

Resisting Action: Slow Response and Care-Full Movement in a Post-Fire Terrain

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Introduction

Initially I stood at a threshold peering into a place of momentous ending. I shook my head. Gundungurra country needs to burn, I imagine its people say across time, just not like this. There is a requirement for care-full in/action when living with and on a post-fire terrain while still in trauma. It is a difficult balancing act for humans who like to fix things. Beyond the domestic clean-up of burnt buildings and infrastructure, my teachers await my attention. They are not of the human kind, rather they are the critters that perch in branches or skitter under rock. They are the soil movers, the crevice crouchers and the mark makers. They are the stirring plants and the underground tendrils of fungal hyphae. They send slow signals and resist tidy aesthetics. They challenge the perception of “dead” and question short-term human economies of usefulness. Ultimately, they remind me that home is made up of many intersecting homes weaving, twisting and turning in a constant process of becoming.

30th November 2020

Dear human,

My communication with other humans, beyond the collective online gridview spaces, has been absent or erratic at best this last year. Yet communication has been at the centre of everything I have been engaging with, here, in a transforming sea of ash, charcoal and blasted sandstone. The transmissions I have been receiving are a cacophony of slow rumbles, subsonic shiftings, and high frequency fallout. While the signals I have been witnessing are a long, sustained reveal. I hope I might convey some sense of this in the following pages.

Yours truly,

Julie

This
is a ridge
line. A
sandstone
plateau.
Many of the
trees here have
a slight lean
toward the
north-east ↗ A
result of the
prevailing south-
west ↙ winds.
After the fire
many branches
on the
remaining trees
had a south-east ↘
lean, desiccated and
frozen. A marker
in time
of the moment
the fire-winds swept
from the north
-west ↖
Over time
these traces are
disappearing
as dead branches
drop and new
epicormic growth
disguises
the evidence.
But still I
see.

A week

after the fire

parched

leaves

started

to fall

like rain

finally

the rain

came

it

fell

lightly

then

heavily

it

damped down

the ash

○ ○○○ ○○○○ ○○○ ○○ ○○○○○○○ ○○ ○
 the pink and orange fruiting bodies of *Pyronema omphalodes* spread across
 ash beds and into the craters of burnt and fallen trees like a film of skin
 the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash,
 the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash,
 the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash, the ash

At first my			
footsteps	lightly		
were	stepping	around	
tentative		a strange	
		ancient	
		seabed	
	of		
	charcoaled		
sea		holding the soft delicate residual traces of a	
corals	pit		tree
to	shallow		I
suddenly	a		spent
	sink into		many
			hours
			staring
			?
			at trees
			care
			fully
			scanning
			for any
			tiny
			ruptures
			if I
			missed
			an
			arboreal
			wink
			it was
			the
		<i>ants</i>	and their
		<i>busy</i>	lines
	<i>up</i>		and
	<i>down</i>		that alerted me

I want to talk about mess

and _____ of mess.

the _____ messiness

We who interrogate and critique various matters and matterings often joyfully summon the messy adjective to indicate the inextricably woven elements that cannot neatly be separated from one situation to another. However, for some there is another mess, one that desires its antonym.

In general it is hard for humans to be **in a mess**

It means we are **not in control**

It compels us to **clean the mess up**

or **cover the mess up**

which often leads to ***A Greater Mess***

Wildfire creates a type of mess that is harrowing for humans and fraught for governments. It is hard to grapple with the mess and the mess of the mess. It is hard to grapple with the messiness of loss and what counts as loss.

The response can be to **clean the mess up**

in order to **restore things “back to normal”**

and **ensure it does not happen again**

which often leads to ***A Greater Mess***

spy treats
to
birds rest
to
land
need to
protection
for
**perches
the
gnarled
and
twisted
remains
of shrubs
acacias
teatrees
hakeas
geebungs
and sheoak
provide
landing pads
and haven
to many
a critter
and
fluttering
insect
they offer
their shadows as shade for vulnerable seedlings
their decaying bodies as slow food for fungal threads
their architecture as framework for regenerating creepers
their dark beauty for the glistening morning mantle of dew-soaked webs**

Addendum

5th February 2021

Dear Tree,

These days you wear a dark charcoal slip and even though you have no feather green boa your bare limbs offer sanctuary. A few months ago, you enticed a crimson rosella to prepare for a new family in a south-east facing aperture. I took great joy in the insistent calls of the nestlings amplified from within your safe walls. From now, you will be a birthplace for generations to come.

Across the border, a line we both know is an illusion, we heard the sounds of your close-by kin pushed and shoved to the ground. We shuddered as their limbs were hacked and discarded. But do not fret. You are safe here with us—for now. Despite knowing borders are constructs, in this instance we will allow such a demarcation. We can pretend it will keep us protected—for now.

Yours truly,
Julie