



# THE LIVING ARCHIVE

## EXTINCTION STORIES FROM OCEANIA

### STORY DETAILS

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**Title:**

Domains of Extinction

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**Summary:**

Bringing together the history of the Beaumaris Zoo, the seed bank and “Pete’s Patch” at the Botanical Gardens, homelessness, site-specific art events, gay beats, the Hobart City Council Development Plan and the Indigenous history of the space, this piece uses the Hobart Domain to reveal interlocking stories about extinction, precarity and resilience.

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## **REPLACE**

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“Fly through a shadowy city and navigate your way through a dark world of fractured stories and drawings, exploded clouds of language, and words that crumble into dust.” (Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang)

Over the last few years, we’ve been walking and talking and thinking our way around the Hobart Domain. The Peoples Park, the Queen’s Domain, known simply as ‘the domain’, is located on a gentle hill overlooking the Derwent river on one side and on the other, the city and kunyani/Mount Wellington. It is perhaps most famous for being the site of the Beaumaris Zoo, the home of the last known thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) and the home of Alison Reid who was the daughter of the zookeeper, a key worker in the zoo and a particular carer of the Tasmanian tiger. It was her exclusion from the tiger’s care that is said to have been the precipitating act in its ultimate death.

The extinguishment of the last thylacine invites us to think through the precarious and the extinct. In the midst of playgrounds and walking tracks, appreciating views and preparing pizzas at the community ovens, there is the quiet insistence to look again. The 229 hectares (568 acres) is a mixture of bush and park. Its’ surfaces cut through with rough walking tracks, perfectly formed jogging circuits and memorial paths. The whole site is marked by the small cliffs of ex-quarries that provided the stone for the building of colonial Hobart. Once the colony was established this space was always vulnerable to the demands of its non-Indigenous populace pushed and pulled between ideas of exploitation and conservation, extinction and preservation.

### **1. HOW IT WAS AND IS AND COULD BE**

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The Domain has wide chunks of un-developed and in Indigenous terms uncared for, bush, described as “remnants” of the original country as seen by the earliest colonists. These are quiet zones and difficult to penetrate spaces where dominant introduced species battle against what was thought to exist before non-Indigenous humans arrived. These spaces are not animated. Away from Indigenous care these spaces have been denied Aboriginal cycles of burning and breathing that create a society of plant species that make it possible to move with and across the land. The “Queen’s Domain Fire-Management Plan” notes that probably “the grassy woodland vegetation covering much of the Domain is a remnant of a more extensive land system along the Derwent Valley that Aborigines maintained by frequent burning” (p.18). There is a recommendation to implement a version of that original fire management plan which in turn links that idea to weed control.

Other identified places of Indigenous significance within the Domain are the “remnant foreshore vegetation” and the “native grasslands” running across the domain. This word “remnant” divides the Domain into original and contemporary. As a strategy for change, as a way of making planners “see” Aboriginal country this division may help. But does it help us feel this place as a much used, cultivated, site of food and gathering? The deep middens scattered along the shore and up into the hill suggest as much. The previous consistent presence of the Indigenous owners of this land is marked by the recording on particular planning maps of those shell middens; they are not marked on the ground. Is this to preserve the sites or ignore them? It seems the stuff of Aboriginal life has been smothered from sight and yet it persists. Reminders and celebration of its continuity loom up in events such as one called “Awakening Nayri Niara (good spirit)” which occurred in 2018. This activation of place before the opening of the Indigenous-centred “Longhouse” building at the bottom of the Domain, connected up the site of this building to the lower banks of the Domain and its chain of midden sites. Linking construction and spiritual activation gently shifts us out of the dichotomous thinking of exploitation or conservation. That “Awakening” called upon the ever existing and renewed story of the Domain and its surrounds as lying between the freshwater rivulet that runs down from the mountain and the big tidal Derwent River. This was once a place of nourishment with enough small bays for shelter wherever the winds came from. And the piling up of the used shells reminded people to eat something else next time! Now everyone is advised to be careful eating fish and shellfish from the Derwent due to the heavy metals from industry that still haunt the water. The “remnants” from the zinc works up the river have made all the shellfish dangerous. The grasses wait for some nourishing fire.

## **2. THE RUINED ZOO**

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We often meet at the abandoned zoo. The site that has been cut into the hill (probably another abandoned quarry), is thoroughly surrounded with tall cyclone fencing and covered in overgrown grass with the ruins of remaining animal enclosures dotted about. The gates themselves depict a number of mournful metal creatures – amongst them an elephant, a lion, a polar bear and a thylacine. Superimposed over another image of the thylacine are the words “Ghosts of Fur and Feathers.” The Beaumaris Zoo had originally been a private zoo run by Mary Roberts and named after her Battery Point house. Mary Roberts was a noted breeder of Tasmanian devils and she traded Australian animals with zoos around the world. The zoo was open to the public on the Battery Point site from 1895 until her death in 1921 at which time it was left to her daughter, Miss Ida Roberts, before it was negotiated that it would be taken over and relocated by the Hobart City Council. In 1922 a new zookeeper was appointed, Arthur Reid,

who found a new site, easily accessible to the public, on the sloping hill of the Hobart Domain and added new animals to the collection. The zoo was re-opened at the Domain site in 1923 and was once again named “Beaumaris” to honour its history.



While Mary Roberts’ zoo was noted particularly for its bird collection and native animals such as Tasmanian devils and thylacines, Reid’s expansion plan was to introduce more exotic animals which were believed to be more appealing to the public of the day. In a commentary on the zoo’s re-opening the *Launceston Examiner* recorded that the zoo “now contained 100 animals and 220 birds” and that “two lions and about 100 Australian parrots have been added to the collection” (“Official” p.12). As well as lions, this zoo was to house polar bears, leopards and even an elephant. Reid lived in the curator’s cottage, overlooking the zoo, with his family, most notably his daughter Alison Reid. Alison was a significant support worker at the zoo, mostly in an unpaid capacity. She assisted at the zoo through working on the turnstile on the weekends and through her practice of hand-rearing the zoo animals. She was also a taxidermist and was employed by the Tasmanian Museum in 1922. If you visit the thylacine display at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) you can see an example of her work.

The zoo is a significant public site for our national story about extinction because it was where the last known thylacine perished. Thylacines were once found throughout Australia and New Guinea but disappeared on mainland Australia

approximately 2000 years ago. In Tasmania, the thylacine was framed as a predator of livestock and a government bounty on their heads from 1880-1910 meant that the species was hunted to extinction. It took just 133 years for the thylacine to become extinct after European settlement. The “last” thylacine, known as “Benjamin,” died cold, alone and neglected, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1936. That same year, the Thylacine became a protected species in Tasmania. September 7, the date of the last captive thylacine’s death, has become National Threatened Species Day. The zoo closed in 1937 and was used as a fuel storage depot for the Royal Australian Navy between 1943 and 1991. Today, the zoo site is once again under the guardianship of the Hobart City Council. Although there are periodic spikes of interest in the site and occasional suggestions that it be opened to the public once again, it’s remains now lie behind locked gates.

On a cold night in 2019 we go to the zoo to see a dance performance by Second Echo Ensemble (SEE), an integrated dance company composed of dancers with and without disabilities. We have walked here, entering the Domain through the industrial space of Macquarie Point and the Hobart regatta grounds. The performance is called “Let Me Dry Your Eyes” and, in the tradition of the Ensemble, it is presented as a work in progress. There are a series of dance-vignettes which are occurring simultaneously on the sloping site which enact a love story between a bird and a whale who can only meet at the surface of the water. As audience members we are handed an object which determines whether we will see the whale or the bird dance first. The bird dances on the top of a crumbling cement enclosure. The whale dances in the leopard’s enclosure; a projection of the whale and the bird dancing together in a swimming pool covers the back of the enclosure while a man in a wetsuit dances the whale as water drips from the ceiling. On this night the zoo is revitalised as a fugitive site in which resilient bodies express themselves, animals are out of place and impossible loves are celebrated and mourned.

### **3. ENCOUNTERS**

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There is a man who has lived in a house right next to the Domain for years. His address is officially Glebe but everyone gets lost finding him including cab drivers and delivery folk. One wintry night a man knocked on his door who he recognized as one of two men who were living rough on the Domain. They had crossed paths on the human worn “goat tracks” that snake up and down the hill and at random intervals had exchanged a few minimal greetings. On this night he has come with \$20 in his hand and asks “Jim” (not his real name) to please order him a Domino’s pizza. He is not an old man.



Jim says to the man: “Domino’s will never find me” and then he goes back into his kitchen and turns the oven on and says; “Let’s go get some pizza”. And he takes the cold homeless man to the Woolies supermarket in Liverpool Street in the city and they are able to buy four pizzas for twenty dollars. Then they go home and wait for two of the pizzas to heat up. Jim reports that the man was very impressed to get four pizzas for his twenty bucks. “FOUR!” he said a couple of times. The man doesn’t want to stay and Jim offers to keep the other two in his freezer but the man is happy with his two hot and two cold pizzas and goes off. Jim doesn’t exactly know where to. He knows where the man lives within about 100 metres but would never try to get closer as they have arrived at a state of living alongside each other through their brief repeated passings and this pizza moment. A delicate zone of connection has grown quietly into place.

Jim talks about an older woman who lives further up in the Domain scrub who he has passed many times over many years, but he has no idea where she actually has her place and she only ever speaks to his dog, never him. If this depiction of life on the Domain is a fair one – these are clearly resilient people and a part of what we would understand as the precariat. Their homelessness seems individualized and yet connected in ways that may not be clear to those of us living otherwise.

#### **4. THE GARDEN WITHIN**

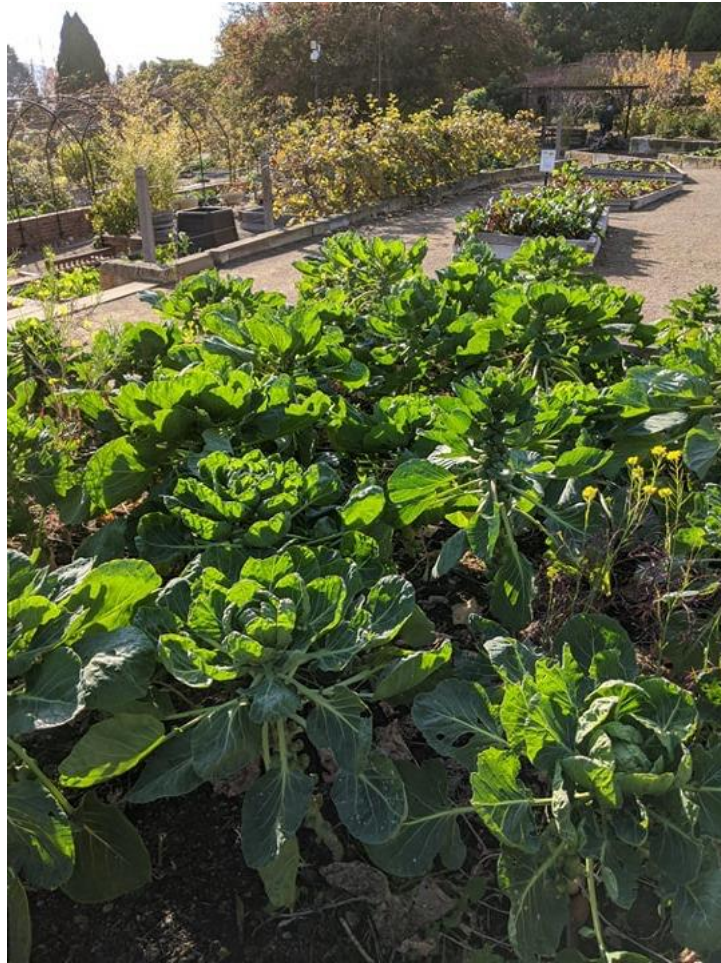
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The botanical gardens, currently celebrating its 200th year, also sits on the edge of the Domain overlooking the Derwent. The site is a sloping park, containing the colonial, convict-built, walls, which were ordered in 1829 by Governor George Arthur and were designed to be heated to protect tender, young fruit trees (it was only heated for a few years); a conservatory built in 1939 from sandstone salvaged from the Hobart General Hospital; “Wombat One” a shelter designed and built in the late 1970s by students from the School of Environmental Design at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education which was intended as a demonstration of environmentally sound timber construction using native wood; and to mark the 200th year, a new lily-pad platform on the duck pond. There is also an extensive collection of Tasmanian native plants, including the Greater Hobart Collection, the Tasmanian East Coast Collection, Tasmanian Fernery and the Huon Pine collection, which “aim to show how native flora can be grown as a horticultural display as well as a means of identification for the public” (RHBG “Tasmanian Collection”). While some areas of the broader Domain contain historical plantings (such as at the University of Tasmania site) or culturally significant plantings (such as the Soldiers Walk), the botanical gardens is situated on land that contains seven native plant communities and 130 native plant

species, with three listed as vulnerable and 16 as rare or threatened (Domain Masterplan).

As mentioned, the Botanical Gardens has a seed bank, an archive described by the botanic gardens as “the ultimate insurance policy for plants” (RHBC “Seed Banks”), in the face of “threats such as climate change, invasive alien species, natural disasters and political instability” and ultimately extinction. This is particularly important in Australia where we have one of the highest rates of extinction and endangerment of species in the world. The seed bank at the Gardens is the “cornerstone of the Botanical Gardens conservation strategy.” Every seed type collected and stored in the Hobart Botanical Gardens Seed Bank is also sent to the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew Gardens in the United Kingdom, whose website proclaims “Within the vaults of the Millennium Seed Bank is the Seed Collection, which represents the greatest concentration of living seed-plant diversity on earth”. Seedbanks claim to protect us from the risks associated with monoculture cropping in industrial agriculture as they preserve genetic diversity. This seed bank now preserves seeds from 57% of Tasmania’s threatened flora.

The Botanic Gardens is also an educational space for the development of the home gardener. It was once the site of “Pete’s Patch”, the environmentalist, pacifist and celebrity gardener, Peter Cundall’s organic garden, which was used for the filming of *Gardening Australia*. A great stalwart of austerity culture in Australia, Pete’s Patch also speaks to the politics of survival and to the preservation of gardening cultures, as it taught Australian gardeners how to grow enough vegetables and fruit to sustain a family. Even Peter Cundall’s catchphrase – “that’s your bloomin’ lot” – delivered in a thick, working-class Manchester accent to Australian television audiences, speaks to a particular version of austerity culture. Pete’s patch was composed of 6, 2×4 beds for growing vegetables, a collection of tightly planted fruit trees, a corner for growing berries, and the compost heap. On the ABC factsheet describing Pete’s patch it says: “the garden is not all that big. In fact, if you narrowed the path, everything would fit quite comfortably into a reasonably-sized backyard. And supply most families with all the vegetables and fruit they could eat all year.”



Pete's Patch has a longer history as a food garden. It was originally part of a farm and then the land was used as vegetable gardens for Government House until the 1950s. Pete's patch was constructed in 1996 as a working organic garden and according to the magazine *Organic Gardener*, provided food to the Botanical Gardens café and to an organisation called Second Bite which distributes food to charities across Tasmania. In 2013, after Peter Cundall's retirement, it was largely re-built and is now the more generic "Tasmanian Community Food Garden", a space designed as an outdoor classroom to educate the public about sustainability and food security. When we visit, we are always impressed by the size of the vegetables. On one particular day the brassicas put our own gardens – grown in less sunny locales and, no doubt, in poorer soils – to shame.

The manicured and middle-class space of the Botanical Gardens belies this important history of working-class austerity culture and the precarity of plant species in the Anthropocene.



## 5. TAKING REFUGE

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In 1921 a Mr Thomas Edgecock, worker on the wharves, found he could no longer pay the rent on his home and moved himself and his ten children and wife to the Domain where they erected and then lived in a tent. In 1922 he was gaoled for refusing to leave but was then released by order of the Premier. Notice was further served on Edgecock to remove from the Domain but council workers and contract lorry drivers, defied the Superintendent of Reserves, Mr Lipscombe, and refused to act against Mr Edgcock and his family. It was reported to council that there “was a prospect of what might resemble a siege as Edgecock’s colleagues would probably go to the Domain out of curiosity and the council would be blamed for upsetting the shipping facilities” (“Edgecock” p.7). It was also noted that other tent dwellers had followed Edgecock to the Domain and that they were a menace to public health. Edgecock’s youngest child was in hospital but had been removed by Edgecock and taken back to the family tent. These events occurred one year after the formation of the Australian Communist Party with one of its power bases in the Waterside Workers Union and within a time when wharf workers had no security, relying upon a daily “pick-up” system to get work each day. The publicising of this exploitation of workers and the possible involvement of the Communist Party heated up the coverage of this event on the Domain. A local Hobart Alderman stated that Edgecock’s removal is “...a matter of law and order versus Bolshevism” (“Domain”, p. 3).

The Chief Sanitary Inspector reported that the following families and constructions were on the Domain:

There are two tents and weatherboard and sacking lean-to in use by the Rourke family. The Rourke Family consists of Mrs Rourke, sen., Mr and Mrs Rourke, jun, five children aged from 3-16 yrs, both sexes, all sleeping in one tent in three beds without any screening whatsoever. There is another tent in use by Mr Richett and others who are away fruit picking. The conditions at these tents should not be permitted to continue for the following reasons: — (1) Common decency does not exist; (2) conditions not sanitary; (3) risk of fire; (4) tent fastened to council building; (5) unsightly tents and surroundings. The second tent is occupied by the Edgecock family and the conditions of tents and surroundings are good. There are also three tents occupied by the Jones family consisting of Mr and Mrs Jones and five children ranging from 2 to 13 of both sexes. Mr Jones is in good work and Mrs Jones is at work at the jam factory, and the children who are left by themselves are dirty and appear to be neglected. This family should not be allowed to continue living here for the following reasons –(1) conditions generally unsatisfactory; (2) excreta on ground near tent; (3) risk of fire; (4) unsightly surroundings. (“Domain” p.3)

This report means that there are at least 20 children, at least one grandparent and at least nine adults living on the Domain. But in a crude comparison with our known Domain dwellers of more recent times these people are highly visible to the public and deeply connected politically. They clearly recognise that they have what we would now think of as traditional labor power and old-fashioned solidarity. The political sensitivity of the scene is suggested by the way in which the state government attempts to overrule the council and by the obvious fears of a Bolshevik uprising or at the very least a “wharfie” strike. But the reasons for their removal remained compelling at the time – a mix of hygiene (excreta, dirt) and moral order (neglect, lack of common decency). And eventually we presume they were moved or at least the reportage runs out. The last we have so far found is that those who founded temporary homes on the Domain were moved permanently to the Queenborough Reserve, a derelict site attached to a defunct cemetery. The conservation of law and order and the exploitation of working-class labour continues.

## **6. BEATEN PATHS**

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If you talk to people, particularly older gay men, about their experiences of the Domain there are other narratives. This is because the “Queen’s” Domain has long produced stories of known gay beats and been understood as a space in which multiple orders of sexuality have been able to be enacted out of the sight of heteronormativity, the parental gaze, ruling class control and other immediate physical strictures. “Dave” (not his real name) says that as a 17-year-old in 1973, he had sex on the Domain with a member of the famous “Les Girls” chorus from Kings Cross. This chorus member had come down for the opening of the Westpoint Casino, Hobart’s “most sophisticated and glamorous” event in decades but one also marked by protests against gambling including contingents from Christian groups. This Casino that was to headline topless Las Vegas showgirls, Jerry Lewis and guests that included the American Ambassador and millionaires from Macau.

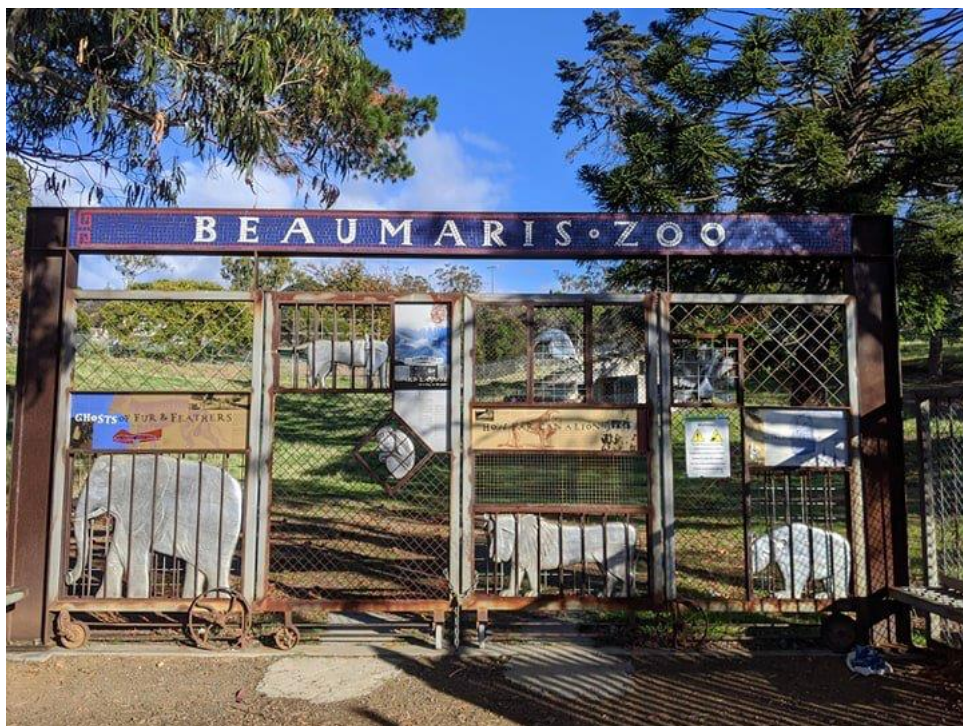


Dave reports that they were “fucking in the grass” when they heard someone calling a dog to heel. The calls go on and at a certain point they look up to see a dog, a black cocker spaniel looking at them. This still makes him laugh more than forty years later. The dog wondering “what to do?” The boys wondering “what to do?” And this wonderfully earthy, queer-sexed riposte to the coming to Hobart of the urbane and sophisticated Casino. But now Dave says the Domain is spoilt for sex. Too many kids. Too many bike paths. He makes us realise the exclusions and threat implied in promises of something being “family friendly” or even “pet friendly” and the ways in which queer space can be extinguished via the so-called harmless and helpful infrastructure of bike paths and children’s playgrounds. And we might also wonder about on-lead and off-lead dog areas and the nocturnal habits of dog-owners. Were Dave and his casual lover in an “off-leash” area or had the dog, sniffing something in the air, run into “on-leash” space.

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The Domain is marked by extinction. But also by acts of conservation, botanical and otherwise. The preservation of law and order through the design of spaces and their policing shape the Domain but so do the anarchical “desire paths” made by regular walkers, Domain dwellers, human and the more-than-human. A lot has happened and is happening on the Domain. It is a central site of mainstream sports and cultural activities and it is also a social edgeland holding histories of peoples and animals and plants who practiced and were punished through austerity, lived nimbly within various forms of the precariat or live

quietly within newly established margins. The haunted zoo space and the ever present but extinct thylacine may give us an ever-emerging map of how to think about this space that gathers and disperses. The space of the Domain is made more accessible to some only to render it closed to others. The people and plants and animals gathered through the normalizing practices of daytime visitors makes it harder for some night-time users and some all-day dwellers including those whose homes are invisible. But while there is space enough, the diversity of activities that are negotiated across the times and spaces, the organic and inorganic materials of the Domain sometimes produce surprising effects including more-than human resilience to human activity. Does knowing extinction mean that this space carries a particular attention to the precarious? Are the seen and unseen connections and communities, past and present, making of this domain of extinction a possible ethical domain that lives with rather than silences extinctions of all sorts? Maybe.





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