

Ineluctable Resolve

KIM SATCHELL

Southern Cross University

The legacy of Deborah Bird Rose's scholarship and life has come into focus at a critical moment when the ecological crisis no longer appears to the mainstream as a future threat but is increasingly becoming understood as a current reality. Debbie loomed in my life as an exemplary figure and consummate thinker, who became influential in my nascent understanding of the riddle that had troubled my adolescent intuition, in the form of the unfolding ecology of the Anthropocene. Firstly, as a person in print, then through an invigorating correspondence as a mentor and colleague, finally and more importantly as a dear friend and confidant. The luminary status she deservedly secured among the community of scholars and First Nations people worldwide was for the quality of her work. On a more personal note I found this level of professional excellence to be matched and exceeded by the presence and quality of her character that quietly infused everything she did with clarity and care. The imperative of responding to the Anthropocene in a productive and a life affirming manner has become a critical feature of the challenge of the ecological crisis. In this short tribute to Debbie I consider her affirmation of life as central to the environmental humanities, an attentiveness to complex personhood as a possibility for wayfinding in the Anthropocene and the influence of water and the ocean in my own practice in the context of Oceania.

The significant aspect characterising Debbie's prodigious body of work, as both gift and legacy, can be summarised as an ethical sensibility awakening an ineluctable resolve to affirm life. One 'says *YES*' to *life* as a matter of fellow feeling and kinship with the multi-species community, inextricably bound together in shared stories, fortunes and fates ("Shimmer" 60, my emphasis). The stories people tell and the lives they lead provide the substance to find a way to affirm life and embrace the changing ecology without neglecting personal and collective responsibility for the biological diversity of the blue planet. Debbie's scholarship is peppered with stories as an accessible way of communicating her thoughts and as a clever way of engaging people in her concerns. She asks us to 'say YES'—despite the difficulties, setbacks, injustices and the manifest violence of human self-interest these stories tell.

Hearing Debbie speak about this great YES to life, describing the relationship between flying foxes and the flora they service as exemplars of a multi-species community in action, provoked in me a closer attention to life worlding in specific contexts, particularly the coast. These circumstances and their contexts are indicative of a manner of wayfinding negotiated by learning from environmental cues and responses to the living world including threats and extinctions (Rose and Robin). People 'say YES'—or indeed 'NO' according to the convictions and actions that become manifest in the lifeways they follow). She lovingly drew our attention to the exuberance animal and plant species

embody in the work of pollination, as a gifting redoubling a generous ecology in reciprocity ('Shimmer'). Not as mere observation but as an invitation in our own lives to carefully respond and contribute generously to life's wonder and challenge.

The cyclic unfolding of the lifeworld or *lifeworlding* involves multi-species mutualism in a resounding YES intrinsic to the existence all species share on earth. The idea of the living world unfolding and folding through participation and co-creativity, both as a making and an inadvertent unmaking, highlights the stakes at play in the everyday world. By necessity such open-endedness means the '*slow-scholar*' makes provisional claims based on the value they may hold over time or as an instructiveness to direct further pursuits in the unnerving welter of busyness and catastrophe ('Rose 'Slowly', my emphasis). Together with Timothy Morton and Donna Haraway, Debbie shows how the investigator becomes implicated not as an innocent bystander or eye-witness, but instead as an accomplice and fugitive, perhaps even turned insurgent against the ignorance, denial and human hubris endemic in the modern world. Any notion of a subjective or even collective reality emerges from the dynamism of a burgeoning chaos whose detailed complexity composes the lifeworld that supports whatever awareness might exist, be contested or be proposed. Considering these contradictions and pressing dilemmas, the storied fragments people hold on to are the substance of latent possibility or lost opportunity.

Key moments in our own lives often slip by almost unnoticed in the present, barely registering at an affective and intuitive level, if at all, only yielding their significance upon further contemplation and retelling. Perhaps then, the epiphanies that do surface are best thought of as multifaceted and longitudinal, as Catherine Bateson theorises in her book *Peripheral Visions*, rather than as fleeting and transitory in the manner they are often invoked—to then vanish through incoherence and forgetting.

In my own experience the process of storytelling and writing has allowed me to become more mindful of these formative and generative experiences, as well as able to recognise them in others ('Sing'). I have become over time more attendant to their value as touchstones or focal points indicative of orientations for wayfinding in the unfolding passage of life. In this case they are emblematic of the search for meaning and relevance, seeking to find a lifeway to pursue without equivocation. In Debbie's career, the mosaic of stories she worked with were latent with possibility, recursively wayfinding a life worlding in the throes of human exploitation and destruction ('Recursive'). The call of the multi-species community—to say YES to life, for humans relies upon developing a robust sense of complex personhood.

Complex personhood presents an ethical dilemma for individual responsibility. Mentored by Debbie, and also inspired by Thom van Dooren, David Abram and Donna Haraway, the complex personhood I am pressing for derives from the kinship and fellow feeling of nature-based cultures, although may also occur in multi-species affinities and lifeways by whatever means they are found. As Avery Gordon insightfully suggests:

Complex personhood means the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imagination is reaching toward. (4)

The entanglement and weave of what complex personhood might articulate and knit together, as viable storytelling and wayfinding, allows people to reach out and acknowledge an awareness of a sentient lifeworld made up of human and non-human others in the intimacy of relationship. Grasping the connectivity of these lifeways, understood and practiced as a means of relational ontology, joins diverse groups and their relations in an enduring commitment to the sanctity of the living world (Rose 'Multispecies'). With Freya Mathews, I rely upon onto-poetics, a communicative dialogue between 'the self and the world, the world and self' as an expressive openness and feel for the complex set of relations that emerge in any set of circumstances (Mathews np; see also Satchell 'Poetics'). These layers of story and onto-poetics touch upon intimacies with the lifeworld that are imaginative and lived in an ongoing dialogue.

Life-worlding, as I am employing the term, is co-constitutive of the lives of multi-species organisms-in-their-environment and the world they co-creatively inhabit including the stories they tell and the lives they lead. I have theorised an 'ecological sensibility' derived from a synergy of the senses that supports the burgeoning of complex personhood that articulates with a range of disciplinary perspectives of emplacement ('Reveries' 97). Tim Ingold describes this formation of complex personhood as a relational ontology as follows:

For inhabitants walk; they thread their lines through the world rather than across its outer surface. [...] In reality, however, not only does the extended mind of the walker infiltrate the ground along myriad pathways, but also, inevitably, it tangles with the mind of fellow inhabitants. (47-49)

This dynamic is therefore posited as exploratory and experimental in spite and because of the conditions they are testing and are being tested by, whether indeed their lives flourish or are diminished by the conditions and their responses to them.

In the context of my own life and research impulses I am saying YES to life—saying YES to Oceania as an expression of wayfinding and lifeworlding using oceanic reverie, blue eco-poetics and everyday practices including surfing and beach walking ('Creative'). On numerous occasions Debbie suggested I take her surfing even if only to lay on a board and be sped along by a wave. This remained an unfulfilled wish of her oceanic desire. Oceanic reverie has provided me the elegant means to engage contemplative space, blue-eco-poetics and everyday practices to process the energy, vitality and subtlety of these cosmic and earth forces that provide an impetus for immersion in the more-than human world ('Reveries'). As Herman Melville asserts, concerning the compact

sealed through ‘ocean reveries’, the attraction between water and meditation can intuitively ascertain the mystery of life, aiding us to become more cognisant of these depths and subtleties in our own lives (4).

Oceania is an emerging idea suited to promote planetary belonging to the environmental culture of the future in the here and now:

All of us in Oceania today, whether indigenous or otherwise, can truly assert that the sea is our single common heritage [...] Our most important role should be that of custodians of the ocean; as such we must reach out to similar people elsewhere in the common task of protecting the seas for the general welfare of all living things. (Hau’ofa 54, 55)

As the change in climate warms the surface of the ocean planet, and sea-levels rise through ice-melt and the expansion of water, the ecological crisis is becoming more acute. Paradoxically, as Oceania is rising as a physical threat, Oceania is rising as the impetus for First Nations solidarity and as a signifier for a socio-cultural movement raising environmental awareness on a planetary scale (Wilson; Hau’ofa). Facing these troubling circumstances, one is reminded of the value of saying YES to life despite the difficulty and uncertainty.

Debbie showed good faith in the possibility of patterns and relational possibilities in the more-than human world that deserve respect and trust on the part of concerned humans (“Shimmer”). She once inquired about the family name of Satchell and my cultural roots, delighted to find the family motto was *en bon foy* meaning ‘in good faith’. I am mindful of the importance of teachers and guides such as Debbie, whose encouragement and contribution provide meaningful words that sustain those who now grapple with these existential threats.

The current challenges facing the world call for an ineluctable resolve to maintain poise under pressure. Those whose lives have gone before the current generation as a testament, demonstrate the importance of a willingness to say YES to life—to continue to find a way to face the enormity of life on earth as it unfolds and the everyday practice to accompany such a commitment.

Responding to the Anthropocene effectively will require the unflinching courage to draw from the wisdom and the practical expertise of these forerunners whose prescience has become evident. The perennial focus of Debbie’s work revolved around questions of life and death, genocide and ecocide, as a theme of scholarship and responsibility, of witness and care, but what has become increasingly evident to me is the more important theme embodied in love—the motivation for all she stood for. The sort of dynamic love she expresses that addresses the heart and calls for a response in an ethical register, rather than merely as an intellectual exercise or inexorable logic.

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