

ARCHE Seminar Series 2023

Peter Hiscock and Kim Sterelny present

“Red Queen in Australia. Co–evolution and adaptive strategy explain Late Holocene cultural change in Australia”

Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution Seminar Series 2.

Abstract: Late Holocene Australia is claimed to be a period of ‘ecological release’ in which foragers experienced economic systems freed from the environmental limits that had previously restricted energy capture, population growth, niche breadth and social choices. This claim forms a basis for the Intensification model, which depicts a continental-wide revolution in forager social organisation that led to a transformation of those societies, from having egalitarian band-level social organisations with immediate return economies to transegalitarian tribal level social organisations with delayed return economies, and with associated increases in territoriality and territorial defence. In this talk we i) note that in Australia the Intensification model contains conceptual difficulties with the offered mechanisms of change, ii) argue that neither the archaeological or ethnohistorical evidence gives strong support for the inferred character or cause of economic shifts in the Late Holocene posited by Intensification, iii) redescribe economic and social changes in a way that can be best explained using well-established processes of co-evolution theory grounded in principles developed by theorists since Darwin, and iv) provide archaeological evidence that fits this new explanation. This is



an expansive agenda, but we sketch the arguments and evidence, and provide concluding comments on what further considerations are raised by our new model.

BIO: Peter Hiscock is Honorary Professor at both the University of Wollongong and the University of Queensland, and an Adjunct Research Fellow at Griffith University.

Kim Sterelny is Professor of Philosophy at the Australian National University. He has held an Australian Laureate Fellowship and given the Lakatos Award (2004) and the Jean-Nicod Prize (2008).

Date/Time – Thursday 23rd February, 2023: Seminar from 4 pm, followed by networking at the Unibar.

Room – N29_0.03 (Nathan Campus)