

## Editorial: *Listening in the Anthropocene*

**Jenni Munday, Cassily Charles Michelle O'Connor, Tracy Sorensen,  
Barbel Ullrich, Louisa Waters**

This special edition of *Fusion* was initially planned to coincide with the *Listening in the Anthropocene* Symposium and Exhibition, in April 2020 - before covid-19 came along, and everything was postponed. [The symposium and exhibition became online events, which happened in late August 2020](#), and submissions for this special edition were reviewed in the months that followed. On one hand, the delays brought some wonderfully positive outcomes, with some delightful, engaging and thought-provoking submissions; and on the other, some disappointments for several of our intended contributors who were affected by COVID-19, particularly those from Europe and the United States.

This special edition, as well as the *Listening in the Anthropocene* exhibition and symposium, are projects of the [Creative Practice Circle at Charles Sturt University](#). We are a research group and a community of arts-based researchers, who started meeting in 2016 to support one another's writing and research processes. Arts-based research can be a fairly solitary activity, and we are spread across various physical locations, so the founding members established regular online meetings – sometimes weekly, sometimes fortnightly, sometimes monthly. The group has grown and now includes a mix of higher degree research candidates, early career researchers, mid-career researchers and artists. We share our works-in-progress and plan collaborative dissemination of these works. At our meetings, our conversations are organic, inclusive, deep and inspiring and lead us to push our work to the edges of contemporary artmaking and research.

The *Listening in the Anthropocene* exhibition was [opened on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2020 by Mandy Martin](#), contemporary Australian artist and Adjunct Professor of the Fenner Institute at the Australian National University. Professor Martin noted the links between this exhibition and the work of the Anthropocene Working group, led by Jan Zalasiewicz, whose mission is to examine the “seventh and last epoch – when the power of Man assisted the operation of nature [which] is described as one in which humans are not only present but, as ‘civilised humans’ are modifying key Earth processes such as regional temperature and precipitation by altering vegetation patterns and burning coal” (Grinevald, McNeill, Oreskes, Steffen, Summerhayes & Zalasiewicz, 2019, p.5).

The term Anthropocene is still in contention, but we have no doubt that humans have altered landscapes, oceans, the atmosphere and ecosystems, making it urgent that we speak out for change. In a heart-breaking journal article about the inevitable demise of the Icelandic glaciers, Morehouse & Cigliano (2020) remind us:

listening well requires decentering ourselves as fixed and referential subjects and shifting our attention to the relations within which we are entangled. It is a strategy that asks us to listen to human and nonhuman storytellers. None of this is easy (p.5).

This is a shared concern among the diverse practices and interests of the Creative Practice Circle, and the core theme of the *Listening in the Anthropocene* exhibition, symposium and special edition of *Fusion*. This special edition collects work by writers who are listening to a range of stories – some of which are hard to hear, and others which are quite joyous and life-affirming.

The special edition includes one of the works from the exhibition, by Nicole Welch. Welch has a strong connection to the natural environment and her infra-red time lapse video, *Yarrahapinni*, captures the movement of water, clouds and vegetation as the tide moves into an estuary on the New South Wales north coast. The colours are eerie, carrying warning, but there is a sense of rejuvenation, too, as more-than-human forces flow and welcome the regeneration of an endangered wetland. *Yarrahapinni* was commissioned by the Manly Art Gallery & Museum for the Manly Dam Project 2019/2020 and Fusion is delighted to publish it here.

Following the exhibition, the *Listening in the Anthropocene* symposium took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2020, with keynotes by [Adjunct Professor Margaret Woodward](#) and [Professor Mandy Martin, with Alexander Boynes](#). This special edition includes articles written by several of the symposium presenters: Bärbel Ullrich, Tracy Sorensen, Margaret Woodward, and Sam Bowker, and also includes contributions from Magdaléna Manderlová, David Calf, Cissi Tsang, Lee Beavington, Milena Popov, Patricia Jäggi, Kate Donovan, Rachel Meyers and Carolyn Philpott.

In her article, Bärbel Ullrich explores the-more-than human world through a creative practice which breaks from traditional landscape conventions by engaging with site specificity, collaborating with land and the earth itself. Drawing on Jungian psychology and the language of the archetype – such as Spiral, Mandala, Stones, Circle and Axis Mundi – Ullrich seeks out ways of *being-in-the-world* that might transcend time and space in order to develop a new human consciousness interconnected with land.

Tracy Sorensen conceptually and literally (through crochet and creative writing) “becomes with” her organs and other non-human entities on the brink of extinction (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Haraway, 2016). These threads she pulls together to unite body with climate change and the bodies pieces/parts within the-more-than human world, which face the turmoil of the Anthropocene. Both Sorensen’s creative writing and her article negate the traditions of linear narrative by following, as she writes, “Baradian ontology, in which there are no “real” beginnings, middles or ends, only entanglement and possibility” (Barad, 2007, p.141). Barad (2007) proposes that there is no individual agency “because nothing exists in-and-of itself; everything is the result of, the creation of, interactions with other things,” (p.396) – a view which is in radical tension with the anthropocentric and individualist axioms of contemporary Western culture, especially under capitalism.

Margaret Woodward’s creative practice and writing traverses both the body and the-more-than human world, as entanglements of the “moments between presence and absence.” Woodward asks how the Anthropocene might be “registered as absences – as genocide, as gaps in the geological record, habitat extinctions, retreating glaciers, mineral and emotional exhaustion or sensory loss.” Woodward applies a collaborative “slow publishing” practice which aims at “Attuning, attending, sensing, distilling and listening ... as well as overhearing.”

Sam Bowker’s paper reveals a creative practice which is as intimate as a mix tape: a gift to ‘listen in’ to the artist/curator’s narratives, cultural location and personal taste. Bowker explores listening to, and creating with, the found objects or ‘readymades’ of our aural world, the “audible objects of the Anthropocene.” Listening out through the lens of literary traditions, Bowker then remixes the audible into ‘song cycles’ of epic tales such as such as *Ramayana*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, or *Aladdjinn* and *Faust* mapping commonality between the grand and enduring works of human civilisations and the unplanned and quotidian sounds of larger life. .

Magdaléna Manderlová engages in a practice of deep listening of the landscape to imagine the sounds of an environment in the North Bohemian region of the Czech Republic, which has

been impacted by mining over many decades. In her artwork *HISS*, Manderlová responds to an immersive excursion to this landscape, through the production of a sonic essay that rumbles with a deep drone, as if an echo sounds up from underneath the surface of the landscape. This is accompanied by an artist book that captures in text and images the impact of loss from mining and extractivism at this place. Manderlová invites us to linger here and imagine the landscape from another time.

David Calf, in his *Spectral Geologies*, asks us to not only listen differently, but to consider the accumulated sediment of sounds from the past. In presenting us with soundscapes recorded in monumental sites around the former Yugoslavia, he challenges us to reflect on the expansive possibility of all events leaving sonic traces in the earth.

Cissi Tsang, in *Sound Art as ways of exploring aspects of place*, has a similar interest in the multi-layered histories that inhabit physical locations, “intertwining with the emotional landscape of the artist.” Tsang introduces us to the works of influential sound sculptors and describes their own work which uses environmental sound enmeshed with technological sources.

Lee Beavington’s *Bird Language and Contemplative Education in the Anthropocene* blends creative and academic writing, in a piece lovingly tied to the particularities of his home on Mayne Island off the coast of British Columbia: mountains, robins, raccoons, bald eagles, wolves. He makes the case for listening as a way of building empathy for the more-than-human world. Birds are talking all the time, and it is time we non-Indigenous humans once again learned to listen to them.

Milena Popov writes about her own multimedia practice in *Juxtaposing Anthropocentric and Natural Rhythms in My Video-Sound Art Explorations*. She explores the jarring contrast between industrial humanity’s noises and the harmonious profusion of non-human sounds, by recording and remixing audio clips taken from natural and urban environments. She calls for a return to a whole-body sensing of the rhythms of the natural environment, in the face of the encroaching rhythms of the endlessly hastening human-centred world.

Rachel Meyers and Carolyn Philpott take us to the soundscapes of the Antarctic by analysing a work by the composer Cheryl Leonard as a case-study of eco-acoustic composition. Listening to the excerpts from the composer, the reader can hear the relationship between the found sound and the performed sound by musicians playing Leonard’s carefully created instruments, made from items found in the Antarctic during a residency with the United States National Science Foundation.

Patricia Jäggi, in *Listening to the Reveries*, asks us to imagine a post-Anthropocene world and reflects on, and compares, the work of contemporary sound artists, considering the utopian or dystopian worlds where humans don’t exist. What would they sound like?

Kate Donovan’s essay *Nightcall Radio: radio – Anthropocene - entanglements* discusses the context for her creative practice, which looks beyond our common expectations about radio, to the ways it connects matter with the more-than human world. Donovan responds to a practice of deep listening and encourages us to listen out for micro-sounds and even silence, to understand how notions of silencing influence the dominant ways of knowing about life in the Anthropocene.

The editorial committee commend the work included in the *invited* section of the edition: Shelley Sacks, in the midst of the COVID crisis in the UK, shared some poignant photographs with us that we felt needed to be included in the edition. Professor Craig Bremner generously

responded to a request to review the [Listening in the Anthropocene online exhibition](#); and Louisa Waters and Michelle O'Connor have produced their valuable contributions while being immersed in the time pressures of doctoral research.

Every article and contribution has the potential to make the reader think deeply and differently. We are very grateful to all the contributors for their inspiring and innovative works, and finish with the words of the Irish band *Bright Eyes*—"we've been wondering what tomorrow's going to sing, on the final field recording from the loud Anthropocene..." (Oberst, 2020).

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## About the Authors

**Jennifer Munday** is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts & Education. Her research consists of Arts-Based research methods and Scholarship of Teaching, particularly in the online space. Jenni's background in the arts began with Theatre Arts and Music. She worked for many years with an experimental theatre company *Theatre of Simultaneity*, in Melbourne, and has also collaborated with Paddy Gillard-Bently at *Flush Ink Productions*, in Kitchener, Canada. Recently Jenni, has been producing a series of podcasts for the International Centre for Women Playwrights – Centre Stage podcast includes a reading by one of the international women playwrights and an interview about their work.

With the Mayday Hills (formerly Beechworth Mental Hospital) research group, Jenni had an exhibition at the Albury Library Museum entitled *Collections from the asylum*, which consisted of several collections of photographs and artefacts the team brought together through their research process. Two original works by Jenni were included: ~~*Mad-Sad Washing*~~ and *Postcards from the Asylum III*. *Postcards from the Asylum III* is also included in the Listening in the Anthropocene online exhibition.

**Michelle O'Connor** is a Lecturer in Communication and teaches radio in the School of Communication and Creative Industries at Charles Sturt University's Bathurst campus. Michelle's research interest draws from radio, listening, soundscape, radio art and storytelling, and she is currently progressing through a PhD investigating the meaning of local significance in Australian community radio. Michelle has a background in community and commercial radio and has received commissions as a freelance audio features producer. Michelle publishes audio work to sounds.around on Instagram.

**Tracy Sorensen** is a PhD candidate in the School of Communication and Creative Industries at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. Her debut novel, *The Lucky Galah* (Picador 2018) was long listed for the Miles Franklin prize in 2019. She was writer in residence at the Charles Perkins Centre, Sydney in 2020. She is an active member of Bathurst Community Climate Action Network, Inc and the River Yarners, a craftivist group.

**Bärbel Ullrich** is a visual artist/printmaker who lives in a property at the foothills of Mt Bogong in Victoria, Australia. Her current project is working in collaboration with the environment to produce prints that imbue the spirit of place. She states: “I have deliberately chosen to create site related works from ‘my place’ as it is where I live and where I feel I have a strong spiritual connection. Through this work I have aimed to understand myself and my artistic practice in greater depth as well as getting to know the ‘bush’ environment surrounding my home dwelling.” Bärbel interacts with and uses material from the environment. The concept that everything is alive is an important philosophy that underlies and informs her work.

**Louisa Waters** is an artist and writer based on Brayukaloong land of the Gunnai Nation, in Gippsland Victoria. Her work researches forgotten histories related to these lands, where she has lived most of her life. Louisa engages with the historical traces and cultural legacies buried within landscapes as a means of developing deeper understandings of how we inhabit these spaces today. Her mixed media works include installation, photography, drawing, video and artist books.

Louisa has been exhibiting professionally for the past six years and has worked for fifteen years in visual arts, education and local government sectors, both teaching and facilitating arts programs, research projects and art events. She is an active member within the Creative Practice Circle at Charles Sturt University, with the Freestone Press Print Makers, with CARE (Concerned Artists Resisting Extinction) and with the Briagolong Art Gallery, artist run space. Waters is currently a PhD Candidate with Charles Sturt University.