



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

‘Susanne Julia Thurow (Editor), Dennis Del Favero: Picturing the Climate Emergency’

Jatinder Mann

To cite this book review: Jatinder Mann, ‘Susanne Julia Thurow (Editor), Dennis Del Favero: Picturing the Climate Emergency’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 214-215, <https://doi.org/10.52230/GJEL8407>

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Susanne Julia Thurow (Editor), *Dennis Del Favero: Picturing the Climate Emergency* (New South Books, 2026), 192pp. Paperback. A\$49.99. ISBN: 978-1-7611-7058-4.

This is one of the most unique books that I have ever reviewed in the over one hundred that I have reviewed during the course of my academic career. This is in terms of both its subject matter and format. The former is the climate emergency (and I think the editor's use of this term instead of climate change signifies the urgency of the issue), and the latter is an edited collection on exhibitions of photographic art by the extremely talented Dennis Del Favero. For an academic who specialises in history, law, and politics and has always focused on text, to say I am a little outside of my comfort zone reviewing this book would be an understatement. But I thought I would review the book as the subject matter is very topical and although I tend to focus on text in my own research, I have been appreciative of photographic art my whole adult life. It is one of the few types of Modern Art that I truly enjoy, having always been more of a traditionalist when it comes to Art.

Anyway, what struck me first about the book is its cover, which is a photographic image of a bushfire, which could easily be in Australia, the driest inhabited continent in the world. It really encapsulates what the book proceeds to do. And it sets the bar for some truly amazing and eye-catching photos. Before proceeding any further I just want to mention that I am writing this review after the United Kingdom and Europe more broadly (hopefully) having just had one of its worst droughts in recorded history. But as I said to my partner more than once during the summer, as bad as it was here, it is a lot worse elsewhere in the world. And Australia sadly is a good example of the latter. As mentioned above it is the driest inhabited continent on this Earth and it is unfortunately prone to bushfires, which appear to be increasing in frequency and ferocity. The 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires in Australia which burned over 17 million hectares were just the most recent example of these. Having lived in Australia previously myself when I was doing my Ph.D., I am no stranger to hearing of the constant danger of bushfires breaking out, especially during the very hot and dry Australian summers in the bottom half of the continent.

The edited book has three main themes: It explores the destructive power of mainly bushfires as a result of the climate emergency; it illustrates the impact of these on people who actually live in especially hard-hit areas; and it also highlights the potential of AI assisted modelling to train firefighters who have the unenviable task of trying to combat these bushfires to save both lives and homes. The seven substantive chapters of the edited book explore these three main themes through some primarily truly amazing photographic art but also text commentaries, which provide some very useful background and context. Actually reading the chapters you sometimes felt like you were actually in an art gallery looking at photographic images and reading the exhibition commentary. This was quite a surreal experience to be honest, and it is not one I have ever had reading a book before.

Although the numerous photographic images of the destructive power of bushfires are quite eye-catching, I actually found the photos of the people affected by the bushfires even more powerful. You can truly feel the emotion of what I can only imagine is an incredibly traumatic event on the faces and in the eyes of those pictured. I think this is a very effective way to bring the realities of the climate emergency home to readers. It is not just an abstract concept, but it actually affects people's lives, sometimes in quite devastating ways.

I found the use of AI modelling of bushfires to assist in the training of firefighters quite fascinating, especially as you hear so much about the dangers posed by AI. It is actually quite good to see AI being used for a very important purpose, which could have material effects on the ability of firefighters to combat bushfires particularly.

I enjoyed reading this book, despite its difficult subject matter. It is extremely insightful and visually stunning. I wholeheartedly recommend it to readers. It will appeal to both general and specialist readers alike.

Jatinder Mann, University of Reading