Introduction to the Special Issue "Australia as a Risk Society: Hopes and Fears of the Past, the Present and the Future"

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Australia may be defined as a society increasingly preoccupied yet also gambling with the future, a worry or denial which is closely connected to the notion of risk as a systematic way of dealing with and constructing hazards and insecurities. Recent events such as the Australian Black Summer and the COVID-19 pandemic have reminded us that the archaic horror of the past, one that colonial imagination of modern progress has tried to impart on us, has been surpassed by the emergence of an enigmatic horror, one that lies in the future. Speculations about the future are also one of the most prominent strategies of recent political discourse and when the speculation level is high, they may provide a fertile ground for "media spinning, scaring the public, creating solidarity, and diverting attention" (see Neiger). Apocalyptic speculations about future events are often employed in Australian right-wing populist discourse about climate change and migration, which have become a feared scapegoat that is blamed for threatening or damaging society. Notwithstanding the necessity of historicising discourses and rhetoric, it may be claimed that visual and lexico-grammatical resources employed by political discourse to appraise climate change, environmental disasters and migration have implicitly inscribed and/or implicitly invoked affects, such as worry and fear, not in order to prevent and prescribe them but to intensify and diffuse them (see Martin and White).

Future risks and their valued outcomes are constantly negotiated and discussed in news and social media discourse, in the academic and art communities, helping the Australian society to identify and share its deepest worries, yet their meaning is far from being stable and unproblematic since risks are threats to outcomes that people value. While some outcomes, such as car mortality and public health costs, are defined as risks, other outcomes, such as environmental disasters, climate change, and epidemics, are contested and their measurement often leads to controversies. By way of example, while dominant representations of climate change and environmental risks are often based on a linear conception of developmental progress, Indigenous Australian traditional owners have pointed to the repetitive and highly predictable risk of cyclones and tidal waves regarding mining pipelines (see Russo). Moreover, they have a deep knowledge of the ordered patterns of bushfires and have often described them as part of change and creation itself rather than being an effect of change or an unpredictable event. Similarly, the apocalyptic representation of the Australian refugee crisis is not just incidental but central to their subjectification (see Bettini). Quantitative and qualitative analysis confirms the correlation of refugees and discourses of chaos and risk based on rhetorical refrains by journalists, politicians and pundits, who insistently reiterate the magnitude and catastrophic impact of the hazards. The affective intensity and resonance of news and political reports is not particularly forceful as it travels within the subtlest and unnoticed surfaces of contact of everyday conversations. Yet, as Andrew Baldwin notes, "through affect we can better appreciate how racial sensibilities are mobilised for political purposes without the vocabulary of race ever being mentioned" (79). The images of migrants and refugees convey a disruptive, yet also comforting, passage of affective intensity, increasing but also setting a limit to the worry of 'ordinary' citizens for the future. In this antagonistic relation, refugees are an empty signifier whose efficiency derives from its affective force and paucity of content and is constructed as a threat to the 'future' of an imagined homogenous community inside a well-protected territory (see Wodak). Yet, another kind of discourse of the future exists, i.e., a future that allows us to search for solutions in the past and creates a space for emergent strategies unfolding in the present. It rests on acts of hope, reinvention and resistance, which at times

succeed in crossing and interrupting linguistic, cultural and political boundaries, thus creating alternative patterns of solidarity and member-shipping. In *A Letter from Manus Island,* Behrouz Boochani writes, calling upon a different discourse of the future, which entails resistance, change and transformation:

> The refugees are overpowered
> The refugees have had extraordinary pressure imposed on them
> The refugees have resisted an entire political system; they have stood up to the power of a whole government
> From the very beginning right through to the very end, the refugees only used peaceful means to stand up and challenge power.
> The refugees have asserted their authority
> The refugees have claimed power
> The refugees were able to reimagine themselves in the face of the detention regime
> The refugees were able to re-envision their personhood when suppressed by every form of torture inflicted on them and when confronted by every application of violence.

Boochani narrates a significant part of Australian history: he narrates a past, present and future that continue to manifest time and time again. Yet he also enables the possibility for what Bill Ashcroft has termed the discourse of "post-colonial future" (1), that is "transformation. It is transformation that gives [refugees] control over their future. Transformation describes the ways in which they have taken dominant discourses, transformed them and used them in the service of their own self-empowerment"(1).

Based on such premises this highly interdisciplinary special issue provides a reading of Australian interpretations and evaluations of future risks from linguistic, discursive, literary, multimodal, filmic, visual and cultural points of view. By focusing on the ways in which transnational/local media, films, literary and artistic works channel information on risks, it hopes to suggest and spread awareness on new cosmopolitical models of sustainability, conviviality and biodiversity in the face of climate change and environmental disasters and exploitation.

The first article by **Bill Ashcroft**, titled "Australia and the Risk of Colonial Blindness," considers the extent to which early explorers and settlers were blind to Aboriginal land management and how this blindness has gradually become an existential risk, which has resulted in a multi-year drought and unprecedented bushfires. Drawing upon a discussion of Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu*, it explores how colonial blindness has become endemic in Australian society and how literature opens forms of possibility that understand, cope with and see beyond the risks with which Australia is afflicted.

In the article "Indigenous Futurity: Two Apocalypses in Claire G. Coleman's *The Old Lie*," **Anne Brewster** analyses how Coleman mobilises a militaristic Indigenous futurism to scrutinise Australian egalitarian democracy and liberal progressivism. Specifically, Coleman's Indigenous futurism demonstrates that apocalypse is a powerful metaphor for genocide and the anthropogenic environmental damage inflicted on Indigenous peoples.

On the premise that there has been a recent growth of Indigenous-authored television drama in Australia, **Monika Bednarek** analyses Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) in three recent Indigenous-authored television series: *Redfern Now, Cleverman*, and *Mystery Road*. The article, titled "Australian Aboriginal English in Indigenous-Authored Television Series: A Corpus Linguistic Study of Lexis in *Redfern Now, Cleverman* and *Mystery Road*" employs lexical profiling analysis to compare the use of AAE lexis across the three programs and demonstrates that the use of

minority/minoritised English is no barrier to mainstream popularity, critical acclaim, and international success.

In "'Digital Dreaming': Connecting to Country and Reclaiming Land through Digital Platforms," **Chiara Minestrelli** examines how the digital provides a productive terrain to challenge current configurations of Land management, while proposing new forms of Indigenous sovereignty. Drawing on Indigenous knowledges, posthuman critical theory and geontologies, the article explores approaches to Country and Land mediated via the digital. More specifically, the article focuses on narratives in the filmography of the *Karrabing Collective* from a multimodal perspective.

"The Populist Brand of *Love Australia or Leave*: A Corpus-Based Investigation of Antipodean Populism," by **Jacqueline Aiello**, explores the production, promulgation and uptake of the ideologies and discourses of *Love Australia or Leave*, a small, peripheral, right-wing populist party in Australia. The article applies a corpus-based discursive-analytical approach to investigate: the main themes and ideologies put forth by the party and how they are structured and articulated; the extent to which the selected content produced by *Love Australia or Leave* exhibits distinctive features of antipodean populism; and the representation and uptake of the BLM movement, a contentious global issue.

Antonella Napolitano's "'Multiculturalism Has Come Back to Bite us during Pandemic': A CDA of Pauline Hanson's Statements on COVID-19" examines Pauline Hanson's political discourse on the implications of COVID-19 for the Australian society and economy. The analysis applies CDA to the study of populist political discourse and explores the way actors and facts are framed, by investigating how the 2020 COVID-19 crisis has been exploited to support nativist policies, feeding fears, and scapegoating 'the other' for the nation's problems.

"Dystopian Screen Media Overthrows Utopic Conventions: The Australian Landscape as an Enigma", authored by **Jytte Holmqvist**, explores Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright* (1971), and Warwick Thornton's *Samson and Delilah* (2009) by applying a Foucauldian and Freudian analytical lens. The article argues that the fear-induced screened narratives represent a nation whose people are most definitely a product of their environment.

"'Living Ghosts': Other Afterlives in Australia" by **Stephen Muecke** claims that the relationships of the living with the dead are a core aspect of Australian culture. The article argues that the tendency to reduce reality to one objective and material level has obscured the diversity of cultural, social and financial capital invested in the dead, from the national war dead to what is often glossed as Indigenous peoples' spiritual relationships to Country.

Cristiano Capuano's "Picturing Country: Contemporary Photomedia Storytelling and The Aboriginal Cultural Landscape" maintains that place narratives have profoundly shaped the language of photography within the field of Australian visual cultures. Drawing from stories told by contemporary Aboriginal artists James Tylor and Hayley Millar-Baker, this article argues that photomedia storytelling addressing landscape as terrain of contestation of colonial narratives enacts a sense of emplacement through the processing of a traumatic past.

Finally, in "Fearless Speech: Portrayals of Refugees in Contemporary Australian Poetry", **Amanda Johnson** elaborates the notion of 'asylegies', namely radical modes of writerly resistance. The author explores how contemporary poets such as Behrouz Boochani, Kit Kelen, Ann Elvey, Marion May Campbell, Ahmid Hashim, Sarah Day, Mohammad Ali Maleki and others counter-frame negative representations of refugees and asylum seekers as expressions of fearless speech. The essay

importantly sheds light on how poets are differently situated, and differently able, to risk speaking truth to power.

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