

Traces of Humanity: Extinctions in the Anthropocene

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Humans are the first species on earth to cause a global environmental catastrophe. Human activities are heating the planet, acidifying the oceans, polluting air, land and sea, devastating ecosystems, degrading soils, and driving millions of species of life to extinction. All of these things are also causing—and will continue to cause—human suffering at a vast scale, as billions of people are left without the resources to survive in a transforming environment. What does it mean to be human in the context of these crises? What happens to accepted notions of reason and responsibility when we apprehend the irreversible extermination of other forms of life? Is it appropriate to speak of ‘our common humanity’ while both wealth and suffering are still so unevenly distributed? How might we rethink human values and identities in the context of deep time?

Traces of Humanity tackles these questions by weaving together scientific research on environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, analysis of historical and contemporary extinction discourse, and ecocritical readings of literary works that engage our thinking towards questions of extinction and environmental justice.

This broad-ranging project juxtaposes work from science writers and philosophers—from Leclerc and Cuvier to Carson and Latour—with literary texts that trouble notions of human exceptionality, and are concerned with the transience of life and the impermanence of human ideas and artefacts. Through close readings of work by César Aira, J.G. Ballard, Jorge Luis Borges, S.T. Coleridge, Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, Akwaeke Emezi, Ernest Hemingway, José Saramago, Lauret Savoy and Ocean Vuong, *Traces of Humanity* shows how the thought of extinction insists we rethink our relations to other species of life, to the past and the future, and to the act of thinking itself.