

Debbie's Gift

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I attended Debbie's last public lecture at the Australian Museum in Sydney in 2018. I remember her saying 'the gift of life is a gift that must keep moving' ('Gifts').

For Debbie, the gift of life was a way of expressing the complex entanglement of ethics, time, relationality, entropy, energy, memory, culture, and inheritance, in living, mortal systems. The gift of life is not something we choose or something we can opt out of. The gift is fundamental for survival as living systems weave webs of togetherness in a planet that tends toward dissolution. The gift, Debbie wrote elsewhere, 'is the way life evades entropy' ('Multispecies' 136).

Debbie used the image of 'knots of embodied time' to explain the way every individual of every species 'is both itself in the present, and the history of its forebears and mutualists' (137). In other words, we carry in our bodies an intricate pattern of creaturely gifts of life and time. Debbie's eloquent and profound observation was that we live in an ecological system in which the 'condition of being-birthed is a gift, and every interface that nourishes and promotes life is another gift' (197). As James Hatley observes, 'we humans are born not only from out of our mother's womb, but also the wombs, both human and more-than-human, both viviparous and oviparous, of our forebears' (180-181). Carrying gifts from our ancestors and from living Country, our bodies are archives of deep multispecies ethical time.

I have been told that I have my grandmother's blue eyes, a reminder that my body is inextricably interwoven with the bodies of my human ancestors. But a human face is also a nest of multispecies relations. 'You have your grandmother's blue eyes' they say, to the face born out of the faces of others, a chain of faces stretching back over ancient rivers before blue eyes even existed, before human beings were even human. Because we are each an embodied knot of multispecies ethical time, the tiniest newborn face carries memories of the world before it has even seen the sun. The meandering gully can be found in a gurgling smile, the billowing cloud in the furrowed brow.

When Debbie died, all I could think of was what a gift her presence in my life had been. It is impossible to know how deeply the life of a friend and mentor will ultimately impact your own. Their influence seems to rise and fall like the tide, the connections of the past mysteriously becoming beneath and around us, guiding us into future selves we have yet to become.

As creatures of memory and story we are woven from the presences of the past, an array of multispecies blessings that sustain us. When Debbie died I realised that she had given me not only the gift of her time as a warm and generous supervisor and friend, but the gift to see and understand that gift in the context of the great flows and connections of the living world. She taught me to begin to see the ways my relationships were knotted into my body and life, and the importance of caring for those relationships. She gave me a gift of self, and a gift of world.

She also gave me a wicked 1970 copy of *Rolling Stone* magazine with Bob Dylan on the front cover, and I will remember her forever.

WORKS CITED

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