Editors' Introduction

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Welcome to the May 2009 issue of *Australian Humanities Review*. We lead off with Paul Genoni and Gaby Haddow's essay 'ERA and the Ranking of Humanities Journals', which follows up on Guy Redden's essay in *AHR* 45 to consider the implications of Australia's new quality benchmarking system (the ERA) for local humanities journals. In 'Romanticism, Modernity, and Virtual Reality: An Overview and Reconceptualisation of the Field', Peter Otto proposes that virtual reality be understood in a longer-range historical perspective that acknowledges the foundational importance of Romantic discourse and rhetoric for contemporary explorations of the tension between 'first-order' and 'second-order' versions of reality.

A special section on 'naturecultures' explores new approaches to the nature/culture and human/non-human divide. Inspired by Actor Network Theory and the work of philosophers and theorists such as Bruno Latour and Michel Serres, what links these diverse essays is an attempt to rethink ecology in such a way that non-human and even non-living entities can be reconceived as political actors in what Bruno Latour calls a 'parliament of things'. Gay Hawkins prompts us to reconsider the ubiquitous plastic bag, not simply as a passive object of moral condemnation, but as a complex material entity capable of diverse actions and interventions. Michael Dieter considers the Preemptive Media collective's AIR project as an example of a new kind of 'reticular' politics that engages people, technologies and environmental matter (in this case, particles of air pollutants) in a networked assembly that prompts us to reconsider political processes for representing 'matters of concern'. Emily Potter considers the metaphor of the ecological footprint, and how our habits of representation often fail to make room for the constantly emerging complexity of materiality. Finally, Zoë Sofoulis considers the anti-biological and anti-experiential legacy of 1970s feminism's 'social constructionist thesis', giving it a twenty-first century makeover using recent developments in disciplines such as evolutionary biology and systems theory.

In this issue we also farewell Libby Robin as the founding co-editor of the Ecological Humanities section of *AHR*, as she takes up an editorial role at the *Historical Records of Australian Science*, the journal of the Australian Academy of Science. As a researcher whose own areas of expertise straddle both science and humanities disciplines, Libby has played a key role in raising the profile of the ecological humanities, and she will continue to serve on the editorial board of *AHR*. Deborah Rose continues as co-editor of the Ecological Humanities, and

will be joined by Dr Thom van Dooren, a philosopher and interdisciplinary environment scholar currently based in the Transforming Cultures Research Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). This issue features Val Plumwood's 'Nature in the Active Voice', the paper she was working on at the time of her death: a powerful rearticulation of her arguments for a rethink of both our scientific and our cultural framings of 'nature'. It is accompanied by three responses to Plumwood's broader body of work—from Thom van Dooren (environmental philosophy), Kate Rigby (literary ecocriticism) and Gerda Roelvink and J.K. Gibson-Graham (politics)—that reflect the cross-disciplinary nature of Plumwood's inspiration and influence.

The Book Reviews section begins with Simon Robb's epigrammatic response to Ross Gibson's enigmatic fictocritical novel *The Summer Exercises*. This is followed by reviews of three books on Indigenous themes: Robert Kenny responds to Martin Nakata's *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*, Samantha Faulkner surveys the essay collection *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance*, while George Main assesses *Making Sense of Place*. Emily O'Gorman considers questions of water rights and water justice in the collection *Fresh Water: New Perspectives on Water in Australia*, while Ed Wright samples the linguistic treasures of *Stunned Mullets and Two-pot Screamers: A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*.