In late August, 2012, the HRC hosted a conference on “The Cultural History of Climate Change”—the first major scholarly meeting devoted specifically to this theme. The conference fell in the middle of something of a season of environmental humanities on the east coast of Australia, an early springtime for ecocriticism and ecophilosophy. The previous weekend, the National Institute for Experimental Arts at UNSW had held a symposium on “Sense of Planet: The Arts and Ecology at Earth Magnitude.” The HRC conference took place on Monday and Tuesday: from Friday to Sunday of the same week, the biennial conference of the Australian and New Zealand branch of the Association for the Study of Literature, Environment and Culture was held in Melbourne on the theme “Regarding the Earth: Ecological Vision in Word and Image.” Many of the participants at the HRC conference also attended these other events, allowing ideas to develop and deepen as conversations travelled south. Many of the participants had also attended the CHCI conference on the “Anthropocene Humanities” that was hosted by the HRC in July, helping to establish the HRC as a vital centre for exploring ecological questions that are now attracting intense critical interest across the humanities.

After a Welcome to Country by Ngunnawal community leader Mrs Agnes O’Shea, OAM, Timothy Morton from Rice University opened the conference with a provocative and engaging keynote, “This is not my beautiful biosphere.” Six panels followed, variously examining climates in theory, communication, writing, law, history and art. The conference concluded somewhat unconventionally, with a roundtable of contemporary artists whose work engages with climate change. Discussion was lively, with the roundtable pushing well past the official conference finishing time, and continuing into the night. The conference was convened by Tom Ford, an Australian Postdoctoral Fellow at the HRC from 2011 to 2013. Together with Tom Bristow (UNE), Tom Ford is currently assembling an edited collection titled The Cultural History of Climate Change that draws on many of the papers from the conference, with anticipated publication in 2014.

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