Foreword

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Where do we go when we die? Will we turn into ghosts, perpetually walking the earth in a world of spirits? Will we leave this dwelling for better or worse places? Or will we not leave at all but simply change mortal shape? To soothe these life-and-death questions, religion and spirituality have tried to provide humans with answers for thousands of years. Yet, those answers fall short if not only we die, but everything around us dies too. Scientists are talking about a sixth mass extinction, while linguists lament the loss of Indigenous languages… Do we have concepts for imagining the loss of ecosystems, languages and cultures? Do we have rituals for mourning entire species and communities, the wisdoms encapsulated in their words, their stories and literary corpora? One way to learn to live with this constant dying that surrounds us is by focusing on the losses and disappearances instead of the void that remains. To Nils Bubandt, it seems that

> [i]n the necropolitics of the Anthropocene, geology is as entangled with politics as it is with ghosts. [...] There are the old ghosts of carbon-based industry, the specters of corrupt politics, and the God-tricks of conventional science, to be sure. But there are also the spirits of a different, emergent kind of politics, a symbiopolitics. [...] Anthropocene landscapes of death and extinction are [...] inhabited by emergent and unexpected constellations of life, nonlife, and afterlife. ("Ghosts" 136-37)

This issue of *FRAME* focuses on these ghosts, already dead or in the midst of dying. We consider our withering ecosystems, languages and cultures. We have selected articles that engage with perspectives on various kinds of deaths, extinctions, losses, disappearances—of words or worlds, and sometimes both. After all, when words disappear, whole worlds do too. Every two weeks, one of about 7000 actively spoken languages dies out, and between fifty and ninety percent are predicted to be extinct by 2100 (Strochlic).

Languages die for a multitude of reasons, ranging from colonialist powers that illegalised Indigenous languages on several continents to processes of climate change and urbanisation that make local languages unviable (Strochlic). Communities in rural or coastal areas particularly vulnerable to climate change are moving due to intense storms, rising sea levels, droughts, floods, and (wars related to) resource scarcity. As a result, they lose their home and identity together with the ecosphere that their language relates to. When integrating into different, often urban, environments, these communities assimilate into new surroundings and start speaking new languages. Ironically, with every language that dies, whole worlds of traditional knowledge on how to navigate the natural world get lost too, especially local wisdoms regarding the management of marine and land resources in fragile ecosystems, the climate, medicine, and landscape (see Rivenburgh qtd. in Eschner). This knowledge might have been helpful in combatting environmental threats. It is, in fact, a vicious cycle that with every piece of dying land,

languages die, and through their loss we lose the possibilities to avoid more death in our worlds.

We lack words for this scale of loss. How can we talk or write about, let alone start living, with this loss? Which words can we cling to when a way of living dies, when a "way of thinking that's been built up over time through organic processes" (Yoder), like fragile ecosystems, disappears, when a "connection between word and world is lost" (Visvanathan)? Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt asks: "In what discursive forms will this newly conceived relationship of humans to the planet and the future be expressed?" ("Ghosts" 171).

The death of land and languages, or worlds and words, happens in such a simultaneous manner that it does not come as a surprise that both are suffering from the same cancerous illness: "Globalisation" or the "near-total victory of monocultures in nearly every field of human activity," ranging from political and economic to cultural realms (Deneen). The world's 'metropolitan' languages are all now rapidly expanding at the expense of 'peripheral' Indigenous languages (see Rivenbergh qtd. in Eschner). The story of the world's biodiversity follows along the same lines: crops have become standardised, monotonous pabulum, and with the lack of biodiverse flora, uncountable animal species are wiped out. Today, the combined mass of all modern meat chickens exceeds the mass of all other birds on Earth (see Nova).

Furthermore, academic educational institutions which operate in the monolithic fashion of standardised higher education (Deneen) are shrinking the richness of our world's cultural and linguistic ecosystems into a homogenous mush. One example of this is the very language in which we are writing this foreword. Neither of us are native English speakers, and we recognise that the university plays a fundamental role in destroying or at least in aiding the disappearance of languages within academia. Although Vlinder writes poetry in Dutch, it seems inconceivable to Vlinder to write academic texts in Vlinder's parental tongue, despite having sufficient fluency and familiarity. It is not because Dutch is not spoken in academic contexts, to the contrary, but because Vlinder has followed a certain trajectory, complying with expectations for English to be the university's lingua franca, the tongue which has

become the standard for conveying (certain) academic thought. For Anasuya, a native German speaker, it is a similarly daunting thought to change to a multilingual academic trajectory after four years of university education in English.

Of course, it is different for languages for which there is not even space reserved in academic spheres, languages that are completely absent, whether these tongues are considered 'regional', 'minor', or perhaps have never been thought of as potentially 'academic'. How many languages are lost through and within academia? While there certainly are multilingual journals that publish academic texts in languages other than English, we should increasingly continue to write, think and publish multilingually and ultimately clamour for multilingualism in universities.

As the cover of this issue on the death of words and worlds encapsulates, it can be rather grim to engage with the knowledge that ecosystems, cultures and languages are dying an often slow but sometimes more swift death. While this knowledge arguably *should* be grim, considering that this death at the hands of (colonial) capitalism is devastatingly dangerous and dangerously devastating, for some more than others, it might be even more dangerous, specifically for Global Northern subjects, to be paralysed by it, to drown in despair rather than to act on it, even when self-absorbed systems and people in power do not (seem to) take notice or steps. In order to respond to all this death, whether slow or swift, whether here or there, hope is what we need.

For that reason, a beam of light spreads across the front cover, tentatively illuminating the issue's title: "Dying Wor(l)ds." The title's bracketplay is inspired by Kathrin Thiele's work on figuration, in which she argues that thinking with figures revolves around "the creation of different relations between words and things—between wording and worlding" (233). Thus, a practice of wor(l)ding takes place in which the mostly textual nature of figuration creates a different engagement with the world: words create worlds. Considering the literary nature of *FRAME*, this issue does not simply focus on the various ways in which the loss of lands and languages is represented in literature, but it particularly examines the ways in which literature allows or does not allow for a productive engagement with this loss, potentially creating new

ways to relate with/to the (dying) world(s) through words, which indeed are practices of wor(l)ding.

How to proceed? Should we paint gloomy pictures in the style of H.G. Wells' 1895 novel *Time Machine,* in which the author travels to the future of a dying earth, in which only crab-like creatures wander the barren beaches slowly and chase humongous butterflies while lichen covers are the world's last vegetation? As fascinating and simultaneously discouraging as this sounds, this issue aims to avoid, as laid out in Kelly van der Meulen's essay in our Masterclass Section, "a simple, superficial depiction of climate change that is so far removed from the readers' reality" and thus might be "losing an affective response amongst readership" (64).

Instead, this issue wants to pause to make ourselves and each other aware of the issues of the now. It tries to find words for the dying of worlds we are living in. How can literature soothe, offer terms and words to negotiate life in dying worlds, create new perspectives on loss? In the eyes of Donna Haraway, literature can offer ways to process these losses: "[w]e relate, know, think, world, and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, yearnings" ("Monsters" 45). Or as Anne van Buuren elaborates in another essay in our Masterclass section, different kinds of storytelling can help "[attain] this essential comprehension of our present-day ecological crisis when words are insufficient to encompass its significance and complexity" (75).

The main section of "Dying Wor(l)ds" begins with Sarah E. McFarland's article on the literary representation of climate emergencies, specifically as conceived in John Lanchester's 2019 novel *The Wall.* In her text "'Nothing Before the Sea Was Real': The Dying World of John Lanchester's *The Wall*", McFarland argues that Lanchester's novel differs from most post-apocalyptic climate fiction by offering empathetic intelligibility rather than adhering to the all too familiar literary conventions of, among others, tribalism, moral simplicity and lack of empathy. By emphasising shared humanity, queer futurity, and greater inclusivity, *The Wall* invites readers to imagine more ethical presents and alternative futures. Lanchester's novel thus makes it easier for readers to fathom the often unimaginable concept of 'climate emergency'

and to possibly steer them in the direction of productive action. After all, climate change is affecting the now and not solely the speculative future imagined in post-apocalyptic novels. According to McFarland, literature that provokes empathetic intelligibility, such as Lanchester's *The Wall*, might transform the hopelessness and despair of climate emergency into inclusion, justice, gratitude, and resilience, possibly encouraging readers to recognise that "meaningful survival depends on systems of shared humanity and genuine, compassionate community without walls" (33).

In the following essay, Sari Kivistö dives into disappearances in literature, which happen for a multitude of reasons, including wars, globalisation, and shifts in trends. Usually, any history is written from the accounts of survivors. The same happens in literary history, which is approached through the corpus of existing works. Sari Kivistö's "Imagining Lost Literature—Some Preliminary Considerations on Literary Extinction" proposes to shift our focus to the literature which is lost. Distinguishing between three different modes of textual loss—poetic fragments, intentionally constructed gaps, and extinct genres—Kivistö offers an alternative approach that investigates how textual losses invite fictitious supplements and creative rewritings. Her text further develops Hubert Zapf's idea of literature as cultural ecology, as it is "both a tradition-sustaining form and renewable creative energy that acts as an ecological force in culture [...] because it is semantically open, incomplete, and constantly changing" (51).

In "'*Stadichoan Wurde Wy Ôfknypt*': The Erosion of Frisian Culture in Contemporary Flood Fiction", the first article in our Masterclass section, Kelly van der Meulen explores the Frisian novel *Ûnder wetter* (2009) by Koos Tiermersma and discusses the way in which its prose poetically interacts with the Dutch cultural narrative of *de strijd tegen het water* (the struggle/battle/fight against water). In the novel, Fryslân's demise is caused by a planned flood and Sil Posset, the narrator, writes a diary three months before the actual catastrophe. Drawing upon cultural memory, Van der Meulen highlights how, in the light of ecocritical discourse, both Frisian land and culture simultaneously disappear under water. The article engages with Pieter Vermeulen's notion of the 'future

reader' as a narratological, embodied representation of environmental memory, who/which serves as a tool to navigate between the reader's reality and the almost ungraspable temporal and spatial scale of climate change. Oscillating between the historian's and the geologist's voice, the narrator enforces a readership that enables a potential affective response which not only evolves into a mobilising force in the Frisian context but reaches far beyond that.

In "Lost for Words: Constructing Human-Nature Relations through Colour in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*", Anne van Buuren discusses the animated film *Nausicäa of the Valley of the Wind* from Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, particularly in terms of how it expresses the relation between the different human tribes and the natural world. In the animation, the so-called 'Seven Days of Fire'—brought on by man-made mass destruction weapons—have led a poisonous forest to emerge that is lethal to humans, yet is able to cleanse the soil and water from its pollution. One of the tribes in particular views this forest and its inhabitants as something to be obliterated, creating a war amongst all the tribes in the valley. Nausicaä, the protagonist, however, learns about the way in which human life actually depends on the cleansing abilities of the forest and demonstrates how a more peaceful connection with nature is also possible. The uniqueness of Van Buuren's article lies in the fact that her analysis not only looks at the story of the film, but also at Miyazaki's use of colour in framing the opposition between the natural world (marked by cool-toned colours) versus the human world (marked by warm-toned colours), and how these two types of colours also reflect the transcorporeal connections between the two worlds, particularly in the figure of Nausicaä, who combines both with her blue dress and red hair. Moreover, Van Buuren demonstrates how Miyazaki visually problematises human's capacity for destruction, both to the forest and the animal life in it. Overall, the essay sheds light on the question of how different kinds of storytelling can play an important role in representing the ecological crises of our present-day situation (the film is heavily influenced by several modern climate crises), even when it sometimes seems like words fall short: namely through colour as a visual story-telling tool with incredible power.

Moving, then, to our Miscellaneous section, the interview with Nikolaj Schultz revolves around his new publication, *Land Sickness* (2023). The protagonist of the ethnografictive essay finds themselves in the midst of a Parisian heatwave exacerbated by climate change and decides to escape the heat to the Mediterranean island of Porquerolles. Instead of finding relief, the narrator is confronted with a dying island: its coasts are eroding by overtourism, its marine biodiversity is shrinking and its potable water is running record-low. In conversation with *FRAME*, Schultz dives into the literary, sociological as well as emotional landscapes of the Anthropocene. Written not as a self-help manual, but a first-person travelogue, Schultz elaborates that his work *Land Sickness*, a title mobilising a nautical metaphor, is trying to capture the "trembling" of both "the life terrain of the human and that of the earthly conditions of subsistence that we are living off and thus destroying by our very way of being human beings" (92). By choosing a hybrid genre, Schultz' work is a sign that we need stories: ecological analysis can connect deeper if it "starts closer to people's own life-worlds" (95).

While modernity has shifted away from stories to facts, stories can constitute a "mourning wall to bemoan the death of a language, [a lost genre, a lost tribe] or the missingness of a seed" (Visvanathan). By focusing on what has been lost, through storytelling, commemoration, and spiritualism, we can make space for a multitude of worlds and shift our focus to what is dying, without the gloominess, but with a sense of possibility that can help us combat the death of our worlds through what Vinciane Despret calls "joyful passions" (qtd. in Bardon). These might range from "curiosity, the practice of reading landscape as it is walked, a deep love of the earth and its creatures, and, perhaps above all, the desire to find magic, to enchant or reenchant the world, to make it possible to inhabit it with love" (Pratt "Ghosts" 172).

A shift in perspective towards today's ghosts and relicts of cultural ecologies can make space for "a world of many worlds," or a "pluriverse," that "[i]nstead of destruction, thrives on the encounter of heterogeneous worldings, taking place alongside each other with their divergent here(s) and now(s), and therefore makes of their taking place a negotiation of their going on together in divergence" (Blaser and De

la Cadena 16). This would entail creating space for diversity in all aspects—culturally, Indigenous, ecological, linguistic. Anna Tsing et al. also see this necessity of recalibrating the way we see our world, as inhabited by both the missing and the present, and of seeing Earth's pluriformity:

> A major challenge is how to think geological, biological, chemical, and cultural activity together, as a network of interactions with shared histories and unstable futures. There is something mythlike about this task: we consider anew the living and the dead; the ability to speak with invisible and cosmic beings; and the possibility of the end of the world. (176)

Like this, to conclude with Haraway's words, "Beings—human and not—become with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in earthly worlding and unworlding" ("Monsters" 45). We hope this issue helps us become with each other, human and/or other, and explore the literary implications of words and worlds.

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