

## Editorial, 'PAN: Variations on a Theme (1)'

**Tom Bristow and Geoff Berry**

Issue 14 of *Philosophy Activism Nature* lovingly celebrates the life and work of anthropologist and multi-species ethnographer, Deborah Bird Rose; it is also dedicated to the flying fox and wild dog in all of us who live in her enduring light.

"Variations on a Theme" is a new series of PAN issues that play lightly with one of the journal's central concerns, which our writers have addressed since its inception: the relationship between creative arts, philosophy, and environmental knowledge. This triangulation opens up a virtual cultural ecology to the editors at PAN, who ordinarily approach their practice with a view to disclose thematic consistency and philosophical rigour; however, a number of writers have contacted us during the last eighteen months to offer their first contributions to what they understand as PAN's outlook and application. As things progressed over the last twelve months, it felt as if the contributors were a band of minstrels announcing their arrival to play the god's pipes; they remind us that the instrument (our journal) is to be shared amongst us and that it is shaped by the breath of those with something to say. This provisional definition of inspiration, inflected by PAN practice, is something that we wish to hold under the sign of Variation in the classical style of riffing on a core motif. Just as the breath of the wild god plays irresistible airs, so the PAN platform is open to the words and energies coalescing in idiosyncratic yet connected spheres of movement.

In the spirit of storytelling and dreaming, of deliberate democracy movements across the world, and with an ear pricked for ecological sensibilities, PAN14 steps forward while offering an alternative way of conceiving its contents as 'work in progress'. It is for the editorial team to respond to bequests in the terms by which they are alive; therefore, the deliberate yet free-flowing curatorial stance of this issue is *on the way* to something that has not yet taken final shape but has definite momentum that resonates with the spirit of earlier issues. We elect to draw a few porous boundaries (sections) around the imaginary as manifest in the writing practices, research questions and poetic practices of colleagues who have come to PAN14 with disciplined attunement to the spirit of interdisciplinary endeavour.

The opening section clears a path for traditional scholarship but it does not close the door on co-creation. Sandra Woollorton, Len Collard and Pierre Horwitz continue to record the deep knowledge of place and traditions of passing on this wisdom in their account of Noongar *boodjar*, or relationship to Country, in terms of the groundwater and wetland systems of south-western Australia. Their inclusion of Rainbow Serpent Dreaming stories underscores the extraordinary achievement of their prose Katitjiny Bidi – a 'knowledge trail' of seasonal shifts in the nature-culture of the place – representing a triumphant 'third way' of representing Country, which is accurate from both Noongar and scientific perspectives. The authors responded beautifully to our request for something that compared western and Aboriginal mythologies, or epistemologies, while

adding a piece of literature that instantly joins the annals of important knowledge about the way we live as humans on a fragile, living earth.

Conversations between writers continues in the contributions by Geoff Berry and Tom Bristow. Berry's 'Speaking English with Country' embodies the mythopoeic PAN spirit keeping conversations alive and relevant. Referring to the 'koan' put to John Bradley in his piece for PAN 13, Berry notes his inability to forget the challenge it represents for the modern animistic and eco-poetic soul; if Bradley's Yanyuwa mentor is right and the Country we live on can't hear us when we speak English, how can we evolve our ecological citizenship as kin with other sentient beings and places? Woollorton, Collard and Horwitz suggest learning local Aboriginal languages, a sentiment Berry supports; yet, in the meantime, he draws upon Abrams and other contemporary 'mythtellers' to support our ongoing efforts to become more eco-attuned, with recourse to Deep Listening and refined approaches to animistic rites. Grounding his efforts in experiential practice as well as what he terms ecomythic literature, Berry draws upon Australian compatriots Bradley, Freya Mathews and Deborah Bird Rose, as well as Martin Shaw, Martin Prechtel and Sean Kane. Readers will find that the editors are delighted to offer a complementary piece to the Berry-Bradley dialogue; Mark Dickinson and Robert Bringhurst are caught up in one side of our double-edged post-script that extends and clarifies the ways Bringhurst brought the power and majesty of Haida eco-poetics to the attention of the world, as Kane pointed out in his seminal *Wisdom of the Mythtellers* (1998).

While conversing with Berry during the writing process, Bristow approaches the ethics of elegy from a strictly humanist point of view, to bring into relief a curious gap between the mobilization of myth and political stalemate. His text keeps close to the question of loss inflected by the Anthropocene (as well as referring to the listening and speaking methods that Berry explores) but it draws greater inspiration from the literary criticism of Laurence Coupe. 'Making the Darkness Conscious' turns towards medieval violence, post-colonial sectarianism and cross-cultural myth as distilled in a collection of poetry from Europe in the 1970s. Bristow's writing is on the way towards a thesis of peace and conciliation in elegy; much more closer to PAN's home territory, Amalia Louisson's spirited interjection, '*Tūwā: Growing and Listening out of Enclosure*', draws from a spirit of listening, which includes more-than-human entities both alive and inanimate, actively contributing to the world we make. Louisson critically engages with new materialism in a way that is alert to the need for reviving our collapsed world, again making western ways (in this case, Pākehā, or non-indigenous New Zealander) 'more collaboratively compatible' with the Māori knowledge (or mātauranga Māori) of that Country. Mythtellers have long reminded us that the aliveness of the world breathes through the underworld into human psyches. Louisson cleaves to this idea and alludes to another example of how listening, this time in cahoots with indigenous reforestation practices, resonates with a cosmologically whole nature/culture; not by collapsing differences between Māori and Pākehā epistemologies but by working with the intelligence of the biosphere as we gather 'different assemblages together in a way that enables multi-species stories to be expressed,' as she so neatly and beautifully puts it.

Section two, 'Triptych', is the output of the very first creative peer-review process we've hosted in PAN. Designed to provide three writers with critical insight on their affective 'voice', disciplinary practice, and critical 'standpoint'; this unrefined, ad-hoc 'workshop via email' has placed emphasis on the individual writer to articulate how they are related to, grounded in, or *of* the subject treated by their particular mode of writing. The process has gifted PAN14 three articles travelling through a three-dimensional feedback loop: Jennifer Coralie's microfiction, 'Swimming in the Dark', approaches the communicative presences of the dwelling place marked by the affective autobiography that brings location into view through the body; 'An Italian's Story' by Giulia Lepori

constructs a damaged dialogue between autoethnography and ecological collapse to discover a broken form for songs of 'self' in our desperate times; and Justin Raycraft draws upon scholarly ethnographic experiences that are open to wider definitions of field work and the bounded field-site than those ordinarily conceived by anthropology. Imaginative cross-disciplinary discussions have helped our writers step outside their comfort zone for a while, before moving deeper within the familiar. Read as a whole, this triptych enfolds first person feelings from Australia and Europe that are indebted to our authors' creative critical commentary on being human in light of the multispecies cosmos.

We are delighted to provide PAN 14 readers with seven contributions of poetry. In a beautiful piece of contemplative lyricism, Tamryn Bennet guides us into Mayan mythology where 'the axis mundi is often seen as a ceiba tree, studded with thorns and souls represented by birds travelling between the underworld and heavens' to uncover the continent of South America as conceived in pre-Columbian times and as relevant to our now globalised ecological consciousness. Ilka Nelson writes from an inner beauty equally at peace with honesty and courage that admits the devastation of the planet into a cry for the Australian Black Cockatoo (the 'Living Dead'). PAN14 wishes to make new ground in the creative arts, to place before us the pain that the Earth bears in its time of great extinction, alongside the increasing phenomenological and spiritual impoverishment humans are facing; in this context, Alice Tarbuck, John Kinsella, and Veronica Fibisan generously offer their commissioned extinction elegies to PAN. These were performed last year in England in an evening co-dedicated to Stephen Regan for his enduring support of literary innovation in the public space (and his support for commissions), and to Deborah Bird Rose as part of a larger collection of works cast in her memory as curated by Red Room Australia and the Durham Centre for Poetry and Poetics. Tarbuck's 'Fin Whale' curiously inhabits the wake of a 'haunted sea-sounder' in an affective environment composed of scientific metrics and species loss. Resonating with the Anthropocene affect of Nelson's piece, Kinsella's 'Not the Postage Stamp of the Christmas Island Pipistrelle' –directly addressing the Durham Centre for Cultural Ecology's website image for the project 'Extinction Elegies'– colours a critical counterpoint to conceptualising loss in the academy with a personal experience of incarceration whereby a 'haunting premonition/of loss' intuits a 'forage zone of the spiritually lost, the vulnerable, the lonely' in heightened empathy for the 'lost' species. Ecological insight into the life and migration route of the Yellow Blossomed Pearly Mussel in Fibisan's 'Arrival at Paducah' provides an Anthropocene context for life in the Sixth Great Extinction, 'folded in / half/ blinded / by high turbidity levels'. In addition to the extinction elegies series that take the idea of ancient genres to new cultural contexts, Tarbuck and Fibisan kindly offer a second startling poem each fresh from the poet's mantle. The poetry section closes with Chantal Jackson's 'Possum Dreaming', a work inspired by a visit to a sacred site in North America that introduced dreaming to an anthropologist's daughter; the invisible presence of the mother throughout this poem and PAN 14 helps us locate what the poem reminds us: there is a long way for our love to go before it is exhausted, and we can draw from our experiences of loss without falling into despair, 'What had seemed desolate and endless was quietly alive'. To extend the paraphrase: if we make darkness conscious we begin to sing of 'a blood-red field of life' which we can respectfully nurture. There is a clear challenge here: to read this poem in the light of the celebratory mode of this issue while cognisant of extinction. That challenge is only partly resolved by the recourse to elegies that portend the need for more-than-human dignity and equanimity apposite for our epoch. It is on this uncertain and incomplete note that we formally close this issue.

And yet, in a two-fold 'Postscript', we continue to pursue our desire to bring many voices together in this issue, and to think of what is offered by triangulation. The conversation between Mark Dickinson (see also his contribution in PAN 12) and Robert Bringhurst explores questions about literature that require Bringhurst to draw upon his vast experience in mythopoeia with realms of mythic dimensions, interspecies communication, oral traditions, shamanic diversity, ecosystemic poetics, colonization

and the paradoxical predicament of the human condition. This conversation underscores and amplifies some of the concerns exhibited in the first three essays; most importantly, perhaps, how do we deal with the loss that directly results from the morally bankrupt, toxic, global marketplace and the military industrial complex that backs it, while regaining the soul of the earth that we always shared? With misanthropy and cynicism cast to one side as demoralising approaches to culture in the contemporary climate, how can modern individuals who care for Country activate their love for the earth in ways that both tap into their own cultural DNA (broken from the earth as it is) *and* show the respect appropriate to ways that remained loyal to the places that inspired them? PAN14 asks how do we do this lyrically, poetically, ecomythically, and beautifully?

These 'events' as captured on the pipes of PAN 14 as PDF floating in hyperspace, are followed by another Canadian voice in the post-script: Geof Hajcman reviewing Dickinson's and Goulet's important collection of writing on the eco-poetics of Jan Zwicky. It is in the mode of benediction that Hajcman articulates the passion and perseverance the editors of *Lyric Ecology* bring to a project with twenty-seven contributions. Such passion reminds us of activist resilience and the reviewer's own deep reading of Canadian poetics. There is a lot going on in this book, the reviewer tells us, which is fitting 'because Zwicky is trying to remind us through poetry, philosophy, and music that there *is* always a lot going on and that it is our job to look for it and then to contemplate.' It is a subliminal message coming through the airwaves carrying PAN's music, which is alive to providing yet another space for our community members to contemplate what is going on out there: specifically loss, lyricism and the latitude of intellectual latency in this issue.

We are extremely grateful to our contributors for working with us this past year, and we hope our readers thoroughly enjoy these contributions. All: we look forward to hearing from you on the subject of your contribution to PAN in the near future. Peace be with you.