

## **Kangaloon: Creative Ecologies**

**Kim Satchell and Lorraine Shannon**

### **Introduction: Strange attractors, a thematic ecology, and a storm**

Let us design an interesting itinerary, one that leaves its optimal talweg and begins to explore a place: one which does not reach a foreseeable resolution, but searches; seems to wander; not deliberate or sure of itself, but rather anxious, off balance and relentless; questing, on the watch, it moves over the whole space, probes, checks things out, reconnoitres, beats about the bush, skips all over the place; few things in the space escape its sweep; whoever follows or invents this itinerary runs the risk of losing everything or inventing; if he makes discoveries, it will be said of his route that he has left the talweg to follow strange attractors (Serres 2008: 271).

The dynamic shape of meaning or preferably of sense making that emerges in generative forms of writing brim and flow with latent energies. In the vernacular, people say certain things ‘develop a life of their own’ (particularly otherwise ordinary phenomena): they could be said to recollect themselves and follow their own peculiar logic. There is, of course, the inherent vitality of stuff and the combinatory synergy assembling in motion as ensembles or variables – of which human agencies are a babe in the woods and often just a help-meet in the enterprise (if that). Much creative work evolves in the manner of big weather events that defy the logic of prediction; tracking and reference only reveal a necessary contingency. When calm is restored one wonders where such surges come from, but then one quietly continues to work in the aftermath, or at times the afterglow, of the effects. When placed relationally writing within a collection such as this Special Issue, there is inevitably cross-pollination, convergence, divergence, polarity and a certain comingling of thought enabling a myriad possible readings and sensibilities – ideas bend toward one another in a photosynthetic sense providing filtered affective light that mutually enlivens and greens. In contrast, others follow different paths, opening differing perspectives and spaces, in and between the texts. In sum, these strange attractors are the result of a variation of itinerary into and out of the subject. The thematic horizon we sought to pursue as co-editors allows for such swerves, crossovers, backtracks, idiosyncrasies, and pleasures along with acknowledgement of memory, patterns of forgetting and a delicate, sometimes bitter-sweet contemplation of our thematic ecology.

Alertness to the working of this enchanted loom, this vibrancy of material circumstances, accompanied the compilation of these contributions. Our editorial team met at Martin’s warm and welcoming home in Wollombi, feasted on one of

Lorraine's astonishing salads, this one with fried Lebanese bread, chilli, baby spinach and chopped dates. In the midst of this hospitality, we discussed the articles, the order, the introduction and the possibility of a post-face piece. The date and venue had been set in advance, but who could have anticipated the weather? Coming on the back of a particularly boisterous wet season on the eastern seaboard, thoughts of climate change were pressed upon everyone's awareness, even those who use such occasions to voice denial. Along the Bucketty Way on the road to Wollombi, trees were down and the SES was milling around their station, police along the road were helplessly waiting on the possibility of further emergency. The beautiful landscape was torn by wind, shrouded in cloud, sodden with rain and pulsed with eerie life and other worldly trepidation. It was as if Bucketty (see Brooks this issue) had produced a belated entry specifically for us as we gathered to consider the provocations of the more-than-human. Indeed, many of the themes running through the various pieces seemed to resonate uncannily with this extraordinary weather event. In the warmth of home, we exchanged ideas, made plans and spoke of future actions, our language tenderly couched in conviviality and friendship. Each of the individual pieces seemed to emerge from and add vitality to the integrity of the emerging whole.

Meeting over, we were back at the mercy of the elements; the creek had risen and covered a section of the road necessitating an alternate route home. As Debbie drove with great care and serene calm into the descending darkness, there seemed to be an accord between other drivers and a moment of grace unlike normal traffic. As a passenger this afforded a moment of reverie and while hidden in the stillness of travelling thought a poetic image lighted upon these events and the possibilities for illuminating these introductory remarks on the collection of essays.

Kim's mind wandered to the poetic image of Hokusai's *View of Mount Fuji from Ejiri*. Where four figures in the foreground wrestle their clothes, as manuscript unfurled is swept up in the swirl of an unbidden wind. The careful arrangement and order is circumvented by a power that animates the work and casts a spell of contingency on the proceedings. The work of the hand becomes the work of the wind. Benignly in the background the spare outline of Fuji said to hold the secret of immortality rests amid all the effort and the sheets fly effortlessly from the present into the future perhaps lost or maybe to be found at some unknown fateful hour by a reader whose own life and thought will become entangled in the dialogue of such a conversation through chance and enchantment. A solitary tree with twin trunks (the height of the frame) bends in shape adapting to the rise and fall of the sudden wind of climatic conditions and the repose of certain weathers. A hat flies from the head of the one whose hands clutch at straws having fumbled the manuscript caught unawares by the sudden reversal of gravity a gust of wind affords. In the middle of the frame, a hut appears the size of a matchbox hiding mortality in the fragility of a place to dwell.

The modest but celebrated woodblock print of this Japanese master illustrates several critical aspects concerning the creative work this Special Issue achieves. As readers and writers committed to a life of contemplation and response to the world within which we live, the sparks of more-than-human creativity and genius meet

and match our efforts (like a sudden wind), animating them in the selfsame mysterious manner that began them. Such correspondence reaches beyond what is ordinarily considered to be a visible limit, gesturing toward hitherto unknown possibilities that might be imagined as time – ‘after modernity’, or ‘near present future’. Or perhaps they can be imagined as space: proximate, present, but somehow disregarded. Or perhaps it is future time that turns us away from disregarded present(s). In any case, something outside our hermeneutic circle presses us toward greater regard.

The way these essays and ideas are presented will inevitably become reconfigured, hot-wired, welded, prised apart, juggled and jumbled together in a combinatory logic that matches the particularity of the context, the usefulness to the circumstances, the various approaches, the studies they apply and even chance. And might their affective dimensions offer some stability, endurance, longevity, vulnerability, sensitivity, stillness, clarity and audacious simplicity?

Kangaloon: Creative Ecologies is a fellowship of poets, scholars, artists and activists in dialogue with the current cascade of ecological degradation and diminishment of life. Through our creative endeavours we pose some key questions. How are we to respond with vision, love and hope? How we may promote health, life and beauty in an era of unfathomable loss? How are we and other species to live and live well? Our commitments are to the beauty and practicality of ecological systems. This predicated upon a philosophy at one with the environment and a simple poetic life in the presence of earth’s creatures. The work of the fellowship is to create art, writing and scholarship from the depth of nature, to promote balance and sustainability in design, and to rethink economy as ecology. In this issue some like-minded people join with various members of the fellowship to address the guiding notion of the reciprocity between writing and ecology in keeping with the ethos of the group stated above.

The contributors to this special edition of *TEXT* have each produced individual analyses and creative, imaginative approaches to the concept that writing creates ecology and ecology creates writing. Martin Harrison’s opening essay ‘The act of writing and the act of attention’ sets the tone with its elegant exploration of writing as a space where ontological newness can emerge. He argues that engaging with and responding to ecological crisis requires an attentiveness that runs counter to complacency and denial – that it requires an attention to the evolving act of writing/reading/writing, attention to literary form, and attention to the intertwining and interdependence of what is other than human.

This is followed by Barbara Brooks’ creative writing piece ‘Bucketty diary’ which consists of extracts from a diary describing time spent in a cabin in the bush. It offers a rich, creative exploration of embeddedness in the other-than-human world. Next, Moya Costello explores experimental approaches to Australian ecocritical creative writing. She argues for the prose poem as a hybrid text that is open to the other, performing an ‘entangled mutuality’. Susan Pyke continues this ecocritical theme in her exploration of two revisions of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. She asks whether the radically different landscapes of the rural moor and the urban

wilderness can liberate an eco-divine that generates a shift towards a more positive relationship with the environment.

Kim Satchell's mix of essay, poetry, citation and theory enacts a non-linear, fractal form of writing that resonates with and evokes a particular well-known place. Specifically, he writes of the poetics of weather and studies in creativity as a way to nurture an ecological sensibility. Peter Boyle's 'Of fate and other inconveniences' presents an epigrammatic, ironic and pointed poetry on the absurd yet tragic consequences of contemporary preoccupations.

Deborah Bird Rose's passionate essay returns the reader to specific discussions on writing. Her 'Slowly – writing into the Anthropocene' examines the concept of 'unmaking' – the fragmentation of ecological, social and intellectual systems. As an antidote to this brokenness she proposes an ethical commitment to slow writing – 'a movement toward thought and attention.' Stephen Muecke considers the colonial history of two specific commodities, coal and ivory, and traces the changes wrought on them by human affect. He elucidates an intermingling of the human and other-than-human that in Latourian fashion takes emotion into account. A second essay on a particular creature is provided by Lorraine Shannon who writes on the wolf as a storied animal. Through a rereading of the Wolf Man's dream she proposes an ecological writing that emerges from the anxiety inherent in meeting the animal gaze.

The remaining two essays by Christie Nieman and James Hatley present thoughtful storyscapes blending emotion and landscape. Nieman writes of the deep sadness of a woman's individual attempt to redress the ecological wounds inflicted on a quintessential rural Australian landscape; wounds that are reflected in her emotional life. Hatley's evocative 'Naming coyote in Hebrew: a memoir' examines the impossibility of beginnings and the uncertainty of memory in writing the multiple stories of coyote, some overt and others hidden but all maintaining their hold on the remembering author. We conclude the collection with a dialogue between Deborah Bird Rose and Martin Harrison. This postscript shares some of the energy, the 'buzz', we experienced as the collection took shape and focus.

Taken together, this collection of essays on ecology creates writing/writing creates ecology offer exciting new approaches to writing, living and creating in an afflicted world where hope, love and an ethic of commitment are essential. Each essay in its individual way is an expression of Kangaloon's resolve to create art, writing and scholarship from the depth of the ecology of a living world. In conclusion, we thank the weather for all its surging power to bring us home to life on planet Earth.

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## Endnotes

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*Lorraine Shannon is an independent scholar and academic editor. She has a PhD in postcolonial literature from Trinity College, Dublin and a non-traditional PhD in ecology and writing from UTS. She has taught in various universities in Ireland and Australia and published in a range of journals including Australian Humanities Review, PAN and Island Magazine. Her edited collection of writings by the environmental philosopher Val Plumwood, *The Eye of the Crocodile*, has been published by ANU ePress and her exploration of edible gardens entitled *The Epicurean Backyard* is forthcoming. She is co-editor of the Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and a founding member of Kangaloon creative ecologies. She has also won several garden design awards.*