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– ARTICLE –

INTRODUTION TO:

REFIGURING DISASTER TEMPORALITIES:
CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS IN(TO) DISASTROUS TIMES

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The three essays that make up the following special section explore questions of temporality that emerge in the context and aftermath of disaster. More specifically, they address the ways that aesthetic responses to, or treatment of, disaster in creative arts both reveal and refigure disaster temporalities in affective terms, often with ethical implications. These ethical implications bear on what Roslyn Diprose (2011, 60; 2013, 186), following Heidegger, has termed 'the plight of dwelling' that characterises human social and cultural life in the midst of political and environmental instability. Although the term 'disaster' can encompass industrial and/or infrastructural accidents and failures (*cf.* Byrd and Matthewman 2014, 2020; Nixon 2009), and political violence such as colonialism, war or terrorism (*cf.* McClintock 2014), these three essays focus on examples of what are referred to, with necessary qualification, as 'natural disasters' – in other words, disasters that manifest as emanating primarily from, or that act in, the natural environment. However, just as industrial / infrastructural accidents or collapses, and processes of political violence, inevitably bring disastrous environmental consequences, each of the essays in this section shows how environmental disasters – Australian bushfires (Grace Moore), the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010–11 (Josephine Carter), and Sulawesi reef ruins (Jeffner Allen) – are inseparable from history and politics, or from questions of human life and community, and the significance of built environments and infrastructures which support that community.

The complexity of disaster as a topic of research is reflected in the vast range of disciplines that have come to include consideration of disaster in their scholarship and practice. Alongside those fields and organisational bodies specifically oriented to generating knowledge, policy and practice for disaster prevention and remediation, scholars across the social sciences and humanities now recognise disaster as both a significant aspect of human experience that

calls to be addressed through their disciplinary perspectives, and as extending the parameters of those same disciplinary perspectives (*cf.* Chakrabarty 2021; Wright 2015). As anthropologists Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman argue, disasters 'both reveal and become an expression of the complex interactions of physical, biological, and sociocultural systems'. They 'manifest the interconnections of these three factors but also expose their operations in material and cultural worlds. Disasters present conjunctural opportunities for documenting linkages' among them (2002, 5–6). Thus, researchers in geography, history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, economics and politics, as well as literary, film and media studies, analyse and theorise preconditions of, and vulnerabilities to disaster, the events and aftermaths of disaster, and questions around framing and representation of disasters. However, fields that occupy the intersections and interstices of such disciplines – such as postcolonial studies, gender studies, disability studies – also draw attention to, and equally find themselves extended by, consideration of disaster as part of the human experience they encompass. Anthony Carrigan (2010), for example, argues the need to bring disaster studies into contact with both postcolonial and disability studies. The essays in this special section cross disciplinary boundaries, occupying conjunctural spaces of literary, eco-critical studies, and history of emotions; postcolonial studies, philosophy, ethics, and cultural studies; environmental studies and poetics. Although all three focus on experiences of time in relation to disaster, they do so through a shared attention to the affects and emotions associated with times of disaster, exploring – even producing (see Allen, this issue) – aesthetic responses that induce or embody these affective responses.

Notions of time are implicit in definitions of disaster. The word itself – along with synonyms like catastrophe or calamity – probably conjures an image of a sudden and spectacular event, consistent with what David Farrier refers to as 'a "ruptural" catastrophe' (2016, 451). Similarly, Steve Matthewman refers to common understandings of disaster as 'major accidents, human and "natural", that are large-scale, expensive, public, unexpected and traumatic' (2015, 5). Yet Eli Elinoff and Tyson Vaughan point out that there are both 'fast and slow' ruptures, posing the question of how to think about 'disasters that seem to occur instantaneously but actually draw from deep historical roots and structure future trajectories' (2021, 2). Referring to the long-term processes of destruction that are too 'slow' to register as events, or as urgent, becoming visible – especially to world media attention – only when it is already too late, Rob Nixon's formulation of 'slow violence' names 'violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (2011, 2). He observes that 'climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnifica-

tion, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively' (Nixon 2011, 2; see also Matthewman 2015, 6). Conversely, Jeffner Allen (this issue) critiques examples of reports on sudden, repeated, and persistent conditions of environmental change as too starkly and readily representing irreparable destruction. I return to the question of specifically 'representational obstacles' below.

Potentiality is another temporal mode of disaster; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman distinguish between 'hazard' and 'disaster', the former as 'normal features of specific environments' while the latter can result when the hazard is 'activated' (2002, 8). There is thus a latency to disaster in particular environments which may – or may not – activate as disaster. Because the extent to which they activate *as* disasters is an index of 'a historically produced pattern of "vulnerability", disasters should be understood as 'processual phenomena rather than events that are isolated and temporally demarcated in exact time frames' (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 3). Farrier expands on this not only to critique 'the normalization of an enduring disaster which lacks a specific moment as only a "threshold catastrophe"' (2016, 451), but also to reflect on the limitations of 'dehistoricizing and narrowly linear' (2016, 451) thinking in relation to environmental disaster that overlooks 'the non-linearity of what [Nigel] Clark calls the "asymmetric causation" underlying historic or predicted climatic shifts; the potential in complex systems for "dense internal feedback loops", whereby small stimuli give rise to large-scale, possibly unstoppable transformations' (2016, 452; citing Clark 2011, 121, 116). Farrier adds that, while 'Oliver-Smith and Hoffman claim disasters must be understood to possess "pasts, presents, and futures" […], where ecological disaster is concerned these times collapse into one another' (2016, 452; citing Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 12).

Indeed, Tyson Vaughan (2021) refers to 'the Anthropocene age, when the experiences of recovery from or preparing for a disaster have become continuous' (210). Disasters that occur repeatedly, whether seasonally, or in an increasingly rapid cycle of frequency (and intensity), can mean that 'there is no longer a meaningful distinction between the phases of the disaster cycle' of 'predisaster preparation or postdisaster recovery' (Elinoff and Vaughan 2021, 7). In this issue, Grace Moore traces the nineteenth-century colonial settler experience of seasonal bushfires becoming, by the twenty-first century, increasingly frequent, unpredictable, and intense, as climate change dovetails with the greater susceptibility of the bush to conflagration as a result of colonial agricultural and land-management practices.

Nevertheless, Farrier follows Nigel Clark (2011) in recognising that 'disaster typically demands a negotiation of two very different temporalities: the need to act decisively, and the need to bear witness to the crisis's long timeframes of causation and consequence' (2016, 458). While, he contends, 'emergency claims only apply to people whose wealth shields them from an everyday experience of precarity', he adds that, 'without the urgency attendant on an emergency claim, where will the impulse to act come from?' (2016, 451). This temporal complexity informs Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2021) analysis of the limitations of thinking in terms of human-historical timeframes and linearity in the face of the Anthropocene, and anthropogenic climate change, while political questions of climate justice compel us to act also within the terms of historical time. However, as Josephine Carter argues in her contribution to this issue, a characteristic of the long timeframes of disaster's consequences can be, for survivors, an experience of temporal suspension in the ongoing emergency, exiled from the temporality of progressive action, from agential movement towards recovery and restoration. By contrast, Allen's essay reflects on an entirely different, and culturally deeply-rooted, understanding of living in a temporality of permanent disruption, to the extent that it does not register as exceptional, or as outside of the terms of everyday ephemerality (Allen, this issue).

These are just some of the diverse and divergent notions of temporality that inform notions of disaster as process and/or event; as unfolding processes in a linear unfolding of time, as ruptural breaks in the experience of time's continuity, or as the collapse of distinctions between past, present and future; as sudden emergencies, or as everyday precarity. While each of these temporal frameworks for understanding disaster engages with some aspect of the complex geophysical, sociopolitical, historical and economic phenomena that disasters encompass, the essays in this special section focus less on technical understandings of disaster than on human subjective experiences of time in contexts of disaster. Of course, how we experience time, even in disaster, is informed by the discourses of time we internalise through their social repetition. Inhabitants of modern western(ised) capitalist societies are interpellated as subjects of an institutionalised linear progressive order of time, so that individual and social selfhood and subjectivity are defined in terms of that linear, progressive and productive order. In the wake of disaster, official discourses of post-disaster recovery tend to emphasise resilience and rebuilding (*cf.* Vaughan 2021, 201). However, disaster – whether in terms of its immediate and/or repeating manifestation, or in terms of the breakdown of social and community infrastructures or individual support systems and psychic strategies – can spell the loss of that temporal scaffolding of life, leaving survivors trapped in an ongoing state of anxious hypervigilance, waiting for the next catastrophic

event, a state that Brian Massumi suggests 'becomes the very [affective] medium of everyday life' (2011, n.p.; see also Moore, this issue). Alternatively, survivors may be suspended in a disempowering state of stasis, adrift from the forward march of productive time that defines the modern western(ised) capitalist order (see Carter, this issue). Disaster can expose and disrupt, or even fracture our sense of time, or our confidence in ourselves as subjects articulating a linear progression from the remembered past, through the lived present, to the future imagined as continuous with those earlier times.

As a number of scholars have noted, following Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* (1986), 'the word "disaster" comes from the Latin "dis-astrato," meaning "disowned by the stars." It denotes abandonment by the cosmos […] and it conjures a despairing sense of human powerlessness and insignificance' (Ravalico 2017, 64). Combining spatial and temporal affective response to disasters that devastate those places we inhabit as 'home', Vaughan refers to

> a peculiar kind of communal trauma that environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2007) has termed 'solastalgia', which is distress caused by 'desolation of the physical environment (home) by forces that undermine a personal and community sense of identity, belonging and control', resulting in a profound, dissonant sense of dislocation or 'homesickness [that] one experiences when one is still at "home"'' (2017, 200; citing Albrecht 2007)

'Apocalypse' is a figure that is often invoked in representing catastrophic events, but Carrigan (2014) cites three different meanings of 'apocalypse' identified by Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz in reflecting on the Haitian earthquake of 2010: 'The first is the "actual imagined end of the world"; the second, a catastrophic experience, "personal or historical", that resembles this "imagined final ending"; and the third, "a disruptive event that provokes revelation"' (3). While, as Carrigan notes, Díaz added that the earthquake collapsed all these meanings into one (Carrigan 2014, 3), the distinctions between them open up a range of possibilities for conceiving of futures in the wake of disaster, possibilities that creative artists have explored in their own responses to disastrous times.

Firstly, imagined ends of the world have, in some fiction for example, called the notion of 'the world' into question, showing how apocalypse, in spelling the end of one world, can give rise to, or make space for, hitherto obscured or precluded new/other worlds (see, for example, Alexis Wright, 2006; see also Diprose 2011, 60 for discussion of the problems of totalising politics that preempt the future). Thus, secondly, the association of apocalypse with personal or

historical catastrophic experience brings the experience of that new – unknown, and intrinsically unknowable – future into the realms of subjective experience and response. Farrier in fact proposes that 'such is disaster's gift, opposing "the symmetry of an economy of truth and understanding" and "the radical asymmetry of an opening into the unknown and unknowable"' (2016, 461; citing Clark 2011, 74). Thirdly, apocalypse as a 'disruptive event that provokes revelation' chimes with both Oliver-Smith and Hoffman's anthropological proposition that disasters are 'self-revelatory', exposing 'the very history, often hidden, that leads to their own making' (2002, 18; see also Matthewman 2015), and with Carrigan's attention to disaster's disclosures as not simply giving rise to, but calling for, 'apocalyptic modes of interpretation' or '"ruin-reading"' (2010, 3; citing Díaz): in other words, 'Díaz frames disaster interpretation not just as a critical practice but as a method of reading' (4). Indeed, although they are referring to anthropological research methods, Oliver-Smith and Hoffman posit that 'methods that privilege narrative and observation' are especially appropriate for 'exploring the process of adjustment and recovery' following a disaster (2002, 12–13). However, referring to the Minamata mercury poisoning disaster in Japan, Vaughan refers to 'sense-making narratives about self and world […] betrayed by unspeakable trauma […]. Narrative order no longer held' (2021, 200). These divergent views suggest that questions of narrative positioning and perspective in responding to disaster are central to consideration of the capacities and even possibilities of narrative.

The role of narrative – broadly, storytelling – in relation to disaster is complex, encompassing formal, functional and ethical considerations. Observing that 'art both participates in and shapes the processes of conceptual reconstruction that accompany material rebuilding the in wake of disaster' (Carrigan 2010, 5), Carrigan argues that

> post-disaster representations can help recover (albeit unevenly) the stories and experiences that would otherwise be lost when physical reconstruction is so pressing. On the other [hand], they show how recovery is never linear, and perhaps always incomplete, given the fissures that catastrophes create in space and time, and the loss and trauma they cause. (Carrigan 2014, 10)

Diprose similarly points to how artistic practices, including literature, can participate in Jacques Rancière's 'aesthetic politics' to the extent that they 'promot[e] the "agency" (or "subjectivization") of the displaced and disadvantaged in any ethics of rebuilding amid the plight of dwelling' (2011, 63–4). Although it is often not the central concern of their work, a number of scholars engaging with the

'arts of disaster' identify issues of temporality as both among those challenges, and as integral to the art itself.

The temporal relation of the artist and the artwork to the disaster to which that work responds is central to its very function and effect. In a discussion of community arts and artist collectives, Jon Spayde has claimed that, for communities struck by disaster – he cites Hurricane Sandy in New York, earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and flooding in New Orleans and Queensland as examples – 'artists act as first responders, create ways for people to gather, and develop emergency preparedness plans' (2013, n.p.). In such contexts, art is less identified with the aesthetic responses of those artists than with artists mobilising their resources to engage survivors in activities that give them outlets for expression, 'to remind evacuees of their humanity', and 'that their lives were larger than what they'd undergone' (2013, n.p.). Engagement with art, whether making it or enjoying it, can thus serve a therapeutic role for disaster survivors.

As more time passes, art that memorialises a tragic disaster can serve to 'tack' the event 'to the fabric of collective memory' (Ravalico 2017, 60), awakening the public, even long after the disaster has taken place, 'from the complacency of the forgetful present' (Ravalico 2017, 64). This function of artistic representations of, or responses to, disaster – linked to the power of empathy – is echoed in Dieter Roelstraete's observation that, for all the ambivalence that may attend depictions of disaster, 'The moral valuation of art resides in its […] claim that it bears witness in ways that cannot be achieved by mere reportage' (2007, 9). Yet the ambivalence is signalled in the title of his article, 'On Catastrophilia', identifying the potential for art to aestheticise misery, to reduce others' experiences of catastrophe and suffering to pleasurable entertainment for spatially or temporally distant audiences. Much of his essay focuses on photography, but he also refers to 'catastrophiliac tourism' – 'the fateful coupling of tourism, exoticism and catastrophe' that he traces back to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English 'Grand Tour,' when 'the enjoyment of ruins first became a full-fledged cultural experience' (2007, 5). However, it is not only 'the enjoyment of ruins' that raises ethical questions around cultural consumption of the misery of 'others'; Lauren Ravalico argues that

> art that re-members disaster must access the beholder's empathetic emotions in order to convey the sense of terror and atrocity at the heart of a particular disaster, yet this relational encounter among eyes, emotions, and work of art denies the disaster its own identity. By relating emotionally to disaster, we nonetheless appropriate the Other's trauma for our own purposes. (2017, 70)

Thus while arguably one of the more ethical responses that arts of disaster may provoke, even empathy can function to reduce the singularity of trauma. At the same time, empathy can take possession of the beholder, 'moving' them in space and time

> 'to produce anxiety as of such a kind as to make us feel we have been transported *there,* to the scene of the extremity, even as we continue to [exist] comfortably, warm and safe, *here*'. […] [T]his sort of extreme, transportative empathy [...] makes 'time feel out of joint.' (Ravalico 2017, 72; citing Chambers 2004, xiii)

On the other hand, the failure of representational systems, such as media, to bring disaster to, and/or keep it within, public attention is the concern of a number of other scholars. Nixon addresses the problems of media fixation on 'conventional assumptions about [environmental] violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound' (2011, 3). He adds that

> politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match. (2011, 3)

Thus, Nixon points out, for slow violence, those 'convoluted cataclysms', there are significant challenges that pertain at the level of representation itself: given a western cultural preference for drama, spectacle, stories with heroes, and plots with conclusions, problems of devising 'arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects' (2011, 3; see also Nixon 2009, 445) not only obscure the processes of slow violence, but sustain the association between disaster and spectacular ruptural catastrophes (see also Nixon 2009, 445–8). Pointing beyond the aesthetics of representation to the technical and political capacities and priorities of visual mass news media, Brian Massumi asks, 'What is the half-life of disaster in today's global media? At most two weeks. The suffering on the ground continues, and will continue for decades. World attention quickly shifts elsewhere. […] [The disaster is] displaced from media attention by a next unforeseen shock' (2011, n.p.).

The question of art's relation to disaster is thus as vexed as the often misquoted (later retracted) pronouncement by Theodor Adorno that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1983, 34), cited as a moral or ethical dictate; or Barbadian

poet Kamau Brathwaite's conviction that 'art must come out of catastrophe' (cited in Carrigan 2014, 4), alongside his famous dictum that 'the hurricane does not roar in pentameter' (1993, 265), a formal, but also historico-political challenge. To pursue Brathwaite's point first, he continues, 'and that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience[?]' (1993, 265). Although he is referring specifically to the difficulties facing Caribbean poets working in the linguistic and aesthetic wake of British colonisation, his argument speaks to broader problems of the aesthetic representation of natural events, including disasters.

Carrigan thus poses the question of 'the challenges of *representing* catastrophes, and of interpreting their effects through an artistic lens' (2010, 4; italics in original). Ravalico contends, for example, that 'once inserted into the machine of representation, disaster is dispossessed of its own singularity and tends to become symbolic of some larger problem for the personally unaffected public' (2017, 70). The generic conventions of particular art forms can falsify the physical, psychic and/or affective experience of disaster. Ravalico (2017) cites Marie-Hélène Huet's argument that because 'disaster is fundamentally a "negation of order", it "cannot be rendered as a narrative without losing its own specificity"' (Ravalico 2017, 64; citing Huet 2012, 19). Carrigan explores catastrophe's 'genealogical association with plot conclusions in drama', yet finds that

> while the tragic mode is essential to much post-disaster art, it is rarely the dominant one. This is because the conventions of the genre – associated canonically with individual acts of hubris, 'fatal flaws', and cathartic resolution (often through death) – do not map neatly on to the communal experience of environmental catastrophes, and particularly the long-term processes of reconstruction that follow them. (2014, 5)

Recalling Vaughan's (2021, 200) account of the collapse of narrative (and subjective) coherence in the face of disaster, the traditional conventions of realist narrative arguably misrepresent disaster experiences to the extent that they order the chaos of events in continuous linear chronology, governed by a teleological movement towards closure.

However, unlike disciplinary and public contexts of documentary recording and reportage, the *arts* of disaster have at their disposal a wide range of resources and strategies for evoking, and indeed foregrounding, the affective dimensions of disaster experiences, while provoking reflections on, and even new understandings of, such experiences. Just as scholarly disciplines in the

humanities have found their boundaries challenged and extended by the need to address disaster, so we could posit the role of disaster arts in both adding new dimensions of understanding of disaster experiences, and as potentially also challenging and extending artistic or aesthetic conventions. It is therefore more productive to explore some of the strategies that artists, across the range of forms and media, have mobilised to engage with disaster, and in particular disaster temporalities.

Carrigan notes that it is narratives that 'decidedly resist closure' that more truly reflect 'the real-world need to continue addressing the deep-lying factors that exacerbate particular disasters' (2014, 5). He adds that

> revelation and 'anamnesis' – the recovery of lost or forgotten knowledge – are therefore key narrative devices in artistic works that help with understanding the multiple forms/and temporalities of catastrophe. And the most powerful representations tend to be those that […] manipulate narrative form in ways that produce new frameworks for post-disaster understanding, and possibilities for social healing. (Carrigan 2014, 5–6)

Similarly, the 'art of trauma, like that of disaster, can […] remind us that the aftermath is less a consequence following a calamitous cause than a "strange dedifferentiation of the received categories that divide time into past, present, and future and make cause and consequences distinguishable"' (Ravalico 2017, 73; citing Chambers 2004, xxii). In her discussion of narrative, photographic and film treatments of trauma, Thy Phu argues that 'trauma is not only the struggle for narrative marked by ruptures in narrative but also the struggle to see that is strangely marked by moments of blindness' (2003, 132); thus it tends to be more truly marked not in or by what it shows or tells, but in what it does not show or cannot tell. Breakdowns in narrative coherence, gaps and fissures, occluded spaces and times, visual disturbances or aural discordance (*cf.* McClintock 2014, 821) can mark the art of trauma, and by extension art that registers the trauma of disaster. Such art may seek, not to 'represent' the disaster as event, but to respond to it in affective terms. Indeed, referring to visual arts – a painting, Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa,* and Michael Arad's *Reflecting Absence,* a 9/11 memorial installation – Ravalico argues that these works 'pointedly eschew mimetic representational strategies, instead *theatricalizing* certain aspects of their historical subject matter in order to reflect (on) the unrepresentability of disaster and the implications of this paradox for the culture of its aftermath' (2017, 63; emphasis in original). However, lack of closure, gaps and spaces, and strategies that draw the beholder into active engagement

or commemoration, do not necessarily index trauma or the persistence of disaster; openings can inaugurate new futures and challenge the emphasis on endings and losses that characterise discourses of disaster. The essays in this special section bring such nuance to their examinations of, or reflections on, disaster and disaster temporalities.

In '"A Taste of Hell": Fear of Fire in the Australian Settler Imaginary', Grace Moore traces a shift in the understandings and experiences of bushfire from nineteenth-century Australian colonial settlers to twenty-first century settler-descended Australians, as reflected in literary works from those eras. The significance of her attention to nineteenth-century texts is perhaps summed up in her observation that 'even the oldest settler fire stories come to typify an anthropocentrism which may have left us literally out of time.' Describing the devastating impacts of colonial, European-derived, (mis)understandings of the land, seasons, and the Indigenous use of fire as a tool of land husbandry, Moore explores fictional portrayals of settler emotions bound up with waiting for fire – anxiety, tension, fear, hyper-vigilance – showing how they bear on experiences of time itself. Narrative strategies, such as time-shifts, show the passing of clock time in tension with characters' phenomenological experiences of time leading up to, during and in the aftermath of bush fire. Moore draws out the fictional evocations of waiting as anticipation that is rooted in memory, experience of the present as an emotionally draining suspension of time, the predictability of the future not as a source of security, but as a source of dread.

However, by the twenty-first century, as Moore shows with reference to both environmental history, ecocritical studies, and contemporary fiction, understandings of climate, land and fire have shifted, and the impacts of past actions, past forgettings and exclusions, inform a different focus in bush fire narratives. Rather than waiting, the emphasis is on aftermaths, and the emotions of dwelling in the aftermath of personal and environmental destruction and loss. Yet alongside trauma, and fictional narrative representation of its temporal characteristics, Moore traces the growth of a movement towards reconciliation to fire as an element of the land to be lived with, rather than regarded as the enemy. Such a revaluation of the place of fire indeed calls for a new ethics of dwelling (*cf.* Diprose 2011) for settler Australians themselves.

While anthropogenic climate change is a disaster we all inhabit daily, and art continues to be made in the midst of such disaster, few artworks are produced during the sudden emergency of events like bush fires or earthquakes. Josephine Carter's 'To Linger in Post-Earthquake Christchurch: The Responsibility of Waiting' attends to the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010–11, and their

extended aftermaths, though with a focus on the period of three years after 2011; and like Moore, her essay is centrally concerned with the experience of waiting. Here, too, waiting is cast as a debilitating, disempowering experience of (spatio-)temporal suspension. Carter posits the role of an institutionalised western regime of standardised progressive clock time in producing the anxious sense of loss of agency in contexts of forced post-disaster waiting, but turns to the possibilities of revaluing the experience of waiting as represented in, or enabled by, a range of different kinds of aesthetic or creative gestures that emerged among the city's ruins. Some of these aesthetic gestures were anonymous and impromptu, offering symbols and messages of resilience and hope; others offered wry acknowledgement of inhabiting disordered spaces and times where domestic/public, or inside/outside distinctions were fragile or undone.

However, Carter's argument culminates in the example of a photographic installation, mounted on boarded-up walls of a quake-damaged central city building, by artist Mike Hewson. The large-scale photographs presented striking visual evocations of the collapse of those conventional social distinctions between inside and outside, domestic/private and urban/public. The photographs, with their uncanny trompe l'oeil effects, induced passers-by to stop, pause, linger and reflect. As Carter puts it, passers-by are drawn out of the temporality of waiting as passivity, to experience waiting as 'a form of responsiveness and thus an experience that foregrounds the fundamental interrelatedness [of people with others, with things, and with their natural and built environments] that marks human existence'.

In their essays, Moore and Carter trace a movement from the problems of anxious waiting towards the ways that 'living with' the elements of our natural and built worlds can offer more enabling modes of dwelling in disastrous times. In her contribution, 'The Last Fish, Phantom Islands, and Reef Ruins: Unsettling Logics of Permanence', Jeffner Allen points to an already-existing cultural ethic of acceptance among the Sama peoples of eastern Sulawesi, of the everydayness of disruption to island and water worlds, and of navigating impermanence, not as 'catastrophe' but as the ephemerality of all things. While acknowledging the realities of climate change and other human-induced impacts on the coral reefs and reef communities of Sulawesi, as well as the movements of unstable elements, including volcanic eruptions, her intervention is thus to challenge 'the logics of permanence' that inform 'disaster' discourse. She issues a challenge to pessimistic pronouncements regarding coral reefs and reef communities, declarations of catastrophe, destruction, and extinction, showing how they often fail to appreciate the capacities of affected creatures and communities to navigate changed circumstances, transform, return and renew connections.

Reverberating through her essay is the local proverb, 'cut water is not severed'.

Allen's essay – she refers to it as a 'composition' – substantially comprises her own immersive and creative reflections on her own experience of diving and dwelling among the reefs and reef communities (humans and other creatures). These creative reflections are rendered in poetic language and form that enacts her critique of conventional expectations of perspective and point of view, of beginnings and endings, of 'things' as discrete entities outside of their relational bonds. The poetic passages play with evocations of mobile space and time, surface and depth, rhythms of separation and continuity, uncertainties of beginnings and endings. Words float, and groups of words form islets in the oceanic movement of the language. The passages are highly imagistic, using light and shade, the array of colours and movement of water and reef creatures encountered while diving, to insist on life, adaptation, transformation, persistence. However, there are also prose passages that follow more traditional scholarly practices of discussion and referencing, and address the impacts of development, politics, tourism, and other pressures on reef worlds. The essay therefore issues a challenge to the reader to reflect on the relationship between these passages and their very different discursive strategies, bringing the essay's formal aspects to bear on its thematic exploration of questions of time disaster.

The essays in this special section examine a range of broad themes and concerns, treated across different forms and contexts of disaster, and in relation to different aesthetic media. There are also shared concerns, such as the various inflections of the experience of 'waiting', that resonate across the three essays. Although their emphases differ, all three offer insights into how creative works of art can open up understanding of affective dimensions of the human (and more-than-human) experience of time in the build-up to, midst, and aftermath of, disaster.

NOTES

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