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The poetics of weather / studies in creativity

Abstract:

In this essay, I consider the poetics of the weather and studies in creativity, as a site to develop emplaced relations for a multi-species sense of place and research methods for place-based inquiry. I take up the theme of this *TEXT* Special Issue, 'Writing creates ecology: Ecology creates writing' as a conversation seeking generative responses to current dilemmas in terms of both ecology and higher learning. The context of the broader conversation sustains a personal inquiry that is quite specific and particular. The relationship I have to the work and that, to which it speaks, is intimate and lived. The themes woven into the piece are in tension with an individual and collective responsibility to respond to the more-than-human world in ecological crisis. The work is in progress, speculative and open-ended; I embody the work not merely as another project but as seeking a manner of life to live. The focus of these concerns can be summarised as revolving around varied forms of attention, modes of inquiry and modes of address. The material is accumulative and accretive, predicated upon the continuity of self-directed field and archival work, undertaken in the form of experimental philosophy, creative writing and living. The manner of writing is multimodal, non-linear, fractal, writing ecology as the resonance of a place from which the ecology emerges in the writing, reliant upon a recursive and synergistic recollection of fragments, shards, uneven and jagged pieces to formulate a whole. The ecological imagination at work morphs into a substantive form of creativity, as an everyday practice making sense and making art, as ecology and as cultural memory.

Biographical note:

Kim Satchell is a mid north coast of New South Wales surfer, poet, performer, writer and academic based at Southern Cross University (Coffs Harbour). His research interests are in Cultural Studies and the Ecological Humanities particularly concerning the literature of place. He has published in leading academic journals the Cultural Studies Review, Performance Paradigm and Continuum.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Ecology – Anthropocene – Weather – Psycho-climatology – Fractal – Place

Once in his life a man ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listen to the sounds made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of the noon and all the colours of the dawn and dusk (N Scott Momaday 1969: 8).

Weather is the key index of a day-to-day engagement with living and a sense of place. The rhythms and turns of weather filter through dwellings in light, dark, heat, cool, sound, noise, fragrance, smell, taste and even feelings in the bones and gut. Rain drizzling on the rooftop lulls the insomniac to sleep. Sunlight dappled on the summer curtain, blown gently by a breeze freshening at dawn, stirs the sleeper awake. Inclement weather holes up the writer whose writing speaks back to the storm gamely from the confines of shelter. Clothes conform to the orders of the day according to many things but not the least temperature and the prospects of the weather. Wardrobes are emblematic of an on-going embrace and anticipation of the changing dance the weather leads. People venture out into the neighbourhood on circuitous excursions quietly mapping a lived cartography, with the sensuous dimensions the weather and seasons quilt (Robertson 2006). They eke out a communal relationship of body to landscape, of living organism with the environment, of seeker with the cosmos. The roundness of these circuitous passages leads to a labyrinthine intricacy, more so than to a fathomable location *per se* and a ‘circumambulatory knowing’ according to Ingold (2004: 331) rather than a Lonely Planet guide. Footsteps turn back on themselves, criss-cross and enjoy the comfort of the well worn. Buoyed and beaten by the weather they find a place to know and live.

A residency built in my case upon the remains of walking, surfing, paying attention, field notes and writing. The complex and richly layered textures of the surrounds are a mixture of soft and hard surfaces, subtle and solid phenomena, ancient and freshly hewn paths, whorls, eddies and flows in and around monumental landforms – a scriptural palimpsest of a combination of fluid movement and glacial shifts of stasis. The weather is the affective face or expression upon the face of place, the deft hand of the sculptural influence of the weather upon the landscape. All these elements belong to the sentient archive whose pages turn day and night, whose closets and cabinets brim with all manner of detail (Satchell 2010a). They contribute to a purchase upon a sense of place and a felt understanding of the genius residing there. Connecting the Genius Loci – the spirit of place – with a custodial interest, a willingness to learn and a desire to stay attuned to the knowledge and understanding a multi-species sense of place may offer (Satchell 2010b).

Even amid the shelter of houses and the shade of clothes, the weather and consequent climate engrains upon the surface of the body, creases into the face, hands, and feet, and deeply inscribes the psyche with climatology. The dynamics of weather and climate play out seasonal conversations in the vernacular terms of conviviality and yet, with all the inflections of alterity and strangeness at the edge of the known. It should come as no surprise then that the stories people’s lives tell and the narratives they follow, unwittingly, in many instances knowingly, derive from the poetics of the weather, and imbibe deeply the wisdom found there. Nor as a surprise, the ecology of

such a language's recollection inscribes a profoundly affective and atmospheric writing.

October 18 field notes – from 'Seven walks toward a coastal philosophy: s field guide for the transformation of everyday life' (unpublished)

I walked on the beach this morning
this morning this mourning
bluebottles baby mangroves a
puffer fish puffer fish puffer fish.

All left by the tide wave goodbye and
say hello with bottle caps rope wood
bits and pieces of plastic plastics plastic
and more plastic, a rusty can of double u-d
forty and a blue lighter.

Makes you want to stub your toe, toes
toe on someone else's. Rain showers shower
falling behind the island but between its back
and the horizon or so it appears from the horizon's
horizon where I am standing.

The wind is up and my lungs are filled with chaotic thoughts
for free. A shaft of light spreads on the ocean between
itself, me and everything else, fiery white
on turquoise, grey turning green and yet indigo
a minute disappears leaving my retina alone but not lonely.
Sand blows down the beach toward
the headland and all over patience'
patience someone's patience not mine.
On the way home it will straighten out
my hair and steady my constitution but
leave my grammar unchanged.

Black cockatoos cockatoo cockatoo whose
lilting flight manifests their sound belies song.
Two coconuts covered in barnacles
one smaller than the other
points of a compass at journeys end.
The waves are a mess but left alone
they tumble through my troubled
thoughts and wash over nascent joys
whose birth and after birth remain as if
in a garden seabed.

While I walk five miles to go
eight hundred yards getting lost only
after a few steps, perhaps ten thousand light years

among friends. They won't send out a
search party and who are they sometimes I am glad
no-one seems to care but other times
it makes me cry and lick my lips with salty
thirsts and howling gasps of baby talk.

Outside my place is a puddle where you can
watch the clouds fly by and still smell the rain.

This essay responds afresh to two ideas Deborah Bird Rose posits as an imperative motivating the writing of place (Satchell 2010a). The first idea concerns love. Rose says love 'shimmers' on the verge of such correspondence, but might more intimately be in the midst of all we do (Rose, ctd. in Curthoys and McGrath 2000: 74). Her second idea is a heartfelt desire for scholarship engaging the sensoria of the worlding world with compassion and wisdom. I take as a guide Herman Hesse (1972) whose literary biographies frame my considerations of perception and experience (walking the long way home with the warmth of Rose's words as meditations). The journey takes up everyday life studies as a field of inquiry, and the immediacy of the world people inhabit day-to-day. Consequently, the ontological design of such assumptions, seeks to substantiate the relevance of common and ordinary practices, as the site of cultural production, tacit forms of creativity and possibility. Conceptually I am seeking to balance human activity on the fulcrum of love and living. Drawing on fieldwork, I refer to notes in the form of creative work as research. These notes, as soundings, resonate with current dilemmas and the imperative of nurturing forms of engagement that are ameliorative. The tessituras of these notes are co-extensive with sentient life and the grain of a voice speaking in concert with the surrounds. Polyphony in agreement with nascent longings, shot through as it were with human folly, and the ecologies entangling the existence of living organisms in the environment.

The form of my discussion will be a rhapsodic report upon self-directed work-in-progress. The opportunity provides a space to go beyond the disciplinary bounds of the Humanities and Social Sciences to practice experimental philosophy and onto-poetics in a broader sense of creative ecologies (Mathews 2007). However, the poetics of these ecologies and their refraction enfold the interests of impulses across the spectrum of burgeoning interdisciplinary work, in music, visual arts, media, humanities, and the social sciences but more specifically creative writing and the environmental humanities. The essay seeks to envision a community of scholars that imbibes the best of intellectual traditions and their legacies, while invigorating the notion of the sacredness of place and academic freedom. A place of deep contemplation devoted to higher learning in the sense of bodhisattva as an ethos predicated upon compassion for all sentient beings and enlightenment for all. Taking up a fragment from René Daumal's (1992: 177) notes in his own unfinished non-Euclidean adventure, 'Art is here taken to mean knowledge realised in action'. I am interested in awakening such conversations.



Fig. 1. Beachcomber at Mandelbrot's Cave (self-portrait) photo: Kim Satchell

I invoke the figure of the Beachcomber as researcher, as poet, as artist, as shaman and as coastal dweller (Brewster 2009). My self-portrait provides a point of reflection upon the immersion I have experienced in the study of place (in particular several sites joined together at two locations on the coastal strip where I live north of Coffs Harbour). The labyrinthine intricacy I refer to is no mere rhetorical flourish but an observation and experience that becomes both clearer and more affective over time. The fieldwork consists of ordinary everyday practices such as walking, swimming, surfing, conversation and collecting; combined with artistic practices such as note taking, poetry, writing, sketching, photography, sculpture and painting. Following the prompting of a conscious desire to develop the affective experiences and academic work of sensuous geographic understandings, into ecological sensibilities, I want to integrate a way of living with a coastal philosophy in keeping with the day-to-day world. As the photograph demonstrates, I am curious about the world in a concentrated yet playful manner, visceral, corporeal, tactile and sensuous. As the Beachcomber among other personas, I feel not only a freedom to pursue these interests but something akin to an invitation – something I have come to understand through onto-poetics, the term Mathews (2007: np) employs as an explanation of the phenomenon. *'What onto-poetics intended to describe is the communicative engagement of self and world with self' (my emphasis)*. The multifaceted communicative relationship between 'self and world with self' exemplifies the range of expression various personas allow the self and indeed the range of expression of the worlding world.



Fig. 2. Kim Satchell Bellinghen Readers and Writers Festival Expression Session ‘Myths, misdemeanours, lies and other surf stories’ Valla Beach March 2012 photo: Tom Woods stimages.com

Reflecting upon the fieldwork of practice-led research conducted along and around coastal foreshores, I have been conducting for a number of years reminds me of some key influences (Smith and Dean 2009). In reference to Momaday’s call in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), for a particular form of attention and recursive practice, my cue came from several disparate sources. The sites themselves consisting of varied landforms and geographies interlocking with the foreshore and seascapes, held a particular charm over my contemplation of the emergence of the new ecology in the humanities. My passion for surfing and coastal life more broadly laid a foundation of immersion and intimacy. The weather animates these scenes and the seasons revolve around them with all the intricacy and complexity of a kaleidoscope. The inklings of a detailed understanding and appreciation of the significance of these life worlds for creative practices and for a quality of life, took on a life of their own. The burgeoning sensory awareness accompanied by ‘topophilia’ developed a gratifying richness and depth, but also fuelled a desire for on-going encounters and finely honed expression (Bachelard 1994: xxv). This too evolved from intuitions and associations valorising the relevance of invocation and evocation upon mutual causality and coexistence (Rose 2004, Mathews 2005, 2007).



Fig. 3. The Witches Hat. photo Kim Satchell

The ideogram of sister places

1. I fell over a moment reflecting in soft light
the seas surface stretches across a large
intertidal series of rockpools around the Witches Hat

the hat-like form whose tip points true north
benignly watches over the mirrored surface
looking up at the sky and yet as I look down
the close waters crystal clear two-way mirror
onto the shallows below and the underwater realm
perfectly to the scale of galaxies and the richness
of detail as the Milky Way.

2. Vernacular spectacular
floating on a lunarsea
the tide goes in and out
while the moon goes round
performing its shape
a quiet reflection upon
light and shade in the near
distance of the conscious with
the subconscious gurgling of the tongue.

3. Refer to the Ideogram of the Cave (for Jay)
The headland winked kangaroos gambol on windswept heights
the cove had one last secret (she never told strangers but those beloved)
and it was as a beloved stranger she first told me to meet her there.

the cave holds many secrets in the deep recesses of cathedral vaults
not made by hands but made in the hallowing of hearts torn respect
one wonders about the clever fellas whose domain and authority
is unquestioned here.

the sound of the sea rattles through the sacred pipe as do bells chime
the entrance and exit sit as polar opposites beckoning dawn and dusk
the tunnel through a primordial forest of stone in relief.



Fig. 4. Inside the cave of the rebirth photo: Jay Ramsay (guest and witness)

One of the earliest influences upon my methodological approach to place-based inquiry stems from an appreciation for the work of Katsushika Hokusai (Jacobs 1965). In particular his series of coloured *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints entitled *Views of Mount Fuji* accompanied by a series of poems by Easley Stephen Jones in the pocket-size edition. Hokusai's obsession with drawing and painting gained a specific focus when he embarked upon his celebrated multiperspective studies of Mount Fuji. The mountain centrally located in Japan, thought to be sacred, internationally enjoys iconic status as a symbolic reference point to Japanese culture. Mount Fuji from the offing at Kanagawa is a universally recognised image and one appropriated by a surfing multinational as branding *par excellence*. Hokusai demonstrates a practice-led research approach to the project, compiling a voluminous archive of sketches and prints that serve as a framework for the multifaceted character of the landform, the surrounds and the changing hue of atmosphere and season (Smith and Dean 2009). This work is particularly noteworthy in the way nature and culture comes together in these representations to produce 'natureculture', enmeshed and implicated in a life world that is alive and gracefully inhabited.

Hokusai exhibits the way the methodological imagination operates to become a substantive form of creativity (Highmore 2006). The forms of attention Hokusai adopts in his day-to-day practices allow for a richness of detail and thickness of description that translate into the visual medium of the woodblock print. These multisensory forms of attention develop with use, concentration and contemplation. Sight sharpened by the horizon, hearing attuned with birdsong, smell sensitised to rain, taste honed across the spectrum of bittersweet, the hand, the feet and the skin learning through the mutuality of touch. Of course to list them, this way may seem clumsy when the synergy of their powers belie their individual attributes or their performative combinations (all aspects that interest me). The skills of the field evident in the studio and gallery, reach their maturation from the exercise of their adoption as forms of attention to become modes of inquiry in their own right – ways of knowing and doing. A mode of inquiry allows a form of attention a path forward as a richer methodological accumulation of material and honing of the senses, as well as the development of skills as part of the groundwork for a larger project or body of work. In terms of studies in creativity, people develop their skills from the concentration and contemplation of doing something involving the imagination (by preparation and planning) along with the activities themselves. People apply themselves as a form of attention but pursue something in a mode of inquiry. For those who are both students and practitioners with an interest in creative writing and ecology this is the invitation to join a conversation about creative practices and the world at large (Lopez 1997). The challenge to read and write the world in a meaningful or even eventful way beckons the brave, the foolhardy and even the meek.

The expression of Hokusai's research and manner of creative practices from forms of attention to modes of inquiry, eventuate in modes of address as visual masterpieces of 'natureculture'. A holistic and ecological thinking underpins their representation as images. He folds the mountain and surrounds magically as a fairy dress into a thimble as prints (De Certeau 1984). Of course, a mode of address is ostensibly a broad category for the production and expression of knowledge considered as

communicative both human and the more-than-human knowing of ontopoetics. Underlying these relationships is a conversation about the intimate connection between the body and landscape, in a living breathing dying stricken world. How does one begin to express, as a mode of addressing a subject, the call of the wild or the cry of the dead produced by extinction? The relationship of bodies to landscapes must assume a sense of intimacy over time both haunted and enchanting (Satchell 2012). This is indeed how everyday life conducts itself, people become woven to their surrounds if allowed freedom, often in spite of oppression and even in the inevitably of mortality. The forms of attention, modes of inquiry and modes of address are not unique to Hokusai but by example provide an analytical framework to map creative practices in the broader landscape of history and the worlding world. More importantly, exactly wherever you and I, live, breathe and pass away.

I stir in remembrance of the influence of Hokusai when reading Benoit Mandelbrot's (1982) book on the fractal geometry of nature. Mandelbrot discusses a few people who display acuity for fractals or in his words 'feeling for fractality' (2010 np) not derived by mathematics but by their form of attention, mode of inquiry and mode of address in other fields of inquiry and endeavour. He mentions Leonardo Da Vinci, Poussin and Hokusai, and is of the persuasion the idea of fractals his mathematics articulates, as the balance and symmetry between micro, meso and macro elements of the animate world, have deeper and deeper roots going back to antiquity. He discusses a particular print of the offing at Kanagawa declaring Hokusai displayed in the printmaking 'an eye for fractals' (Mandelbrot 2010 np). The fractal geometry of nature is now widely accepted and evident in mountains, trees, rivers, oceans, islands, waves, clouds and so on, even a lightning strike produces a fractal-like scar if indeed it does not kill you. Mandelbrot's breakthrough mathematics confirms that within the confines of the world as it appears are infinite possibilities – signifiers and symbioses. His assertion that 'the closer you look the bigger things become' has some startling ramifications for inquiry (Mandelbrot 2010 np). As in my self-portrait, the image of concentration upon a rock pool reflects back in a manner that opens back upon a lifeworld as if through a cave. The lifeworld as a sphere is an understanding that highlights otherwise imperceptible motion, interconnectedness, synergy and the contingency of a world worlding with ramifications for connectivity and ambience. In the same way, a surfer may try to auto-choreograph the ride with the synchronicity of a wave, human activity must seek to synchronise with ecology as a symbiotic relationship between bodies and landscapes. I call this an ecological sensibility of sensing and sense-making (Satchell 2006).

The revelation of fractal geometry for me is the possibilities embedded in the materiality of the world and the cosmos supporting those possibilities. One startling demonstration of the relevance of fractal geometry is evident with consideration based upon the measurement of the coast. Mandelbrot became interested in the problem that has dogged explorers, cartographers, planners, developers, ecologists and indeed coastal dwellers alike. How do you produce an accurate outline or representation of the complexity of the coast on a map in terms of length and detail? What patterns of settlement, development or land use complement the complexity of the land and seascapes that living organisms rely on? A dilemma Henri Lefebvre (1990) identifies

in *The Production of Space* where he discusses the relationship between common perceptions of space with which people are socialised and enculturated, with the conceptions of space, designers, planners and policy wonks overlay, and the common lived experiences that appropriate and produce space through a relationship of mobility, dwelling and living.

A great influence upon Mandelbrot is a lesser-known figure Lewis Fry Richardson whose work upon weather prediction has become legendary in the field through the landmark publication *Weather Prediction by Numerical Process* (Whitaker 2010). However, the influence upon Mandelbrot of what has become known as the Richardson Effect (the length of the coast will increase according to the size of the unit of measurement), is interesting and pronounced (Mandelbrot 1967). When interviewed Mandelbrot refers to studies Richardson had done as an analysis of a series of sketches by Leonardo Da Vinci as a mode of inquiry to do with turbulence and hydrodynamics, resulting in Richardson's now famous twist on Augustus De Morgan's paraphrase of Swift concerning fleas. 'Big whirls have little whirls that feed on their velocity, and little whirls have lesser whirls and so on to viscosity' (Richardson 2007: 66). Richardson's insight came through close study of Da Vinci's sketches of fountains. The Richardson Effect is one of exquisite importance for research questions of all kind. The way the unit of measurement affects the detail of a study and the texture of the knowledge integral to broader understandings.

If you broaden this out to think about the measurement of language sketching a surveyor's view or a homeland song, in fractal terms you might measure the coast by a poem or series of poems, as you might measure the coast with your life or by doing a thumbnail sketch. Measuring the coast with either poem or life or both, with the intention to render the things people hold dear – visible and affective in the ecology of care, creativity and materiality. This is a mode of address with a multispecies sense of place at heart and manner of voice. Too much loss occurs by simply reducing things to numbers and formulas, dare I say living in a world where the numbers do not add up or as Kathleen Stewart might say 'things aren't as they seem' (1996: 44). The finer measurements conducted by language in story telling potentially lead to more expansive imaginings and feats of creativity. The product of a language immersed in everyday life with the concerns of the ages at heart – philosophy as love. As a research methodology developing archives over time, practising forms of attention, pursuing varied modes of inquiry and embodying a range of modes of address, seems a sensitive and vulnerable approach to the genius of a place. A place-based inquiry proceeds as in the arena of living entities, multispecies and the weather-producing climate for habitat. The sensibility for a place is the embodiment of instinct, intuition, learned way-finding and varied tactical approaches. In *Singing the Coast* (2010), Margret Somerville and Tony Perkins talk about the Gumbaygiirr Nation, their histories and songlines, singing up the coast as the ancestors did as a measure and measurement of homeland and shared traditions with neighbouring nations predicated upon nurture. The fractal nature of Indigenous knowledge is worth noting but also more broadly as a cultural code across the ages with deeper roots as Mandelbrot argues than formally understood. This story illustrates the argument I am making from Gumbaygiirr Dreaming.

The two sisters
 completed their circle
 making the sand and the sea
 of a coastline we call 'Australia'
 they met again at Moonee Beach
 swam out to the ocean
 crossed their yam sticks
 at Split Solitary Islands
 and went up into the sky
 into the stars we call Janagan
 the Seven Sisters
 where the story ends.

Ken Walker, Traditional Owner and Elder from Gumbaynggirr (Somerville and Perkins 2010: 82)

Sitting at my desk, overlooking Look at Me Now Headland, I can see Split Solitary Island away in the distance the size of a small stone. At night, I can look up and spot the Seven Sisters pinpricks in the universe. I will return to the discussion of the Richardson Effect shortly, but want to consider in the manner of a Beachcomber reflecting, the collection and inspiration of Chinese Scholar's Rocks, related to a story with which I will complete at the end as a final report. Chinese Scholar's Rocks were objects of interest for scholars in the Song Dynasty, although interest in these rocks remains, if anything it shows an increase in veneration (Xin 2007). The rocks are ordinarily small enough to display upon the desk or somewhere in the study of the literati of the time. They are objects of contemplation, representative of mountains but in scaled down formation. In Zen arts and practices, thinking with an ecological sensibility and a 'feeling for fractility' is evident in everyday creative practices. The inversion of the mountain into a smaller rock and the rock into the mountain is emblematic of a connectedness in thinking between the small part, the larger whole and the connections at every stratum. This is evident also in the connection between the coast, the island and the stars of Gumbaynggirr Dreaming. These scholars as have many others over time and many places become entranced with the organic structure of the world and the exquisite intricacy of things folding and unfolding magically it would seem all around. They open up the closer you look and according to the unit of measurement. Chinese Scholar's Rocks and the landforms they represent, become invocations of the body landscape relations between the collector and their stones, symbolic of their surrounds and haunts, as they find themselves ontopoetically through contemplation wayfaring, walking and witness.

My own Chinese Scholar's Rocks also relate to two garden-like formations of rocks and rockpools at the beaches I haunt. Marvellously polished with wind, sand, salt and water these rocks and their intricate patterns are fractal as you can imagine. They are veritable clouds in stone, once you realise the symmetry of their patterns and harmony with the melody of things. The hieroglyphics of the space they pattern and infuse are already in a charged location, on the foreshore at the foot of the sea. A worshipful or at least sacred place appears before the eyes of the wayfarer, a pilgrim who returns day-in day-out – trying to read the signs and intimations of such a beautiful display of

natural wonder, bewitched with a form of attention become mode of inquiry. What does one discover worshipping at the foreshore imbibing a sacred geography with everyday and creative practices? If not enchanted thoughts about the scheme of things, the sanctity of all sentient life and the biogeography of a place.

With the ‘Richardson Effect’ Mandelbrot’s work on coasts, more particularly the measurement of coastlines underwent illumination in a precursory anticipation of the fractal depths patterned in nature. Richardson proved the measurement of the coastline varied according to the unit of measurement and became infinite in detail the further the analysis led and the finer the instruments become. The possibilities this opens for considering the way people might inhabit the foreshore with care for the littoral zone is compelling. How might we enchant the coast poetically and live sensitively with more-than-human others? The past haunts the landscape and the future seems only to threaten with further development. I suggest we make peace with the spirits that inhabit a place and learn to live again. Another question this leads to in terms of ecology the Greek *oikos*, the earth household, relates to a sense of home. How does one measure or know their homeplace? (Satchell 2008). If the size of the answer or the quality of the work varies according to the measurement of the unit of analysis it would vary if you use pictures, or words, photographs rather than rulers and numbers or indeed other such symbols. My sense of homeplace derives from three movements, the first the search or flight from the place where I grew up in Sydney. The second the Genius Loci – the spirit of place I encountered in coastal locales and more specifically in the body-landscape relations where I now live. The third follows as the onto-poetics of a communicative engagement of care and the mutual causality of a multispecies sense of place to which I am accustomed.

Nature culture entanglements must demonstrate the sentiment Deborah Bird Rose draws upon in a petition for bats in the Sydney Botanic Gardens, conviviality among multispecies (van Dooren and Rose 2012). Living together now depends on our ability to work toward the ameliorative affects of living together with the vibrancy of ecology in a body landscape relationship of care and interest. In contradistinction with inculcating the brute survival of relic and ghost species whose ability to live with humans masks the true loss of biodiversity of those who have succumbed to habitat fragmentation and human neglect of the natural elements (Meyer 2006, Green 2010). Doreen Massey argues and I agree, ‘the stake is not change itself (the denial of it in the past or the refusal of it in the future), for change of some sort is inevitable, rather it is the character and the terms of that change’ (2006: 40). The imperative of future change must articulate a rethink of the fundamental alternatives to wholesale destruction. This underscores the gravity of the stakes and the character and the nature of change, which is largely destructive evidenced in species extinctions and a cascading loss of biological diversity. Where do we find the finer tools of language to express the pathos, desperation and the wild dreams to spark alternate futures for new evolutions? In a rockpool I found a cosmos completely joined at every point stretching out into a lifeworld not as yet fully aware of the way the threats to this lifeworld were mounting up. The same photo-degraded plastic caught in the doldrums of the great ocean gyres lines the foreshores of my homeplace. Alarmed by the afterlife of plastic I wrote a Message in a Bottle to Jimmie Durham about non-

biodegradable toxic waste, after I found a piece of sea-glass with the word THIS at one of the rock gardens called The Witches Hat (Satchell 2010b).

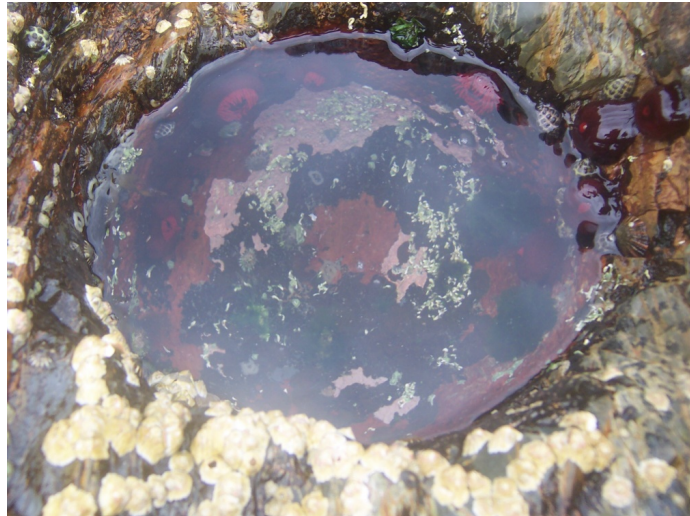


Fig. 5. A globe, a sphere and the cosmos. Rockpool at the Witches Hat. photo: Kim Satchell

While the Anthropocene as a geological period associated with climate change is gaining wider acceptance and credence, the accumulative effect of human activity upon earth's eco-systems carries on apace. Premonitions of the consequences of the Anthropocene are grim and all too real. How does writing arrest the assault on ecology and temper human activity with a multispecies sense of place? Charles Baudelaire attributes the premonition of modernity and the substantive genius of 'The Painter of Modern Life' to the font of curiosity (1995: 7). A form of attention trained upon the unfolding spectacle and a childlike attentiveness that finds pleasure and interest in all manner of detail. A mode of inquiry flourishing on sensory bombardment and information overload coupled with a breathtaking ability for analysis and distillation to the core of a thing. The mode of address because of such creative engagement is informed and informs by providing evidence of intimacy with the subject and the intricacy of complexity such attention and appreciation garners. Such a mode of address speaks as if in conversation, dialogically, open-ended, prepared to listen and respond to phenomenon onto poetically, the self with the world, the world with the self.

Baudelaire considers the painter's practice and attentiveness to the world at large, employing the trope of Poe's 'Man of the Crowd' convalescing from a near death experience. The impetus for a renewed vigour and interest in life, he is cognizant of the fleeting opportunity and torpid state from which he has arisen. Such a moment of grace, we all do well to heed. The Man of the Crowd captures the reader with identification, everyone in a sense at some point, is desirous to play close attention to moments of clarity or hold on to a sustained contemplation upon the entanglement of human and more-than-human life with death. A sense of our own near death, in the Anthropocene heightened zeitgeist, should infuse scholarship seeking to invigorate a conversation between creative writing and the eco-humanities. A key tenet of the eco-humanities is about working across epistemological divides (Rose 2004). The binaries inherent within the academy are unfit for the work of higher learning demanded of

everyone. The multiplicity of creative writing forms suggests it as a mode of address dexterous enough to spin from the impossible some probable alternatives.

In this essay, I am seeking to contribute to emergent and generative conversations located in ‘contractual proximity’ with creative writing and the ecological humanities (De Certeau 1984: 117). These concerns are at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics in a move toward creative research practices and pedagogies. I suggest ideas from the standpoint of scholarship in everyday life studies and studies in creativity. At a moment of profound challenge, these perspectives on ecological matters resonate with the possibilities of ethical intervention intrinsic to Cultural Studies, future curriculum innovation in the Humanities and the need for community engagement with creative ecologies. Underpinning such endeavours are fresh approaches to rearticulating the recursive relationship between creative research and performance that support the production and dissemination of sustainable narratives. What literary injunctions are there to support such approaches?

In this instance, I refer to Herman Hesse, whose ethical imagination and ability to write ecology provides a rich legacy with which to engage. My focus here is quite specific. In the masterwork, *The Glass Bead Game*, Hesse uses a historical, autobiographical fiction of the life of Joseph Knecht, to give a fabulist account of a world deeply embedded in the heritage of world culture, as a meta-analysis of higher learning and a self-reflexive account of the artistic life. A fuller analysis of this Nobel Prize winning work is beyond the ambit of this essay. In the account of Joseph Knecht’s life and his rise to the pinnacle of intellectual life in Castalia (a province devoted to scholarship) Hesse draws attention to a period of free study that marks the transition between the early preparation of schooling and taking up an official position within the governing Order. In the chapter, headed ‘Years of freedom’, references are made by the biographer to the only official requirement made upon graduates. The yearly practice of writing an essay as a stylistic exercise called a ‘Life’. Hesse supplies three such essays or lives, written supposedly by Knecht as a student, and regards them in the text speculatively as the most valuable aspect of the whole book.

It is to the story of the first of these three lives, ‘The Rainmaker’, that I turn my attention in order to consider contemporary possibilities for creative research practice, performativity and pedagogy at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics. My interest in the narrative of ‘The Rainmaker’ runs parallel to my interest in current eco-humanities scholarship that engages with the weather, psycho-climatology, extinction studies and regenerative bioregions. The Rainmaker exhibits concern for an ecology of care intimately woven with the web of life and adaptation. In the same way certain research and writing follows the contours of the shape shifting of inexorable change, as the naming of phenomena and as an adaptive response to such dynamics that become premonitory. This discussion contributes to emergent understandings of the uncertainty of our times and ways to respond.

The ideogram of the clouds (a koan)
– selected from *Dream ideograms (unpublished manuscript)*

By the time I saw the ideogram for the clouds
I had a wonderful sense of everything connecting
together in an intricacy of forms and fluencies
I smelt the rain as they drifted by and could taste
the rain as they swirled back arcing around and descending.

Once a little boy read his father's note on the kitchen table
I have run away to be with the Circus but the little boy
misread the note as run away to be with the Cirrus and
believed his father had taken off in the clouds and one day
he would join him.

In lieu of a conclusion, I will end this essay, recounting a Chinese myth *The Dragon's Gate*. I am using this contemplation as a metaphor for the writing of a life reporting on the progress or learning of self-directed study.

Staring into the rhythms of the nearby pool breathing in I relax. Breathing out my consciousness expands across a threshold of wonder and on the verge of a moaning utterance. The wind riffs with birdsong and the gurgle of a surging tide. The patterned light shimmers in the small bodies of water contained as varying but enlarged crystal balls hidden in the rocky shoreline. The efflorescence of this viscous reflection of energy, of light lay bare, teeming restfully in the shallow of the elements, arrests my attention. Hypnotics give way to reverie. 'You touch one thing deeply everything is there' Thich Nhat Hanh (1996: 99) says but when it happens by 'looking deeply at one thing, we see the whole cosmos' (Hanh 1996: 92) consciousness expands. The sense of being working in tandem with the possibility of becoming, to embody the moment and reach for what the future holds in the enunciation of a learning trajectory – a life as a work of art.



Fig. 6. Contemplations at the Rockpools. photo: Kim Satchell

A young man sits by the pond in his ancestral garden watching the moving pattern of koi swimming in the shallows. Life peers into his depths and from these depths he peers into a lifetime he longs for; one filled productively with creative work. Amid this contemplation, his mind turns to the mythic story of the Dragon's Gate and a profound knowing envelops his thoughts. To achieve the life he is inkling for means he must become like the koi who according to the myth swims the length of the river, up the waterfall and finally leaping over the top into the upper levels of the sacred headwaters becomes a dragon. His mind flashes forward to a vision of himself aged and wizened seated at the pond dictating his final wishes to a younger colleague. The elder pulls a necklace from his pocket, a gold chain with an ornamental koi gleams in his hand, sparkling in the eyes of the younger.

He recounts the story of the fish, filling in details of his own life's journey. While discussing the indomitable spirit necessary to overcome all the odds, his countenance changes and his piercing eyes gleam with the splendour of a life well lived. His voice sounds words with the fullness and suppleness of the cascading waterfall. Speaking about the waterfall, he recounts the way demon spirits enlarged the precipice to thwart him. For what may have been magically one hundred years, he swam against their power and finally overcame the stubborn resistance from the strength he acquired. Accordingly, when he leaped over the Dragon's Gate the strength of the fish transforms into the power of a dragon – emblematic of a new stature. As the resident spirit of the place according to the myth he recounts, his influence brought a benevolent peace and wellbeing to the region. For the remainder of his life he had flown the heavens seeking pearls of wisdom to restore the home place of the spirits who had gone before. He placed the necklace into the hand of the younger man and simply disappeared. However, the sense of his spirit remained strong with the young man and his presence in absence filled the whole region he so loved with wonder.

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