

NEWSLETTER OF THE EPOCH WARS ARTIST-RUN GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

Development Stage 1: March, April, May 2019

Arts House, North Melbourne Town Hall, Melbourne, Victoria

521 Queensberry St, North Melbourne VIC 3051



SUMMARY:

On August 21st, 2017, Pony Express applied to undertake a \$10,000-aud funded residency at Arts House via the CultureLab program. The residency took place April 23rd, 2019 – May 14th, 2019. The follow notes track the progression of the preliminary development of the first Artist Run Geological Congress.

KEY PERSONNEL:

Loren Kronemyer: Research Director, Co-Showrunner, Performer

Ian Sinclair: Co-Showrunner, Performer

Tom Cramond: Videographer

CONTENTS:

1. FILMING

2. LECTURE

3. EPOCH WARS AT ARTS HOUSE: MINUTES AND DOCUMENTATION

1. FILMING

From April 23rd, 2019 - May 6th, 2019, Pony Express worked from Kronemyer's studio in Tasmania to film propaganda promoting three alter-epochs: The Manthropocene, The Plasticene, and The Chthulucene. The intent was for these films to serve as informative content within the Artist-Run Geological Congress.

Creative direction, costume, and prop design was led by Kronemyer in response to locations around her home in the Southern D'Entrecasteaux Channel region of Tasmania. Kronemyer and Sinclair collaborated on devising and performing in the films, which were largely improvised and captured with support from videographer Tom Cramond.

MANTHROPOCENE

Inspired by: Raworth, K 2014, 'Must the Anthropocene be a Manthropocene?', The Guardian, Mon 20 Oct 2014, Opinion, Science, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/20/anthropocene-working-group-science-gender-bias>>.

Summary: Kronemyer hunts Sinclair down and removes a GSSP from his mouth

View: <https://vimeo.com/761292928/b1e3c56358>



PLASTICENE

Inspired by: Davis, H 2015, 'Toxic progeny: The plastisphere and other queer futures', philoSOPHIA, vol. Volume 5, no. 2, pp. 231-250.

Summary: Kronemyer walks across a difficult landscape in spike heels

View: <https://vimeo.com/761295383/64c475e297>



CHTHULUCENE

Inspired by: Haraway, D 2016, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental futures: technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices, Duke University Press, Durham, London.

Summary: Pony Express explore the remains of a sunken and burned catamaran boat once operated by Captain Cook Cruises.

View: <https://vimeo.com/761301770/ca3428347c>



2. LECTURE

INTRODUCTION

On May 6th, 2019, Pony Express traveled to Melbourne to begin the on-site residency at Arts House. On May 10th, as part of these activities, Kronemyer presented a paper at the workshop “Writing Place, Writing Laws: Law and the Humanities in the ‘Anthropocene’”, convened by Dr Kathleen Birrell at the Melbourne Law School.



Danielle Burford, *Sand Goanna*

Call for Papers

**Writing Place, Writing Laws:
Laws & the Humanities in the
‘Anthropocene’**

Workshop

Friday 10th May 2019 | Melbourne Law School

Registration Open

The provocations of the open call state:

“How do we ‘narrate, create and legislate’ the ‘Anthropocene’? How do we locate ourselves and our laws, in time and space, but also within the epistemological and ontological traditions in which we are immersed? How do narratives compete and entwine in a recuperation of cosmopolitanism as ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’?...Climate change has been described as a crisis of culture and imagination. How is political subjectivity and activism in this era subordinated to ‘catastrophic imaginaries’? What is the political and juridical force of imagination in the ‘Anthropocene’? Can the imperatives of climate change be disentangled from global rhetoric and understood from within imaginaries in place?”

Kronemyer took advantage of this opportunity by delivering and filming an introduction to the premise of *Epoch Wars*. This film would play a key role in the delivery of future live events.

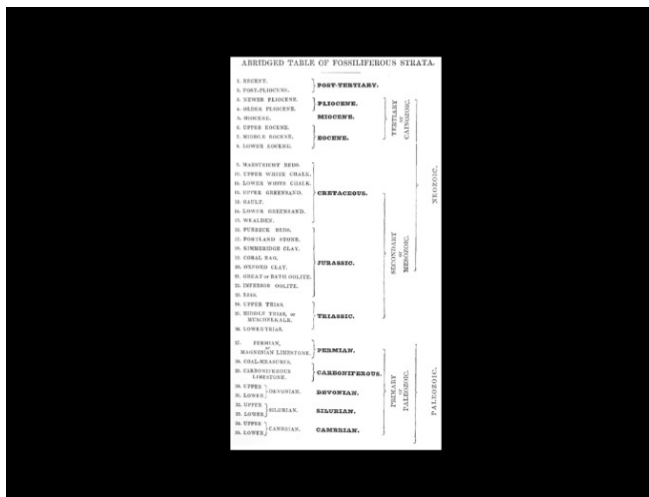
Below is a transcription of her talk, accompanied by slides delivered at the event.

[Watch full video here: https://vimeo.com/760918618/ae5221beca](https://vimeo.com/760918618/ae5221beca)

LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

The word ‘Anthropocene’, the human-recent era, is understood to mean the age of mankind as a geological force within earth’s history. The so-called ‘Anthropocene’ as a proposed new name for our present epoch is both a geological concept and a cultural meme.

The social traction gained by the word Anthropocene has drawn new attention to the world of



chronostratigraphy, the science of defining earth’s age, and its processes and shortcomings. Chronostratigraphy has existed since the 1850s, when a world-traveling Scottish man named Charles Lyell coined most of the epoch names still used to divide earth’s history today. If and when the name is formally adopted into our geological record, it will be thanks to the efforts of the Anthropocene Working Group, who are working in Lyell’s tradition.

The Anthropocene Working Group is a research group, presently consisting of 36 members from 13 countries. Their task is to define the Anthropocene in geological terms, identifying where this new era begins and advancing the name within the International Commission on Stratigraphy, the largest scientific organisation within the International Union of Geological Sciences,, geology’s primary governing body and one of the most active nongovernmental scientific organizations in the world.

Here is a photo published in the 8th Newsletter of the Anthropocene Working Group from 2018. As you can see, for a group set upon the



task of naming our coming millenia after the impact of humanity, this group does not come close to representing the scope of diversity that humanity has to offer. Or, as Kate Raworth put it: “Leading scientists may have the intellect to recognise that our planetary era is dominated by human activity, but they still seem oblivious to the fact that their own intellectual deliberations are bizarrely dominated by white northern male voices.”

This is an image of a Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point, or GSSP. The GSSP method of chronostratigraphy has existed since the 1960s.

The GSSP is a physical object, a literal golden spike, ordained by the International Commission on Stratigraphy. The golden spike is hammered into the earth in a ritual that signifies the division of every geological epoch that preceded it. The spike is driven into a location that best shows the boundary line where one era meets another. GSSP spikes have been hammered into locations all around the world, in a ritualized choreography performed by geologists to formally divide earth’s timeline according to their principles. The most recent GSSP is located in an ice core in Greenland, and marks the beginning of the Holocene Epoch, the epoch that most people in the room were once considered to be born in.

Currently members of the Anthropocene Working Group are holding internal debates about where to place the so-called Anthropocene’s golden spike, favoring sites that marked by the emissions of nucleotides that effected global strata around the 1950s.



There is an argument that the name of our new epoch will have an enormous impact on the future of our planet.

There is an argument, well articulated by scholars including Donna Haraway, Eileen Crist, CJ Cuomo, and others, that if we name our epoch after humans as a species, we are obscuring the fact that only a small, disproportionately powerful subset of humans are largely responsible for the problems of our era. That naming the epoch Anthropocene is letting those people off the hook in the eyes of the future.

There is an argument that the task of making this existential decision shouldn't be confined to an obscure subcommittee consisting almost entirely of members of those same disproportionately powerful demographics. That the golden spike should be nailed into the handful of persons and corporate persons responsible for the decisions that have altered our strata. That this decision has consequence for all entities on earth, and thus should be made in consultation with more than just the few invited to the table.

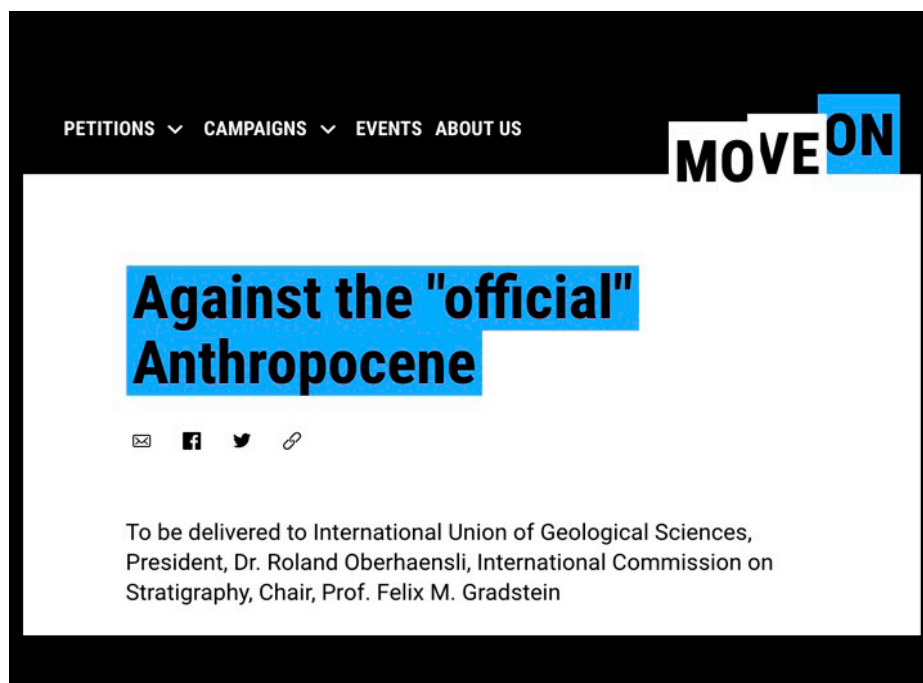
Show spike prop. This is a lindt bunny wrapper wrapped around a railroad spike. The alleged Anthropocene, just like this spike, is in danger of being deconstructed and revealed as illegitimate.



Based on the mere 200 years of colonial and patriarchal violence underpinning the field of chronostratigraphy, and based on the current danger of having our epoch, the epoch in which we will all die, defined by a small cohort of privileged beneficiaries, I would like

to propose that this alternative golden spike has just as much relevance, power, and ritualistic significance to define our era, if wielded carefully.

Imagining a rewriting of our current geological norms is the purpose of the project Epoch Wars. In the year 2020, we will be convening an alternative geological council, to coincide with the 36th meeting of the International Union of Geological Sciences. This new council will aim to rectify the omissions of previous councils, with the goal of devising a method of epoch-naming that takes into account the plurality of voices deserving of a seat at the table.



The argument against the naming of the Anthropocene has already been put forth as a petition by CJ Cuomo. In her moveon.org petition “Against the Official Naming of the Anthropocene” from the year 2015, she writes: “The undeniable markers of “human-caused” destructive domination of Earth are dismal warning signs that the Holocene epoch is seriously endangered, but they are not nails on the coffin of life as we know it.”

“We do not accept the idea that the Holocene is over, or that some essential “human” quality has caused the severe destruction of nuclear war, strip mining, ocean acidification and species extinction. The term “anthropocene” masks the work of capitalism, colonialism and other systems of domination in creating climate change and current global ecological hardships. It therefore misidentifies the problem, and misdirects attempts to address it.”

As of today, the petition has 129 Signatures.

There is already an over-abundance of new epoch names suggested as alternatives to the “Anthropocene”. This proliferation of names has seeded across many academic disciplines, creating a flood of contributions, each with their own values and biases. Many of these epoch names have accompanying manifestos or texts, in support of their arguments over who to blame for earth’s present state, or what we want the future of earth to look like.



Anthropocene
Capitalocene
Chthulucene
Plantationocene
Symbiocene
Gynecene
Manthropocene
Plasticene
Technocene
Pyrocene
Terrametacene
Vermicene

Epoch wars supports the expansion and acceleration of this list, and is concerned with commissioning new epoch names and facilitating the process of epochal world building for excluded communities. We want to know what epoch name matters to communities displaced by climate change; to people living in custody; to people with no access to clean water; to children born into the doomer era. What epoch name, if any, best affirms survivance of the diverse cosmologies of first nations people? What epoch name is most useful to people fighting for their lives, or mobilizing for the next generation? In the words of Clare Colebrook: The personal is geological. Our personal lives, as dictated by our own choices and the impositions of the society we live in, have physical, consequential geological ramifications that will endure for millenia. With that in mind, we want to bring the task of epoch naming into the hands of individuals.

A problem with this discourse is the lack of synthesis between these contributions from other disciplines and the geological establishment. Although many thinkers have been hard at work synthesizing new names, very few of these names take into the account the customs and norms of chronostratigraphy, making them easy for those within the IUGS to dismiss as viable alternatives.

Epoch Wars is interested in mending this rift, encouraging a better understanding of chronostratigraphic rituals so as to better deconstruct them. This includes an aim to lobby attendees of the IUGS, to promote the need for alternative names and for a more ethical form of nomenclature to the geologists themselves.

Although there has been much writing about the problems with “Anthropocene”, there has been little translation of thinking to action in unseating its cultural spread. Academia and the arts are addicted to the word “Anthropocene”, and its cultural value as a key-word, theme area, hashtag, and meme. Reliance on the social cache of the word has led to it spreading quickly through popular culture as a way to articulate the anxieties about our era. Much like the members of the Anthropocene Working Group are vying to become authors of the scientific paper that writes their name into history, cultural producers are leveraging “Anthropocene” as a way to attach their work to this significant historical moment.

The Anthropocene working group are aware of this. At their latest meeting, members convened a panel reflecting on the power of interdisciplinary industries, including the arts, in validating the word “Anthropocene”, and members of the AWG have collaborated recently with artists including photographer Edward Burtynsky.

FOURTH ANTHROPOCENE WORKING GROUP MEETING

The fourth meeting of the AWG, coordinated by Astrid Kaltenbach and Colin Waters, was held in Mainz on 5th–8th September 2018, kindly hosted by the Max-Planck Institute for Chemistry (MPIC). In addition to members of the AWG, numerous speakers and attendees, notably from the Max-Planck Institute, added richly to the debate. Presentations focussed upon the some of the relevant work currently undertaken at MPIC, the key signals and potential environments which could host a GSSP, the utility of the Anthropocene as a chronostratigraphic unit and the use of the term in the social sciences and arts.



Discussions at the Max-Planck Institute for Chemistry, Mainz. Photos by Astrid Kaltenbach (MPIC)

If artists can be useful in disseminating this dangerous epoch name, then they can be useful in overthrowing it. Epoch Wars will draft a voluntary compact between global cultural producers, pledging that we will stop relying on the word in our titles and curatorial texts, and instead use our platforms to disseminate an alternative, any alternative. It is our responsibility to use language that will bring about the world we want to live and die in. The nomenclature of our future, and the means we use to establish it, is still subject to a fluid imagining. By accepting our responsibility as epoch warriors, we can halt the fatal future from being set in stone.



3. EPOCH WARS AT ARTS HOUSE: MINUTES AND DOCUMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The remainder of Pony Express's time at Arts House (May 6th - May 14th) was spent developing a trial working group of the Epoch Wars Artist Run Geological Congress.

Formats for keynotes, panels, and breakout sessions were developed and tested between Sinclair and Kronemyer. Preliminary designs for props, effects, lanyards, and tote bags were created, alongside sound samples from musician Alex Last. These elements were trialled on a test audience who were invited via the following message:

"Arts House and Pony Express would like to invite you to a development showing of Epoch Wars as they prepare to combat the "Anthropocene".

Epoch Wars is a faux-symposium that places you in the battle-field about what to name our current geological era. The Ponies are facilitating a queer, multi-species alternative to the meeting of International Geological Congress to formalise the contested naming Anthropocene.

Epoch Wars asks audiences to question their role in the creation of scientific norms; consider who is and isn't asked to the table in planetary decision-making and confronting the implications of naming time itself.

We look forward to seeing you there.

When

Sat 11 May, 4pm

Approx. 90 mins

Where

Arts House - The Warehouse

(Please enter directly to The Warehouse at the rear of North Melbourne Town Hall)

521 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne

Wheelchair accessible

RSVP

By Friday 10 May to Olivia Anderson (Producer, Arts House)

Olivia.Anderson@melbourne.vic.gov.au"

MINUTES OF THE ARTIST RUN GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS, VERSION 1

Minute 1:

- Participants walk in to studio and are given name tags and tote bags. Some are their actual names, some are names of plants, minerals, animals, and other nonhuman entities. Some are names of people: “Secretary”, “CJ Cuomo”, “Donna Haraway”, “Glenn Albrecht”, etc.
- Kronemyer and Sinclair are behind a table distributing the name tags, prompting entrants “please take your seat”
- The studio contains one table with crowded chairs
- There is a lectern at the head of table
- There is bright lighting

(Image: Studio setup at the beginning of event)



Minute 5-10:

- The GSSP slide is on the projector
- Sinclair begins at the lectern, offers welcome and Traditional Welcome
- Sinclair offers “Existential Welcome”
- “For our introductions today we’re going to make a timeline of ourselves. When your decade is called please stand up and introduce yourself and state your species. Anyone born in the Holocene please stand - Anyone born in the anthropocene please stand”.
- “A bit of housekeeping”: Toilets - Coffee break, do a bit of networking - chime in with questions as you go - you are free to leave whenever you need.

(Image: Version one of Epoch Wars tote bags)

Minute 10-15:

- Sinclair states: “We are here to discuss the naming of our present epoch”
 - Introduces Kronemyer
 - Kronemyer recursively introduces video of Kronemyer from earlier in the week.
 - Video of lecture at Writing Place Writing Laws plays
 - Lecture contextualises the epoch debate and the IGC
 - Live Kronemyer is wearing the same outfit and mannerisms as video Kronemyer
- (Image: Recursive Kronemyer Keynote)



NEWSLETTER OF THE EPOCH WARS ARTIST-RUN GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS
DEVELOPMENT STAGE 1: MARCH, APRIL, MAY 2019

Minute 15-20:

- Kronemyer invites CJ Cuomo to the lectern
- Audience member with “CJ Cuomo” lanyard takes the lectern
- Audience member reads CJ Cuomo’s petition from print out on clipboard
- A big light and sound cue heightens the text
- Pony Express offer thanks and shuffle them off.

Minute 20-30:

- Sinclair takes the lectern as Kronemyer drags over new table to add to the existing one.
- Sinclair introduces a breakout session on “The Capitalocene”
- SINCLAIR: “We just wanted to make some more space, if you could help Loren add a table. Now to introduce our next epoch representative, the Capitalocene. This is a bit of a break-out sessions. If you could just grab your bags and hand-bags and place them by your side.

So were just going to start by connecting to the breath. Breath in and out. Just letting your eyes go soft. Breathing together, remember if you’re not breathing, you’re dead. Now as we breath in we’re just going to reach into our pockets or handbags, and take out our wallets. In. And lift up. And out.

Now just place your wallet on the table. And in your own time. Remove all the contents from the wallet.

Place all your cards out on the table in front of you. Arrange them in order from most powerful to least powerful. Consider them for a moment.

Observe your neighbors’ cards. Observe the cards of everyone at the table.

When you’re ready choose your most powerful card from a financial institution.

Hold that card in your hand. Excavate this card with your eyes. Let your eyes unfocus and refocus. Examine this card, Feel its weight, feel it’s texture.

I want you to consider that The Reserve Bank of Australia, recently printed, 400 million \$50 notes with the word responsibility spelled incorrectly. Repeat in your head res-pon-si-bilty. Res-pon-si-bilty. (Image: Capitalocene Breakout Session)



You are holding a fossil. This fossil is a petrified example of the late-capitalist era. This fossil represents an old capitalist trick, that the problems of the world are the problems created by everyone, when in fact it is the res-pon-si-bilty of capital. This relic is the transformation of global environments into a force of production.

In your own time, Return the fossils from where they came and bury back with your other belongings.”

NEWSLETTER OF THE EPOCH WARS ARTIST-RUN GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS
DEVELOPMENT STAGE 1: MARCH, APRIL, MAY 2019

Minute 30-40:

- Kronemyer enters out with her a compound bow and menaces Sinclair away from podium.
- She introduces the “Manthropocene” text from Kate Raworth
- Sinclair re-enters in his underwear with a coffee cart
- Sinclair drags over a new third table and serves the audience coffee while “Manthropocene” video plays
(Image: Audience member with coffee)



Minute 40-50:

- “Manthropocene” video ends.
- Kronemyer introduces the “Secretary”
- Audience member with “Secretary” lanyard comes to the podium
- “Secretary” reads “The Minutes” script - a series of speculative minutes of a Congress where more and more diverse and nonhuman entities continuously arrive.
- Pony Express, with audience help, begin bringing out more tables and rearranging tables into a circle
- Pony Express periodically bring in objects and creatures, coordinated with the text, until the tables form a completely new landscape dotted with lit candles, slime, dissected electronics, plants, and other strange features.
- Video projections play on tables (Symbiocene Video, Chthulucene Video), lighting and music transitions for more intense ambiance
(Image: Reconfigured table with e-waste and axe)



Minute 50:

- The final Minute in the script calls for “A negotiation”
- In large spike heels, Kronemyer precariously traverses the landscape of tables, relying on helping hands from the audience

Minute 60:

- Nina Simone’s “22nd Century” comes in, signaling the end of the gathering.
- Lights come up and participants are invited to stay for Networking Drinks
(Image: Kronemyer traversing tables)

