not until the early 2000s that ecocriticism proper began to take off in Australia, beginning with a special issue of the journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association journal *AUMLA* dedicated to 'Nature and the Environment' (Fisher 2001), followed by a fast growing number of monographs (e.g. Rigby 2004, Tredinnick 2005, Wilson 2006, Kinsella 2007, Huggan and Tiffin 2010), anthologies (e.g. Cranston and Zeller 2007, Tiffin 2007) and special issues (e.g. Rigby 2006, Bird 2006 and 2009, Rigby and Tredinnick 2007). In her contribution to Scott Slovic's 'Booklist of International Environmental Literature' (2009), Ruth Blair identifies a number of earlier works of Australian 'environmental writing', including Elyne Mitchell's, *Soil and Civilization* (1946), Alec H. Chisholm's, *Land of Wonder* (1964), Eric Rolls's, *They All Ran Wild* (1969) and Judith Wright's, *Collected Poems 1942-85* (1994), to which I would add Wright's settler family history, *Generations of Men* (1959) and its searing anti-colonial counterpart, *Cry of the Dead* (1981).

At the time that Griffiths gave his address to DEST, though, ecocriticism and 'nature writing' only constituted a minor strand in the fabric of the Australian eco-humanities, in which philosophy, history, and Aboriginal Studies were initially far more prominent. In the

early 2000s, Australian theologians and biblical scholars were nonetheless at the forefront of the development of ecocritical biblical studies. Whereas the Australia-New Zealand Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was only formed in 2003 at the Watermark Nature Writers' Muster convened by environmental historian Eric Rolls,^{ix} in 2001 a group of Australian biblical scholars, including Indigenous writers, had already launched the international Earth Bible initiative. Dedicated to critically reinterpreting biblical texts through an ecohermeneutical lens shaped by core ecojustice principles, this initiative led to the publication of the five-volume Earth Bible series (Habel et al., 2000-2002), and associated liturgical resources, as well as advancing eco-biblical studies worldwide.

Such explorations of environmental questions within discrete humanities disciplines (and humanities-leaning social sciences, such as human geography and cultural anthropology) made a vital contribution to the formation of the ecological humanities. But what was new and distinctive about the project of the National Working group was its commitment to the creation of new, historically informed, philosophically reflected, and ethico-politically engaged ways of knowing that crossed entrenched divides of various kinds. The shared vision that emerged from these early discussions was encapsulated in a 'Manifesto' that framed the Ecological Humanities as an interdisciplinary and intercultural endeavour, dedicated to 'rethreading the fabric of knowledge' by 'building bridges' between 'the sciences and the humanities, and between western and other ways of knowing', with a view to 'developing moral action in relation to the "natural" world'. This undertaking, we affirmed, was motivated by curiosity, uncertainty, concern, and a desire to collaborate with 'scholars and other experts from a diversity of cultures and traditions', along with a commitment to 'cultural, biological, and academic diversity'.^x The scare quotes around 'natural' signalled our keen awareness of both the cultural construction of concepts of 'nature' and of the interrelationship of 'social and ecological justice', as Rose and Robin highlighted in their invitation to the 'Ecological Humanities in Action' in the inaugural 'Eco-Humanities Corner' of the *Australian Humanities Review* (Rose and Robin 2004).

Interdisciplinary adventures require institutional support, and for several years, the ANU continued to provide this in good measure. For example, in 2006, the Fenner School for Society and Environment (into which CRES has been dissolved) hosted a multi-disciplinary workshop entitled 'Mind the Gap', which generated a landmark article in which Rose and Robin, together with a host of co-authors largely from the biological and physical sciences, brought the case for ecological humanities and humanities-leaning social sciences to the readership of the scientific journal, *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*. In order to close 'the growing "sustainability gap" between what we know needs to be done and what is actually being done' with respect to 'key global biophysical indicators such as climate change and biodiversity loss', Fischer *et al.* recommend that 'transdisciplinary research programs must confront key normative questions facing modern consumer societies'. (2007, 621)

Redressing complex socio-ecological problems, in other words, necessitates bridging the disciplinary divide. Observing that '[h]uman action in the world emerges from a complex dialectic among the living world itself, the social contexts of human life and action, and the conceptualizations through which human life is made meaningful', Fischer et al. maintain that '[f]undamentally enhanced collaboration among natural and social scientists and scholars of human contexts, symbols and meanings would signal the beginning of a new paradigm for

addressing the sustainability gap.’ (623). Robin and Griffiths were engaged in just such a collaboration at this time, working with other environmental historians, geographers, anthropologists, palaeontologists, ecologists, agricultural scientists, artists, and representatives of diverse stakeholder groups (pastoralists, Traditional owners, governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations) to address the multiple socio-ecological challenges facing Queensland’s remarkable Desert Channels region (Robin, Dickman and Martin 2010). Such collaborations across disciplinary divides bore fruit in both directions, moreover, alerting environmental humanities and social science scholars to emerging scientific concepts, such as the Anthropocene (e.g. Rose 2009, Gibson *et al.* 2015), and affording opportunities to publish in science journals (e.g. Fischer 2007, Muir 2010), whilst also informing the thinking of leading Australian ecologists and climatologists (e.g. Manning 2009; Steffen 2018).

Disciplinary divides were not the only ones being challenged. Another was that between experiential and theoretical ways of knowing. For example, Mathews and I were among the participants in a series of cross-disciplinary colloquia on ‘sense of place’ initiated by researchers in the Social Ecology programme at the University of Western Sydney, which were held out-of-doors: in caves and gullies in the Blue Mountains, a dry river bed in Central Australia, and on a forested mountain in Victoria’s Yarra Valley. While humans are liable to get so absorbed in their chatter with one another that they become oblivious to their surroundings, the purpose of these outdoor colloquia was to allow the places in which we met to have a say, as it were, in our conversations: and as Mathews has described through her own panpsychist lens (2003), they sometimes did, and nowhere more dramatically so than on the old Hamilton Downs cattle station, some 80 kilometres north of Alice Springs. By allowing our deliberations to be interrupted by non-human entities, whether a curious echidna or a blood-hungry leech, a passing wallaby or a snoozing snake, a sunbeam or a hailstorm, we were constantly reminded of the more-than-human actants and interests with which our own were entangled, materially but potentially also morally, in complex and sometimes conflictual ways (the Australian bush, after all, is infamously full of critters that are liable to bite, sting, and even devour you). New forms of knowledge require new institutions: for Socrates, it was the symposium; for Francis Bacon, the laboratory; for Freud, the couch. Perhaps, for the Australian ecological humanities, it was the camp-fire.

The camp-fire colloquium was also practiced by another group co-constituted in the 1990s by Mathews, Plumwood and Patsy Hallen, together with the founding Director of the activist Rainforest Information Centre and prominent ‘deep ecologist’, John Seed (Seed *et al.*, 1988). The purpose of ‘Earth Philosophies Australia’ was to bridge the gap between academic ecophilosophy and activist engagement. Other more urban forms of public engagement included Robin’s and Main’s work with the National Museum of Australia,^{xi} exhibitions,^{xii} performances,^{xiii} and the ‘Ecophilosophy in the Pub’ sessions that Mathews ran in the grungy, smoke-infused upper room of a pub in inner Melbourne, aptly named the Rainbow. Over the course of the first year of monthly meetings in the mid-1990s, Mathews provided a systematic introduction to anglophone environmental philosophy and ethics, with set readings and vigorous discussion. I was amongst the diverse participants in this group, as was Sharron Pfueller, a microbiologist and environmental health specialist in Environmental Science at Monash. When the discussion group began to run out of steam, the project of

getting ecophilosophy into the public arena was taken forward in the new guise of the journal, *PAN (Philosophy Activism Nature)*, co-edited by myself, Mathews and Pfueller.^{xiv} Publishing refereed articles, short prose pieces and poetry exploring the ‘philosophical, psychological and mythological underpinnings of ecological thought and practice,’ *PAN*, according to the blurb for our first issue (2000), was ‘dedicated to voicing connections between people and place, especially, but not exclusively in Australia’, and sought to ‘conjoin the rehallowing of earth being(s) with the fostering of human well-being.’

Bridging the divide between Indigenous and settler knowledges, ontologies, ethics and poetics was another core undertaking of the Australian ecological humanities. Of the original participants in the National Working Group, three worked in Aboriginal Studies: Rose herself was the author of an acclaimed study of Aboriginal life and culture in the Victoria River district of Northern Australia (1992); Muecke had co-authored an award-winning book with Aboriginal elder, Paddy Roe (1984), and co-edited with Jack Davis and Mudrooroo Narogin the first anthology of Black Australian writings (1990); and Rowse had written a key work on ‘indigenous traditions’ in the wake of the landmark Mabo ruling, which overthrew the colonial doctrine of *terra nullius*, disclosing how Western intellectual traditions had been complicit with imperialism (1993). Taking up the invitation to ‘come into country’, for euro-western Australians, could also mean rediscovering submerged elements within Western culture that can contribute to the intercultural work of recovering from colonial catastrophes. The first issue of *PAN*, for example, contained an extract from San Roque’s *Sugarman Song Cycle*, on which he had presented a talk at the first Sense of Place colloquium in the Blue Mountains, as Freya recalls in a recent retrospective on the origins of the journal (Mathews 2017). This work was already being performed in communities around Central Australia, and has since toured internationally. It was composed in response to a conversation in which a group of elderly Aboriginal men explained to San Roque that they would not be able to tackle the problem of alcoholism unless they ‘had the story [...] The said they didn’t have it. The white fellas brought the grog, so they must have the story.’ Craig realized that indeed they did have the story, and it was one that ‘belonged to the great myth cycles that lie at the foundation of Western civilization.’ (Editors’ note to San Roque 2000, 42). He therefore set about retelling of the myth of Dionysus (aka Sugarman, whose risky gift of wine causes not only drunkenness, but also, amongst a host of other woes, diabetes), ‘relocated to Central Australia and narrated in Aboriginal English, in the casual and often humorous cadences of Aboriginal Dreaming stories.’ (Mathews 2017, 2)

Such intercultural collaborations are intrinsic to the ethics and poetics of decolonization. Across much of Australia they are also ecologically imperative. At least half the continent is effectively under Aboriginal land management, often in co-management with State, Territory or Federal authorities. This has been supported by Native Title legislation, along with the ‘Country Needs People’ initiative,^{xv} which empowers Aboriginal people to work as rangers on their ancestral lands, tackling environmental problems through a combination of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and modern science and technology, whilst also regenerating local communities. This hybrid approach is ‘essential to deal with 21st century postcolonial problems including depopulation, the orphaning of country that needs human presence for management, and broadscale and pervasive environmental threats’ (Altman in Altman and Kerins 2012, 221). TEK, it should be stressed, is not a static database

or ‘toolkit’, but a situated and adaptive way of knowing that recognizes both the limits of human knowledge and the importance of non-human agency and interests (Muir, Rose and Sullivan 2010).

The vital contribution of Indigenous peoples, perspectives and practices to the formation of the Australian ecological humanities helps to account for one of its most valuable features: namely its ethical orientation towards a transpecies concept of justice, which bridges the divide between the deep ecological critique of human chauvinism and social ecological concerns with environmental justice. The exciting new interdiscipline of ‘multispecies ethnography’, which developed in Australia out of the collaboration of artist and ethnographer Eben Kirksey with Rose and her erstwhile doctoral student, Thom Van Dooren, is underpinned by this bio-inclusive and inter-cultural ethic (Van Dooren, Kirksey and Münster, 2016). It can also be traced in the work around ‘caring for country’ of the Australia-Pacific Humanities for the Environment Observatory.^{xvi}

Housed in Sydney University’s Environment Institute under the directorship of historian Iain McCalman, the creation of this Observatory in 2013, one of an international network of Mellon-funded Observatories, was indicative of the firm foothold that the environmental humanities had now found globally, as well as in Australia. So too was the launch, in 2012, of the *Environmental Humanities* journal. In the following year, the annual conference of the Australian Humanities Academy, co-hosted by Hawkins at the University of Queensland, finally picked up on the programme set forth by Griffiths ten years earlier. Fittingly, second generation EH scholar Van Dooren had the honor of giving the annual Hancock Lecture on ‘Life at the Edge of Extinction’.

As already indicated, environmental literature and criticism were marginal to the emergence of the Australian ecological humanities, but came to play a more significant role in its development from the mid-2000s. In keeping with what I have said above, it will come as no surprise that the US-centric narrative of ecocriticism’s successive ‘waves’ does not wash with respect to Australia, where post- and decolonial, as well as socialist and feminist perspectives were in play from the start, alongside and in conversation with deep ecological ones (Bergthaller *et al.* 2014).^{xvii} In my view, some of the claims that are made for the transformative potential of environmental literature, and, by extension, for the importance of ecocriticism, are overblown. As I observed in an Eco-Humanities Corner article on ‘Writing in the Anthropocene’:

If, in George Steiner’s words, the Shoah confronted humanists with the devastating realisation that ‘a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening [...] and go to his day’s work at Auschwitz in the morning’, so too, ecocritics must acknowledge that a woman might well read Wordsworth or Thoreau in the evening (well, in the unlikely event that she has any time for reading at all), and go to her day’s work for Exxon-Mobil in the morning. (2009, n.p.)

Nonetheless, so long as the study of literature remains a core part of the school curriculum and English continues to attract significant numbers of university students, there is considerable value in the production of the scholarly resources for teachers and lecturers to bring socioecological concerns into the literature classroom, and for writers to reach wider

publics. But environmental literature and criticism comprise but one thread in the inter- and transdisciplinary weave of the environmental humanities, which is drawing authors and critics into new kinds of creative and scholarly configurations.^{xviii}

The gravity of today's socioecological problems imply that hermeneutic debates about the potential meaning of particular texts are far less urgent than examining what sorts of narratives, values, images and ideas might inspire or impede the pursuit of transpecies justice and collective flourishing in the present. This means moving beyond a preoccupation with textual representation to an ethnographic engagement with social practices, entailing participatory research with non-academic, and potentially also non-human partners (e.g. Bastian et al. 2017). To pursue this kind of transdisciplinary project in the UK will require following the Australian example of overcoming those disciplinary divides, which are evidently more rigid here. The importance now attributed to public engagement and impact, both in the REF and by the Research Councils, is nonetheless highly conducive to transdisciplinary endeavours, such as Sam Walton's AHRC-funded 'Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing' project.^{xix} The growing recognition of the severity of the environmental problems besetting the UK, as indicated by the government's '25 year plan to improve the environment' (2018), suggests that there is likely to be increasing support for the environmental humanities in the future. Yet the transformative potential of this field in the UK, as elsewhere in the 'old world', will be severely restricted in the absence of any deep recognition of the historical-cultural relativity of those modern euro-western epistemologies, ontologies and ethics, which underpin the 'natural capital' paradigm informing current government policy (Sullivan 2018). For decolonisation, considered bio-inclusively to include the decolonisation of 'nature' (Adams and Mulligan 2003), is a process that needs to be undertaken in the European heartlands, no less than in the settler societies that they spawned. This is vital to the future not only of the environmental humanities, but also to shaping just and compassionate responses to the plight of those, both human and otherwise, displaced by escalating environmental change and climate chaos.

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ⁱ Following the 1992 Rio Summit, the Australian Labor government had developed a national strategy for 'Ecologically Sustainable Development' (Robin 2017, n.p.). In 1990, PM Hawke had also announced plans to cut Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 25%; an initiative that was subsequently derailed by well-funded climate change denialists (Taylor 2014).

ⁱⁱ Bath Spa's RCEH has a membership of forty academic staff and nine affiliated PhD students, who come from a wide range of subject areas, including biological sciences, philosophy and religious studies, history, anthropology, physical and human geography, film and media studies, education, visual and performing arts, and English and creative writing, and has hosted six AHRC-funded projects since 2016. Bath Spa also offers an interdisciplinary taught MA in Environmental Humanities. Bristol and Exeter universities have also established Centres for Environmental Humanities (or Arts and Humanities, in the latter case) and multi-disciplinary environmental humanities research groups with affiliated postgraduate programmes also exist elsewhere in the UK, notably at the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Leeds.

ⁱⁱⁱ See also the excellent accounts by Robin (2017 and 2018). I am indebted to Robin and Mathews for their corrections to an earlier draft, and grateful for the recommendations of the anonymous reviewers. This article is dedicated to the memory of Deborah Bird Rose (d. December, 21, 2018).

^{iv} International linkages include the KTH, where Robin was Guest and then Associate Professor (2011-17), Rachel Carson Center, where Robin was, and Rigby is, an Advisory Board Member (and where numerous Australian EH researches have held fellowships); the international network of Mellon-funded Humanities for the Environment Observatories; and the Seedbox (Linköping), co-founded by (Canadian) Astrida Neimanis, a Key Researcher in the Sydney Environment Institute. As Chancellor's Fellow, Michelle Bastian (a member of Rose's Extinction Studies Working Group), has also contributed hugely to the development of the Edinburgh Environmental Humanities Network.

^v E.g. Rose's former PhD students include Thom Van Dooren, Associate Professor at the University of Sydney, is a founding co-editor of the *Environmental Humanities Journal*, who also helped to create one the world's first undergraduate degrees in environmental humanities at UNSW, and coordinates the Australian Environmental Humanities Hub (with Robin); Jessica Weir, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Western Sydney; Stuart Cooke, Senior lecturer at Griffith University and an award-winning poet; and (during her time as Professor of Social Inclusion at Macquarie University) Kate Wright, postdoctoral research fellow at the University of New England and co-editor of the Living Lexicon section of *Environmental Humanities*. Griffith's former PhD students include the other co-editor of the Living Lexicon, Emily O'Gorman, Senior Lecturer at Macquarie; and Christine Hansen, who established an environmental humanities research network at Gothenburg University in Sweden, before returning to Australia as Head of Collections and Research at Queen

Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania. Robin's former PhD students include Cameron Muir, who works at the National Museum of Australia and is a member of the ANU's Centre for Environmental History (along with Weir and O'Gorman as associate supervisor). My own include Anne Elvey, founding editor of *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Eco-poetry and Eco-poetics*; Geoff Berry, special issues editor of *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature*; and (as associate supervisor), Matthew Chrulow, Senior Research Fellow at Curtin University, and (like Van Dooren) a founding member of Rose's Extinction Studies Working Group (see Rose, Van Dooren and Chrulow, 2017).

^{vi} Glenn Albrecht's 'psychoterratic' studies also deserve mention here, with his influential concept of 'solastalgia' first framed in an article in *PAN* (2005). For a fuller account of Australian environmental philosophies, see Mathews (2014).

^{vii} The Australia-New Zealand Environmental History Network, currently convened by Andrea Gaynor, was founded in 1997. Further key figures, such as Katie Holmes and (second generation) Ruth Morgan, are listed on their website: <http://www.environmentalhistory-au-nz.org/members/>

^{viii} In the early 2000s, Muecke initiated a Latour-inspired 'Naturecultures' research network within Australian cultural studies. See e.g. Potter and Hawkins 2009.

^{ix} This was first mooted at the landmark "Environment, Culture and Community" conference hosted by Ruth Blair at the University of Queensland in 2002.

^x 'A Manifesto for the Ecological Humanities'. <https://fennerschool-associated.anu.edu.au/ecologicalhumanities/manifesto.php>

^{xi} Robin was a Senior Research Fellow in the NMA between 2007 and 2015. Among the ecological humanities initiatives hosted by the NMA were the 2009 symposium 'Violent Ends: The Arts of Environmental Anxiety' (http://www.nma.gov.au/history/research/conferences_and_seminars/violent_ends2/home) and the 2013 public forum, 'Part of the Feast: The Life and Legacy of Val Plumwood', which was associated with the NMA's acquisition of canoe from which Plumwood was dragged by a saltwater crocodile in Kakadu National Park in 1985 (<http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/detail/part-of-the-feast-the-life-and-legacy-of-val-plumwood/>).

^{xii} E.g. former President of ASLE-ANZ and founder of the AEGIS art and ecology network has curated a series of international exhibitions at RMIT gallery, including *The Idea of the Animal* (2006), *Heat: Art and Climate Change* (2008), *2112: Imagining the Future* (2012), and *Ocean Imaginaries* (2017). In 2009, Rose led the creation of a network of artists, writers and scholars, called Kangaloon.

^{xiii} E.g. in 2009-10 (and beyond) Canberra's Chorus of Women presented numerous performances of Glenda Cloughley's "Gifts of the Furies", a rewriting of the Oresteia, keyed to climate change, which were followed by community conversations among audience, performers and climate scientists.

^{xiv} In 2018, general editorship of *PAN* passed to Tom Bristow. Although British and currently based at Durham University, Bristow made a significant contribution to the Australian environmental humanities as President of ASLEC-ANZ, in which capacity he co-hosted the EH Affective Habitus conference on New Environmental Histories of Botany, Zoology and Emotions at the ANU in 2014.

^{xv} See e.g. the Country Needs People initiative (<https://www.countryneedspeople.org.au/>)

^{xvi} <https://hfe-observatories.org/observatories/australia-pacific-observatory/>

^{xvii} Huggan's and Tiffin's landmark work of postcolonial and zoocritical environmental literary studies (2010), whilst not exclusively Australian in scope, is exemplary of the bio-inclusive orientation of the Australian environmental humanities.

^{xviii} This cross-disciplinary ambition was integral to ASLE-ANZ's decision to follow the Canadians and Europeans in adding 'Culture' to the name of the association, and can be traced throughout the association's biennial conferences.

^{xix} <https://culturenaturewellbeing.wordpress.com/investigator-profile/>