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## Hacking the Anthropocene: Do-It-Together (DIT)

issue 10 • fall 2021

### Epoch Wars

*Pony Express*

*Experimental artists Pony Express set out to explore how artistic intervention could subvert the cultural uptake of the word “Anthropocene” to describe the current epoch of Earth’s history. This inquiry has produced the body of experimental worldbuilding work “Epoch Wars,” emerging from a detailed, four-year research process spanning institutions around the world. They conducted interviews with key figures in the debate for and against the word “Anthropocene,” which informed creative developments to produce an artist-led alternative to the formal scientific procedure for adopting new names into the geological timeline. Pony Express utilised a process of world-building: creating video, objects, graphic design collateral and merchandise, manifestos, published texts, virtual artworks, and collaborative live performances with Arts House (2019), Chronus Art Center, Shanghai (2019), HIAP, Finland (2019), Asia TOPA (2020-21), and Brunswick Mechanics Institute (2020) to produce the portfolio of material presented here.*

PONY EXPRESS is an experimental, Live Art duo led by Ian Sinclair and Loren Kronemyer. Through their pandrogynous collaborative process, Pony Express work across platforms of media art, performance, video and transdisciplinary research, creating immersive alternate realities that reflect themes of adaptation, global weirding, and the slow apocalypse. They present work in a diverse array of traditional and non-traditional venues, cooperating with communities, organisations, and subcultures at the forefront of environmental futures. The duo focus on queer ecologies and nonhuman politics to build worlds that trouble the ethical landscape of the present day. Find them on **Instagram** (@helloponyexpress). Visit their website at: [www.helloponyexpress.com](http://www.helloponyexpress.com).



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**Curated by  
Pony Express**



# INTRODUCTION

Experimental art duo Pony Express are ready to kill the word “Anthropocene.” Epoch Wars is an ongoing artistic research project in which Pony Express negotiate new approaches to the naming of Earth’s present epoch by attempting to usurp the cultural capital accumulating around the name “Anthropocene.”

To date, this project has encompassed collaborative workshops, commissioned creative responses, exchanges between artists and geologists, and large-scale live participatory performances, each presented with the goal of extending who has the power and opportunity to determine the name of the era we will die in. Pony Express are interested in how the real-world debate around epoch naming can encompass stories beyond the binary of science and fiction.

The following portfolio presents documentation of live and written artworks that have been developed between 2018 and 2020 as part of Epoch Wars. The portfolio is followed by collaborator credits and associated works cited. It has been assembled by Loren Kronemyer on the lands of the muwinina people in southern lutruwita (Tasmania) on June 10th, 2020.



# INVITATION

This letter was written in June 2019 by Loren Kronemyer while in residency at the Helsinki International Artist Programme (HIAP) on Suomenlinna. Pony Express use this letter as a conversion tool, an invitation to potential collaborators or institutional partners who may wish to contest the word “Anthropocene” and thus become Epoch Warriors.

Between 2016 and 2018, Pony Express were invited to participate in five publications or shows with the word “Anthropocene” in their title. The artists observed how—despite the well-reasoned objections to the word articulated by influential scholars—academic and artistic spheres still seemed addicted to using it.

This raises the question: What type of petition, action, or appeal would it take to definitively kill the cultural embrace of the toxic label “Anthropocene”?

This invitation is intended to be circulated and shared between communities of makers during Earth’s epochal transition.



Dear Viewer, Artist, Writer, Curator, or Institution:

I would like to urgently invite you to join the growing ranks of those among us who identify as Epoch Warriors. Membership in this cohort means a total divestment of your creative resources from promoting the word Anthropocene and its associated rhetoric. As you may be aware, this name and its implications work contrary to the goal of promoting a survivable future for Earth's diverse constituents. If you identify as an ethically self-aware participant in artistic discourse, it is time to reconsider the reflexive overuse of this word and to use your power to advocate against its acceptance as both a scientific and a cultural norm.

To summarize arguments made by my peers regarding the dominant name:

- It falsely attributes the toxic markers of this era to all humans, rather than to the specific persons and corporate-persons most responsible for emitting them.
- It obscures the identities of those most responsible for this epoch, reducing the likelihood of future accountability or restorative justice.
- Ideologically, it paves the way for further inevitable geological-scale intervention.
- It condemns future generations to a fatalist epoch, further hindering their ability to imagine more pluralistic alternatives.
- It invalidates the many diverse cosmologies and chronologies that may differ from the western geological timeline. This timeline is the product of resource extraction, colonization, patriarchy, and slavery, and is itself worthy of reexamination.
- It serves to further privilege the careers of the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG), the 34 individuals advocating for the geological formalization of the name within the International Geological Congress (IGC).
- It has been arrived at in a hasty fashion that is wholly inappropriate for a name with more than 10,000 years of potential consequences.

If you believe that these stakes are significant enough to warrant your action, here are the first steps to becoming an Epoch Warrior:

1. Halt indiscriminate use of the dominant name in the publications and creative outputs within your purview.
2. Refer to the present epoch as an alternative name from the growing list of candidates, a new name of your choice, the Holocene, or simply "our fucked-up present day."
3. Encourage epoch accountability among your peers and institutions. Dislodge the normalization of the dominant name wherever you may encounter it.

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on the role you may be playing in disseminating language that serves perpetrators of deep-time violence.

Regards,  
Loren Kronemyer

*Tomorrow will be the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century*

*-Nina Simone*

For additional copies of this letter, the Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP) sticker, and other Epoch Warrior resources, please contact [loren.kronemyer@utas.edu.au](mailto:loren.kronemyer@utas.edu.au)



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# EPOCH WARS MANIFESTO

The Epoch Wars Manifesto was first drafted by Pony Express at the Chronus Art Centre in Shanghai on October 27th 2019. It was extracted through a method developed by Pony Express called Artist Interrogation. In this experimental form of artist talk, the artists submit to a polygraph (lie detector) test, while answering live questions from the audience. After their questioning, the artist is invited to offer a confession.

The polygraph machine is an example of a tool that was once seen as a useful scientific instrument but that has since fallen out of favour. It is now considered too subjective or inaccurate to be used in prosecution.

This text was confessed by Ian Sinclair. The polygraph was administered by Loren Kronemyer and Tiyan Baker with live translation from Sophie Zhu Miyi.





I don't want to die in the 'Anthropocene'  
even though I probably deserve to  
I want the free will to choose what era I die in  
I want my own timescale  
I want deep time  
I don't want human touch  
I want nonhuman  
nonhumans  
I want the tentacles  
I want the worms  
I want the worms to decide  
I want the worms to decide with me  
a congress of all beings  
a congress of all beings  
I don't believe in violence  
but I want to kill the 'Anthropocene.'  
kill the 'Anthropocene' through language  
through talking  
through killing  
through now  
I want to go to a place  
where words mean more than they mean  
I want free will  
I want free will for all things  
let me lie  
let me lie in the strata  
let me lie in between the rocks  
let us decide our own fate  
let us decide our own fate together  
not them us  
not them us  
not them us.



## THE MINUTES OF THE 36TH INTERNATIONAL GEOLOGI- CAL CONGRESS

The International Geological Congress (IGC) is a quaternary event, where the world's geological and earth sciences professionals gather to share and verify important findings. The 35th IGC in 2016 marked the beginning of the project to formally include the name "Anthropocene" into Earth's fossil record, subject to approval by the decision-making hierarchy of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS).

This text is a living document by Pony Express that describes a speculative, artist-run Geological Congress, held as an alternative to the 36th IGC. Told as the minutes of a multi-species, multi-millennial meeting, this text imagines the proposition of a new epoch name as an opportunity for a radically inclusive council of deep-time stakeholders.

Accompanying this text is documentation of the live event Epoch Wars. This event brings to life the vision of an artist-run Geological Congress, as a collaborative and participatory live artwork disguised as a symposium. Via a wild and multi-sensory program of keynotes panels, propaganda, and performance, audiences tour the alternative futures associated with various epoch names. The performance ends with a reading of this text, as delegates are brought to order to vote on the name of the era they will die in.

The latest showing of Epoch Wars took place on lands of the Kulin Nations, Melbourne on March 8th, 2020. This showing was programmed to occur at the same time as the actual 36th IGC in New Delhi; however, the official IGC was cancelled at short notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.





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For the pleasure of the Board,  
a reading of the minutes of the  
36th International Geological  
Congress...



Images left to right:

1. Chronostratigraphic "golden spike" icon signifying the Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP), a geological tool that signals a new epoch's boundary.
2. GSSP sticker on the Permian/Triassic "golden spike" plaque, China. Epoch Wars distributed these stickers to people wanting to experiment with marking a new epoch.
3. Screenshot of the homepage of the 36th IGC (IUGS 2019).



Minute 1: Welcome, Acknowledgements, and Multiple Apologies.

Minute 5: The 34 members of the Anthropocene Working Group champion the human era (Zalasiewicz 2019).

Minute 9: Carly Shepperd rebukes the Anthropocene, declaring a soft war on the powers of epistemicide.

Minute 10: The Capitalocene—the era of wealth disparity and economic depravity—arrives, declaring itself “too big to fail.” Too big to function, it inevitably does (Moore 2017).

Minute 12: Earth’s oldest continuous civilization receives their invitation.

Minute 13: The summit of mountains provides a keynote.

Minute 14: Geology is mining, mining is slavery. Katherine Yusoff proposes the beginning of the search for a nonextractive geopolitical timeline (Yusoff 2018).

Minute 15: The delegation of striking schoolchildren interrupts the proceedings to take the seats.

Minute 18: As the delegates sip their coffee, the Plantationocene bursts in, bitter and roasting the conference. Decrying this as the era of enslavement; of the forced labour of peoples, crops, and microbes; and of toppled monuments (Moore et al. 2019).

Minute 20: The bombast of baby boomers pushes their way in.



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Minute 26: Australian toilet paper is declared a finite resource.

Minute 27: Donna Haraway descends, crying for the Chthulucene as a way to collect up the trash of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene. An epoch made up of ongoing multi-species stories and practices of becoming-with. The ancient ones rise: defiant and abyssal and tentacled, they demand a seat at the table (Haraway 2015).

Minute 33: A deep-play panel talk.

Minute 40: We welcome the delegates with dorsal fins.

Minute 50: We welcome the worm tribunal.

Images left to right: Carly Shepperd Keynote, Epoch Wars 2020; Logo of the AWG, from <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>.



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Minute 51: Toxic masculinity arrives.

Minute 66: English economist Kate Raworth calls out the Manthropocene. This era—hairly, sweaty, and overly familiar—mansplains the panellists into submission (Raworth 2014).



Minute 70: Nucleotides emit their response, pointing fingers and pushing buttons.

Minute 79: The delegation of skyscrapers.

Minute 90: Artists Alexandra Pirici and Raluca Voinea incite a battle cry for the Gynecene. The time has come for the femme body politic to imprint herself onto the strata (Pirici 2015).

Minute 110: Forgotten satellites submit a motion.

Minute 586: From a dank, dark dance floor, the Technocene recognizes you. She invites you to a permanent party atop a mountain of e-waste, start ups, and data dumps (Hornborg 2015).

Images left to right: Epoch Wars 2020 Artist Interrogation Panel Talk; Epoch Wars 2020 tote bag logo.



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Minute 139: The congregation of farmers with no water seconds the action.

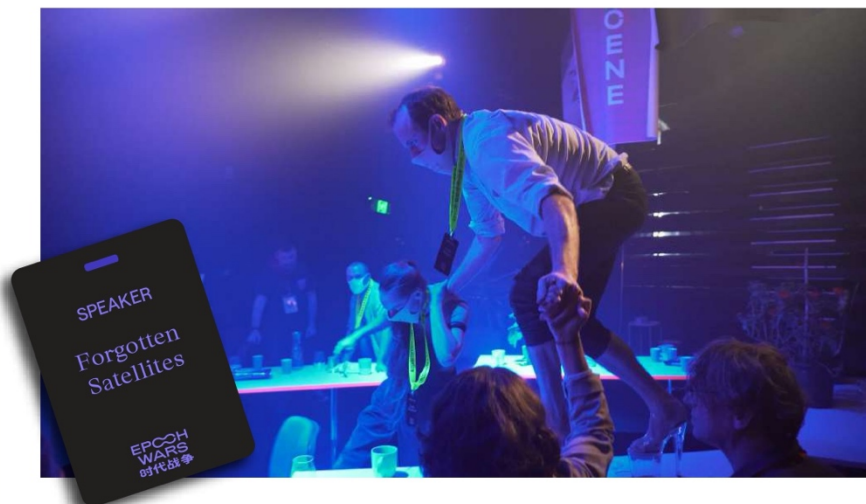
Minute 144: Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht declares the beginning of the Symbiocene: an era of generational and geological parity; of green muscle; of a healing slime that decomposes dominator culture (Albrecht 2015).

Minute 156: The stay-at-home mothers attend via skype.

Minute 213: The well-intentioned arts audience members raise a motion.

Minute 254: With a burning fury the Pyrocene enters and declares a state of emergency from the embers of governmental inaction (Pyne 2015).

Minute 305: A transmission from a trans-astronaut.



Images left to right: Epoch Wars 2020 lanyard; Epoch Wars 2020 arrival of delegates.



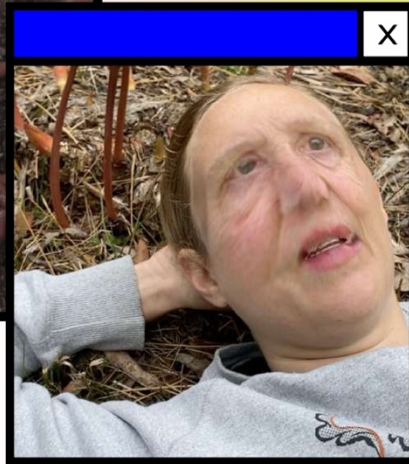


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Minute 440: Gut bacteria reclaim their time.

Minute 611: A call comes in through the Square Kilometer Array; the epoch of unification asks for clarification.

Minute 666: The bat ambassadors.

Minute 721: Rats, possums, crows, and lizards form a coalition.

Minute 864: Self-made geologist Rory Wray-McCann invites Pony Express to Queenstown to read his manifesto for the Ter-rametacene—a rock dog's dream of carbon catastrophe.

Images left to right: Epoch Wars 2020 GSSP of the Vermicene; Epoch Wars 2020 Deep Play Donna Haraway Keynote.





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Minute 876: A leadership spill of asphalt.

Minute 900: Every balloon ever.

Minute 901: Misprinted currency.

Minute 923: Noble Gases.

Minute 940: The Vermicene emerges: it's the worm's world and we're living in it. Burrowing deep down into the discussion, they call themselves the first terra-formers.

Minute 988: Krill second the motion.

Minute 983: Tectonic plates expand and reprimand.

Minute 999: We slow-dance to "The 22nd Century."

Minute 0: We return to the beginning.

Minute 1: A negotiation.



Images left to right: Epoch Wars 2020 final negotiation; Epoch Wars 2020 engraving of the new GSSP.



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All images of Epoch Wars, March 8th, 2020

The artist-run Geological Congress featured contributions from: Ian Sinclair, Loren Kronemyer, Carly Shepherd, Will McBride, Colin Waters, Alex Last, Rachael Guinness, UNA X, Rory Wray-McCann, Tiyan Baker. Live Translation by Joe Dias, Photos by Alex Sibbison. Showing presented at the Brunswick Mechanics Institute for Asia TOPA. Supported by Asia TOPA, the Australia Council for the Arts, Australia China Exchange, Performing Lines, and the University of Tasmania College of Arts, Law and Education, and the Research Training Program (RTP).



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