

## Editorial, “‘Animism is normative consciousness”; or, Variations on a Theme (2)’

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As I write the editorial for this our fifteenth issue of the journal, species interconnectedness and global vectors have been brought into fresh relief that the editors of our fourteenth issue could not have imagined. Today, with one eye on the Sixth Great Extinction and one eye on COVID-19, I feel that there is a sense we are moving away from the privatisation of environmental morality in mainstream media to a politicised battle for bandwidth. The Plague of Athens was one thing; the gaps between the most dominant ideologies of the present. Another. In the latter, we are increasingly securing stories of and audiences for more-than-human vulnerability. Scientifically peer-reviewed enumerations of discretely identified problems in ecosystems all around and within the Earth’s surfaces and its underbelly has not only been secured, but disseminated and turned into localised policy initiatives around the world. With more to be done, *PAN* distrusts the polarizing and homogenizing forces of social media; it endorses the spirit of the return of authority to informed folk. We continue to offer our journal free at the point of entry to our open access platform, and we would like you to spread the word across as many continents as you can. Accordingly, this journal endorses the use of myth in contemporary politics seeking to unite where there is division, and to look deeply into a ‘cure’ for our times of trouble.<sup>2</sup>

Three articles open issue 15 in the spirit of ‘philosophy’ as understood in *PAN* since its inception: as both *a mode of enquiry* and *an art of living* as Poelina et. al. remind us in our first article. Our contributors demonstrate some of the many modes of address that we encourage in this journal’s editorial and submission processes—place-based academic research, criticism of the arts and humanities, rhetorical essaying, respectively in articles from Poelina et. al., Glade-Wright, Berry. We are delighted to learn more from Poelina et. al. whose work is amongst the vital work of humanities and social science scholars in Australian tertiary education and research; they offer more insights from their evaluation of Indigenous epistemology with a focus here on the ontological aspects of life on this continent, ‘becoming family with place’ is a term for a practice that is easily ours; it pretty much seals the deal for the reader who is alert to and informed by the current wave of instructive engagement with First Nations’ knowledge and wisdom that has been developed and protected by scholars in this field (and in their cognate disciplines) in Australia since the early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> An incredible amount of work across multiple generations leads us to a place where we can take ‘Feeling and hearing Country’ as evidence of the celebration of an ontopoetics for Country. The paper brings together contributions from a Western Australian writing group working beyond the Indigenous-non-Indigenous binary to articulate ‘sincere observation and accumulative,

experiential insightful learning.’ These practices are ‘vital’ the authors argue ‘for the future survival of species and Peoples.’

In developing the polylogue of John Bradley, Geoff Berry and others over the pages of *PAN13* and *PAN14*, Poelina et. al. work through John Heron’s definitional sense of cooperative enquiry, a distinctive form of action research, to articulate two concepts, *liyan* and *wirrin*, on the way to clarifying ‘thinking together’ and ‘becoming family with place’; two distinct projects that meet in the songs and experiences of how and when Country responds to people. With a view to sharing the work of scholars in Indigenous humanities and education—specifically, Marie Battiste and Cathryn McConaghy alongside their own scholarship and that of Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Sarah Wright, Kate Lloyd, Matalena Tofa, Djawundil Maymuru and others in the fields of political geography and anthropology in Australia— Poelina et. al. hook this knowledge to earth-centred governance and to our individual capacity to maintain the ecocosm from our spiritual attitudes.

The first *PAN* article from artist and academic Glade-Wright examines art as a motivating force in environmental behaviour. Focused on micro-plastics, ‘the ubiquitous and persistent contaminants’, Glade-Wright’s art installation at the Cairns Institute at James Cook University in North Queensland, ‘Micro-plastics Found in Human Embryo’ of 2018, offers an image through which to read a wave of scientific publications on plastic production, plastic use and the extensive damage to earth life. The damage ranges from disruption of endocrine and reproductive systems, increase in cancers, decreased sex hormones and the cell death of phytoplankton ‘which reduces the supply of food at the base of the food chain’. While Poelina et. al. seek to find paths to ‘empathic, creative communication and engagement’, Glade-Wright uses a beautiful aesthetic form to communicate terrifying Earth crises, bringing an invisible presence into the imagination of regional Queenslanders along the way. Glade-Wright’s article includes an invaluable summary of a small survey of respondents to her piece, which names their feelings and points to public art’s capacity to bring immediacy to an issue that fails to receive adequate representation. Like Poelina et. al., and Berry, Glade-Wright’s contribution embodies a nurturing spirit in its expression of education as part of the process of engaging the imagination.

‘The Nature Spirits Were Always Hiding’ closes the formal section of writing in *PAN15*. Berry’s latest contribution to the problems inherent to ‘white fellah dreaming’ clarifies the position of scholars demanding a reboot to our vision of the natural world. Berry’s romantic vision is a vision of multicultural myth empowering the imaginative faculties. Like Glade-Wright, Berry realises the problem of representation and connection, which to his mind have kept humans in a space where we can yet read ‘the information imparted by the plant spirits, or intelligence’. To understand dryads as real, as the poet John Keats did before Berry, enables our sense of dwelling to come to terms with life ‘as natives’; the communicative possibilities between humans and the more-than-human world are there for us to enjoy once we step through ‘the logic of imperialism’ that comes with our language and our modes of power. Moreover, Dreaming as Berry spells it in his reading of the Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner, can offer us a space in which we contribute to ‘interspecies communication’ and to an ‘accordant sense of kinship.’ For Berry, this site of meaning making and interpretation is ‘an ever-present realm of potential’ for it can be understood as ‘always happening’; such praxis within this space would complement Indigenous practices as we are coming to understand them. Berry channels Patrick Curry citing Val Plumwood, finding nature as ‘powerful, agentic and creative’ in turn making room in our culture ‘for an animating sensibility and vocabulary’. This synthesis of ideas finds articulation in Berry’s idiosyncratic and insightful storytelling from *the way* we might be: in short,

'messaging arising out of a world of intuitive depth perception' through the inhabitation of 'our own personal bodymind' in the prelinguistic 'everywhen' of experience. Berry's article at once steps over Glade-Wright and dovetails into her analysis: interfacing directly with Poelina et. al.'s minding of Country while also reanimating the nurturing spirit of art that targets ecological citizenry as its subject. Berry's engagement with Josh Schrei provides the phrase for the title of this editorial.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's radio programme, 'Word Up' brings listeners into the 'diverse languages of black Australia one word at a time'; the artistic director of Queensland Theatre Company, Wesley Enoch, selected 'Binangug' that his experience defines as "you are not listening" (your ears are empty, they have nothing in them).<sup>4</sup> This Jandai word is in use by the clans of Stradbroke Island. For Enoch, this term is useful for reconciliation—a focus on the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—for it is part of a lexicon of how to listen and learn from each other, to ensure that we are not 'billungary' to each other.<sup>5</sup> Berry's thesis resonates not only with the work of human ecologist, Paul Shepard, but with the ecologist, Gregory Bateson, too. Shepard writes of the loss of language in twentieth-century culture that leads to and is born from the depleting range of experiences of interaction with the realm of animals for children; Bateson clarifies post-Enlightenment epistemological fallacies on the way to pointing towards the common sense (for our security, safety, sovereignty and sustainability) of literacy for 'organism-in-ecosystem'. Berry, Poelina et. al. and Glade-Wright provide insights on this problem (the disconnection thesis inflected anew) and this solution (how we conceptualise our part in Earth's life).

Australian literature has an exciting contemporary scene that might be understood as a determinate negation of the emphasis on language and sign making from the point of view of human understanding; another philosophical position arises as a result of the implicit critique of Anthropocentrism in poems, plays and novels by Indigenous writers. The preface to Alexis Wright's marvellous novel of contemporary pastoralism (mining) and Country, *Carpentaria*, not only steps outside of the Asia Pacific environment in drawing from Seamus Heaney's version of Marin Sorescu's Romanian farming poem; the new pastoral moves from terrain and solidity to water and fluidity, to connect to 'the deep brain' that is the inner recesses of mind where mind and body are conjoined (to work with Berry) and where the word is made flesh once more:

The first words got polluted  
Like river water in the morning...  
My only drink is meaning from the deep brain,  
What the birds and the grass and the stones drink. ('The First Words' 1-2, 5,6)<sup>6</sup>

The combination of the river as a metaphor for contamination and the spirit level of one's own judgement is given appropriate stress and tone in Issac Drandich's reading for the 2008 audiobook by Bolinda publishing.<sup>7</sup> There are two modes of hermeneutics operating here: at once going back to source *and* insisting on this as sustenance for the future. For literary scholars, linguists and philosophers, the 'deep brain' brings together a passion for concealed meaning and a passion for original meaning. Word choice here might over-emphasize what is a 'mind' for authors contributing to the onto-poetics section in this issue; however, their words seem to agree with the principle that is registered in the desire of the poem's voice: 'Let everything flow / Up to the four elements, / Up to water and earth and fire and air' (7-9).

Synchronicity is a very different model of knowledge and action than the essays articulate and critique as 'information in the system; behaviour out'. If we admit into our imagination that humans and non-humans alike experience simultaneous

meaningful events that are not causally connected, then we are close to considering the way messages are carried and take on meaning. A sense of synchronicity helps here; as does the curated 'ontopoetics' section of *PAN*, which harnesses communicative presences that have their own psycho-active dimensions. Meaningfulness defined in this creative context, emanates not from cause-and-effect interactions; it emanates from the world's side of life as well as from our side. I have indicated the ways our essayists have responded to the ways that the world is capable of engaging with us *in recognizably meaningful ways*. As with a number of poets published in *PAN* who take ontopoetics as a modality, this sense of *reality as subject* proceeds to inflect life not only with a capacity to share meaning but with an *inclination to create meaning with us*; conceived as such, ontopoetics is cousin to panpsychism yet distinctive for it centres on communicative engagement.

Two articles in *PAN15* embody communicative engagement informed by Freya Mathew's invitation to ontopoetics in *PAN6*: Addey's 'A whole forest of oaks...' and Reason's 'Snæfellsjökull.' Taking the warning signs of earthquakes in 2016 and 2019 alongside the alarming pandemic of 2020, Addey's wisdom instructs us how to sensitively work through myths to decode the world's replies to our questions; her path is of enquiry is 'shown' to her by world, allowing for us to explore her lines of initiation into the great pondering on the nature of things. Addey's language of respect and veneration centres this contribution as 'a serious alternative to the mechanistic, Newtonian worldview' and highlights the failures of the 'scientific view of the physical world as an inert backdrop' for our existence. Reason shares Addey's capacity to read the movement of the world. A heavy, steel ship, *Tecla*, is the focal point for Reason's three-week long journey across the North Atlantic from Scotland to the Snæfellsnes peninsular of Norway. In a delicate and robust prose style, Reason shares his multiple experiences of viewing the volcano towering over an ancient fishing village, and the influence of this geological phenomenon on the frightening wind and waves the boat must endure. Presence, the living presence that is in the world, is his subject; as such, it has no truck with the materialist perspective that Addey gracefully rebukes. For Addey and Reason, the living cosmos is full of expressive gestures that we can be open to, and if we 'invoke a living presence' we might be rewarded with 'a meaningful response.' The importance of this mode of communication for Earth ethics cannot be overstated, and *PAN* is committed to celebrate and share such writing.

This issue of *PAN* begins with Poelina et. al. claiming that English 'is not yet conducive of meaningful engagement with place', that it is still 'linear, disengaged language, full of dualities and exclusions'. While this argument neither holds true for our ontopoetics section nor our poetry section, the call to open up worldview narrowness that has a relationship to language use, meets with the call for experiential, creative and propositional combinations of words in our final section in ways Poelina et. al. would understand as a corrective to disengagement. For the foreseeable future, the poetry section will contain its own introduction so that editors can make their mark with commentary, analysis, poems, notes etc. of their choosing without such illuminations mistranslated in the text of the editorial. We are delighted to publish poems by Tracy Ryan, Prithi Varatharajan, Veronica Fibisan and Luke Fischer this issue.

Among the most engaging and impactful editorials that have emerged in the environmental humanities of the last decade here in Australia, are the innovative co-edited collections that bear the fingerprints and intelligence of John Charles Ryan. Ryan's ground-breaking consideration of fungi with Alison Pouliot (see *PAN10*), and his exacting exploration of critical studies of plant agency and intelligence with Monica Gagliano in *The Green Thread: Dialogues with the Vegetal World* (2015) provide vital resources for scholars and educators working within the emerging fields of plant

studies and more-than-human ethnographies. Modest, world-class and collaboratively energised, the meeting of a contemporary history of the wetlands preservation movement and expertise in ecological appreciation and community wellbeing is placed within *Australian Wetland Cultures: Swamps and the Environmental Crisis* (2020), co-edited with Li Chen. Ryan and Chen find their audience in the reviewers Sandra Wooltorton and Len Collard who work alongside Anne Poelina, Sandra Harben, Pierre Horwitz and David Palmer in the opening essay to this issue. The reviewers acknowledge the contribution to this field by Ron Giblett (1996, 2004, 2016) and they emphasise the power of Ryan's and Chen's rhetorical questions that assist readers to make sense of the many ways wetlands produce. The editor is grateful for the reviewers' sensitivity to the modes of production that 'bring into being' the natural world as exemplified by the work of Ryan, Chen and bodies of waters.

With thanks to Geoff Berry and Freya Mathews.

North Queensland  
29 November 2020

## Notes

1. Tom Bristow is *Philosophy Activism Nature* editor-in-chief.
2. Socrates' conception of the soul as the 'seat' or bearer of wisdom is not a dramatic departure from the conception of soul embedded in ordinary Greek thought and language. Philosophically speaking, in recognition of both the ordinary-language connection between soul and practical thought, and the well-documented use of the soul as seat of morally significant characteristics – particularly courage – Socrates' conception exhibits parity with the thinkers of his age. The idea of the soul as the bearer of excellence of character lasts through its interpretations in politics, drama, and poetry. One such interpretation, 'The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*' was published in New York by Farrar Straus and Giroux in 1990; the author, noble-prize laureate, Seamus Heaney. The Field Day Theatre Company toured, the production premiered at the Guildhall in Derry in 1990; President Bill Clinton drew from it during political reconciliation between the British and Irish after decades of sectarian violence, leading to The Good Friday Agreement in 1995. In 2020, passages from Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* were repurposed for #JOE20, the American Presidential Campaign for Former Vice President, Joe Biden.
3. Events at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, throughout the last forty years is one institutional example of the touchstone in consciousness and literacy for planet, people and place in this country.
4. Broadcast on Saturday 12 December, 2020.
5. See also Wesley Enoch, 'If you remove language, you're also removing knowledge of landscape', *British Council Voices Magazine*, 13 August 2018.
5. See Marin Sorescu, *The Biggest Egg in the World*, Northumbria: Bloodaxe, 1988.
6. Dranditch has directed one of Australia's leading theatre companies touring works by First Nations artists, 'Ilbijerri' Theatre Company – a Woiwurrung word meaning 'Coming together for Ceremony', which is committed to bringing black voices to major venues, prisons and community halls, and has capitalised on the Australian Government's (Department of Communication and the Arts) Catalyst Australian Arts and Culture Fund in addition to tours supported by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program.