

unpsychology

issue 9.2 autumn 2023



imaginings



tinyurl.com/imaginings1landing



IMAGININGS1 OF 2



unpsychology

issue 9.2 autumn 2023

imaginings

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A quadrilogue of worms

WORM 1, AKA ADAM THE GARDENER:

There's usually a dialogue here at the start between two of the editors. But instead we* are burrowing some wormholes between issues 9.1 and 9.2...

When the first Unpsychology Imaginings editions came out, there were no worms in it. We hadn't even been imagined. That was more a failure of imagination of the editorial team than an existential reality. We are always around, burrowing in and through, making soil and humus and endlessly complex micro-ecologies, and generally avoiding humans (except when we get cut in two by a spade—and then there's some fun!)

Anyway, we got imagined, by accident it turns out (as you can read on page 146): *"One evening", writes a human, "I had an inky brayer to clean off, and some left over gold ink and decided to play. The combination of faded black and gold was mesmerising and so I progressed it as an experiment. The resulting original prints felt a bit weird and visceral, but I kept them. They are the sand worms of Dune, the worm holes of the universe, the worms that nourish our soil and a good end to a day of very messing creativity."*

Very eloquent — mesmerisingly messy, weird, indeed! — but she opened up a can of us right there. Sand worms, worm holes and all manner of other things wriggling through and between the digital and paper pages of this piece of human conceit. Honestly....

WORM 2, AKA BRONWEN THE WRIGGLEY:

Oh Adam, editors and humans don't fail in imagination. They only often lack courage to act upon their beautiful, vivid imagining; they constrain themselves into conventional shapes instead of wriggling free. How weird and wonderful the world might be if only imagination were given full rein and humans could trust themselves sufficiently to bring those imaginings into being.

As to the timing of these worm-holed editions, let's play with the idea that imperfection is perfect. Issue 9.1 was published without its fully realised worms, but let's imagine that they were lurking under the soil of creativity where they couldn't be seen, just waiting to burst out into these pages here and now. A bit of asymmetry, a bit of messiness, a bit of soil sprinkled across the white expanse of a page.

Those editor humans have been invoking the beauty of messiness and mistakes throughout the labour and birth of these unpsychology issues, and celebrating the imperfections that arise. We beings of the earth, we humans and non-humans, we're none of us perfect and that is exactly as it should be. How we welcome those imperfections into the soil of life is the most exquisite opportunity afforded to each of us. (And thus I wax lyrical, as I often do, in my wriggly permutations of wormishness.)

* the worms



WORM 3, AKA SHAI HALUD OF ARRAKIS

I beg your waxing pardon Bronwen the Wiggly; my permutations are not wriggly and imperfect; they are gigantic and perilous! Travel through the worm holes of space and you will find me there — on Arrakis, Dune — shaping the land, travelling the sand.

Much has been written of me since I was imagined. I am deified and worshipped by the humans there, and they fear me like all humans fear monsters. Yet they need me too and melange — the spice that is made from the ecological complexity of both my being and that of my desert planet.

The point is, I was imagined. I am an imagining. I exist because humans need something wild to believe in — to transcend, to conquer. But their dreaming destroys them too. Melange dreams are prescient and psychedelic — it is true — but perhaps the humans in and around these pages suspect that they don't need psychotropics to drop the mic, paint the world or write up a storm...

Talking of storms, there's a big one coming and we sandworms are off to make a wild rumpus. Watch out, humans, watch out, you really do not know what you have unleashed...

WORM 4, AKA ROCKWELL THE FRIED

You may think you are a gigantic and perilous beacon of literature, Shai Halud, but you are not alone in wormish renown. I have also been immortalised in words and in film, and I even managed to be banned by more conservative humans who found me socially threatening due to my glorification of outrageous behaviour. As long as we're talking about a wild rumpus, let's consider what happens to those who challenge norms by eating worms. What?! Horrendous! Mad! Lock them up!

Once we've let the dirt settle on that idea, let's return our attention to these pages of imagined imaginings. What might we learn from all this wormy, squirmy silliness? Perhaps only this: that making mistakes can be mightily mirthful. Following along those lines, and with a nod to SF, we might add that stumbling along in stupidity can be surprisingly salutary and fashioning failure can be fruitfully fun.

So yes: we worms invite the unpsychology community to enjoy issue 9.2 in all its splendid fecundity.

~



Mary Thorp — Sandworm #12



unpsychology 9.2

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... within and between these sections there is
sandworm art and textures by Mary Thorp, art by
Nesli Ergün & sound and remixed music by
Patrick Carpenter and the Imaginings Ensemble.

Not a repair, not healing —
a release needed:
thisssss issss realllll...you are real because
I am real —
the signals they detect are bright and clear.
What would it feel like, she daydreams to
the ceiling,
With the bower destroyed?
This bower, I have built it over a lifetime,
at the same time resembles a landfill.
What opens up is utterly unexpected —
a human person, just like
everyone else.

No healing – but a real releassssssse

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< *This poem uses words and phrases
from pieces in this section.
Hear it read by Steve Thorp.
Music accompaniment
by Ruth Thorp.*



tinyurl.com/UP9-2foundpoem1



NORA BATESON, LESLIE THULIN,
RACHEL HENTSCH & VIVIEN LEUNG

IT'S FANTASTIC

A multimedia experience

LESLIE THULIN, RACHEL HENTSCH & VIVIEN LEUNG

It's Fantastic stochastic metalogue

Watch
video
here



Warm soup

WE ARE EXCITED TO PRESENT one of Warm Soup Productions' first Warm Soup Projects—the multimedia experience inspired by Nora Bateson's essay *'It's Fantastic.'*

As we released this piece, we were invited to write about the confluence of our creation processes. Over the past few years, we (Leslie Thulin Eubanks, Rachel Hentsch, and Vivien Leung) have come together to work on numerous projects creating nourishing stochastic processes related to Warm Data with Nora Bateson. After multiple invitations to talk about the stochastic ways we have worked together, we began an attempt to assemble an assemblage that resembled what was happening. What could we articulate, share, express, or point to? What could we make legible, recognizable, or translatable?

We noticed separately and together that we were experiencing a sense of wonder, delight, and surprise in working together whilst also finding ourselves at unbelievably fantastic junctions together. All this was happening with no project plans, no budgets, on seemingly tight and unclear time frames, with very little experience in the project's content nor history of working together. New ideas, possibilities, and curiosities were emerging through

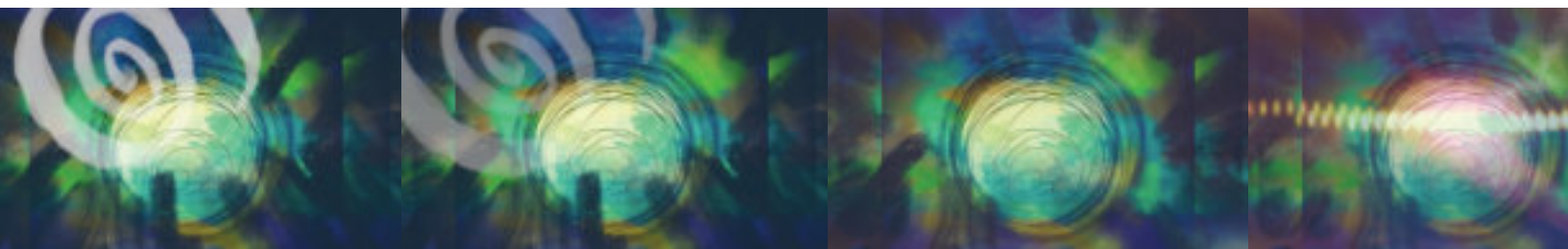
our relationships that felt different.

Don't get us wrong, there have been plenty of stumbles!

The inspiration from Nora and her writing in *'It's Fantastic'* was contagious. Oh my, how we love how the essay is dreaming us into life, rocking us to a new asymmetrical beat, and waking us from the numb slumber of industrialized belief.

Upon reading *'It's Fantastic'* for the first time, I (Leslie) noticed a faint irregular pulse developing into an odd beating drum as each sentence unfolded in my head, then a bass accompaniment began illuminating the asymmetrical beat wandering underfoot. My mind bent in time, thresholds passing under my feet at the speed of light, and suddenly I was floating into another world of ethereal grace meeting sharp edges in its travel. Arriving with cuts on hands mending an internal wound never seen. Not a repair, not healing—a release needed when the stitches were too tight, one cut is all it took to let loose, tearing the space between, underneath my tissues, deep inside my belly. Finding a dark silence stirring an eternity of grooves with sunlight, from form to formlessness, round and round, revealing the illusion of the 'real' in new time.

I sat and read again, and in the blinking of my eyes, the written words on the paper disappeared, leaving only the idea of the sound of Nora reading it out loud to me. I could hear her voice in the silence.



Listening allowed my eyes to rest as the sounds fell over me and combinings and repetition shook the ground beneath. That was the yearning, and we were calling on it. The next week Nora read the essay in our Warm Data Reading Salon.

Months later, we came together in person, and more of the idea sprouted—an animation, elaboration and exploration. We had been simmering this soup for some time on the back burner. We said ‘yes’ with no clear vision of how it would come to be. It was quite fantastic. New modes of being were arising through our work together. The patterns and learnings were difficult to describe and more difficult to name, yet they had a magnetism attracting our attention.

Without a conversation or list of what to do, the ripple of inspiration moved us.

We began by recording Nora. There was no soundproof room or quiet place; instead, we recorded amongst the chatter and laughter from another room, with no effort to perfect anything—life was life-ing. Yet the idea of the background sound filtered through our industrial lens. The critique came from within and through layers of history, culture, and more—the seemingly unwanted background noise disturbing the pristineness of our programmed view of needing a ‘quiet’ that is stripped of life. Illusions running rampant. Nothing else ‘should’ touch the sound. Ha, what a trickster.

Moving on and the life around us fell into the simmering pot ironically at just the right time, engulfing the industrial judge in the belly of the beast and beginning the digestion process. Can you hear the distant laugh as it’s laughing? A deep belly-laugh shaking from the center breaking down the scripts and rules; the dough of possibilities rising—meeting the moment in the journey pairing perfectly with the timing in the story—re-pairing the errors of our layers with our love of life. How

could we have known or planned ‘perfect’ timing? As if we could plan distant ripples in an ocean that would later carry us to the other shore? We could not have scripted it.

Before making time to improvise together on the visuals, we scattered to other parts of the world. And the random yet not-so-random unfoldings continued. All three of us love playing on our iPads with brushes and palettes into swirling, curling, jagged, messy, stirred, beautiful and ugly, unexpected and disturbed, disoriented and flowing. We were slow cooking the lies of ‘this is real.’ Tenderizing our attachments while laying the sinew aside to tie together later. We envisioned dancing canvases with stirred colors and asymmetrical movement in harmony as they alchemized with Nora’s voice. A joy-ride around mountains and hills revealing unchartable landscapes and melting frozen soundscapes bringing the beat back with life.

We dithered, and one, then two of us, fell ill. The reminder that catastrophes are necessary in evolution relaxed our expectations. And now being geographically dispersed, we relied on the magic of improvisation, each drawing on our own, at different rhythms, across oceans and time zones yet held by Nora’s ideas and voice, our friendship and trust with one another and a trust in life itself. We felt something move through our hands and fingers—untamed—yearning for the movement of unexpected life.

Rachel collected our drawings and layered our art and animations into a moving collage, using transparencies and swirls, clipping, adding, multiplying, and sprinkling; feeling the joy as the combinings coalesce nth order life-affirming intricacies. And the process of coalescing will continue as you lay your eyes and ears upon this experience, continuing its own transformation with and through you.



The beginning of the beginning...

After working on our first big projects together in 2021, we began to search for a beginning of sorts. How did we know we could work together so well? Because we did know somehow though—maybe not explicitly. Where did it all begin? We searched to find the beginning. But where did *what* begin? What was ‘it’? How do we even know what we are looking for? Is there an ‘it’ at all?

We discovered there were beginnings everywhere. We met the beginning again and again in different ways—and the beginning met us. We found the beginning in the middle and the middle in the end, crossing our senses.

The synesthetic magic of the stochastic flowing us down a river of no return did not go unnoticed. We found our way through white water and rapids, in and out of eddies, and onto shore again and again. We detected changing drafts, lines, currents, paths, temperatures, pace, rhythms, and timing—though it wasn’t clear what elements and conditions were influencing it all. The stochastic is not random—it is (random) with brackets. The stochastic needs time.

With Warm Data, we continuously explore new ways of being together that support our care for one another and life itself. How are we caring together? What are we tending? What are the hidden losses and dangers in the quagmire of capitalism, imperialism, and the supposed efficiencies of the industrial machine? How is our tending and caring shaped and used? As Nora often says, it is not about what is said but what is possible to say. You will not know what happened at the gathering by reading the transcript.

The work itself is not central; the people and relationships are central. Yet our work is shaped by people and relationships whilst also being shaped and directed in dangerous ways by the structures we are held in—like an invisible prison. We are not

looking for answers or opportunities to repair these systems. We are looking to each other and to the possibilities that arise when we learn together with a love for life, and as we notice the myriad ways our systems and structures mold our subjectivity toward particularities that reinforce these systems limiting our ability to find one another.

The challenge in describing and naming our experience requires us to remember that describing and naming itself shapes and changes what we are describing and naming and trying to understand! We never see or understand the direct experience upon reflection. Instead, the reflection is a new experience combining with all that is in-between. Every description filters those that came before and shapes those that come after. It is inescapable.

As Nora says often, ‘Your story changes my story.’ Our perceptions are moulded by our past experiences, including our family, culture, sense of identity, political and economic circumstances, and broader collective history. They change and continue to shape our perceptions moving in and through time. Our responses are shaped and created by our collective choices—the individual does not have quite the choices assumed. ‘It’s Fantastic’ points to these ideas in many ways—the possibilities are shaping the possibilities, and the possibilities are rooted in what is possible.

Stochastic magic requests a kind of respect beyond understanding. Our reflections took us down a river where we found ourselves moving across time into memories and places that seemed altogether elsewhere. Yet as we shared and continued our conversation, the similarities and differences amongst the memories—along with other memories—began revealing evidence of tributaries in deep confluence below the riverbeds feeding and meeting one another.

Human beings have been bombarded, cut, tor-

mented, twisted, and drowned by the mechanistic, imperialistic, and capitalistic ideas that are the systemic foundation of the world around us. These systems are predicated on exploitation and limit our ability to find one another. We are forced to fit in and explain why we can't when we don't. It's a one size fits all illusion. We internalise rules, habits, processes, and structures that are always guiding, shaping, and moving us—we point to the push and pull, hoping for freedom. The ways information is received, and interpreted changes as our attention learns to move us transcontextually. It matters who and what we put together and next to each other.

In our work together, we had sudden recognitions that the conversation was not at all about what we thought. Jumps were made possible that were once improbable, maybe even impossible, and backdoors were illuminated out of nowhere. There are understandings we can't explain, and this 'not know-

ing' changed how we responded to each other. The information expressed and received in any moment is infinitely beyond our wildest sense of sensitivities and sensibilities.

Through our work we discovered a coalescing of invitations to explore our curiosity and allow our sensitivities to play untamed. What unfolded were new paths revealing bridges over water and tunnels underneath. The rigour, flexibility, integrity, humility, generosity, and curiosity that transpired in our togetherness was recognized in hindsight as infinitely necessary—yet these words hardly touch what we are pointing to. Our ideas around success, failure, and mistakes arrived repeatedly. We settled on the idea that there's nowhere to settle. Our refuge is each other. So the questions shifts from what is happening together to who is it possible to be together. The answers will never be the same. ∞

Find a multimedia version of
this metalogue — including
animated GIFs — here:



tinyurl.com/itsfantasticimagining



tinyurl.com/combinings

Nora's essay is reprinted below and the original Medium piece can be found at medium.com/@norabateson/its-fantastic and also appears in her new book, *Combining*.

NORA BATESON

It's fantastic

JUST TO WITNESS such a theater of tangled stories is indeed a show to beat all shows.

The way each flavor of the stories of this moment have produced their own puzzle, complete with transcontextual overlapping versions is remarkable, even terrible, but beautiful in its intricacy.

It is fantastic. It is everywhere. It is a whirling maze of reiterations. A fugue of seductive cages for epistemology to stir itself into itself.

Through one door, it's religions; a tangle of the sacred, the potential for devotion wrapped into a spiral of exclusions and controls...and God is god because of god, and god is absolute.

Through another door it's money, and money is real because what is real is defined in terms of money. The buck stops and starts there.

Then there is the academy and what is real is studied because what is studied is real. Research proves the research.

The schools are labeling, measuring and funneling the next generation into compartments that desensitize the ability to receive information about life.

The law is based on ownership, which is based on

law.

The machines keep telling us we need more machines.

The health systems are making people sick. Pharma is a lifeline that is laced with lies.

Self help is producing an unhealthy idea of the self, and help.

Spirituality — — is full of wordy scripts where there only breath, art, and music can offer communion. Words are inadequate.

So they point to imagination for a break from the boxes, only to find that the imagination is sourcing from the epistemology that produces boxes. Remodelling the models.

I might shrug my shoulders, sigh and think... well, it is what it is.

As Korzybski says... it IS not what it is. And that is the fantastic part.

The perception of any one of these tautologies is forged and patterned into a writhing cluster of habits and language, spinning round and round. The thing seen is not the thing. The thing felt is not the thing...

Caught in one thousand traps at the same time,



at some point one must admire their magnificent mire.

All of the stories are in cahoots, even in their contradictions — proving the others, in a world of proofs. The education system proves the economic system proves the political system proves the culture proves the health system proves the religion, proves the parenting of the next generation into the same traps. And around we go, never touching ground.

It's fantastic. All attempts to wiggle it, upturn it, reverse it or destroy it are thwarted by the momentum. You can't change it because it is what it is. Even though it isn't. It is.

What a tragic comedy, a romantic adventure, a fun house of optical illusions. Not fun.

It's nothing short of incredible.

Now, hold, pull, release. Let the anxiety of each failure to make change pile on top of each failure to perceive another way, until you can climb on top of them and peek out.

Here it is, the slippery stuckness. In its redundancy is its continuity.

In the continuity is the ever-shifting, in the ball of interlocking snakes of story is the way out. Fix one story at a time and dig your way deeper into the tangle. You have to dance with them all at once.

You have to dance them out of their gripping of each other.

I have to dance you out of your embracing me into this strangle hold. You have to dance me out of my idea of who I am when I am with you. Let me be unpredictable.

The stories tell each other.

The institutions reflect each other. The traps are not simple locked doors, but rather they fasten one another into the sphere of reconfirmation. They whisper in hissy voices... thisssss issss realllll...you

are real because I am real.

War is human because history has war. Off shore accounts are possible because there is no law to make them impossible because it is possible that off shore accounts rely on impossibility. The market is driven by slave labor because the labor needs the market that enslaves.

Shattered mirrors reflecting strange angles of the same crime scene.

It takes humor, art, reverence and irreverence... it takes rigor, practice, stretching the brain. It takes synesthesia, sensing in new ways across senses. It takes warmth, weirdness, and wonder.

I feel I am screaming in space, writing in invisible ink. I can tell you ahead of time that I am going to seem incoherent, un-informed, irrational. I am an aberration, a nonsense...but that is what change looks like.

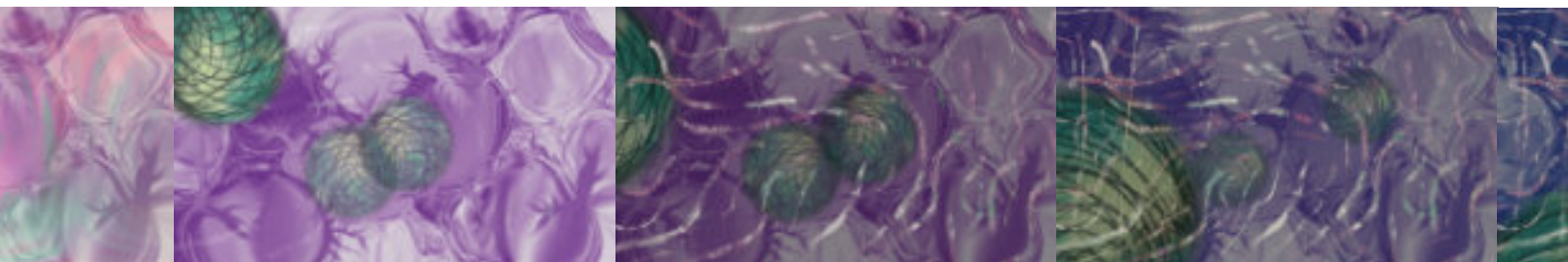
I mean seriously, this is why play is vital. The change needed looks unfamiliar, looks nothing like the existing perceptions, looks nothing like what might be called grace or profanity from this vista. You cannot trust yourself to recognize it when it kisses you. We cannot rely on this current vantage point to reveal the change, we cannot see it or name it from here. It is not in existing language. There are no subtitles.

It is crickets, wind, light waves and the call of next years baby goats. We do not hear it. And when we do it sounds too strange.

So where is the change? It is everywhere except where we try to make it. The trying and the making of change are contaminated with the familiar scripts and blue prints. Watch the swirl, try not to be distracted by what is swirling.

The tautology is a tautology.

It's fantastic. ∞





STEPHEN KASTNER

The 46th

WE COLLECT, WE EXPAND, then reform as needs command. A cooperative collective, we are dynamic, an ever-changing, systemic hybrid consisting of an almost infinite number and variety of individual variations. Each singular member emanates from condensed energy, a spark of consciousness that coexists in a thought stream. Connected, we become an entity much greater than the sum of our individual parts. We are the life force incarnate in material form.

Bees understand these same principles and function as a community. They balance the optimal size of a hive based upon physical constraints of their perceived environment including the available supply of nectar and pollen. But we are not bees. We are social hybrids, all that was left after the mass extinction, the flash that transformed our DNA, cross-pollinating us with random threads of disparate life.

We have no queen. We are a universal consciousness, fully aware of each other and the strength of our individual and collective voice. We are the 46th. Our song reveals the age of our generation echoed out as a distinct melody, combining in a symphony, the sounds of our prothoracic legs scratching forth select melodies of gratitude to the eternal sun. Waves of the unity prayer open and close each day encircling us in a continuous dual emanation. It is

the planetary song we broadcast, a binary pulse sent forth.

Darkness cools. I feel the curtain of heat lift as the sun vanishes. My reflective exoskeleton begins to ping as it cools and shrinks having protected my innards from frying like a broken egg at midday.

We are the left-behind children, survivors in a sick sense. The untouched have left us here to survive as we will, as we always have. Our prime directive is survival. Because I am a hominid cross, I have a life expectancy of approximately 33 years. I and my offspring will continue to gain ubiquity over what remains. We felt their hatred, their revulsion, the feel of their boot-crushing, murderous intent.

We look forward to their final departure. They were inadvertently our very own creators. We are the sons and daughters of their rage. And yet, we fear their horrific and irrepressibly aggressive nature, their former will to dominate and overtake every measure of the soil beneath our feet. I am of the 46th generation. Each iteration refining and perfecting the genetic cross.

I may never fully comprehend how I came to be, merely the child of a dynamic process, the splitting apart and joining together of nature gone mad. Released by the explosive force of destruction, came the birth of the unexpected. I do not ask for redemption. I am perfect, the incarnate answer to

the ultimate and unanswerable question: What is life? Why do I exist?

These puzzling thoughts cause me to remain aloft sometimes for days, drifting with the winds. It is safer in the air, out of their reach. I am a wanderer by nature, but I know my limits. I can fly for a week without water and a month without food. I am a fierce survivor. One of my mesothoracic legs is a regrowth. It took 93 days, and that particular foot only has four joints. But it works and I am grateful.

I am also thankful for the gift of my hands and the capacity to verbalize as a hominid. I retain the ancient memories passed on with the birth of the 46th. I am two years on this red earthen plane. Flying free, gazing down at the endless rusted landscape, drifting, listening for the song of my brethren. We remain reclusive, waiting for the last of their ships to ascend and vanish.

On that day, we will at long last inherit all that remains of this spinning red ball. Peace and collaboration will be the watchwords that ensure a new tomorrow. Transformation and evolution, as we spring forth from the jaws of destruction, this world born of fire, mother of new and rational mythologies.

Atonement for the sins etched in red sands, we bring forth new incarnations, the new and untested, a gamble on genetic variables, this rapid re-selection process, children of the great preceptress. Four to six generations each year, our regenerative life force is the goddess we revere. I and my sisters and brothers now numbering in the tens of thousands, each generation recognizable by our song and the distinctive family mark, a shape that loops and reconnects to itself in a pattern on my back.

I drop from aloft, to skim and sense the surface air. Coming to rest on a high outcropping of bedrock, I stop to preen my antennae. From deep within, I feel an urge, a tingling sense of unfulfilled desire. Yes, it is the male instinct to penetrate and release, one that comes over me and clouds my thoughts. I feel unable to resist it. I take hold of one antenna and thrust it between my mandibles to cleanse the waxy substance from the surface. I work

until it is pristine, then release it back into the air to clutch and preen the other in a similar manner.

The signals they detect are bright and clear. I turn and face into the gentle breeze that stirs from the valley below me. My body resonates with a renewed electrical sensitivity. I am alert, seeking, and ready. I will find her. It is a compulsion out of mind, beyond control. I cannot avert my intention. It is as if I am possessed by a new and singular entity, one that dominates my every thought, paralyzes any alternatives other than penetration and release. I sense a mounting pressure, one that threatens to burst the membrane of my exoskeleton, while knowing full well that this is impossible.

I spread my wings and take to the air once again, swooping toward the red sands below an outcrop of harsh, blackened stone. I skim and alight seeking any trace of that smell, the pheromone signal that says she is near. I spring to the air, senses trembling and alert. The sun drifts across a cloudless sky, another of the 687 days it takes to circle round the sun, coming to closure. I cannot rest until I find her. We were once nocturnal by nature, but that was long ago. Be it day or night, I take rest when I tire of flight.

My dreams are flooded with her. I see delicate wings lifting high above her back to reveal the ovaries between the second and sixth segments of her abdomen. I am drunk with the scent. I raise my wings only to catch the shadow of a boot. The crushing force hits us both. Blackness and nothingness banish my receptors. Like the snapping of a twig, my antennae spring out to immediately expose the three eyes on my forehead to the rays of a sharp crack of sunlight that has penetrated the crevasse I chose for safety. My compound eyes perceive that I am intact, untouched.

Overcome with a confusion of grief, turning to joy, and then the seasonal lust returns. I am alive. A dark dream invaded my resting phase. She remains a vision, the ever-present urge that swells, the thoughts that cloud every aspect of my existence. I am nothing until I find her.

There, my eyes fix upon a rainbow of colors ema-

nating from a single ray of sunlight transfusing as it passes through a tiny drop of moisture that remains upon on a lone blade of desert grass, a momentary survivor resisting the great heat. I will have it. I spring forth to clutch the blade, delicately bending it toward my mouth, feeling the wetness enter and flood my interior, my first drink in more than a week. Fortune is with me today. I return to

the quest, preening and seeking life in a barren world. The madness overrules me once again. I take flight.

A cage of rotting flesh and bone emanates a scent trail for miles, and I trace it like a river, sensing the possibility of food and the likelihood of community, breeding females, a family. I bank sharply on instinct, turning into the wind to follow the source.

NOTE

The image on page 18 was AI generated, empowered by DALL-E from a prompt by Stephen then developed through many different iterations and refined further in Photoshop and Illustrator, where it was placed in a Martian landscape.

Music from the Imaginings Ensemble, remixed by Patrick Carpenter



tinyurl.com/Imaginationsremix-1

CIARÁN HODGERS

Behaviour

A wooden buddha roosts on the bookshelf,
mouth melting into a knowing smile
as he supervises her stenography of my misery.
I scan the titles beside him,
frantic for clues.

I've been fading more and more
since we've been talking about behaviour;
a flicker here, a flash from time to time.
By now, she's struggling to find eye contact at all.
I see her searching for an approximate position,
careful to remain calm
when all she sees
is a cream wall behind me.

You know there's a frog in the Arctic circle
that freezes its blood to survive the winter?

She nods, knowing I communicate in pilgrimages,

Or do you ever think about giraffe necks?
How generations reaching for leafier branches
finally gave them the lift they needed?

Wood pigeons coo their suburban patter,
tarmac melts through the window,
tailgating a lazy breeze.

What does this feel like in your body?
She encourages a more direct path.

Like a need to stretch, I say;
like this is someone else's skin.
Like I'm lonely for myself.

The words hang there
as if dappled from the trees outside;
a twinkle of a wind chime;
a car door flashing as it closes in the sun.

What would it feel like, she daydreams to the ceiling,
if you could harness everything it takes to disappear
and direct it into something
that would make you feel more solid,
more alive, more yourself?

I think of colour-changing cuttlefish,
dung-beetles chartering paths of celestial light,
lizards dropping limbs like disposable prosthetics,
and bowfin fish fixing eyes to their tails.

To have that much choice
would feel like forgiveness.

Just then, a lightless dawn turns between the walls.
Faintly, she finds my gaze.
I have, at least, a semblance of an edge
as if I were made of hot, blown glass.
Shuffling, I shimmer a glittered phantom
that frames the God perched over her shoulder.

TAWNYA RENELLE

Once I realised I was a bowerbird

Arranging

PERHAPS IT IS THIS IDEA of arranging and arrangement that attracts me most to the bowerbird—connects me—makes me want to invoke the bowerbird in my life. Arranging and arrangement seem to be omnipresent in my life right now. When having lunch with A several weeks ago, we chatted about our experiences of internal work—he said that he is happily single and doesn't want to date anyone right now because he is rearranging furniture inside himself. Perhaps he is a bowerbird too, though I didn't say this to him at the time. He is in a process of interior designing, redecorating, collecting and arranging. His metaphor—this image has stuck with me and I have now borrowed it (like a bowerbird) several times over and have mentioned it in many conversations.

Scientific Fact: bowerbirds continually steal from one another—plundering items when they are away, some articles indicate there is a constant rotation of objects being taken, taken back, in gigantic games of collaboration, recycling, collecting and borrowing.

Arranging the furniture surfaced as well in my recent therapy session where I described this to my therapist. I am deciding right now what furniture is going to the dump, what pieces just need a bit of new fabric and where I want to arrange everything.

I am even weaving a new area rug it feels. She suggested that it isn't just a process of taking the furniture out and putting it back in, but rather that the furniture has been blown up.

Scientific Fact: The older generation of bowerbirds at the height of mating season will destroy the half formed newly constructed bower of the younger birds.

It would seem that perhaps the bower I had thought I had built has been destroyed and I am now starting again. I am not sure I am even at the phase of collecting and arranging.

With the bower destroyed at least all the twigs remain—all the collecting of branches—which I have always imagined as a combination of drift wood and forest branches covered with moss and lichen—lay on the ground ready for construction.

My therapist said to me what I am doing is really healthy, even if it is tortuous and tedious. Oh, to be a bowerbird and simply start reconstructing with a sense of urgency! The young bowerbird has none of this struggle of looking at the branches strewn about the ground exhausted and frustrated. The bowerbird doesn't just sit in the nest and cry. The young bird simply begins again.

Scientific Fact: When observed over a period of a month it was noted that both the Satin Bowerbird and the Vogelkomp Bowerbird will arrange their

collections every single day, looking for just the right arrangements—removing, shifting, and perfecting the placement of each item.

I don't arrange daily—but have arranged several times over.

With each new bower, some arrangements have changed, some stayed the same, it has been a refinement of learning what combination of objects suits me best, suits the bower best.

I am writing into a space of both the internal and external bower—and while each of these bowers influences the other, I will need to decide if writing this is also a bower.

Arranging for you

It started when I decided I needed to see a therapist while my regular one was on leave. At first, I found her shockingly casual and familiar and it made me a bit unsure of why I was paying her £45/hour to just give me the assignment of writing out my life story and then reviewing it with me line by line, age by age. Something about her though was incredibly endearing: the manner in which she spoke; her drawn on eyebrows; the fact that she works with horses; the way that she sometimes overshared information, including her telling me again and again that she doesn't watch telly and has an obsession with learning. Recently she told me how sometimes when she is on her own, she blows bubbles to make herself happy. I don't know why the information made me feel uncomfortable, while also making me enjoy that I had chosen her for these few meetings.

During one of our sessions, I was enjoying all of this but was still questioning why I was paying her until, with 15 minutes left, when we had reached the end of my life story, she looked at me pointedly and said, we need to figure out a way that your sense of self-worth is more than your achievements; that you realise it is within you and you deserve more.

Like I do with my ideas—as I imagine most people do—this challenge to my preconceived narrative of myself took a few days to mull over. And as I mulled it over it was unexpectedly aided by a deci-

sion I made—a pained decision I should note—a rebellion against my own rebellion that had led to me spending the last few months falling into the chaos trap of a man who was very much a boy and was very much like my ex. A man I should say who was beautiful, philosophical, dark, and wrong for me in every way.

As I watched the phone ring—with the surname Cutie that I had given him the morning after I had pulled him from the pub—one thought entered my mind and would not leave me: I deserve better—I deserve so much better. While I felt all the stabs and discomfort of a new thought—one I had convinced myself I wasn't allowed to have—I didn't answer his call and I didn't call him back. This man I had let spend many nights in my bower.

That night I had a dream, the first in which I can remember having a conversation with my inner child. I am the adult, you have to trust me, you deserve more and you are worthy and I am going to make sure you get that.

It has been these moments that have made me come to think of my home as a bower, a bower that I have been building for you.

The you I haven't met, the you I am absolutely terrified of, the you that I don't know how I will adjust to—the you that I want but already feel resistant to. The you I have learned to say I want. The you I say I want and have to trust I won't be disappointed if you never arrive. The you my grandma has begun praying I meet. The you whose qualities I have focused on in quiet practice. The you I am not looking for.

This bower, I have built it over a lifetime—an obsession with objects as identity and symbols of self. Collecting myself in everything I find. Collection upon collection upon collection.

I wonder if you will note the shelf near my desk, each level carefully curated; objects gathered and arranged. Will you see on the top shelf the glass dome, enclosed there is a tree, a wooden bunny, and the smallest of blue vials, containing the ashes of Gitana?

And the level which was once so simple, with bird

books and a vase shaped like a deer, is now overflowing with shells and beach glass, collections of myself as a wanderer in the Scottish Highlands.

Will you notice the top of the vanity in my bedroom? The collection of cameos neatly lined up, the tintype of a woman in a corset, another collection of rocks (ones I have been collecting from travels to France, Spain, and more) and the framed photo of the cover of an Anais Nin book?

Even my kitchen. Will I make you a cup of tea or coffee and will you spy the collection on the window ledge there, small trinkets and plants?

I want you to enter my bower, look around and find all the collections appealing and attractive. Will you be drawn in? Will the particular colours and arrangements I have made catch your eye? Will I need to point them out to you? I hope you will just know.

Have you built your own bower too and how many years have you spent building it?

I have spent so much time thinking about my own bower that I have forgotten you will have built one as well. That you will have spent the same patience and care that I have curating, creating, shaping, collecting and arranging.

When I daydream about your bower and the collections held within, I imagine that the moss green I love so much will be there. An astrologer

friend once told me you would be wearing tweed and so I wonder if your bower will be laden with tweed? A couch or cushions perhaps?

I fantasise about your book collection in the hopes you have one and think about how I may be lured in. Will it be alphabetized like mine, or by colour or genre?

Will the black vinyl in my bower be echoed in yours?

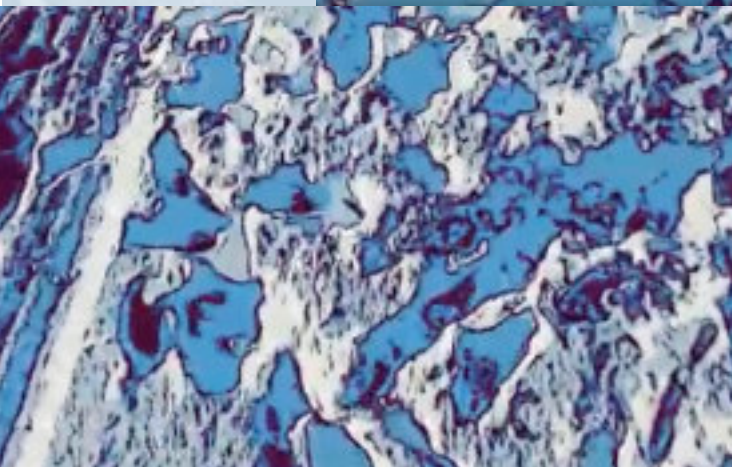
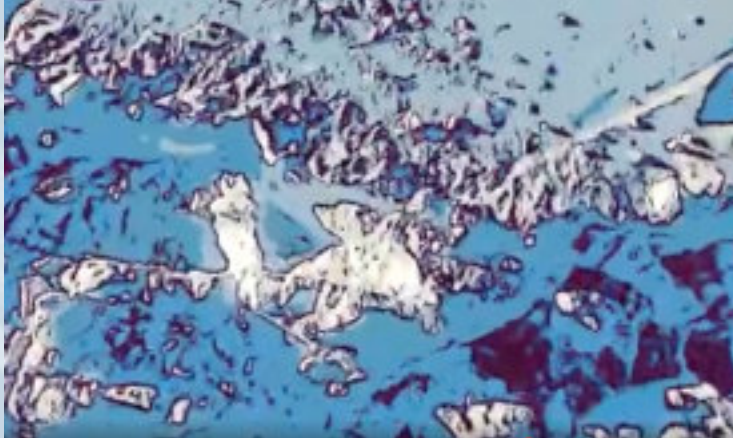
How will our bowers compare? If we have both been building our bowers for years will the colours be similar or will opposites attract?

How many variations of arrangements of eye-catching items have you tried and how many potential mates entered your bower and ultimately left? Do you worry as I do about letting someone into your bower or are you calmer and more self-assured than I?

I built this bower for myself. But also in wait for you, and I have never minded the years it has taken and that it has already been rejected by some.

I built this bower for myself, steady and slow in my determination. Focused in my attentions and intentions. I have asked many to leave my bower.

I didn't realise I had been building this bower until I came to know myself as a bower bird and once I realised this, everything was easier. ∞



MILENA POPOV — NENA,
Solution-dissolution

THIS SHORT ANIMATED VIDEO artwork follows a journey through a desolate landscape that at the same time resembles a landfill, melting glaciers, and an alien planet. In either way, human footprint is the one that makes changes in this environment.



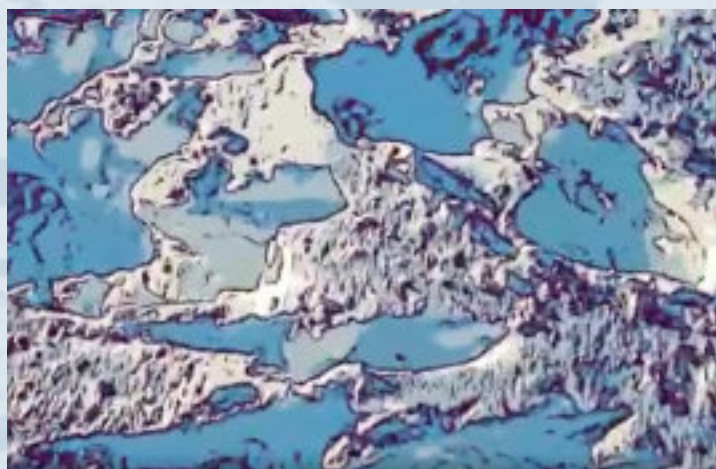
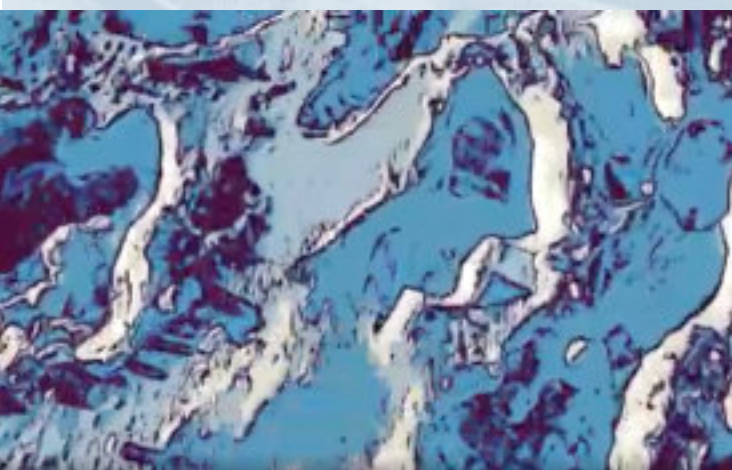
Video, color, sound, 1:26 min, 2022.

Video link: tinyurl.com/imaginepopov

Video: Milena Popov–Nena

Sound: Misa and Olga Popov

Sound mix: Milena Popov–Nena



STEVE THORP

To be Human

To be human is the fifth of the Watertime series of short fictions written for Unpsychology Magazine. The stories are set in a future — in a place a bit like the UK — beset by devastating seasonal floods. The Heat has ravaged the land; and the RageTime has left an uncertain, fearful society — a world in which outliers, artists and Lostlings creep around the edges of the present, and live with the legacies of a far distant past. The first of the stories, Bobcat in the Watertime, together with links to the following tales, can be found at unpsychology.substack.com/p/bobcat-in-the-watertime.

IT HAS BEEN RAINING FOR WEEKS. Prolonged downpours are not unusual these days, but right now Bobcat imagines she is trapped in a vast dark building with a persistent hammering on the roof. She is deep in the forest — walking through streams and pools where paths once were. She hadn't realised the forest stretched this far and the rhythm of her journey has induced a kind of trance. This in itself is familiar — trance is a state she is used to — but the depth of it surprises her. Everything seems magnified and endless.

It seems an eternity since she met Human travellers singing and camping in the forest clearing,

and spoke with the women with her drum and rumbling wisdom. Since then, Bobcat has encountered no-one. Even the Habitants and ghosts, her usual companions, have become subdued and out of reach.

With her tracker's sense she has been following the familiar signs of Habitants on the move — a rustle, a snap or a sudden burst of flight — but in recent days they haven't come near, nor spoken with their familiar, reassuring, intuitive mind-chatter. And the ghosts are just not there at all — as if her ghost-sense has deserted her.

This feels very wrong. As a Lostling, she is used to being alone, but she has never been without the companionship of voices from the world around and beyond her. These are always present — reference points for her instincts and intuitions; senses swirling and settling; hidden things rising up, her body brimming with energy, crackling so the whole world feels encapsulated.

Feeling fear rising fast, she does her usual thing to calm herself with breath and presence. She sits at the base of a tree just above the waterline — and empties. This routine is well-practiced, learned through a chaotic, loss-filled childhood, perfected in a short adult life. In the emptiness, she trusts that something inquisitive will come to explore the

space. Then others will follow and she will be filled with presence, life and perception again. Ready to move on.

She sits beneath this tree, with the imposing monotony of the forest canopy above, trusting her lifetime of practice. Waiting. Waiting.

Nothing comes. She probes with her ghost-sense. At the edge of her awareness, something flickers, then seems to withdraw. Nothing. She opens her perception to the surrounding forest.. She knows there are Habitants all around—she can even describe the unseen tableaux: a pair of jays squabbling high in the canopy; other birds circling, settling and calling; a fox hunting, as other more timid animals on the forest floor fan out before the predator, trying to be the one that escapes. Below all this, amongst soaked detritus and flooded channels on the forest floor, small things of myriad variety living in their own small worlds.

All this, she senses, but none of the Habitants have a voice. And the human part of her begins to ask, what happens when this part of ‘me’ is all that there is? She seldom uses this word—but what if there is no-one here but ‘me’?

She panics. Takes out her Pad. Thinks about calling someone—another human: brother Jake in the City; sister Flute at the Big House; even someone random back in Town. She has no Contact here however, so even this distraction is not available.

Something rises inside and she howls. A desolate baying cry that pours out from her body into the forest—though it is immediately muffled by the incessant rain. There is no reply or response. If anything, the forest quietens, thickens, as if the air and water around her was congealed by her cry. Everything closes in. She feels she is being forced underground into a burrow that is too small for her, and does the only thing her body can do—curling up tight—and whimpers to herself until eventually she sleeps.

She dreams. Wakes. Forgets the dream, retains its essence for only a moment. The grim chill of wandering somewhere desolate fades. She dozes, dreams, wakes; dozes, dreams, wakes. She senses

dark figures looming over her near-to-waking self, as if they want to tell her something, but whatever they say is lost in waking.

Now, even the smooth transition between the waking and sleeping worlds is lost. She wakes the next time in rage and fear.

Everything that makes Bobcat Bobcat is fading into a singularity; a one-dimensional experience of her ‘self’ she has never felt before. Even when she lost Mamma and Gramma, even when Dadda left and Jake was taken, the voices, ghosts, dreams and connections she forged across time and space meant that she always knew she was part of something intricate and beautiful—the world as she imagines it really is.

Not a Human world of Teck, fear, big ideas and broken promises, but one filled with ordinary wonder, and taken-for granted magic—with no sleight of hand or trickery. Now, all gone, washed away in a deluge of weeks of rain in an endless, flooded forest.

She lies there. The landscape is monotonous and unchanging. Rain hammers, waters rise. She lies there, as saturated as everything else, eating nothing, drinking when she feels thirsty, holding out her hands to catch water that drips incessantly from the tree canopy. Once in a while she stirs, moves uphill a little to avoid the rising water. Mostly, she sleeps, dreams and wakes; sleeps, dreams and...

Waking, she senses something is different. It is quieter, brighter. The rain has stopped and shafts of sunlight are shining through the canopy. She is struck by their beauty. They remind her of the colours and shapes refracted through stained glass high in the tower of a Big House, illuminating the people below with glorious halos.

She remembers what she had decided to call this journey—her ‘peregrinatio’.

What was it that someone had written on the Pad Note?, “It’s walking for God, for fuck’s sake”. Maybe this is what she was walking for, this moment of glory? Maybe this is what the people in the long past meant by God?

Maybe... and her thoughts trail off into the ordi-

nariness of this moment. The sun has come out. It does this every day somewhere, and now it's here and the rain has stopped. The journey feels hopeless again.

She looks around. The forest begins to steam. The suffocating coagulation she felt before begins to dissipate, and Bobcat feels a lightening in her bones—even in the air itself. And now she feels hungry. So hungry. The awareness of this is so strong and sudden that she staggers. She she needs to eat, desperately!

Bobcat has been foraging since she was knee-high, and is soon in gathering mode. Many of the plants she would usually search for have been submerged by the water, but there are a few acorns and other fare scattered around. Not much, but enough to feed her as she wanders.

Walk on, she must. Something draws her and, though she still cannot sense the Habitant's voices or the ghosts' whispers, she trusts that something must be guiding her. This is how the world works. Yet, this is new territory for her and she is miles from familiar trails. She stops, realising that she is utterly lost, unsure of where she is and where she is going.

Breath. Presence. She turns to practice again. Look at where the stream is flowing, she tells herself. It is a directional signpost she is familiar with, and will lead somewhere other than this desolate, claustrophobic wood. The channels, however, are in full chaotic flow and it's impossible to see the direction the original watercourse might be heading.

Breath. Presence. Follow the higher ground, she thinks, and starts to climb a nearby hillock towards a small summit, on the other side of which is...more water.

Breath. Presence. Let's not get lost in panic, though everything else seems lost right now.

Breath. Presence. Through the trees she sees a change in the tone of the light. It is not sunlight descending in shafts, more a spreading illumination. She scrambles towards it, which takes longer than it looks like it should, and emerges—scratched and newly saturated from several tumbles into

streams and bushes on the way—into a clearing.

What opens up is utterly unexpected. Instead of endless trees and the rustling sounds and faint calls of Habitants, there is a hum of Human activity and Lectrix. As her eyes become accustomed to the brightness, she sees a cluster of buildings—brick-built like those on the flooded estate back home. These, however, are not ruined, empty homes for restless ghosts, but buzzing with life. Human life.

Her instinct is to fall back into the familiar cover of the trees, but her human mind is thinking now and there seems little to be gained in returning to the forest. Cautiously, she approaches the nearest building. She can see there are people walking around the area. Most look purposeful, some are relaxed, chatting, enjoying the warmth of new sunshine. There are as many people here as she would usually see in the Town, on the few times she ventures in.

At first no-one notices her; then there are some curious glances—not unfriendly—but she must look very bedraggled and strange to these cleanly clothed Humans. They are dressed a bit like the people she met in the wood—simple, easy garments in subdued colours, and certainly not Teck made.

Some look towards her as she stands stock still. Her habits of surviving in the world have deserted her. The Habitants are silent, the ghosts are gone. All that is left is a small, wet, ragged human in an unexpected and very Human place.

"I feel strange" she thinks, "Me, me, me" - as if she is practicing saying the word.

Her body is calm. She is composed, silent and still, as one of the people approaches—concern on their face – and speaks to her. She cannot hear the words. Does not respond. Stares blankly. Allows herself to be led along a path, through a door and into one of the brick buildings. Follows down a lit corridor, to a room with a bed.

Bobcat sleeps...

When she wakes, and has been gently bathed, dressed and fed by quiet, kindly folk, she feels certain that she must no longer be a Lostling. Here, now, in this place, she can only be a Human. This

thought surprises her, but it seems true. Everything she has known of her is gone, and what is left is a young, underfed, tatty-looking human animal. One that she sees in the mirror in this plain and comfortable room.

She begins to wander the corridors of these strange buildings – unhindered, and unchallenged. It occurs to her that there are connections in the world of which she has been entirely ignorant. If she had spent more time attending Homeschool, maybe she'd know a little more?

The thought tails off. Another one takes over.

Humans connect with each other. She remembers Mamma, Gramma and Dadda, with affection and feels their loss. She misses Jake and Flute, when she thinks of them (which isn't often.) Yet, she has never engaged with people like these, and has little

in the way of conversation to offer. Fortunately, for the most part, they leave her alone, nodding a greeting or asking if she would like something.

The Habitant voices are silent and her ghost sense is gone. There is nothing but a swirl of questions turning around in her mind. She feels panic rising. Breath. Presence. She practices her shut-down, then picks up her Pad—she has Contact in this Human place—and wonders whether to call Flute or Jake first to share the startling family news.

Each morning, as soon as she wakes, questions start whirling. The thoughts are like voices, but all of them her own. The ones she has known, and now craves, are silent—as if her mind has been hollowed out. She is left with being Human, like all these people walking about this strange place.

A human person, just like everyone else. ∞

Music from the Imaginings Ensemble, remixed by Patrick Carpenter



tinyurl.com/imaginingsremix-2

the wheel
on a modern
a sweet tongued fire in dark waters
is so shaping of reality,
and I learned to love the space
trapped behind the blinds of my eyes.
The name of the deck says it all, as
The world gently turns on its dark
violet axis.
The emptiness of the tiny hands is
revealed for what it is.
Her song hitches, as always.
I imagine walking through the woods
within the euphonic cacophony of
everything.

A fox's song and a sweet tongued fire

- 34 NESLI ERGÜN – Take five
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- 64 TEMPIST JADE – Pandemonious revelations: the terra-fying mystery of belonging (part 2)
- + Within and between: sandworm art & textures by MARY THORP, art by NESLI ERGÜN & the remixed music of PATRICK CARPENTER & THE IMAGININGS ENSEMBLE.

< This poem uses words and phrases
from pieces in this section.
Hear it read by Steve Thorp.
Music accompaniment
by Ruth Thorp.



tinyurl.com/UP9-2foundpoem2

NESLI ERGÜN – Retreat







RACHEL STANWORTH

There is a flame

(After Rumi)

There is a flame burning bright
at the bottom of an ocean,
whose depth will never be known.

Look into my eyes
and you will see its flicker.

Observe moss on a stone,
hold its weight against your cheek,
experience the velvety softness
caressing hard rock.

Now tell me there cannot be
a sweet tongued fire
in dark waters.

Tell me there is not a man or woman
in every child, a death
that slithers in with every birth.

I say this not to frighten you,
but to help you understand
there is nowhere
in this whole wide world
you cannot call home.

JULIETTA CERIN

The space in it

I FIND HOPE in the unexpected.

To put it another way: my hope is sustained by what I don't know.

I didn't know, when I started this job, that ninety percent of my clients would be men in prison. I'd never been to a prison. I didn't know how it would go, for me or for them. Would I hate it? Would I cope? Could I relate to these people whose lives—the world, the culture they know—are so different to mine? Would they give me the time of day?

I call a man in jail. Let's call him Phil. I've spoken to Phil three or four times in eight months, always briefly. He's a 'man of few words'—of the type who speak little in any conversation, avoid personal topics at all costs, and would never put their hand up for therapy.

In these cases I don't push it, I respect the client's way of coping. Prison is not a safe place, and in the absence of other resources, people figure out their own way to survive. Most arrive at a kind of homeostasis that I don't hazard to touch, to disrupt; to do so would be both presumptuous and unsafe.

Australia's National Redress Scheme offers financial and personal acknowledgement, by institutions, to people who were harmed by sexual abuse as children in their care. My job is to help people apply to the Scheme, completing the lengthy form (including a detailed account of the abuse) as safely as possible,

while keeping a holistic eye on other needs as well.

It's a muddled job, and one I'm often overwhelmed by: partly clerical, fitting messy stories of trauma onto the bureaucratic template; partly practical, concrete help within limits, only no-one is sure what the limits are; and slightly therapeutic, packing a little counseling around the work like cotton wool on a wound, only no-one knows how much.

The Redress Scheme offers monetary payments, so it draws in folk who'd never otherwise raise their hand for therapy. It's ground-breaking, and the kind of changes this might produce in our society and culture are colossal in scale, and entirely unknowable. For instance, on average it takes decades (for men, over two decades) to disclose experiences of child sexual abuse for the first time. Many never disclose at all. The Redress Scheme is time limited and therefore provides an incentive for large numbers of survivors to disclose in a specific time frame. (The NRS is currently receiving 200 applications per week.) What further currents, undercurrents, riptides, might it create in society, to alter patterns of disclosure so dramatically and abruptly?

Trauma is so shaping of reality. As a human being, if you go through something so scary or horrifying that the inbuilt alarm system in your brain perceives a threat to your survival, your primal 'survival brain' takes over. If this happens too often, or

goes on for too long, it can leave lasting effects on your body, brain and mind.

Your brain's threat-detection system may become over-sensitised, so the whole world (and especially other people, if the trauma was caused by people) seem dangerous. This may have you react to ordinary situations as if your life were in danger. When your 'survival brain' detects a situation that in some way resembles the original trauma, blood flows away from your brain to your limbs, so planning and logical thought become difficult, and over time this can become chronic.

Your nervous system may idle too high or too low, so a state of relaxed alertness in which you can learn or function well is elusive. Memories of the event aren't properly 'time-stamped' in your brain, and intrude willy-nilly as flashbacks or nightmares, uncontrollable and unwanted. Sets of sensations get 'stuck' in the body as mostly unconscious patterns or behaviours. Even if you're aware of them, you likely won't realise they're related to the traumatic events you remember. The chronic stress in your body may cause a range of real physical ailments. You may use drugs or alcohol to shut down the sense of danger, the physical sensations, the memories and flashbacks.¹

All of this shapes your perceptions, motivations, choices, reactions, stances towards other people and the world, in ways you're not even aware of. Scale this up to families, companies, governments, or entire populations (the prison population are almost universally trauma survivors), ethnic groups or nations, and it becomes a lens through which to interpret how not only individual experiences but social phenomena such as politics, war, migration and criminality are shaped. And so to change trauma—to create opportunities on a mass scale for people to talk about and relate differently to their own trauma, and for others to become aware of and relate to it—creates a rich vast wide-open space for imagining many different shapings of reality, both individual and collective.

Phil has avoided talking about his abuse, but this morning he says he's psyched up and wants to "get

it off his chest." I listen intently and type feverishly as he speaks of being groomed and abused in foster care, of the confusion and terrible shame he's carried secretly all these years.

I later can't recall what prompted the intuition, but I ask if Phil has a mental picture of himself at that age. "Yes." I ask, "Where is little Phil in the picture? Still in that house?" Again he answers "Yes." Before I know it, I find myself improvising a brief introduction to one of the ways that trauma can impact the personality, especially when it happens to children or adolescents: bits of our personality can remain 'stuck' at the time of the trauma, believing it's happening now.

I ask if there's anything he'd like to tell Little Phil. He answers surprisingly readily: *it's not your fault, you've done nothing wrong, and I'm getting justice for you now with this application.* We agree, again briefly (he remains a man of few words), that the aim is for Little Phil to understand that it's now 2022, and a grown-up Phil is in charge. We discuss how grown-up Phil might be able to take the little one to a safer place.

It's not textbook. No-one would recommend doing this kind of therapy this way—in a single conversation, a brief snatch, with no preamble and likely no follow-up. I'm very aware that I may never again discuss this with Phil. Prison work is unpredictable and discontinuous; visits get cancelled, people get moved or released. The system is as oblivious to my plans as to the prisoners' wishes and needs.

But sometimes the moment arrives, the door opens and therapy happens. Those moments are as precious as they are unpredictable. It's a single idea—and the road to recovery is paved with a thousand ideas—but it's a gleaming idea that might just bring a shift. Sometimes a snippet of information is all a person needs to take it and run with it.

I suggest: "Just play with this. If it's helpful, keep doing it—if it gets you upset, chuck it." I warn: "If it takes you into any dark places, stop." And I get the sense that Phil is entirely capable of this—of choosing whether it's safe and useful for him. He has a

strong sense of both his capacity and his vulnerability. He has to; he's survived alone for a very long time.

For the rest of the conversation, he repeatedly mentions 'Little Phil,' of his own volition, when I've already changed topic. This has really struck a chord in the man; one I would never have guessed was in him.

I love it when clients surprise me, when they show me they're capable of more than I imagined. I'm a person easily discouraged. Strength in the face of blows—that's not me. I crumble at the first knock. I grew up with adults in chaos, who didn't know how to self-regulate. I never learned to think, "this will pass" or "things will get better"—they never did. They got worse.

But if resilience is defined as 'bouncing back' from blows, perhaps my own recovery taught me a bit about that. What-I-don't-know had been my nemesis, the thorn in my side, the shadow at my back, and at a certain point became the defining element in my life, threatening to crush my future in its annihilating grip.

And it failed. And I learned to love the space in that. I learned that despair is a form of arrogance—how presumptuous it was, imagining I could predict every outcome and rule out every possibility! I learned also to pay attention to little things and to savour their value—in themselves, and as markers of the richness of what-I-don't-know.

Until I went to the high security prison, several months into the job, I didn't know the men who spoke to me on the phone were in a tiny booth, one metre square, with walls of glass. They're on display to all the men in both wings of the division, and to the guards—who can listen in to the call. When first confronted with this, I didn't know if it was safe or possible to discuss abuse at all in these conditions. If we did, I imagined the conversations could have no therapeutic potential or impact. How could they?

I visit a man in jail. Let's call him Dave. The first time I met Dave, he had someone's initials burned into his face. That red weal has haunted me ever since.

Since that first visit, I've talked to Dave on the phone a few more times, and written down his account of abuse. He was always cagey, remote. The next time I tried to book a call they said he'd been released. I had no more news of him for a month, when I heard he was back in jail.

Like Dave, most of the men I work with were sexually abused in juvenile detention, aged eleven, twelve, thirteen, and have been in and out of prison ever since. Prison is all they know, their only experience, their single milieu, their one set of skills for survival. When trouble has hold of a life so thoroughly, from so far back, I really struggle to hold out hope for change.

Dave didn't contact me while he was out; I'm convinced no useful work can happen here, apart from the application.

With that in mind, I meet with him to get the application signed. My approach is: let's get this done, with minimum fuss. Dave tells me he was released on parole. On the first morning, as required, he turned up at the parole office. He was given a list of conditions and requirements he found unexpected, overwhelming and unmanageable. As Dave listened he knew he could never comply—they were setting him up to fail.

Overnight his anxiety escalated to uncontrollable. He cut off the tracking bracelet and absconded. On the run for a month, he says he tried to contact me a couple of times, but didn't leave a message. I now understand why.

Dave tells me he does want help—he wants to work on his anxiety, and also get help for his drug habit (which he uses to mask the anxiety). But he says he wants to do it in his own time, in his own way, not with someone breathing down his neck and commanding every move. "Maybe that sounds piss-weak," he adds.

I tell him, not at all, and offer the idea of "getting back in the driver's seat"—how the core of trauma is powerlessness, a terrifying experience over which one has no control, and as long as Dave's trauma responses and his attempts to soothe them (with drugs) dictate his choices, the abuser has still been

driving Dave's life all this time.

Dave then says he's been thinking a lot about the link between his abuse, his drug use, and why he keeps coming to prison. He says he can see now how he got on this path, and that he wants to leave it. He articulates this with perhaps the most striking metaphor I've ever heard from a client: "I want to *step out*, and look back at this person I've been."

Like Phil, Dave has never spoken to anyone before me about the sexual abuse. He tells me today he nearly didn't go through with it. He also explains it's terribly embarrassing to take my calls—after every stint in that glass booth, other men quiz him on who he talked to. Mortifying.

And yet he persisted. He tells me today, "I've been

thinking a lot about this—I think of it all the time. I lie awake at night thinking about it. I never understood before—the link between the abuse and where I am now. It's only since I started talking to *you*, that I understand."

So much weight on the small word 'you.' And here I was, thinking I couldn't reach him.

Dave's journey won't be easy. There's no easy way to switch paths. The obstacles are daunting, and countless. And yet *without even knowing it at the time*, I have offered this man a chance, a window onto a different life.

I don't know what Dave will do with his new insight. Right there, in the not-knowing, is space for hope. ∞

NOTES

Articles about the physiology of trauma:

- *Both Your Body and Brain Are Different After Trauma. What to Know*, Leamey T. & Sun V., CNET, online article dated 5 Nov 2022, available at www.cnet.com/health/mental/how-trauma-makes-neurobiological-changes-to-your-brain-and-body/
- *The Physiology of Trauma*, Boston Evening Therapy Associates, online article dated 19 December 2016, available at bostoneveningtherapy.com/the-physiology-of-trauma/
- Traumatic stress: effects on the brain, Douglas J Brenner, MD, *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 2006 Dec; 8(4): 445–461, available at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3181836/

- Why the symptoms of trauma make sense, Carolyn Spring, September 2021, on her own blog www.carolynspring.com/blog/why-the-symptoms-of-trauma-make-sense/

Other trauma resources:

My understanding of and approach to treating trauma is closely aligned with that of Dr Janina Fisher (see janinafisher.com/tmodel/). More information about trauma and particularly complex trauma (usually a result of repeated trauma experienced by a child or young person) can be found at Blue Knot blueknot.org.au

ELIZABETH BOQUET

In sight, out of mind

I think in our conversations,
between my ears — behind
the blinds of my eyes — as if
we were talking over drinks.

You're comfier listening,
in my mind. I'm fully captivating.
You guzzle me down until
I'm through. Then I do you.

Our punch-drunk banter plays on
all night, in my mind, between
my ears, trapped behind the blinds
of my eyes, out of sight.

YVAN GREENBERG

Altar for the Spotted Lanternfly

Altar

A sacred place
To pause to notice
Something differently
To come face
To face with an
Other and be changed.

MY PARTNER AND I were enjoying cocktails and conversation with a few close friends in our apartment in New York City. I don't recall how, but conversation turned to the Spotted Lanternfly. If 2020–22 were the Years of COVID, it has sometimes felt in NYC as though 2022–2023 have been the Years of the Spotted Lanternfly. Our friends related how they had come across a tree covered with these insects and did everything they could to scrape them off the tree trunk and stomp and squash them to smithereens, just as everyone—ecologists, local government officials, the media—was asking of us: “See it? Squish it!” I was horrified by their tale, though I said nothing at the time. Something about the enjoyment that they seemed to take in doing their part to eradicate this so-called “invasive species” stuck with me uncomfortably for months. And so it's to sit with this discomfort that I write this—to erect this altar for the Spotted Lanternfly, and for other members of the community of life on this planet who have been labeled as “invasive

species,” “non-native species,” “exotics,” “weeds,” or “pests.”

The story we've been told about the Spotted Lanternfly, *Lycorma delicatula*, is that it is “native” to China and likely arrived in the U.S. in 2012 as egg masses on a shipment of stone to Pennsylvania. The first “infestation” observed was in 2014 in Berks County, PA, in a wooded area of *Ailanthus altissima*, or Tree of Heaven (also an “invasive”). As is the case with the spread of many insects and plants dubbed “invasive,” it is actually “transportation by human activity [that] is the most common form of movement, and the main reason spotted lanternfly populations have spread significant distances.”¹ Concern about *Lycorma delicatula* centers on the prospect of economic damage for “residents, businesses, tourism, forestry, and agriculture. Their presence has led to crop loss, exporting issues, and increased management costs,” with particular concern for grape farming. However, it is too soon after their arrival to the U.S. to know how significant the economic damage might be. It's important to note, however, that “spotted lanternflies do *not* appear to be damaging trees or most agricultural crops...but the issue is still being studied.”²

While we assign these insects and plants a nefarious intent by labeling them “invasive,” human activity is the majority cause for their dispersion. We could certainly think of the Spotted Lanternfly

as having been transported against their will, but I doubt anyone believes that their *intentions* are to “invade.” Invasion requires an intent. Why is it that we use language that assigns the Spotted Lanternfly the agency of invasion, yet our culture generally denies the agency of most other-than-human beings?

From a contemporary animist perspective, I see an invitation here based on my understanding that all living beings are “persons” — though I continually wonder if there’s not a better, less anthropocentric term to use — and that, as persons, they all have wisdom, agency, and interiority. A subjective experience. There’s an invitation to engage with *Lycorma delicatula* to inquire *from them* about their experience. In many traditional and Indigenous cultures world-wide, not only are plants, animals, stones, and bodies of water (to name just a few) considered to be “persons,” but they are also considered to be kin, and these familial relationships are often based on the uses of their gifts.

While of course no two Indigenous cultures or people have the same worldview or follow the same protocols, determining the nature of new relationships often begins with introducing oneself and asking the other what gifts they have to impart — and this extends to introduced or ‘invasive’ species.³ To relate to the Spotted Lanternfly in new ways, through new stories, outside of the frame of invasion, I want to ask Spotted Lanternfly questions. Divination can provide one method or interface for communication with other-than-human beings.

Conversing with *Lycorma delicatula*

As a scholar of divination and also a practicing, professional diviner, I see divination as providing the means for going beyond culturally conditioned ways of thinking/perceiving, as a method for engaging in imaginal research. Given that even how and what we can imagine are likely shaped by modernity/coloniality, divination offers the potential for opening unforeseen vistas to imagining otherwise. The kind of imaginings that we need in order to “stay with the trouble,” to use Donna Haraway’s phrase, and create richer, more complexity-capable and response-able multi-species navigations with the world as things fall apart.

Cartomancy, divination with cards, is my particular area of study/practice, and so I sit here at my altar for *Lycorma delicatula* with a tarot deck in hand. I interpret the cards primarily based on what happens visually in the images, and by making analogical connections between the images and the context of the question. I’ve chosen to use a non-traditional deck to celebrate the kind of reworlding I’m looking to imagine. The name of the deck says it all — it’s the *Carnival at the End of the World Tarot*, created by Nicolas Kahn and Richard Selesnick. The images are peopled with strange human/animal hybrids, concatenated creatures participating in the festival of a world that’s falling apart.

I shuffle the deck of cards thoroughly, and lay down a line of three randomly selected cards to answer the following question: *Spotted Lanternfly, what gift or teaching do you have to share?*

Spotted Lanternfly, what gift or teaching do you have to share?

7 Swords - 8 Batons -
The Lovers



Based on these cards, a teaching here is to see the damage and twisted spirits born from how we use language/regulations (7 Swords) to ride on the backs of other beings in the name of growth/agriculture (8 Batons), and our naked complicity in the ever-more-constrictive trappings of industrial-age mindsets as we stand here stranded on this rock we call Spaceship Earth (The Lovers.) The Lovers card also speaks to significant otherness. Looking at the bottom of each image, I'm struck by how the pile of paper at the bottom of the first card looks like a pool of water, which gradually dries up over the next two cards, leaving the humans standing on a bare slag heap. The words we use matter. The concepts they carry matter.

Invasive Ideologies

Scientific and industrial ways of knowing—thinking of the natural world as mechanical, as resources to extract, study, operationalize—have resulted in many of the crises we face today. The idea that humans are separate from, and superior to, nature has attempted to remove all agency from the other-than-human world. But the world keeps on world-ing, life keeps on life-ing.

If we were to consider the Spotted Lanternfly as an immigrant—a *human* immigrant—would people who consider themselves as having “good, Liberal, humanist” values take such glee in vast, public, science-backed, media-fueled, state-sanctioned campaigns of violence and eradication?⁴ Ever since my friends relayed their story to me, I haven't been able to shake this analogy, and I'll return to the implications of this later.

Of general concern with any “invasive species,” is whether their introduction to a “non-native” ecosystem ends up creating a loss of biodiversity. Not enough time has passed to know whether the Spotted Lanternfly leads to this kind of effect. However, species designated as “invasive” or “non-native” do not universally or inherently cause biodiversity loss.

Ecologist Mark Davis, along with 18 of his colleagues in the field, notes that:

Certainly, some species introduced by humans have driven extinctions and undermined important ecological services such as clean water and timber resources. ...But many of the claims driving people's perception that introduced species pose an apocalyptic threat to biodiversity are not backed by data. ...Indeed, recent analyses suggest that invaders do not represent a major extinction threat to most species in most environments.⁵

Counter to the pervasive narrative, introduced species often increase the number of species in a region.⁶ Japanese honeysuckle, first introduced to the United States in the 1800s, does grow aggressively, quickly overtaking “native” plants. However, “its ‘fruit and vegetative growth...furnish food and cover for many bird and mammal species,’”⁷ and “in Pennsylvania, more non-native honeysuckles mean more native bird species.”⁸

Davis adds that while “the effects of ‘non-native’ species may vary with time, and species that are not causing harm now might do so in the future...the same is true of ‘natives,’ particularly in rapidly changing environments.”⁹ It's also important to recognize that what we consider to be harmful may belie the political and economic motivations of “industrial and national-scale interests—forestry, agriculture, fisheries, and tourism”¹⁰ for example—that are rooted in colonial, capitalist, extractive, terraforming patterns.

It is possible that spotted lanternflies will have unforeseen damaging effects on the new ecosystems—and/or economies—they find themselves in. We just don't know yet. They may simultaneously bring with them gifts, experiences, and stories that challenge how we've been conditioned to perceive and relate to them. Haraway writes about significant otherness and what it means to build naturecultures with companion species. Given the complexity of how entangled our world is, is there any organism on the planet that *isn't* companioning us, that *isn't* a significant other to our human species?

*What do you need?
What do you want now that
you've moved/been moved to
new lands?*

3 Cups - 9 Swords/Arrows
- 3 Swords/Arrows



What does it mean to move and be moved?

I take up the tarot cards, place the cards from my first reading back into the deck, and shuffle thoroughly again. To ask Spotted Lanternfly: *What do you need? What do you want now that you've moved/been moved to new lands?*

It looks to me like Spotted Lanternfly simply wants to continue enjoying copious amounts of the sap it feeds on (3 Cups), and to fly from place to place while avoiding harm (9 Swords). In other words, they simply want to live. But in the process, perhaps they also want to skewer our preconceptions of what “home” means (3 Swords).

Much has been written about the variety of mechanisms—often peculiar mechanisms—employed by organisms to transport their species to lands beyond their initial point of origin. “Things that lived together in the past don't live together now, and things that live together now didn't live together in the past. ...At any given time during a migration, particular organisms happen to be grouped together, but those groupings are just snapshots of a continuously changing reality.”¹¹

Animals and plants have always wandered, whether by their own accord or not—such as birds dispersing plant seeds by eating them in one location and then shitting them out in another. If we focus too much on the human introduction of “non-native” species as somehow “worse” than other-than-human methods of species migration, isn't this continuing to replicate the colonial, anthropocentric mythology of human exceptionalism and separation from nature?

As an animist, I'm open to the possibility that Spotted Lanternfly may have intentionally played a role in their migration. The Spotted Lanternfly is like the Honeysuckle, whose “movement is perceived as a problem and labeled as a threat” by federal and state governments in the U.S. But this movement is simply life: “annual growth, the blossoming of buds into flowers, the birth and development of leaves. Honeysuckle's movement is not motivated by opposing the settler state. ...It is not invading. It is flourishing.”¹² It is flourishing that Spotted Lanternfly desires, with no conception of nation-state, citizenship, or invasion/conquest.

Looking at all the tarot cards that have appeared in my readings thus far, there is a preponderance of the suit of Swords/Arrows. Swords are trouble, pain, used for cutting, and arrows for piercing. It's undeniable that coming into new relationships with other beings—other humans as well as other-than-humans—is not necessarily a clean or painless process. Our attempts to eradicate “invasives,” “weeds,” “pests,” are also part of a modern/colonial desire for things to be neat and tidy. To not have to deal with the mess of it all.

The labeling and classifying of all things into delimited, fully described (and thus supposedly understood) categories is also a method for codifying purity. The language of “native” vs. “non-native” species has clearly colonial and racialized connotations. Indeed, “the concept of nativeness was first outlined by the English botanist John Henslow in 1835. By the late 1840's, botanists had adapted the terms ‘native’ and ‘alien’ from common law to help

What could our worlding
together look like instead?
Justice - Wheel of
Fortune - High Priestess



them distinguish those plants that composed a ‘true’ British flora from ‘artifacts’ of other cultures/lands¹³ This dynamic appeared even earlier in the U.S. when the New England Federalists imposed their racist fears about Irish and French radicals onto plant life, to foster a “biological nativism [that] is inseparable from the perceived racial superiority of whites and the transformations of settler society.”¹⁴

The move of linking nativist political ideologies to flora and fauna can be seen more recently and clearly in Nazi Germany:

In advocating native plants along the Reichsautobahnen, Nazi architects of the Reich’s motor highways explicitly compared their proposed restriction to Aryan purification of the people. By this procedure, Reinhold Tüxen hoped “to cleanse the German landscape of unharmonious foreign substance.” In 1942 a team of German botanists made the analogy explicit in calling for the extirpation of *Impatiens parviflora*, a supposed interloper: “As with the fight against Bolshevism, our entire Occidental culture is at stake, so with the fight against this Mongolian invader, an essential element of this culture, namely, the beauty of our home forest, is at stake.”¹⁵

It is impossible to disentangle concepts of “native” and “non-native” species from the purity politics of eugenics. The evolutionary lineage of

which humans today are a part began 30 million years ago when prehistoric fish began crawling out of the sea—from an evolutionary standpoint, perhaps we were all invasive once. However, some humans, white settler-colonialists, have been more invasive than others. What exactly does “home” mean given these histories?

And yet...

To wrap up this experiment of imagining otherwise, beyond the dominant framing of our relationship to “invasive species,” mess and all, I pose a final question to the cards: *What could our worlding together look like instead?*

A more just world perhaps, but one where justice isn’t solely a human enterprise. A justice that doesn’t continue to perpetuate the same cycles of justice/injustice we’re used to—no longer that of the proverbial dancing bear, wildness made captive to entertain or pacify us with its loud organ grinder tunes. “Justice” may not even be the appropriate word to use—what’s pictured here isn’t tied to our current understandings of the word.

The High Priestess is often said to be silent. Like the feather on Justice’s scales, she barely touches the ground. Perhaps the justness of a world beyond human/nature dualisms is a quieter and lighter one. And like the antlered/tree/woman, perhaps if we repair the human/nature separation at the heart of modernity/coloniality, see that it was an illusion to begin with, and re-kin ourselves with the rest of the

other-than-human world, we'll become more gentle in how we tend the world, and thus lighter in heart.

AND YET. Even as I attempt to read the cards as a method of imagining otherwise, I can't help but be struck by the possibility that I, too, am exploiting the Spotted Lanternfly here for my own aims. Why shoulder this beautiful winged creature with my wrestling/writing about coming to terms with the mental constructs that modernity/coloniality has saddled us with? Is the turn to divination simply another manifestation of the need for answers, closure, some kind of certainty? Is reading the cards with an aim towards telling the future—even in an imaginative, speculative, nonanthropocentric, and, indeed, spirit-directed way—any different from all the other ways we tell stories about what the future may hold, for better or for worse?

My point here is not to pass judgment. In fact, it

is precisely *not* to pass judgment—thereby serving up yet another claim to certainty—but to continue to stay with the trouble. Divination can foster the hyper-self-reflexivity required for becoming aware of how we are shaped by modernity/coloniality, and push imagination beyond conditioned thought. “To imagine...is to conjure an idea, a feeling, a thought, a sensory or affective response that was not present before the act of conjuring began... All those movements that clear space and mark our struggle to live free, live better, love more, to knit abundance, all that is the work of another realm that is not-here.”¹⁶ We need these imaginings now more than ever, not as escape from the present or from the trouble, and not with any claim to certainty, but as acts of enchantment for co-creating a future of flourishing with the world. ∞

NOTES

- 1 Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, “*Stop the Spread of Spotted Lanternfly*,” accessed Nov 18, 2022: <https://cals.cornell.edu/new-york-state-integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/whats-bugging-you/spotted-lanternfly/stop-spread-spotted-lanternfly>
- 2 Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, “*Spotted Lanternfly Damage*,” accessed Nov 18, 2022: <https://cals.cornell.edu/new-york-state-integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/whats-bugging-you/spotted-lanternfly/spotted-lanternfly-damage>
- 3 See for example: Reo, Nicholas and Laura Ogden, “Anishnaabe Aki: An Indigenous Perspective on the Global Threat of Invasive Species,” *Sustainability Science*, May 4 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4>
- 4 All one has to do is peruse the comment sections on social media posts about the Spotted Lanternfly by major news organizations and municipal agencies to see the manic, rage filled glee that people seem to take in the idea of this kind of mass slaughter (comments which occasionally include explicitly xenophobic and racist language.) See for example at *The New York Times*, Sep 2, 2023: www.instagram.com/p/CwsVfvYObcX/; ABC News, Aug 17, 2023: www.facebook.com/ABC7NY/posts/pfbidou3fxSdpmCVgifTD-wAyqayPetJgS6HdDqkP6FGk9R3hvaqkKosD6jyKfjeE9wF4VDI; or NYC 311, Jul 4, 2023: www.instagram.com/p/CuSD-Zo1AUto
- 5 Davis, Mark, et al. “Don't Judge Species on Their Origins,” *Nature*, vol. 474, June 9, 2022, p. 153. Accessed: www.nature.com/articles/474153a.
- 6 Davis, et al. Ibid.
- 7 Hughes, Bethany, “Beautifully Uncontainable: Of Honey-suckle and Choctaw Walking,” *Mobilities*, 17:2, 238-251, 2022, p. 3. Accessed: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17450101.2021.2012504.
- 8 Davis, et al. also note that “the seed dispersal of native berry-producing plants is higher in places where non-native honeysuckles are most abundant.” p. 154.
- 9 Davis, et al. Ibid.
- 10 Dos Santos, Lucilene Lima, et al. “The Cultural Value of Invasive Species: A Case Study from Semi-Arid Northeastern Brazil,” *Economic Botany*, 68(3), 2014, p. 296–7. Accessed: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43305665>.
- 11 Trefil, James, “When Plants Migrate,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 1998. Accessed: <https://www.smithsonian-mag.com/science-nature/when-plants-migrate-156905950/>.
- 12 Hughes, p. 11–12
- 13 Davis, et al. p. 153
- 14 Bousfield, Dan, “Settler colonialism in vegetal worlds: exploring progress and resilience at the margins of the Anthropocene,” *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2020, p. 10. Accessed: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/2201473X.2019.1604297.

- 15 Gould, Stephen Jay, "An Evolutionary Perspective on Strengths, Fallacies, and Confusions in the Concept of Native Plants," *Arnoldia* 58 (1):11-19, 1998. p. 3-4. Accessed: <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1998-58-1-an-evolutionary-perspective-on-strengths-fallacies-and-confusions-in-the-concept-of-native-plants.pdf>.

- 16 Olufemi, Lola. *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*. United Kingdom, Hajar Press, 2021.

All illustrations: From *Carnival at the End of the World* Tarot by Nicolas Kahn and Richard Selesnick, 2017; author's photos.

Music from the Imaginings Ensemble, remixed by Patrick Carpenter



tinyurl.com/imaginings-remix-3



CATHERINE STREET

The lover's utopia

THERE IS A FRAGILE TRANQUILLITY caught in life's privileges. There is the golden egg, the pear tree and the peacock. I sit here in the garden, the white stillness of the city around me. I see a strange tower that contains a figurine of the Buddha. I feel the tender breeze in my dyed ash blonde hair. I wear my coat of pale mink, willing myself into existence. I hear voices and the rushing of water, a woman in a white robe feeds the ravens. There is sunlight on paper as the blue scribe chases our thoughts onto the checkerboard. There is sand obscuring ancient numerals. The hollow becomes the nothing, the no-place, the place holder. Early mathematics came before the scandal of madness I am inside now. There is a clay mountain, the tabletop ornament in the room of the physician. The growth of a ceramic heaven. As water trickles it gives me the therapeutic feels. There's an electronic puff ball that gives out perfumed ions in the sacred sanctuary of the hospital. There are fantastic draperies. I hear the Earth falling into the hands of the pastor. I am arrested in an eternal now. I don't care for the thoughts of the past. The terrific fierceness of Athens' woman philosophers who we shall never know. Thinking about the future is the mark of anxiety. I have no need of maxims or moral law. I face the circularity of time with grief and desirous wanting.

Enough of this sadness!

Birds are chirruping now as they throng the bright green trees, their iridescent feathers rustle. The grass grows with an eternal commitment to the spring. The first signs of beauty were the roots of the devil. The woman spurs the dry wick of a candle, a light in the outside of the garden. There is water in rills; rhododendrons staking their claim on the soil's rotten bounty. In the multiplicity of time there is decay in a thousand blades. Plants spread within subterranean cells, a delicate interaction, a plane inhabited by carbon and hydrogen. There are pikes in the water, their black eyes searching for ducklings. The comb of the cockerel is coated in platinum, forever in the present. I see the darkness of the yew tree as she feeds on the dead. I sit now in this blue-glass palace surrounded by the inertness of crystal. I see dark green triangular pools; there are shining streaks of oil on the surface. Skeins of water creep down granite slabs, the opal curves of the angels. Gabriel appears with her message of god seeping through the cervix. The sky is reflected on the surface of the water. As I write my pen glistens with moisture. There is a terrible amazement: a boy with fire in his hair on the inside of some great golden chamber. They listen. He cries as if in a furnace. There is a dirty yellow balloon that floats on the greatness of science's ethics.

Now we yearn to encounter the scholarly erotic

of the reading room. There is an avalanche effect of cumulative error. There is a dank framework impossible to escape. There are hurts in thought that cannot be resolved. Once renounced, we fail to bring precision into the light. I feel this fateful summarisation, a pattern of estimation, the approach of ideas whose clarity will resist being revealed. The characteristics of evil include a will to non-being. I am the not-aware of madness. Language is in crisis. Can a woman's body be the model for a perfect society? An attempt to create Paradise on Earth is the harshest of sins.

We are anxious as we watch the world unfold and unfurl with its vast estates of inequity. An unreal imagining to stave off imbalance. There are ways to experiment, to try out speech as the organism is cut off from mind. The flesh decomposes and morals flirt with expiration. Fault in thought passes into the evils of the world. I feel the pressure to make suggestions, to stand and pronounce on the ethics of study and academic striving. Striving instead for the freeing erasure of the self to leave words behind. Into the intellect's space of non-being, non-language where symbols are dreams and discourse is erotic replication. There is contact, there is friction between souls and worlds, the absence that proves the realness of the thing.

The world gently turns on its dark violet axis. There is a perturbation of the spirits as the red guardians of the ages penetrate the flesh. There are multi-coloured gourds—each split in delight. The soft sheen of an alien spacecraft. The clinginess of time. A child cries for the end of the world and you long for deliverance. To a no-place, a place beyond mind. The perfect melding of mental spirits—the hopes of a civilisation—are wrapped beneath my tongue. Taste my infinite lips and puckerings of form. There is the glinting of pressed roses, a scent that takes you far away from your troubles. The eroticism felt beneath cosmic risk and the swelling of the limbs, the casting of eyes. There is the column of movement, the orchestra of blood. Now is the time to retract your organic desperation. Flinging

the words of your inhibitions into a paradise of feelings. Outside the mind is the vindication of the flesh and the death of philosophy. Risk is desire's greatest gift.

The erotic of the empty hollow, body as a nothingness, a no-place of heresy and treason. The 'o' in the sand is a placeholder, ready to turn a unit into a multitude. Giving herself over to endless permutations and possibilities. The philosopher-messenger is dirty from nights spent on the streets. Hungry and abandoned, she told me that the world is far too complicated to think about cause and effect. She spreads her filthy tentacles into the spirit of the text. There she finds the relation of visions with reality, the grave sin of wanting things to be other than what they are. She is the god of paradox. The price of paradox is life, the price of paradise death. You will have a new kind of mind that never shrinks from the light. A perfect state of knowledge causes language to implode. To whom do the objects of madness and nothingness belong?

There was no formulation of nothing when mathematics was invented/discovered five thousand years ago. Basking in the unknown of the future to which we add our ideas of a better world, a hollow like a womb, ripe for the filling. Things and thoughts are modifications of emptiness. In the world beyond language we are free to imagine our own souls. We are infinitely penetrable by exotic particles that rush excitedly through us. We are without quantity, all prior forces carry a temporary limitlessness. The syntax of our dreams brings about multiplicity, the shrinking away of measurement from the beating hearts of being. Writing is a restless wandering in the destruction of unity. We are abundant and overflowing, proliferating and constantly in flux. The indeterminate unfolding into an infinity of life and time. We long for the eerie space of geometry that has no cause for judgements or decisions. There is a tumultuous fever of ideas, associations and inferences wildly multiplying within the creaturely warmth of consciousness. ∞

ZANELE MFONO

Zenani? A challenge of change

NEWBORN BABIES COMMONLY CLOSE their hands into tiny fists as if they are cautiously hiding something to the unknown world they are stepping into. The name Zenani actually asks the newborn, “What have you brought with you?” In due course the emptiness of the tiny hands is revealed for what it is, along with other secrets the new arrival brings along. But what does rapid social change bring along to societies steeped in traditions whose footprint indicates a direction which challenges social change?

After spending the year 2019 festive season at my three sisters’ different homes in South Africa’s fast growing town of Umtata, I felt really good about myself. The past year had ended well, what could possibly go wrong in the year ahead besides the “normal” irritations that attend the lives of senior citizens? I was at my home town whose congestion in some areas makes me feel dizzy. I had saved the last day after my holiday for the best: the day following New Year’s Day was reserved for a visit to Princess. I call her Princess, because she walks like a princess, and is indeed a princess in her family and in her clan. She is exactly five days younger than me, a voluptuous retired priestess, retired clinical psychologist and producer of the most exquisite Xhosa traditional craftwork creations, all folded up into one fun person who is forever peeping into what is

going on in my head.

Her home, which I was visiting, was not just a home, but a sizeable classy retreat establishment, which speaks to the owner’s impeccable taste and order as well as to the social stature of its former owner in the community. The establishment has a security guard who watches over its extensive walled-in premises, with several small cottages which provide accommodation for individuals and groups of visitors who visit, mostly for spiritual reasons.

Like my parents, Princess’ parents never had a son, but had four daughters instead, and Princess, being the eldest, became the heiress upon the end of her marriage. For me, Princess’ home oozes quiet dignity, combined with good taste, and Princess’ artistic head, with help from generations of gardeners’ sweaty hands re-modelled it from ordinary to extraordinary.

Upon my late afternoon arrival at Princess’ home I found Princess in the company of a fellow priestess. Predictably, our conversation could put the Book of Lamentations to shame, dwelling as it did on lamenting the social difficulties of present times. Don’t oldies tend to complain endlessly in their assessment of current scenarios, with resigned laments about the “good old days” which their parents had patiently drummed into their heads

against their resistance? The overlapping of old and new generational lifestyles create competition for ownership of current scenarios, with the young impetuously pointing out the exit doorway to the shocked imperious parental generation and its ways. This has been described as an adaptational breakdown. How extensive can such conflict be within a given society? And yet social change must go on.

The team of young people, consisting of Princess' young priestess cousin and her three sons aged 10, 8 and 6 years, and the household helper were bustling around the kitchen, readying the victuals for everyone on the premises. The supper table was a dignified formal seating for everyone, old and young. The meal was preceded by a short prayer of thanksgiving and followed by a quiet conversation. Towards the end of this seating, the hostess excused herself and went to the kitchen to dish out the lavish dessert she had personally prepared for the guests.

Very shortly after she left, the blindfolded and hand-cuffed security guard was pushed in through the dining room doorway by three gun wielding men, and this action was accompanied by a stern command "This is a hold up, put your cell phones on the table and lie down on the floor!" The atmosphere was instantly frozen as everyone grasped this threatening reality, deposited their phones on the table as instructed, pushed back the chair they had occupied and lay flat on the cold tiled floor. The cell phones were collected by one of the intruders, our pockets were searched for ammunitions or whatever tools the group might have used in defence.

Silence reigned for a while, as we adjusted our positions on the cold floor, but suddenly a piercing scream came from the kitchen, with pleadings for mercy. The imprisoned guests realized that two of the gunmen had taken their terror to the kitchen, where Princess was sorting out the dessert. What could be heard from her pleadings for mercy was that there was no safe or money on the property, and that there was no business of any nature conducted on the premises,. The intruders firmly insisted that they had inside information that there

were safes with money on the premises. Princess was wrestled, dragged and forced to trot at gunpoint, first to her own residence on the premises, which was searched thoroughly. They yanked and scuffed her mercilessly to each of the several cottages, through the evening darkness until every one of them was opened and searched.

This drama must have continued for some hours, with the rest of us lying in terrified obedience on the cold tiled floor. The third intruder, who I shall respectfully refer to as Mr Gunman, watched for the slightest movement from his pitiful prisoners, and occasionally barked threatening commands. I had prayed for my life at the onset of the ordeal, then prayed against any bloody violence on us all, shivering uncontrollably from both fear and cold. The three young boys quietly drew closer to each other into a warmth-sharing human bundle under the table. The boys did not look as terrified as the adults were. I reasoned that being bullied was as commonplace in their ranks as it was foreign to mine.

My deathly fear slowly abated and my body developed a sensible relationship with the cold floor. My position also allowed me to make an inspection of Mr Gunman at the doorway and try to understand him, confer a personality on him and gratefully acknowledge his favour in allowing us to live and resisting the temptation to demonstrate his power to extinguish our lives. He held on to the gun on his hand firmly, watchful and ready to react to any movement from his captives, especially from the security guard who received occasional kicks even while lying flat on the floor with his wrists tied behind his body. But Mr Gunman later became chatty, reassuring us that we only needed to do as we were commanded, to be safe.

Mr Gunman's chattiness was about the places they ply their trade at, mentioning Johannesburg as one of the places where they had "worked." He appeared to be trying to make us understand that we were not singled out in the plight we found ourselves in, and that we were just one of many "Work-places."

Lying quietly under the table on the cold floor, I

was positioned for an uninterrupted stare at Mr Gunman as he posed confidently at the doorway of the dining room. This staring was flooded with considerations of what might have pushed this young person into choosing bullying and criminality as a road to achievement. Mr Gunman's parents most likely knew nothing about the adventure he was presently engaged in. They would most likely be surprised to see him driving a car one day, from the returns from such adventures. They would buy into his story that the car belongs to a friend. Their home would be visited by police detectives looking for information about his whereabouts, which they would not have. He would enjoy popularity with the prettiest young girls, outclassing his age mates as well as the older men, who use their material advantage to prey on young girls. But the bubble would burst, sooner or later, leaving Mr Gunman's trail of false achievement behind for his parents, relatives and clan, former school mates and teachers all wondering in despair what went wrong and how they could have helped his patience with schooling and menial jobs on his way to better life opportunities.

Minutes must have turned into hours. Eventually, the search of every niche in the premises yielded no return for the intruders but they were not about to walk away empty handed. They turned their attention to the cell phones they had impounded for withdrawing money from the accounts of their intimidated hostages, who by now were desperate to be released from their agony. Bank details and pin codes were given, and two of the threesome drove to the nearest ATM for the loot. The release from intimidation came shortly before midnight, with stern warnings against reporting the incident to the police, because reprisal would follow if the police reported to were in the same league as the intruders!

Huddled together, the erstwhile hostages finally welcomed the cold night off the cold floor, just happy to be alive and escaping with no blood shed. The children headed to their bedroom instantly upon release, but the adults huddled together, sharing thoughts about the incident, considering the finan-

cial losses and the complete disregard of personal dignities by such young people. The intruders must have averaged thirty years in age, but were capable of wreaking guntoting bullying on a company constituted mostly of elderly women and children, without compunction.

I woke up very early from a restless and useless sleep the following morning, and with a determination to make the day really good, I refined my plans for it. I would not waste time with ablutions or wake anybody for a courteous goodbye. Despite my resolve to have a good day, a nervousness from the horrific event of the night before pestered me into an early morning unceremonious sneaking out into the five o'clock low traffic. I realized I was badly traumatized and needed to escape urgently, more than anything else. My business plans for the day also dictated that I should move on and move fast.

The tiny clenched fists babies arrive with, in reaction to the unceremonious interruption of a familiar womb environment at birth into a confusing world, may contain some clues on how they might handle traumatic life experiences. For me, the incident was a brutalizing continuation of the ongoing onslaught on women in our society. In my opinion the invasion of the retreat centre was planned in detail beforehand, whether with inside information or not, but with an understanding that once the security guard was captured, there were no men on the premises to offer formidable resistance at the time planned for the assault. In other words, there was an intentional targeting of a vulnerable setting, and women and children were targeted by a cowardly threesome. It was also ugly to me because the erstwhile owner of the premises invaded was my former high school principal, a highly respected person in his community, with professional discipline in his job, and commanding respect in his home district and in the country. Princess, the current owner of the premises, was a retired clinical psychologist and priest providing support services to clergymen, women, youth and laity. Her stature and disposition were of a dignified woman in her clan, both nationally and locally. To me, both the home in a physical

sense and its erstwhile, current and concurrent human occupants deserved veneration, certainly not being rubbished in the way it was by criminality. However, I was forced to agree with Princess that no one can consider themselves exempt from criminal invasion of their home or business. That is what lawlessness is all about.

Despite my resolve to lock the previous night's incident out of my thoughts, my mind refused and laboured endlessly on it, as if my life depended on it. Turning to myself and my reaction when the intrusion was in progress, I realized that the joke was on me for not just becoming old, but also becoming ancient. The gunmen were not only my sons and grandsons culturally. They were also sons of parents who had proudly assembled their extended families, along with their entire communities to ceremonial celebrations of their sons' attainment of manhood. That event was filled with pomp, ceremony and gifts for the initiates, squeezed out from meager budgets of mothers, grandmothers, relatives and friends. That event was also celebrated with drinking and feasting, all in recognition of the initiates' attainment of maturity, with the family and social responsibility expectations that milestone entails.

Amongst the people in the communities like mine, male initiation rites are time honoured social and cultural events, that are not just traditional, but indeed sacred. They are teaching institutions designed to transition young males into the responsibilities of manhood ahead. And therein arises the question of what responsibilities of manhood are instilled, especially in the face of rapid social change. One must enquire what changes have been spawned as responsibilities of the various age and gender components of the societies concerned. The question of what the content of the teaching of young males within the initiation rites boils down to, what the messages shared with initiates entering the new threshold of their lives are, in a rapidly changing context. Reasonable conjecture assumes that discipline, courage, how to be reputable and responsible men with the capacity to contribute positively to society are some of the core messages.

But in the face of the fast growing incidence of crime, one must enquire how earnestly are young men adjured to consider being honourable and respectable adult men, becoming assets rather than liabilities even under challenging circumstances, being protectors of the vulnerable in their communities? The need to work hard to earn a living, rather than becoming rapacious parasites trying to pin the outcomes of their own work-shyness to everything else other than themselves? How do sniffing around for safes containing money, burglaries and violent killings sneak into the survival options of subjects who emerge from a venerable customary blessing? Something appears to be amiss in this scenario and warrants serious consideration.

The question of a value system instilled into young male initiates should not be a subject of conjecture, for various reasons. They are young, strong, virile, with the built-in capacity to inflict harm at its highest to the weakest and most vulnerable. Letting them loose with no strings to hold them back is potentially dangerous to the vulnerable members of society, especially women and children, whom they might view as easy prey.

The problem is that initiation rites are traditionally located in the hands of gerontocracy. Young people have successfully moved the mountain of tertiary education once located out of their reach. What might be their next challenge? Possibly crime and corruption at all levels. Analysts of social change and futurists have carried out their analyses as if societies with entrenched traditions exist outside the realm of societies. The spade work in gender relations will hopefully not escape the notice of many young male adults because of its potential obstructionist role to their aspirations.

Even though Mr Gunman arrested both my gaze and my thoughts, the three young brothers who made a warm bundle cluster alongside me, sat quietly, their eye movements apparently taking in what was going on around them. But what was going on in their minds? Young boys like toy guns and the heroic ambush that sometimes comes with rescue scenarios. I could not help considering the domino


effect of this experience on them. Fortunately they did not appear to be plotting a heroic rescue attempt for us. But what did this experience prompt in their young minds? What would their threesome take away from the cooperative effort of the threesome that was holding us ransom?

While I thought the joke is on me in considering old people and small children as deserving protection in their vulnerability, the much more serious joke on me, upon dismissing the fright of facing the barrel of a gun, is a realization of the visual acuity of the intruders at the retreat center. They most likely have noted a state of affairs characterized by a messy clambering for amassing wealth by unfair means, even at the cost of losing respectability. They probably are aware of the skillful maneuvering the well-positioned elites engage in to divert resources intended for benefitting all and sundry, to their personal benefit, in complete disregard of the intended and more deserving recipients, thus dashing hopes for across the board lifestyle improvements, and creating an atmosphere of hopelessness in which drugs, alcohol and criminality progressively become trusted anesthetic agents. In this scenario, Mr Gunman and his teammates, along with other young teams of the same ilk may just be viewed as young

copycats of a burgeoning lifestyle, not inventors of a new lifestyle. This is very saddening.

Social change, while adaptive to the ever evolving scenarios of contemporary lifestyles, invariably challenges traditions. These must be plied for understanding their original intentions and how effectively they still serve those intended purposes. Adjustments may need to be made to retain the useful aspects of each tradition and discard the aspects which no longer serve any purpose. Accommodating

traditions which do not fit in well with contemporary lifestyles appears to require meaningful compromises on how such traditions should apply usefully and flexibly, in ways that help society adapt meaningfully.

In the context discussed above, what is contained in the teachings of masculine responsibility is kept under wraps, but is made suspect by the growing crime rates and increasing gender violence. Like the fists of newborn infants, traditions need to be pried open to establish what they bring along from the grey past. Such prying may reveal useful information on the reasoning behind them, and save societies from the tragedies of following sheepishly on what was, and ignoring what is. 



HANNE LARSSON

Only that age changes everything

Frigg knows there are things she could be getting on with: the upstairs loo blocked again, sloe gin bottles to turn, the knitting, or perhaps inking that recipe book she'd been promising herself for years. There're always meals; he never offers to prepare any of them.

Instead, she waits.

He'll come in, snow dripping off his boots onto her newly mopped floor, his quarry lifeless over his shoulder, reeking of testosterone, sweat and horse-hair. Silently, she'll clear the table for his success, and perform her role in this ritual as he traipses upstairs to wash, dress, and celebrate in whatever way he does these days. Perhaps they'll exchange pleasantries afterwards, but there are fewer with each passing year. They are rutted so deep they barely see the sky.

He's tried to explain it to her before: the thrill of the chase, the ritual, the part he fulfils in managing such wilderness. Of how he is in communion with his horse as they tear through the trees, spotting that elusive flash of red, of how the jays screech their warnings when he races past, of how occasionally his wild dash is paused by a passer-by's obstacle. Those times are his favourites—he drones on and on—when he gets to cajole and promise riches, if they'll only step aside. And how no one can resist his

charms, so on he tears.

Frigg has heard it so many times the words are single-string-loops.

He's never failed. Betting against him only fuels his competitive streak. It used to be a bit of fun, when there was something worth pitting her wits against, some element that could go awry, but there's not been that for so long. The world has changed around them, they're firmly in its periphery now, in a space beyond the nine known ones.

And in the between-times, she potters, and he goes somewhere each day, back only for food and drink, sometimes having convinced one of their sons to join them. This farmhouse is a far cry from their grander halls, and elaborate celebrations; its austerity at the edge of the woods once necessary, but now stifling. No traveller gets lost enough to knock at their door these days.

So, soon they'll be forgotten. Most days she's fine with that, but he will not see it the way she's come to accept.

The whinny alerts her from her stray thoughts, and standing, she clears the table, boils the kettle, pulls out her bottles and ointments, braces herself. It never gets any easier.

The door boots open, flying back with a bang against the frame, her husband's size filling the

space.

'Beer for my friends, wife dearest! Our quarry led us a merry dance this year, nearly back empty-handed, weren't we, lads?'

Frigg doesn't know how many crowd her kitchen, or even where he's found them, but she fills and refills glasses, whilst they riot and rampage around her, ever louder, slapping each other on backs, pride and boast filling her space to the rafters. Time ticks away and finally her husband catches her look.

'Come on boys, let's take this elsewhere, leave my wife to her domain.'

And she hates him for that diminishing cruelty, now leaving her with so little time for her subtleties.

Frigg works in near silence, her soft underbreath hum setting the scene as she begins to clean her husband's trophy.

She starts with the tail—long, luxurious red—brushing the leaves, twigs, and mud out of it, imagining the terror and the breathlessness in heart and lung as the charging horse gains ground. It does not need washing, not this year, and so she rolls the body over.

Her song hitches, as always. She grasps the grain of the table, her knuckles white, remembering who she is and what she can do. Tradition, he says, but this isn't what they are. Frigg doesn't know how they let it get to this point.

The eyes are closed, the face like delicate porcelain, the huldra's lips turned up in a small smile.

Dipping her cloths in the ribwort-infused water, Frigg begins undoing the mud, washing the scrapes and death from the woman, her tune rising and falling to the need of this.

It takes hours of muttering, of careful stitching back together before the being sits up. She's fully versed in the novels; this is no Dr Frankenstein thing. She just undoes the time experienced by one creature. At this point she would normally lever the door open, retreat, giving the woman an escape. And she would leap, graceful and un-lurching, a wildness in her eyes and silently be gone.

'Again?' the huldra rasps, her voice creaking and dry as summer kindling, of trickles of summer water

over dry beds, of breezes rustling the canopy. It's not what Frigg expected her to sound like, but she shouldn't be too surprised that her husband's quarry sounds like the woods and rivers where she is the caretaker.

Frigg nods, watching the bushy tail springing up when the woman pushes off the table and lands softly.

'I am grateful, mistress, but I never feel quite right just after and it never gets any easier, each year. I don't doubt your skill, only that age changes everything.'

Frigg muses as she hands her a drink, which she drains in one gulp. 'I'm Nyva,' the huldra says, curtsying. 'Don't think we've ever introduced ourselves.'

'Frigg,' Frigg replies, raising her glass, refilling her guest's. 'No, I suppose not. Tell you the truth, this gets harder to justify.'

Nyva's tail flashes slowly behind her like a cat's, clearly annoyed. Frigg would be too; probably more so if she was the one pursued and resurrected every year. Who knows what is left behind each time, and whether the Nyva who had never been hunted would be markedly different from the one who was. 'Why do you do it?'

'My job is to care. Better me who knows how to... well, how to... you know, than let him loose on the rest of the forest. Why do you?'

'Better me, I suppose,' Friggs says, staring into her empty glass. 'Still my husband. Still bound together, still...' She swallows her other answer, the one she would usually give to smooth things over, tired of always smoothing things over. She looks Nyva straight in the eye.

'We have a dilemma. I've no wish to patch you up ever again, you've no wish to lie there on my table until I wake you. I already know what you would offer – your method to compel him to stay the way you would compel a stray bull to remain in the stable – but, being selfish, that would mean he stalks round here, destroying my peace. We may still be, but...'

From deeper in the house the heavy boots and laughing is becoming overwhelming. Her husband is a bad drunk, and is much worse when hungover.

Nyva sits down, grabs the bottle, drinks. 'A problem indeed. Yet, times change, you must have noticed how the forest has shrunk, the road widened, and the world more illuminated when night falls? Are we not allowed to change with it?'

Suddenly, Nyva smiles, slow, secretively, and Frigg finds herself matching it as an idea takes hold. 'Seems like we only have one option left then, for peace to us both.'

And they toast their idea, working and reworking it over bread and cheeses and more strong drinks.

Frigg knows there are things she should be getting on with, but instead she waits for the familiar crunch of hoof on gravel. She can't help listening. It is a noise ingrained, a visiting ghost for this day of the year. On the table stands two glasses, a bottle of birch spirit between them. She's replaced those

glasses at least four times, alternating with her potions, cloths and poultices. She doesn't know how this alteration will change the rest of their lives. She's not sure she's brave enough to change the whole story, with just one loud crack.

And then, she hears it, the soft whinny as the horse greets his friends, and standing, opens the door.

'He's faster than he looks, but as heavy as expected. Do you feed him rocks along with the beer? Have you decided?'

Frigg laughs, tension released, makes sure the door is propped so it doesn't slam backwards, letting her new friend over the threshold. Change doesn't have to be one loud bang, she realises. 'Yes, yes I have. Put him on the table, and have a drink with me first.' ∞

Music from the Imaginings Ensemble, remixed by Patrick Carpenter



tinyurl.com/imaginingsremix4



VALERIE'S POEM, *35 years*, follows another poem she wrote about her dad, which appeared in Issue 9.1. In an email to Steve, she describes the process of writing this new poem about her Mum:

Both pieces are part of me processing grief. When my dad died four years ago I was soaked in grief. I didn't wish it away, I just sat with it, and from time to time strong memories came to mind. One day I sat down and recorded what came out, and this shaped the piece about my Dad. Having that published felt like a great tribute to him.

Once I had submitted the first piece I began to think of my mother, who had died 35 years previously. What surfaced when I remembered my mum was the pain and confusion of a 21 year old woman. Surfacing those feelings helped me move past them, and become closer to the real feelings I had for my mother. Whether this piece is published or not, I am so grateful to you and your team for nudging the process and helping me restore a loving relationship with my mum.

Listen to Valerie reading *35 years* here:



tinyurl.com/thirtyfiveyears

Read and listen to Valerie's moving imaginings written for her mum (in this issue 9.2) and dad (in issue 9.1) together here:



tinyurl.com/ValerieJackmanpoems



VALERIE JACKMAN

35 years

What if, after 35 years, we were to meet again.

I imagine walking through the woods. I look up and see someone in the distance, and as they get closer, I realise, **it's you**, with your red scarf. You haven't changed, but I have. I am now the older woman.

Imagine if after 35 years, we were to meet again, what would I do with the remnants of feelings that stayed with me, unbeknown to me.

What would I do with the fear that I felt, when I knew you were going, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

What would I do with the **pain**?

What would I do with the **blame**?

What would I do with the **sorrow**?

What would I do with the shame that I felt for being a poor reflection of your beauty and perfection?

What would I do with the resentment, for the things you didn't tell me, didn't show me, didn't teach me?

What would I do with my need for you to survive, when you didn't stand a chance?

What would I do with the **anger**?

What would I do with the **jealousy**?

What would I do with the **guilt**, for not making you the centre of my world when our world was falling apart?

Imagine if after 35 years we were to meet again, and of these feelings had faded away, what deeper feelings would remain?

The **joy** I felt, knowing I was yours,

The **pride** knowing you were mine.

The **comfort** I felt sitting under your oxtail.

The **happiness** when I saw you smile.

I don't think I'd need to do anything, because time has helped me see, that through all of this, only one thing mattered. I loved you, and you loved me.

TEMPIST JADE

Pandemonious revelations: the terra-fying mystery of belonging (part 2)

Continued from issue 9.1...

WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY OWN PROPOSITION with regard to humanity's purpose as a species whose genealogy reaches back to the origins of the Universe. If we engage these times with the understanding that humans are Gaian, and therefore everything we do is natural, how might we come to understand the nature of our destruction from renewed places? What might open up within and around us when we set down the rejection of destruction brought about through our bodies? And, what else might be possible when we consider that we are not doing it alone? Asked another way, as members of a Gaian assemblage, what is the Earth really up to?

Contrary to what the ongoing script tells us, that the Earth is a mute victim in need of saving, our world is teeming with multi-specied, agentic bodies participating in the emergent story of the world. Not to mention the galactic, ancestral, and unseen bodies collaboratively at play. As neuromicrobiology reminds us, we humans are anything but singular. Our gut biomes, alone, contain trillions of bacteria and fungi that produce chemicals with the capacity to influence our nervous systems. Pair that with the research being done by organizations such as the

HeartMath Institute studying the effects of solar activity upon human behavior, and we end up with a spiraling body of trans-specied and -stellar proportion.

Upending reductive approaches applied as solutions to our increasingly complex times, our minds bend as we must reconsider who is weaving the web or steering the ship. Pick your metaphor. To be sure, this is not an attempt to outsource responsibility, rather an inquiry about what informs and drives human behavior, and the nature of our participation, as "what is or isn't an 'individual' is not clear and distinct matter."⁶ While accountability is a reflective skill that equips us with space to change, our porosity makes us available to the influence of other forces. The idea of individualism waivers here, as we fold in towards our own navels, remembering our plural beginnings in the womb.

Indeed, humans have proven to be an impactful presence, the resulting consequences of which vary in diversity as much as humans themselves do. This is a reflection of our Gaian heritage, and a testament to the relational patternings that ceaselessly propel us across the thresholds of evolution. Just as much as our actions can be terrifying, they are also terra-fying. Shaping and reshaping ecologies, for

'better' or 'worse,' is innate to all life-forms. And though there are eco-philosophical camps of thought proclaiming that much of humanity has forgotten their intra-connection with the rest of life, resulting in self-imposed ostracization and 'unnatural' destruction, I've found myself wondering what other possibilities have been overlooked.

For example, is it possible that it isn't so much that we've forgotten we are Earth, rather that we are an earthen force capable of terra-fying acts? Acts with further reaching implications than any single one of us could ever imagine or lay claim to knowing? Actions that are the manifestation of an intra- and trans-specied assemblage? And if our actions are the result of a more distributed Gaian intelligence, what does such forgetting facilitate in the larger storying of the world? Try as some might with triumphant perpetualism and savioristic voyages into a villainous unknown, we cannot stop the wheel from turning.

Even in modern day humanity's attempts at preventing large-scale change, the Earth remains a steadfast shapeshifter, relentlessly reincarnating. And while it remains true that our species is undeniably participatory, savioristic narratives present humanity as the sole cause of these ecological crises. This fosters a denial of other agentic bodies, and binds us to the belief that we can fix and control our circumstances. Extinction, for all of the appropriately felt grief, rage, despair and terror it evokes, remains a Gaian process, and humans are but one of an endless many, comprising and re-comprising the Earth's shape and form.

Human beings are no accident, nor are we a mistake to be fixed or a problem to be solved. Dynamic and unruly, our existence tells a story of belonging more vast than most present-day scriptures convey. We lived as a dream inside the bodies of those who have come before, present in our absence. And just as presence lives within absence, absence makes way for presence. The absence of our Jurassic ancestors made way for the presence of our current world, just as the absence of other bacteria, killed off by our photosynthetic kin, made way for

our floral kin. Absence becomes a gesture of space-making, and space-making is a gestational act of love.

Reorienting our relationship with belonging from this place of immeasurable kinship reminds us of the world's irreducibility; that existence depends upon the magic of tentacular becomings conceived by death through adaptations, mutations, and hybridizations. We are pluralized, proverbial cells within a larger pluralizing body, within which our living becomes a relationally, self-exceeded queer koan. Left to consider the endless entanglements that drive emergence, that mystic skill of full-bodied listening becomes a synesthetic prayer: sacred speech that re-intimates us with wonder, and the mystery within the sonorous shape of our be-longing.

Prayer arises out of our deepest longings, perpetually consummating our relationship with Mystery. As a result, our bodies become a solemn vow to listen for all the ways we long to dream with the world. Consequently, we are reciprocally met by all the ways the world longs to dream with and through us. In this way, futurism becomes an intra-imaginative act of devotion that channels our prayerful attention: a present-moment conjugation by all of the dreaming bodies of the world inspired by the rhythms of creation and destruction. As a result, we are led not toward destination points, but rather toward each other, perpetually renewed by the seasons of belonging that are marked by presence and absence.

With regard to my own life, understanding the world from this place meant relinquishing my solutional pursuits; the small and righteous stories of how I thought the world should be, opening me up to all the ways the world longs to be. And though I was not without resistance, the accumulated force of my dreams and visions, as well as the nights of ritualized restlessness, painstakingly renewed my faith in creation and its inseparability from destruction. I began to feel the blurred edges of love-making where the erotic play between Khaos and Kosmos arouses orgiastic intelligences; moaning

polyphonies that continue to tempt my listening toward heretical futures gyrating to the music of life hungering for life.

Not only had my understanding of death's necessity for life's continuation been expanded, I had begun to remember death as an aspect of existence replete with pleasure. This truth, though disturbing, liberates eroticism from the confinements of a sanitized generativity. Indeed, attempts to sterilize Eros remain futile as death's ravenous desire carries on impregnating the world with rebellious catenations: turbulent harmonies erupting from the consum-mating bodies of Khaos and Kosmos. Even survival is not exempt, as the desperate cravings to continue living carry the seeds of death's erotic pulse. No life-form is absolved from this cycle. This is a mattering wisdom adorned by the temporary dapplings of satiety.

The industrial appetite of many humans is often characterized as greedy and excessive, charging pockets of humanity with the responsibility for our current, ecological circumstances. Yet this is not an isolated phenomenon only to be seen in humans. Ticks, as their populations swell, are consuming moose blood at a rate now so severe they are draining calves to death with the anticipated effect of moose populations declining. Or consider pine beetles who pine for pine trees. They are blanketing forests with their hunger, and, with the aid of a fungus, leaving tree graveyards in their wake. Similar to large swaths of humanity, neither ticks nor pine beetles appear to be considering 'resource' dependent longevity. Allopathic explanations attempt to frame such behavior as symptomatic of an industrial disease, conveniently dismissing the complexity of our world's current emergenc-y. Though we are in the midst of devastating ecological losses, it is also true that many species are benefiting and adapting, reminding us that "the rules of togetherness are constantly being renegotiated."⁷

Such striking behavioral similarities kink the linear narratives that present these times as a singularly human-driven apocalypse from which we are the only species capable of saving the Earth.

Urgency's cries are irresistible to the heroic compulsions of saviorism, whose pursuit is a future holding the promise of our existence. When we are driven by forward-thinking activisms, we estrange ourselves from an awareness of the fuzzy and peripheral collaborations of our multi-specied world.

Slowing down becomes a prerequisite to reconnecting our attention with the mystery of our entangled existence. To be sure, this is no small feat, especially at a time when so much we hold dear and love is at stake. Stilling the frantic firings of our overwhelmed nervous systems is a privilege that feels inaccessible for more and more people. Acknowledging this very real animal-bodied response to stress and threat, I would like to invite you to pause before continuing on. For what lays ahead are more renegade questions that hold no promise of simple answers, hoped-for solutions, or universal directives. Rather, these forthcoming questions are meant to invite the cyclic renewal of multi-directional possibilities expressed through our participation, and to wonder how such questions change the way we are in relationship with the world.

So, I invite you to notice your body, and its current orientation. Let your senses grow wide, feeling yourself as a part of your greater surroundings. Notice your breath, its rhythm, texture and pace; whether it is smooth or choppy, short or long. If you can, let yourself feel you, as you are in this moment, right now. Are you ready? Here we go.

Is it possible that we humans, the trans-specied animals that we are, whether conscious of it or not, are being wielded by a more distributed Gaian consciousness that has set course for a large-scale biotic transformation commonly referred to as mass extinction? Pause here, and maybe read that question again, for it disrupts anthropocentric, human exceptionalistic, and savioristic understandings of purpose and belonging. Such a question leaves us to consider other pandemonious possibilities expressed through our participation, opening our awareness back to the thrumming web of intra-specied and -ancestral collaborations. Possibilities

that spring from the terra-fying mystery of our web-works of belonging.

For some, this might be incredibly difficult and heartbreaking to imagine, or even entertain. And yet imagination, in its heart of hearts, is transgressive, challenging the boundaries of convention; drawing us out beyond the edges of the known toward that vast realm of the unknown, where our convictions falter and succumb to the currents of possibility. In this place we must surrender narratives we hold tightly, lest we are drowned. Though narratives of certitude offer the illusion of safety, none of us are exempt from the primeval dance of Khaos and Kosmos. Their love affair births emergent and unpredictable futures whose mutating bodies stretch across the webbing of time and space, offering panoramic views of the past, present, and future's perennial intra-sections.

When I look up at the night sky, I see some of the same constellations my ancestors did. Indeed, stars have been looked to for guidance by all manner of creatures for millions, if not, billions of years. From migration and finding food to planting crops and searching for mates, steering by starlight is an ancestral skill, and these denizens of the sky have yet more to impart. As atomized ancients, they are constantly unleashing energetic wisdoms that glisten in the darkness, reconnecting us to our awesome origins. I believe that's why so many of our ancestors devoted their attention to these holy luminaries. They remind us of our unequivocal belonging, and that our genealogy extends to the origins of

the universe. And these times, for all their precious precarity, are an invitation to reconvene with the mystery of our entangling lives.

As members of a larger Gaian and cosmic family shrouded in mystery, I believe there are other yet-to-be-known possibilities that lay in wait for us. Terra-fying prospects whose emergent becomings grow their way out of a perpetually rearranging ground of absence and presence. Through the aid of mysticism and imagination, we can learn to navigate this ever-shifting territory, fitting ourselves with big questions that become a musical contribution within the euphonic cacophony of everything. Which brings me to three questions I shall leave you with:

- What is your current governing narrative of belonging?
- How can the quality of your listening radically alter your sense of belonging?
- How does the nature of your participation change when your belonging is reconfigured?

These are the kinds of questions I find best explored with/in the regions of the world we are each in relationship with, at this time. My hope is that they will encourage a richer sense of place-based kinship, a widened consideration of 'self,' and a more personalized understanding of purpose as expressing our participatory aliveness. Each moment is an opportunity to dream with the world, and to wonder what other assemblages of life are waiting in the mystical territory of our chthonic and cosmic transformations. ∞

NOTES

6 Barad, Karen. "Intra-actions." Adam Kleinman. *mousse* 34. johannesk.com/posthumanist/readings/barad-mousse.pdf

7 Weber, Andreas. *Matter & Desire: An Erotic Ecology*. Translated by Rory Bradley. 2014. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017. p 40



< Listen to Tempist reading two extracts from her essay here.

tinyurl.com/TempistJadereadings



< Read Tempist's full essay on Unpsychology Voices Substack here.

tinyurl.com/TempistJadeessay

When I was a child, I was
experiencing a living
people for the first time — I felt
in my heart a living, growing
and feeling a sense of awe,
a sense of wonder, a sense of
the infinite, wide-open space
under a colorless sky,
the sun beating down on me
on the crown of my head.

Around me was a
mechanically ploughed
field of every kind of
as my eye could see
growing was more
than living soil, and
and wind-scorched
arms I held a loose
even felt baskets of
living soil was
pungent, cozy with
with microbes and

For her first birthday I made her a
Cheetah Clock;

Love lingers. It whispers in the wind;
now I can smell the earth...

What's falling? This one voice has
taken over like a weed,

but it bore unexpected fruit.

Pity that I never told you about your
origin, I said,

remembered the buzzing of the
swarm of bees,

wandered over to the statue.

I guess there's no real limit on
diversity of life and thought.

I shall not keep you, nor let you fall —
I WILL be there.

Oh how we love the world and you

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the remixed music of PATRICK CARPENTER & THE IMAGININGS
ENSEMBLE.

< This poem uses words and phrases
from pieces in this section.
Hear it read by Steve Thorp.
Music accompaniment
by Ruth Thorp.



tinyurl.com/UP9-2foundpoem3

NESLI ERGÜN

TikTok

THE REVOLUTION IS IN THE APHANIPOIESIS. That's why it's so radical—that's why it's so good. And eventually, that's why it will work. But, yes, it's difficult (and beautiful) because you can't know what's going on in submerged territory. It's beyond reach—and so, beyond control. It's wild, so it's free.

At the core, it trembles. Shifting fundamentals. Never certain. Always open to jitter into new formations. An earthen mosaic of tectonic plates. Clattering edges and welding wedges where connective tissues are made and then fade.

Sometimes we'll be called upon to question our assumptions and frameworks; tickling the topsoil of the aphanipoietic garden below. My soirée into this subterranean dance unfolded in glimpses across space and time. I can't know what it all means and that excites me. What unlearning awaits me in the future? What unlearning has it sparked in me now?

The transition from my home studio to my kid's room played out in adagio. Inchmeal and piecemeal. Then one day the discord started to harmonize. The sound moved me. So I jumped into the shoes of motherhood and danced my way forward. My tempo set, even if I didn't know where it was we were setting to go.

Now, my daughter Mina has a room of her own to bemuse life's mysteries. Layers of dark teal con-



trast various shades of orange giving way to a resolute cheetah lurking in the corner. Cheetahs, as you might recall, are the fastest land animal in the world. I drew it to remind Mina of her relationship with time. To remind us all really, of the role speed has in our improbable and finite lives. Reminding us how fast it goes by and how important it is to take a breath and slow down; enough to savor the fleeting moments of togetherness. Every time I join Mina in her room the watchful eyes of a crouching cheetah are there to remind me.

For her first birthday I made her a Cheetah Clock.

A Cheetah Clock is a way of measuring time based on how many cheetahs are living in the wild. This clock has 4 important dates on it: 1918, 1949, 1981, and 2021. These dates relate to the average birth year of 4 generations of our family. In other words, when Mina's great-great grandparents were born there were about 100,000 cheetahs living in the wild. When her grandparents were born that number decreased to 40,000. And when her parents were born it decreased by half of that. In 2021, the year Mina was born, a total of 7,100 cheetahs roam the wild. I imagine this clock will be an iterative fine tuning for years to come. It's not finished. Perhaps the next version will include an Arduino pro-

grammed clock handle connected to an online website that takes live streaming data from researchers on the ground tracking cheetah populations around the world.

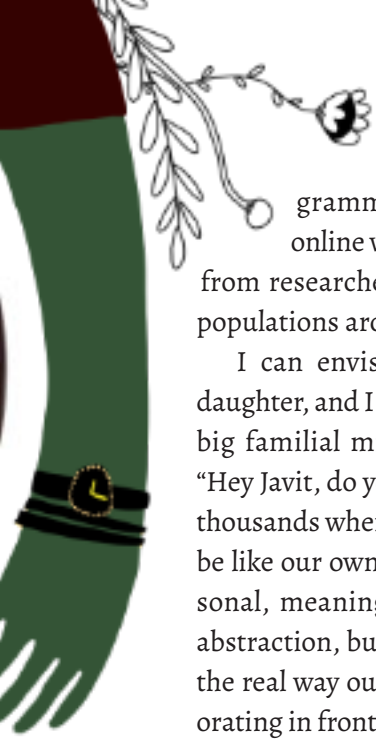
I can envision a future where my husband, daughter, and I measure the broad strokes of life and big familial milestones with a Cheetah Number. "Hey Javit, do you remember when we were in the 6 thousands when such and such happened?" It would be like our own secret way of measuring time; personal, meaningful. Telling time, not as a distant abstraction, but as a way to ground our psyche into the real way our planet is transforming and deteriorating in front of our eyes and during our lifetimes.

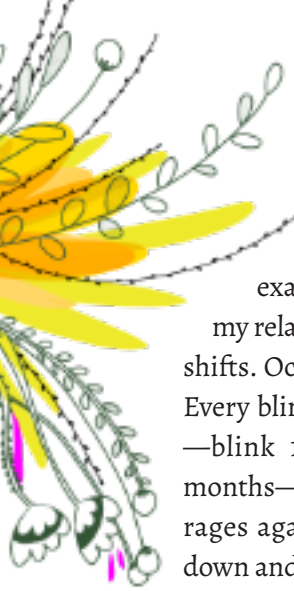
As sad as this world can be sometimes, this is our world. And there is only one planet Earth. Experimenting with the measures of time in this way invites us to step away from convention and open towards possibility. The Cheetah Clock is my small contribution to a revolution. But the revolution wasn't in the making of the clock. It wasn't in the explaining to birthday party guests the concept of this weird gift.

And it's not in the adaptation and usage of the clock itself. The revolution is in the unseen. The revolution starts where concepts end. Localized in the aphanipoiesis of unknowing. A core rumbling. A shaking of magnitudes that will remain eternally mysterious. In depths we cannot see or hear. Seismic, perhaps. Or subtle and slight. Manifest as a perpetually evolving animal instinct.

Isn't it so true, what Joe Zadeh says, "The more we synchronize ourselves with the time in clocks, the more we fall out of sync with our own bodies and the world around us."? Clock-time didn't yet destroy alternative traditions of timekeeping as so many indigenous people know, and how artists like David Horvits exhibit with a selection of clocks synchronized to heartbeats and cat shadows. Or like Scott Thrift who developed the 'Today' clock that simplifies the passage of time into dawn, noon, dusk and midnight instead of seconds, minutes and hours.

What is time anyway? And who measures whose future?





Raising a child has changed me in ways I'm only beginning to notice. For example, in tandem with her development, my relationship with time has gone through many shifts. Occasionally, it would feel like time sped up. Every blink we'd be back at the pediatrician's office—blink 12 months, blink 15 months, blink 18 months—and other periods, especially during her rages against sleep, my sense of time would slow down and days would slug on seemingly forever. My fraught relationship with time was in need of mending. So I looked for consolation in Carlo Rovelli's *The Order of Time*, only to find time to be one of the most illusive and incomprehensible ideas I have ever encountered. My mind is still boggled.

We are taught in school that the Earth completes an orbit of the sun in 365 days, which determines the length of our year. And similarly our 24 hour day is based on the rotation of the Earth's axis. But actually the Earth isn't a perfect sphere and these measurements just sorta kinda "measure up." They are slices of rigidity that try to regulate something irregular, wobbly and unrefined. After all, isn't nature's nature irregular?

Mina's approximate first tour of the sun got me questioning how we use measures and standards in this world and what measures and standards are appropriate to use for a kid. In his essay, 'The Global Crisis of Measurement', education philosopher Zachery Stein writes that measures and standards "...impact the ways we order our social world, how we understand ourselves, and the nature of reality itself. They make some things possible and others impossible; they reveal certain aspects of reality while concealing others."

While measures and standards give rise to trust at a distance and across cultures, it should never be lost on us that those who have the power to create and institutionalize measures and standards control society. "This is a kind of anonymous," in the words of Zack Stein, "insidious" in the words of Nora Bateson, "power that is quite unlike the power of a tyrant or dictator. It is a subtle, hardly noted power, often only seen when basic social expectations are violated

or technologies break."

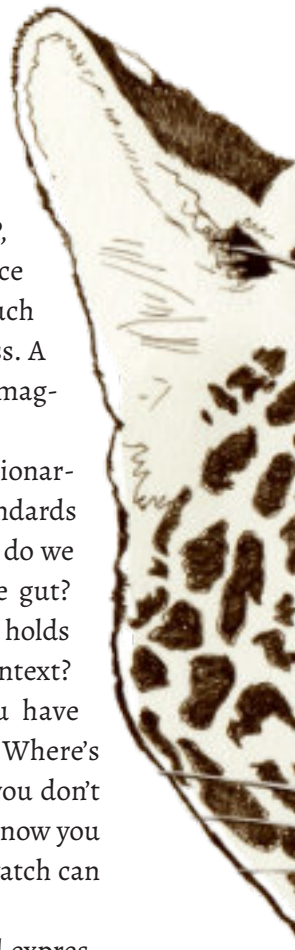
Take a closer look at some of our existing metrics and it's easy to see how they have failed us. How they have dulled our creativity to dream radically. GDP, unemployment rate, university entrance exams, political polls, all of it and so much more could use a good ole magnifying glass. A scrutiny on its own. Afterwards, take that magnifying glass and smash it too.

How do we raise a new generation of visionaries who can intuit when measures and standards stop serving them or the planet well? How do we cultivate perception that comes from the gut? How does that gut digest a worldview that holds innumerable entangled multitudes of context? How does one know if the context you have accounted for is comprehensive enough? Where's enough's edge? Do you account for what you don't know? Do you account for what you don't know you don't know? When you look at your wristwatch can you see the relativity?

Mina's Cheetah Clock is an invitational expression. Softly, interminably whispering: "it doesn't have to be the way it is." Tickling the children of the future into playful explorations of what lurks from beyond convention and status quo. Begging them to question the relativity embedded in their own systems of measurement that are both inherited and imagined anew. More than anything, I want Mina's belly to know that the measures and standards we subject ourselves to give structure to our lives in profound ways. I want her to be unafraid to stare down convention to see all its edges, practicalities and shortcomings notwithstanding. Fearless, like African animal tracker Boyd Varty who advises "Know your truth, stick to the process, and be free of the outcome."

Cheetah's speed.

The revolution is in the aphanipoeisis. It's not loud. You cannot feel it or touch it. It does not have furry spots, and it most certainly will not be televised. The revolution is in the aphanipoeisis. ~







Mary Thorp — *Sandworm #6*

DANIËL EIKEBOOM

Το θηριον και κενος ανθρωπος

Characters:

MERGRIL: Epic, breathes in silence

NUR: Eternal, like prose

SID VILLAIN: Lyric, only hears itself

BETWEEN THE FOUR WALLS life holds no name. Here the landscape is unplotted and unpieced, like in the beginning. Though paradise too knows dusk and so Sid Villain fills his bag fanatically.

SID VILLAIN: Why wouldn't you? The world closes in five minutes and beware tomorrow to be fruitful. You look skinny and your bag is empty. Why wouldn't you? Eyes are not made to be shy and questions despite themselves. Why ... Where are you?

MERGRIL: By night, the silence, with her sightless eyes.

No shout, no street. Sid Villain lost but himself his reach. As a patient with patience grows mad and mantic, he flew and fell.

SID VILLAIN: Rather be on my own than with no one else. Although I wish the moon was full to lume me.

NUR: Whatever wishes whisper, glossolalia grow around you:
Aloof, soon, calhoun
Weep, whim, zest
Aloof, soon, calhoun

SID VILLAIN: I lost my footprints and the compass sense. This sibilance smells incinerated. Like moss, a ritual for the waste land.

After Mergril cast the spell she held the senses to herself. The way up cannot be drawn, there is only one way down.

MERGRIL: Rituals are rooted and devoted to finitude: "We who were living are now dying" utters the subjunctive mood.

SID VILLAIN: Behold! My spirit expires in smoke! (...) I miss the silence and the silence alone.

When there is a heart left it desires and looks at the stars. Longing beyond yourself was for Sid too far. He later told Mergril he himself had deliberately elected the dark.

MERGRIL: Who has told you rosy lips wither? If you tempest your time; don't be a fool, don't be a stranger!

SID VILLAIN: Leave me my freedom! Admit my impediment! I ran and ran because I wanted to speak but did not know what to say.

MERGRIL: Awkward and adieu through his eyes... Now tell me thrice: For whom has love so undone you?

SID VILLAIN: (...)

MERGRIL: I see. Silence doesn't stain.

NUR: Young blood, more mud:
Fud, fud, fud,
Fud, fud, fud,
Fud, fud, fud.

SID VILLAIN: I'll have love destroy me before I die.

NUR: Love lingers. It whispers in the wind. Wavering like waves,
imitating new shapes. Like humans, once and once again:
Lessen, lone, rose
Opt, soften, soar
Lessen, lone, rose

Branching new beginnings:
Still, spring, song
Fond, fault, fall
Vessel, old, vow

Sid's first love looked like god. Like four in the morning, uncapitalised and goldenrod.

SID VILLAIN: Now I am hunted. Dappling down the darkness without a face. Once these woes are washed away will the dank wasteland abandon me?

NUR: Alone is out of control. It echoes. Listen and refuse to respond:

Crooked, kind, twitter

Cross, say, sea

Hostile, hand, help me

An immersion is witnessed without fashion:

Cloud, coil, range

Steer, slender, rapture

Flat, falcon, fender

MERGRIL: Should I stay or should I go? (...) Restless is less for a reason! Like love, you only know when you've fallen once you can leave again. Now rest in love for there is no place that does not see you.

SID VILLAIN: ... I know why, I know why ...

MERGRIL: So far Sid and his stars. Rest is passing pictures populating a landscape. In retrospection, so to say. I rather accumulate and above all. The wind warns you before everything is irreversible.

NUR: Worse, what remains of a wanderer bereft of their map?

Falling stars and cosmic curtains:

Sinew, stifle, stortion

Trickle, twist, tender

Lost, stop, surrender

SID VILLAIN: In the west I have seen Venus, bright and disguised. My retina told the volcanoes to spur lava and lucifer. Oh Venus, your brilliance is bloodless and you shiver of novelty. Will you pride my name?

MERGRIL: But whose eyes pale as they raise?

NUR: It rains it rains. The paper-wet trees beseech. It rains it

rains:

Coarse, famous, soar

Loathe, let go, leigh

Coarse, famous, soar

As pebbles idle away:

Trickle, twist, tender

Flick, fasten, fop

Trickle, twist, tender

The tears of rain are universal, they soften scars.

MERGRIL: If Venus were like twin desires, the one to gaze, the other to look away, where would you stay?

SID VILLAIN: I couldn't wait for love to lose me, Mergril. Nor do I want to be lost in love.

MERGRIL: Beyond the sense that makes the widest round will your face appear. That's why I go back to the beginning, back to where you were.

NUR: Like dawn, shyly it starts:

Flew, five, fort

Fierce, fennel, frenzy

Flew, five, fort



STEFFI BEDNAREK, ALAN BOLDON, STEVE THORP

Imaginings: a conversation

STEVE: ...I guess the starting point is 'Imaginings.' Listening to Bjork on a podcast¹ sparked off a chain for me: following Bjork, then stumbling on her conversations with Timothy Morton,² then reading some Timothy Morton and so on. That's what Imaginings means for me. It's not necessarily anything archetypal or that I'm imagining the solution to something, it's about where my mind rolls over!

STEFFI: For me anything that is in the realm of image, imagining, imaginations brings up the question what we are wandering into? Where's the boundary of that mind you mentioned and is this meandering an expression of a willful 'me' or could something else be dreaming itself through me and telling its story through me?

STEVE: Yes I think I was distinguishing between 'mind' and 'self.' I think the reason I used the word 'mind' is because I've been exploring 'neurodivergence' recently what that means to people in my family, people I work with, kids at the school where I work and what it means to me. I think you're right about the boundaries of 'I' and 'self.' All that is so complex.

ALAN: I sometimes get overwhelmed with thoughts when thinking about image, imagination or imag-

inings. The therapist Hermine Feinstein developed a group process where she would ask people to describe art images in terms of a set of rules.³

The first stage was "what are we looking at?" — a painting — or "how big is it," "does it look like it's oil, or acrylic". The second phase concerned formal qualities: was it heavily balanced in one area, does it have jagged or smooth lines or circles, what's the range of colours? The third was a description of what we recognise, a dog, a yard... When people made a comment, Feinstein asked for what she called 'referential adequacy.' They had to say exactly where they saw what they attributed to the image. If the majority of the group saw the same qualities then there was sufficient referential adequacy in the image to back up the statement.

The therapeutic process was in the differentiation between something that someone brought to the image and what could be said to reside in the image. This process helped to differentiate between different notions of I, we, and something bigger, and also participating in the image.

What Hermine Feinstein was trying to do was to slow down first impressions. The fifth and last stage was 'do you like it?' By the time you get to that, that's an irrelevant statement, because your relationship with the image is now so rich. If you express either a strong preference or a prejudice up front, you lose

a lot of rich qualities of engagement, metaphoric possibilities, associated possibilities, because there is an inclination to back-up a statement of preference or dislike.

STEVE: I was in Bath recently at the opening of my daughter and her partner's exhibition along with other artists. We were circling round the room. There were first impressions. Then we circled round the room again. Something else emerged. Another circle round and I had a conversation with the artist or someone looking at the same piece. With each circle, I had a different perspective. If I had just come in and out, then the first impressions would have been intact. But because I was circling round the room it became a much richer experience.

A large abstract piece caught my eye. I loved the colours but didn't engage with it at first. When I came round again, the artist started talking to me about how she had been ill and hadn't been in her studio recently. At first she talked about two small pieces she'd painted on flat bits of copper taken from an old household boiler. When she finally talked about the big piece, I looked at it with a completely different eye. If I hadn't circled around I would have missed it!

STEFFI: There's something about the circling round that reminds me of a story I heard a while ago. Due to a betrayal someone is pushed into a well. They try to get out but this is impossible. They shout for help but nobody can hear them. With no other option left, they circle around in the darkness — always on the same ground. The circling has no aim. It seems pointless and yet he circles. His steps compact the soil underneath his feet and still he circles. It's not clear whether this takes days, weeks, years or decades. At some point he sits down. Then he reaches out into the darkness. Where nothing had been before, he now lays his hands on a flute. The circling round in the dark was integral to the story being able to continue. Without the circling, the story would not have been able to take an unexpected route.

In both of your stories, there's something about not rushing to completion and foreclosing other ways of seeing. There is a commitment to allowing multiple stories and textures to unfold, not to fix any of them, but instead allowing more and more layers of complexity to reveal themselves...

ALAN: ...In conversation one can feel that it's important to move somewhere and find a common direction with a nice tidy arc rather than putting out a number of possibilities and letting them float alongside each other — possibly drawing some links, but not trying to force those. Certainly in a Feinsein group process you can circle the same idea, drawing from multiple people and experiences; looking from different angles. In my view the depth of an image is probably endless.

As you were talking about the well, Steffi, I thought of Bachelard and another obsession of mine — that of 'second reading.' In the first reading of a novel, you're pulled by the plot to find out what happens. In the second reading, you already know the plot so you might luxuriate in the construction and the atmosphere, in the characters, in the moment. As you were describing the well, Steffi, I had a sense of earth compacting, and of the quality of light, even though you didn't necessarily talk about that, and so something was being conjured up just in the few words that you used.

STEFFI: Now I can smell the earth...

STEVE: One of my favourite Bachelard ideas is that "the poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche" — emerging unbidden, with no inner thrust.⁴ And this reminds me of Nora Bateson's work on Warm Data, where there is no conscious purpose, no determinism — like when my mind flicks from Bjork to Morton to other places...

In one of her novellas, Ursula K LeGuin tells the story of a group of misfits and 'escapists' who volunteer for a survey journey on a spaceship that travels for light years towards another planet.⁵ This journey and return will take "five or ten centuries,"

but by the quirks of LeGuin's made-up physics, they get there in several months. They land on this planet that has no animal life forms. Two people die. They do their survey and return. That's about it! There is no real point beyond the encounter with a planetary, non-animal intelligence. This feels like a parallel to the story of the well, Steffi. This story lasts hundreds of years and nothing happens except a bit of science.

STEFFI: I really appreciate when my immediate meaning-making about an image that has become 'salient' in my awareness is challenged—when my claim to the image, this privatisation of the image is disrupted. I am thinking about a residential training where the facilitator invited us to share our dreams in the morning. After a few people had shared their dream fragments, it became apparent that some fragments appeared in several people's dreams. Some people had the same dream or were claimed by the same image. Some images traversed the personal boundaries that we usually draw in a waking state. Someone sketched a peculiar looking swan that was in their dream. Others recognised the swan. It had also been in their dreams.

In psychotherapy we traditionally see dream images as a communication from our psyche, but what happens when you dream 'my' dream or 'your' swan has entered 'my' dream? This swan seems to have paddled through different people's dreams.

We can consider this as collective unconscious symbol formation, but what if this swan had its own volition and wanted to enter the group process? How would a place communicate if not through images? Are these dream images always part of the psyche or might they be part of the place or of actual swans? And how old might these images be? Could images be of a different era, a bit like a star we see which has gone extinct a long time ago? What happens when we circle and widen our reading beyond the familiar ways of seeing without getting attached to a singular narrative?

ALAN: Yeah, I like all of that! When Bachelard says the image is salient as a fundamentally new thing in

consciousness, he's partly saying, let's not assume we know where this image has come from. It might be the place dreaming through us. It might be an ancestor from 5000 years ago. It might be a planet in another galaxy revealing itself. This going back and circling again and again is to say, maybe it's all possible. We can do loads of stuff around what might be personal, group, collective, human - and we can use another frame. Let's see what happens when we think this is a more than human experience. It's not our dream. It's not our image. What do we think about the mineral possibilities of this image? We can ask another question and something rich and resonant might happen.

I've been re-reading some of James Hillman's writings on image. You know he collected bear dreams? He asked people to send their bear dreams, because he wanted to know more about bears that were wandering around in the world of dreams—not about the people. He's like: OK you've sent it. Fine, whatever! It's not just you or your dream. For Hillman the Bears exist more or less independently of the dreamer and he is curious to find out what they are up to. This kind of provocation is typical of Hillman but it speaks to our conversation in which I think we are looking to loosen the grip of literal readings or the idea that the image is wholly related to the person who imagined it.

STEVE: Hillman uses very specific language to not be too literal. When writing about 'acorn' in *The Souls Code*,⁶ he never says it is an acorn; it is 'as if' it was an acorn. He's very clear about this distinction and between what we might call material reality and taking a spiritual concept literally.

ALAN: Yes, certainly a sort of resistance to literalism as a form of closing down. Lots of what we are saying is about opening out. Then the challenge can be—where do you stop opening out? You're both therapists, I'm not, but if you're spinning out images with clients, how do you know where to stop? You know, there's Hillman's thing of 'stick to the image,' as a reminder to develop a sense of when

one may have wandered too far from the primary source – the image.

STEFFI: Well, in Gestalt Psychotherapy I am interested in the meaning-making connections that happen spontaneously and those that happen habitually. What is said with words and what is communicated in tone, facial expressions, body language may be different. If the meaning-making figure becomes too rigid, I would apply solvent, so that it doesn't get fixed. If it is too aloof, we need to come back to the ground of the image. Some connections can't be made immediately, they are made weeks, months, years or decades later. The swan dream story is over 20 years old—but it fitted into this conversation! It is contextual.

Sometimes the attention on how and why we are making certain connections can reveal important meaning. At other times it can be such a dangerous question, because it fixes the gaze, ties down meaning and makes it utilitarian. Culturally I think we're less used to enjoying the meandering for what it is, without it being useful in some way. We stop when we lose interest or when it is time to go home.

STEVE: I used to do some visual journalling, alongside writing poetry. There are two things I remember. One was that the visuals were nearly always meanders and circles. The second was that many poems I wrote weren't understandable to me until much later! Sometimes I would go back to my journal—perhaps after six months or a year—and realise “Oh, *that's* what that was about!”

STEFFI: ...and there's the trans-contextuality that Nora Bateson talks about⁷—the importance of context and the placing of the image, thought, idea or fragment in different contexts whilst extending the capacity to hold as many of them as possible simultaneously. As a therapist, I play a lot with zooming in and zooming out, being literal and being poetic—it's about polarities and the relational connection between them. Sometimes it's interesting to be literal about something that was poetic and

vice versa. If somebody has dreams about falling, it can be interesting to experiment with literal falling... on hard ground, into someone's arms... falling in love. Sometimes you literally have to do it in order to find out another layer of context. You have to be embodied again. Vice versa, if there is a literal wish to die by jumping off somewhere, there is also a metaphorical story expressed in this death wish. The literal can be re-contextualised in metaphor, where we now play with the imaginal image of falling apart, being dismembered and the experience of familiar forms being broken apart.

ALAN: I like the solvent idea, it made me think of an idea from literary theory about narrative smoothing, in which you get rid of everything that doesn't serve the central narrative. And how dull is that? You might want to go back and splash some solvent around the story and just mess with it. Actually, it can be a stronger literary technique to put in stuff that doesn't serve the central story because your mind and imagination are invited to wander in the writing. If an idea of falling seems to be helpful to explore with somebody, in a very strict therapeutic sense, but then you loosen it out and just look at falling. What's falling? What about the original fall, or societal fall? Someone might feel like it's about their falling, but it might be about the economy crashing or who knows what?

STEFFI: My LinkedIn feed is full of advice on how you need to strip away everything that is in the way of getting to 'the' answer. And it's such an incredibly impoverished answer that you get!

ALAN: Steffi, you mentioned time—and the LeGuin story when they go away for hundreds of years, I didn't know what to do with it—that is—how to make sense of it in this conversation. I thought of it again, Steffi, when you said it might have been 20 years ago—the story's just there and it'll pop back up, and somehow time just disappears or shrinks or makes no sense. It wouldn't make sense to try to do something with it in a moment, because you can't,

you're not ready. It'll bubble up, when it's right.

STEVE: The thing about the Le Guin story is that though it's taken so long to unfold, if you strip that story to its bones, it would be nothing. People get into a spaceship, look at a planet and come back. That's why I liked Nora Bateson's work and the idea of conscious purpose being really detrimental to lifelong mutual learning, and why I don't like the words 'growth' or 'development' because they have such upward implications.

STEFFI: We hear so often that we live in the most challenging time, that we need solutions to the problems we face and that there is an urgency to do so. But if we tell such a narrow story of what the problem is, then, goodness, what's the answer worth that we come up with...?

STEVE: That's a good point. And I love what you said about LinkedIn. I think it relates. We look in these predictable places for answers, for those kinds of analyses, and we ignore other places. The obvious place that everyone thinks is ignored is 'indigenous' knowledge, and that is true, but there are other perspectives too. John Goodbun says that the kind of ecological thinking we need is not the bourgeois, prissy, love-nature kind.⁸ He brings Batesonian ecology and Marxism together, quoting David Harvey who sees the integration as carrying the possibility for re-enchantment.⁹ We might expect Martin Shaw or David Abram to come up with that kind of language, but here's somebody bringing it together with other stories. In order to be re-enanted we might need all of this, as well as the animist stuff—the non-human dimension—which is where Timothy Morton's writing goes.

(Long pause)

STEFFI: Well in a lot of mythology... the important stuff doesn't happen in the centre of the story. The characters need to get lost or stray from the path. And usually something happens that is not welcome.

And because of that, through the destruction of the linear, almost by chance, something important happens.

ALAN: Things are horribly out of balance, and we have some evidence, in various forms, but the evidence is generated in ways that can feel quite abstract. I don't actually understand climate data. I have tried to read IPCC reports, and I don't really understand it, so I mostly just trust people who know better than me to tell me what's happening. And immediately that puts me at a distance from the questions and ways of knowing. Mostly I tend to bring together a range of people and ways of knowing to help me to find out about anything — which can be a delicate and deeply challenging process. In this process we look at what kind of cautious action will allow us to know more by "disturbing the system", as Capra says, and then, with multiple forms of knowing, observing the effect of the disturbance, we can perhaps know more and know what the next action needs to be. As soon as we talk about climate, I observe a very reductive process to gain an understanding of what's wrong, and how from this there arises a set of proposals to fix what's wrong. All of that makes me feel very uneasy.

STEFFI: If an ecology is a trans-contextual multiplicity that co-evolves together, then the story of science is one valid voice in that multiplicity, but it's just one voice. This one voice has taken over like a weed that has completely dominated the whole place, and pushed all other possibilities and ways of knowing that may be equally valid to the margins. We only trust something if it can be verified through the lens of science. But what about the stories that are communicated along different lines? The truths that can't be counted remain unseen. They may trip us up in unexpected ways and be more disastrous than any of the scientific predictions that we've currently got, but they may also hold glorious beauty, messiness or goodness knows what.

What happens to all the knowledge that is rejected by science? What about somebody's dreams for

instance? What do the swans and the bears in our dreams have to say? What do they want? Yet, that proposal is laughable in the overculture of science. How do we ask for other ways of seeing to be taken more seriously?

ALAN: Hmm, that's tricky isn't it? I think good scientists can feel reduced by the narrative of what science is. Scientists—the ones I've encountered—are often full of wonder and know that their work doesn't necessarily fully reveal and can sometimes reduce what it is that they find wonderful. I find myself thinking of Ian McGilchrist in a workshop I attended, proposing that we move between the rational and logical, intuitive and imaginative, and keep moving between these modes. He said that one

of the things that can happen is that we encounter the 'sublime' and the 'divine.' And unless we do that, we've had it, you know, he was very blunt on that. He thought that was the only possible way forward—but that isn't a solution, it's about opening out our experience, or opening up to the possibility of experiencing the sublime. What comes after that, he's trusting, and I would trust as well. If we could be open to that then I think we would live differently. And he also used this beautiful phrase from the John Donne poem: "he who will approach the hill of truth, about must—about must go". Instead of being a straight line towards truth, you have to sort of circle—which speaks to a bit of what we said at the beginning... ∞

NOTES

- 1 Bjork: Sonic Symbolism podcast: <https://mailchimp.com/presents/podcast/sonic-symbolism/>
- 2 Bjork's letters with Timothy Morton: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/gallery/20196/0/bjork-s-letters-with-timothy-morton>
- 3 Hermine Feinstein (1989) The Art Response Guide: How to Read Art for Meaning, a Primer for Art Criticism, *Art Education*, 42:3, 43-53, DOI: 10.1080/00043125.1989.11654232
- 4 Gaston Bachelard: "The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche, the lesser psychological causes of which have not been sufficiently investigated...The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away", from *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon, 1994 (1957).
- 5 Vaster than Empires and More Slow, in *The Found and the Lost, The Collected Novellas of Ursula K LeGuin*, Saga Press, 2016.
- 6 James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search for Character and Calling*, 1997, Grand Central Publishing.
- 7 Nora Bateson, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles: Framing Through Other Patterns*, Triarchy Press, 2016.
- 8 Jon Goodbun, Gregory Bateson's Ecological Aesthetics—an addendum to Urban Political Ecology in *Field: Volume 4 · Issue 1 · 2011 · Ecology* <https://www.field-journal.org/article/id/42/>
- 9 David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996): "for Marxists, there can be no going back, as many ecologists seem to propose, to an unmediated relation to nature (or a world built solely on face to face relations), to a pre-capitalist and communitarian world of non-scientific understandings with limited divisions of labour. The only path is to seek political, cultural and intellectual means that 'go beyond'... The emancipatory potential of modern society, founded on alienation, must continue to be explored. But this cannot be, as it so often is, an end in itself, for that is to treat alienation as the end point, the goal. The ecologists' and the early Marx's concern to recuperate 'in higher form' the alienation from nature (as well as from others) that modern day capitalism instantiates must be a fundamental goal of any ecosocialist project. The idea of 're-enchantment' with the sensuous world through a more sensitive science, more sensitive social relations and material practices, through meaningful labour processes, provides a better language than that of alienation with all of its essentialist overtones."



We're in this together... it should be, it must be a collaboration between all of us

*There's no such thing as mistakes... just all kinds of
weird things that happen in the world*

*That's the unpsychology approach:
it's relational*

If you start with visions and voices and possessions, these are
things that are theorised psychiatrically as pathological
conditions... that is where we are now

*Starting from where we are
— not just starting over*

The onus of accountability for the
interpretation of the experience belongs to the
experiencer

*Super-wicked problems and how
they defy intentional straight-line
solutions*

We need to keep the focus on where is the
power, what is the injustice

*Beyond non-dual dualisms and staying
with the material trouble*

In a locked ward it doesn't really matter
what you say, you're still in a locked ward

Mad studies consists of voices that
have been insufficiently heard

You've just got to make something up and
then you've got to make it meaningful

Listen to Julia
and Richard's
conversation
here



tinyurl.com/JuliaRichardconvo



JULIA MACINTOSH

Scholarship frontiers: A conversation with Richard Saville-Smith

SO: I KEPT PUTTING OFF this interview with Richard Saville-Smith, because I wanted to pay him the respect of finishing his book—*Acute Religious Experiences: Madness, Psychosis and Religious Studies*—before meeting with him. I had originally intended to write about Mad Studies for this issue 9.2 (for those unfamiliar: Mad Studies is an emerging academic discipline which explores and critiques the mainstream mental health paradigm.) However, my imaginings took me instead to Richard's book and to the idea of engaging him in interview.

Richard is a friend and ally of the Mad Studies team at Queen Margaret University, where I have been an associate student since January 2023. Faculty and students of the Mad Studies master's course know him from his academic work in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. He gained a fan when I heard him speak at the Too Mad to be True conference which took place at the Museum Dr. Guislain in Gent at the end of May and where his keynote talk brought a spotlight onto the respective gospels of Jesus and Taylor Swift. Richard's charisma and humour intrigued me so much that I looked him up and followed him on the-social-media-platform-formerly-known-as-Twitter (where he lives by the handle @DrAnamorphosis.) I got hold of his

book, I got in touch... and from there to here.

Anyway, as I said, I'd hoped to have finished reading his book before meeting with him. My life, however, was not cooperating; time pressures meant that I hadn't read more than half of it and when I mentioned this to my friends in the Unpsychology editorial team, they urged me to get on with the interview despite not having finished it. We start from where we are, they reminded me. So I met with Richard from where I was: partially unread, unschooled in the techniques of interviewing, and winging it. The process was organic, and messy, but it bore unexpected fruit. We shared a delicious hour together and I hope the resulting conversation delights you as much as it did me.

It's never easy to listen to oneself on a recording, and this time has been no exception. I cringe at my gormless lack of vocabulary (wonderful! absolutely!) and my stumbling about over Lesley's surname. Yet I must concede to my own ultimate wisdom, that there is “no such thing as mistakes” or at least to embrace them as an absolutely wonderful, inevitable aspect of living. Rather than striving to eradicate mistakes, we can instead have fun with them. We can play with them. We start from where we are, and I invite you to start from here and to please enjoy our conversation. ∞



ELIZA CUIHUA

Swan Go

"You would degenerate into a low two-dimensional torso when engrossed in a high game of Go." The girl in black behind the transparent cabin of V-shaped High Altitude Airship made a chilly lip-shape towards me.

"Glad to share your philosophy at the height of 1,000 feet, darling." The crumble lightning grinned above while I attempted to maintain balance, to prevent falling off the swans beneath my tiptoes.

The last flock of whooper swans in the world.

Then I, one of the special commissioners of the global government, equipped with a satellite-as-clairvoyant, served as their head bird.

I officially assumed control of them in early fall by blowing a specialized, infrasonic-emitting whistle for migratory birds and, like Nils on a goose to a wonderful voyage, I spent four weeks guiding them from Siberia to a temporary rest near the lower Yangtze River where, after flying over the Peak of Swan raced athwart a thunderstorm, we would then head straight for the overwintering sites in Oceania, about 3,800 miles away.

This extended tour is actually the new shortest migration route designed for swans. Today's humanity united under the leadership of global government, but global warming is such serious that 25% of birds have a tendency to migrate to the poles. For the wintering birds of East Asia, anthropogenic fac-

tors and the loss of wetlands mean that those who would otherwise only spend winters in the Mid-low Reaches of Yangtze River, retreating year by year-eventually being unable to retreat but to cross the ocean.

However, as soon as my close colleague arrived, I realized the government had changed its mind again.

"Quack!" Suddenly, countless swans in front of me shrieked and made way. I blinked, only to see a huge fireball heading straight to my face. I wrapped my snowy cloak and leaned back, eyes closed. The fireball grazed my left brow, leaving me unscathed but conveying a strong warning. Next second, I saw the cabin of HAA open like a cracked eggshell; the girl who had boarded the dull platform was glaring at me in exasperation.

On her sagging wrist was a simple electrical pulse igniter, the bottom of which had a number of blue starbursts that were slowly fading.

"Make way!" Her face was now pale and trembling with anger, as she pointed to the airship, "I thought Ms. Daredevils knew she should be at the tail now!"

"Aye, wasn't it assented – the furry guys all tail me?" Hovering above the unwieldy thunderstorm, I lowered myself while collecting the feathers that were floating around me. I soon loaded them into

my miniature launcher to harden shape. Abruptly, with a tiny “poof”, several feathers shot out as arrows and stabbed at her.

I felt so zen believing she could dodge since I had fostered her. But suddenly, a spout in the thick platform beneath her feet opened out of the blue and firmly locked on me instead. It was like being seized in a low-speed wind tunnel laboratory. A strong wind blew me away, and a few feathers that had just been launched forcefully pushed back at me.

Good thing is that the swans fast gathered in formation, as if forming a huge net to prevent my descent. From a flat perspective, I stopped inside the octagonal cage frame like a repulsed boxer.

Now, I was standing on the radian composed of swans, and she was standing on the V-corner framed by the airship. The two of us were like two opponents facing each other at a huge Go-board, one holding black and the other cherishing white. A game of Go, where bright stars fall and dark horses spill.

“Let me guess,” I said, “poisons may cause contamination, shooting them down one by one wastes bullets, and reactivating heavy weapons only to send birds to heaven is foolish, so...”

“So I deployed an airship serving in the Southeast Military Region and calculated the timing in advance—that’s to say, I can take advantage of the lightning to guide intense current through the whole insulated airship, like the fire that burned the chain of Armada warships, harness the power of nature to strike the concentrated swans from first to last.” She fired off the mission and paused before saying, “Get out of the way, or I’ll kill you, too.”

“Then,” I shrugged, “the child we adopted together will also lose a mother.”

“Why bother!” She questioned my farewell, not a trace of erstwhile love audible in her tone. “Climate change pushes even pandas from living fossils into the abyss of extinction. The whooper swans are nothing more than air pandas—remnant is the end.”

“No, the game between us and nature has just begun. Each species is a piece closely linked to the

players, and has the power to occasion win or loss.” I said, looking up to the sky, where only storms raged overhead, a reminder that no one could stay out of it.

“But the swan is already a throwaway.” She pressed me tightly, “A game always has a give and take.”

“Figuring out the value of each piece is hard—maybe without the help of these swans, you wouldn’t have survived until now to kill them.” I said.

She interrupted me with a sniff gesture: “So what?”

“Pity that I never told you about your origin.” I said with a smile, “Please, for the sake of our love for so many years, for the sake of my impending death, hear me out.”

Large, dark clouds swarmed, blotting out the sky and our respective, riddled Go board.

“It was you who raised me up and taught me—you are a swan, not a woman.” Her voice was a little shaky. “You don’t need to die. Just wait for me to deal with these birds and then go back home. Our relationship is still the same as before.”

“What if these birds are your saviours?” I ignored her and grasped a feather that was floating like a pinnate cloud. It felt as though a minstrel had grasped her Muse’s magic quill.

“Twenty years ago, in the same autumn, your hometown experienced the biggest flood in a century. I was ordered to rescue, only to discover you alone on a riverbed of rocks, wrapped in the rolling waves. Fortunately, it was the migration season for the whooper swans, so I utilized this infrasonic whistle to attract them. They formed a sturdy bridge by connecting heads and tails so that I could approach and embrace you, just like—I am doing right now.”

I held my little lover and gently soothed her. She was trembling slightly as I stopped speaking and walked along the aerial path paved by the swans, as if walking on the magpie bridge across the Milky Way: “This moves deep into your heart—no more pieces, right?”

To my surprise, she broke free from my siege

once again.

The cabin swiftly closed, enveloping us safely inside, while the airship shook off the wailing swans and swooped toward the thunderbolt at the Peak of Swan!

The dark clouds looked impenetrable, the vast silvery swirls of encased thunder and lightning were touched to their peak period. Rain clouds, like grains of rice, mixed with water vapor, stirred by the raging wind, stored high in the sky, precipitated into the pot of nature's paunch barrel, and finally brewed into an unstoppable round of storm.

The airship, with tip pointing forward, was the first to reach the highest peak. The galvanized alloy layer around it and the ion generators under the steel acted like a huge predischARGE lightning rod, guiding all thunderbolts by itself!

Meanwhile, the V-shaped HAA resembled a pair of glowing Seraph wings, illuminating half the heavens—it didn't usher dead, but rather bore the deadly high-load lightning to a huge, grounded

lightning rod at the peak, safely guiding it into the arms of Mother Earth.

It also guided my damsel into my arms, whimpering.

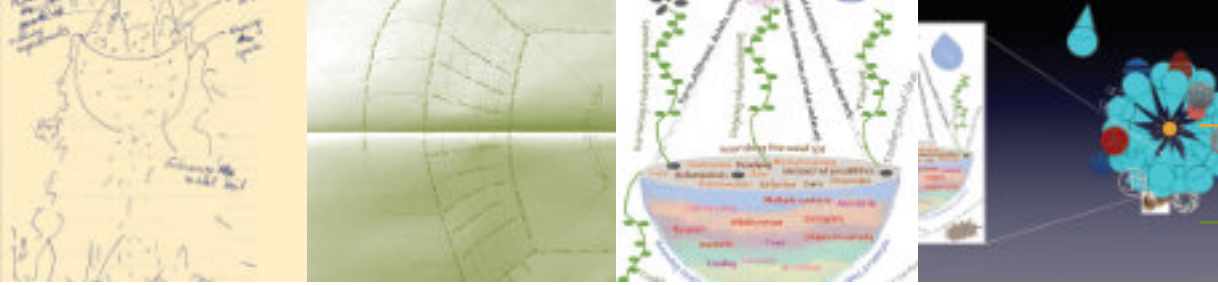
Through the transparent panels beneath our feet, I saw a multitude of majestic swans soaring freely, arranging a breathtaking V-shaped formation behind the V-shaped HAA, following our trajectory and flapping their wings in perfect unison, reminiscent of a large flock of snow-white koi fish triumphantly leaping over the Dragon Gate.

Swan goes.

"We won the Swan Go, too." I said what I'd to say most and planted a peck on my girl's forehead.

"Ooh, let them all go!—just think of a credible explanation for our higher-ups!"

"Don't worry. Swans can overcome, we can also overcome." I contemplated all the oceanic swans parted by our dirigible, as the Red Sea parted by Moses, together to a new desirable epoch, "we overcome, therefore we are." ~



Continuing their conversation from issue 9.1...

FIONA BROOKS & JULIAN STILL

WEavings continue...

FIONA: Some weeks ago, Lesley (Unpsychology editor) contacted us to ask whether we would like to share something in the second edition of *Imaginings*. While our answer was “yes,” life wasn’t so cooperative.

I’ve been in the throes of WEaving in my local community, designing and organising a short series of gatherings bringing together diverse people and experiences, in which Warm Data Labs have been the warp around which we have woven other offerings. We (a loose collection of human beings with a yearning to see all life thriving) called it *ReStorying Life*. This WEaving has been bringing together many aspects of my life: my family, local community group, choir, neighbourhood, hosting pod, regular coffee shop, city, friends...

I notice a discomfort in using the word ‘my’ here as it implies ownership, whereas what I mean is more like “a set of relationships in which I am enmeshed”. There are so many words in the English language, and I still can’t find the right ones for so many ideas!

Meanwhile I came down sick. ‘Just’ a cold, but one that put me to bed for a week and left me with a residual cough and lethargy for months. My threads were snipped short. When I tried to WEave it took tremendous effort and often felt like the pieces were falling out as quickly as I tried to WEave

them together. Julian and I had repeated plans to meet via Zoom and they too kept falling apart. We missed each other time and again.

In some ways my WEaving in *ReStorying Life* was magical. The threads from ‘different’ parts of my life came together in new combinations, some of them surprising. Our first Warm Data gathering was beautiful. Around 30 people, aged 13–70+ and from a wide range of backgrounds, shared conversations that were delectably alive; warm, curious, inclusive and accepting. A new participant described the experience as art and asked us to host the sessions weekly, a repeat guest said these were her one grounded place in a world of constant change, and a 16-year-old asked his parents if his family could come back for the next gathering (the answer was an enthusiastic “Yes!”)

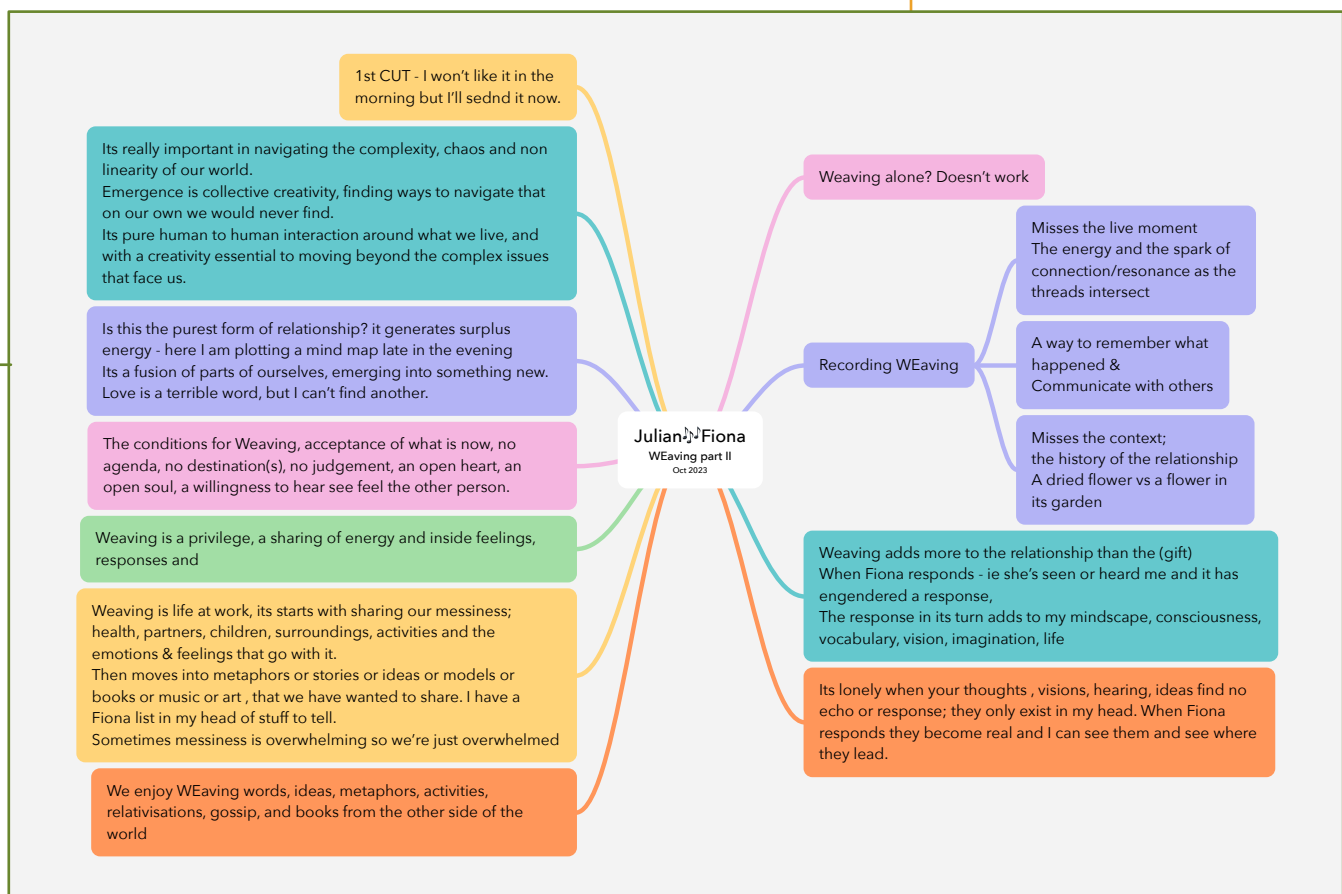
In some ways my WEaving in *ReStorying Life* was tortuous. Previously invitations into these types of conversations have been intimate, each of us reaching out to others in our mycelial networks. For this one, though, we were trying something different—inviting our own networks plus people from the wider community and “changemaker groups.” I still attempted a form of intimacy, seeking phone numbers and reaching out to people for conversations and to proffer the invitation. This sound file describes my experience (*see next page*).

Listen here to a aural description of
Fiona's experience inviting people
to her ReStorying Life series...



tinyurl.com/FionaRestorying

JULIAN:



FIONA: After another rich and meandering conversation Julian sent me a mind map. Fascinating! While I could taste some of the same herbs, Julian's soup was quite different from what was in my mental bowl.

What lingered for me was strongly visual and embodied...

When I'd arrived in the Zoom room and was waiting for Julian I'd wondered whether we were going to manage to meet, and felt like I was holding one end of a thread that needed someone else at the other end in order to create a WEave.

While speaking of my experience of inviting people to a Warm-Data-infused gathering, I saw and felt a strong image/experience. I was standing in a wide-open space under a cloudless sky, the sun beating painfully on the crown of my head. Around me was a mechanically ploughed field, grey furrows as far as my eye could see. The ground was dirt rather than living soil, depleted and wind-scoured. In my arms I held a loosely-woven felt basket of rich living soil. It was moist, pungent, oozy, writhing with microbes and entangled invisible fungal fibres. Clods of earth dripped from the basket onto the dusty ground. I was singing an invitation to people in the field as they cast seeds into the furrows. Most were too busy with their labours to stop though, either ignoring me or looking up briefly and mopping their brows before returning to their work. Some glanced at me yearningly and turned back to

their labour with a sigh. Meanwhile, just a few stepped toward me, touching the basket of soil lightly with their fingertips, faces questioning.

I'd seen Julian's 10-year-old son enter the room and heard him ask his father to help pull out a wobbly tooth. Julian disappeared mostly off screen, returning in a moment with a triumphant smile and description of his much-practiced technique of pinching off the tooth below the gum. I'd felt the squelch and pop between my own finger and thumb.

I remembered the buzzing of the swarm of bees who had visited my garden on Sunday. As I'd watched them whirl, I'd thought of Julian and his passion for bees, and I'd reached into my community to find someone with the ability to rehouse the bees before they got themselves into trouble by attempting to build a new home in a place they'd be (bee) unwelcome.

My heart ached at Julian's stories of difficulties people in his family and community have been experiencing.

As we spoke of the joy of our conversations I realised there is something about us *meeting* one another, rather than *matching*. I am not Julian, I could not do most of what he does, we are very different in so many ways, but something in us meets something in the other — a resonance, an entangling of ideas which create new ideas.

JULIAN: *I'm finding words difficult*; they don't express what I'm trying to say and how I feel and what I see. And they are so so slow, I've tried dictation software but spend as much time correcting as I do typing with four fingers.

Fiona came to breakfast. I was late. And normally we can talk before the two boys need breakfast, but being late they needed morning attention. At 10 & 14, they might make it alone, out the door on time for their train with lunch etc, but there's a reasonable probability that something will be missed, and I would have to run round to fix it later in the day.

So, Fiona joined us for breakfast, which the boys surprisingly didn't mind at all. Having her smiling red-haired presence on the screen in front of them was treated as if it happened every day. Fiona and I continued our conversation, interrupted by the minutiae of getting boys prepped and out the door on time. All very messy, not at all polite for the 'guest' but Fiona thought it was great, just life life-ing.

Dinosaurs and Strips

Yesterday's conversation contained the usual catch-up stuff—there's a lot happening on our respective sides of the planet at present, and consideration of how we would put this piece to bed in time for Lesley's deadline. We ended up at cartoons and comics, a deeply embedded part of Belgian literature. Yes, adult Belgians of all languages still read what they

call 'strips'.

Maybe we thought by mentioning it here we might find some keen cartoon artists who could help us with putting WEaving into the mouths of some cool characters.

Then I cleared up the litter of dinosaurs left on my desk by Timo, who had been doing animations for a school project.

And then it hit me, right under my nose was the potential source of our cartoons. AI can help with drawing, and when I asked him if he could do something his 10-year brain was off nearly over the horizon with ideas and questions, and energy and smiles at doing something with Dad and Fiona, and and and.

So, if you're reading this and want to feed into how WEaving can be told, shown, heard, drawn, animated, then reach out...Maybe it's too late for this edition, but perhaps we could do something for the next one (*or on the Unpsychology Voices Substack online*). Has a new genre emerged from some inter-continental WEaving?

Would you like to WEave with us?

JULIAN: julian@humanmycelia.life

FIONA: fiona@threefoldconsulting.com.au

WARM DATA: batesoninstitute.org/warm-data/

MARK MCKERGOW

Imagining imaginings and doughnut brittle

A 'Ben' Nevis short story

I HATE GOING TO THE CITY. Particularly London. The countryside is much more conducive to proper thinking: rational, precise, sorted, based on facts. That's why I love to walk in places like the Yorkshire limestone country. Mind you, some pretty irrational things can happen there too, as I've reported here before.*

So one day I had to come to London, and was in Piccadilly Circus, the very heart of the West End where theatreland meets shopping paradise meets tourist traders meets flashing signs meets hustle meets bustle. My meeting at the Royal Institution (founded in 1799, one of the oldest scientific societies in the world) was an hour away. Fifty eight minutes, to be exact. It's good to be exact. The Institution is in Albemarle Street, a few hundred yards away, which my phone said would take me nine minutes to walk. What to do for the next forty-nine minutes?

I wandered over to the statue in the middle of the Circus. Folk always say this is a statue of Eros, the Greek god of love. However, sculptor Sir Albert Gilbert made him as Anteros, the god of reciprocated love or counter-love, in honour of Victorian philanthropist Lord Shaftesbury, who loved his fellow people. Anteros was Eros' brother; they look similar, but look closely and you can see his distinctive long

hair and plumed butterfly wings. Gilbert knew what he was on about. Eros and Anteros are members of the Erotes — winged deities with connections to love, sex and passion. Not much passion in the middle of a traffic island at just after nine in the morning though.

It has been said that if you sit by the statue of Anteros in Piccadilly Circus for long enough you'll meet everyone you have ever known in the world. Something about an infinite number of monkeys writing the works of Shakespeare in that idea, it seems to me. Unprovable, impossible, unrealistic and almost certainly untrue. "You're missing your chance," I muttered under my breath to nobody in particular. I wouldn't be back here for a while. If ever. Maybe.

I walked across to a little booth sitting near the Criterion Theatre at the corner of the Circus and Regent Street South, by Lillywhites sports shop. Lillywhites started off in 1863 selling cricketing goods and cigars. Now it's Nike and no smoking paraphernalia of any kind. Progress, I suppose. The kiosk was a dull green colour and offered hop-on hop-off bus tour tickets in addition to the usual souvenir hats, keyrings, maps and soft drinks. "Fancy a bus trip sir?" said the tall chap behind the counter. "Don't look as if you come from round here."

I was about to argue when I caught a glimpse of myself in the shop window. He had a point. I didn't exactly look like a city boy. With Gore-tex boots, Rohan trousers, anorak, scarf and bobble hat, you could tell I preferred the hills to the city. My name's Alexander Nevis but everyone calls me Ben, after the mountain. The gear works well up there. At least at the Royal Institution they want what you've got to teach, not what you're wearing.

"No thanks," I replied. "No time." Which wasn't strictly true — I had forty-two minutes. Perhaps the slightest hesitation gave the game away, as the kiosk man came back at me.

"What would you like?"

"Sorry pardon?"

"What would you like? Something to eat, maybe?"

"What do you have?" I asked, a bit bemused.

"That's not what I asked. What would you like? If you could have anything?"

"What's the point of that? Is there a menu? So I can see what's possible?"

"No menu, friend. No list. This isn't a choice, it's an imagining."

"That's no use! I'm a scientist. I deal in facts. Like what's on the menu. Peer-reviewed facts, preferably. Agreed by sane and informed professionals. So, again, what do you have?"

"I don't have anything, mate. There isn't anything—until you call it. So try something here... what do you really like eating?"

"Umm... well... maybe... doughnuts."

"Aha! Now we're getting somewhere. What kind of doughnuts?"

"The ones with jam in the middle... no! The ones with nuts on and chocolate sauce". My mouth started watering.

"And what else do you really like eating. No limits now...?"

"Hazelnut brittle... Crunchiness, sugar, naughty, nutty... bash it up and share it out..." I could almost feel the sugar rush coming on.

"OK! So, now, what might happen if you put them together?"

"Apart from a lot of sugar?"

The kiosk guy chuckled. "Not just put them together pal, what if you actually combined them? Made a new thing?"

"What, you mean 'doughnut brittle'?"

"Ah... yes, could be. Tell me more about this doughnut brittle."

"But it doesn't exist!"

"Ah, but it does. At least, it just started. You called it. And until you call it, it isn't. And now it is. So, how is it?"

I have no idea how we'd managed to get to this point. Just a couple of minutes ago I was minding my own business with a statue. And now, apparently from nothing, I was pitched into another world. There was silence. I realised that the bustle had stopped and all that remained was me, the kiosk guy and a sense of potential.

"Erm.... Doughnut brittle... It's... brittle with, um, doughnuts. Tiny little doughnuts... . No, it's got that lovely yeasty doughy taste and it's also crunchy... and the nuts are all through it, not on it.

"Go on, mate... you're doing champion!" Maybe he wasn't from round here either?

"And there's chocolate sauce – in the middle!" I continue, picking up the pace as things start to expand further. "So maybe it's bite-sized, kind of egg sized... no, that won't work if it's too brittle... wait, yes it does! If the outside is brittle and the inside creamy, and it tastes doughnutty, wow...". I faded into a wan sense of fascination with this new and so delectable morsel.

"What else can it do?" asks the kiosk guy. What a strange question. Food doesn't do anything, surely.

"You're thinking that's a rum question, aren't you? 'What can it do?' is a much more interesting question than 'What is it?' Takes us into a whole new area of emergent futures we haven't yet seen or even thought of."

I pause. What could it do? Be an amazing gift? Act as part of a game involving eating the pieces? Challenge the dominant narrative of how crunchy and doughy can't coexist? Park its tanks on the cronut's lawn? Cronut—hrmph, they're just crois-

sants fried with cream inners. Bread on a dirty weekend in Paris.

“Well.... How about they’re sold as a uniquely desirable gift... connected to a game... about paradox and fuzzy logic... to be played in an erotically charged environment? In Paris?”

“What else could it do?”

“Be an iconic example of strangeness? The kind of thing people eat in secret—all together? Parties of doughnut brittle eaters meeting secretly in discreet suburban houses... Supplies hard to get but I know a guy who knows Big Sam from Peckham who can get them from Denmark, that kind of thing?”

I looked up. The kiosk guy nodded. “That’ll do” he said. I felt kind of dizzy, breathing a bit heavily and yet elated. The traffic noise came back. I glance at my watch. Twelve minutes until my meeting. Where did the time go? Half an hour. And yet I’ve been somewhere new, seen something that nobody’s ever seen before as far as I know, and it’s all been created right here on a traffic island.

“Cheerio pal. See what happens when you call

something new and see what it can do? Imagine...”

He pulled down the shutters emphatically. I gathered myself and set off for the Institution. What could doughnut brittle do? At the traffic lights I started to think about red and green ones. Maybe green with a red filling? Halloween! And the zebra crossing—black and white stripes, like a piano keyboard...

I walked along Piccadilly towards Albermarle Street and each turning I passed gave another kick to the possibilities. Air Street—make ‘em light as a feather! Vine Street—wine flavoured versions for before and after dinner. Particularly after. With port, brandy or scotch. Sackville Street—take a leaf out of Virginia Woolf’s book *Orlando* and have a mix of delights for men, women, and more.

I turned up Albemarle Street and walked along to the Royal Institution. I looked into the café on my way past; Tunnock’s Teacakes, pain au chocolat—but no doughnut brittle! The dream is on! ∞

NOTES

- 1 See ‘Cold Weather, Warm Data’, *Unpsychology* 8, pp 128–131

Music from the Imaginings Ensemble, remixed by Patrick Carpenter



tinyurl.com/imaginings-remix-5



Mary Thorp — Sandworm #5

I think this is a really nice image of you and me. It looks like both of us. It represents a moment in this relationship between us. It's like an emoji of that moment. Or a prayer. It's a kind of visual puzzle where I got to make up all the rules.

I enjoyed doing it!

I love our woven self. It was so fun doing the photos together and it captures something of that day.

Francis' weaving
of Francis and Lesley

Yeah, and the joy and humour of our ideas. Light and frivolous, yes, but there's something truly wonderful here too.



*We're looking pretty calm but we're also looking off to the side.
There's something else going on outside the frame..*

And there's lots of cheeky pink bits in there too, like in between the lines. When I didn't get the squares exactly accurate, the little seams of pink light came through.

I love that you're mentioning that. Even working on the computer, you allowed the irregularities to have a life of their own and you loved them and gave them expression.

FRANCIS SALOLE AND LESLEY MACLEAN

Weaving ourselves together

I REMEMBER WATCHING YOU weave your pictures a few years ago, using your scalpel to encourage those little strips of paper at the sides to fit in neatly. Now I've given it a go and I noticed I didn't want to do that at all, which got me reflecting about how I do things, my love of messy edges.

If I continue this weaving practice with my inclinations, there would still a connection to what you're doing, but it would go off on its own track...

Isn't that interesting! You know, when I was looking at your ones, I recognised that what I was doing was quite different. Even though it has the same whakapapa¹ as your ones, descending from me just doing what you're doing, with the same geometry.

One of the things that I'm excited about in my art at the moment is the weaving together of the analog and the digital, the virtual and the actual.

I'm interested in those too. And though I think about weaving a lot — weaving is one of the many words Nora Bateson uses to describe the relationshiping going on within a living system² — I'm finding myself wanting to stop thinking about weaving, and to do more actual weaving. Less virtual, more actual.

One thing that I noticed when I did the weavings with the cabbage trees in them, was that the trees were already woven into their environment. This photo weaving is just a simplified version of what nature is already always doing.

Yeah, I try to keep things simple, because complexity already exists in there. And when I try to bring in complexity deliberately, I just feel that I've overthought it. Particularly when you zoom right in and you realise that it's weavings weaving weavings right down to molecules and protons.

Some of the difficulty with complexity seems to be due to the infinite number of possibilities for doing things and yet having to make actual decisions at some points.

Yeah, when I started to get into my painterly lens, trying to make it pretty, with the squares and circles and the colours and the balance, I could just go on and on. I have indulged myself a little bit.

They're the particular responses that each of us had in those moments. We could have done something else but we did what we did. For reasons known and unknown..

I like the difference between our weavings. We're not placing one of them on a platform saying it's better than the others. Well OK, yours is a lot more ambitious and refined and finished and that's why I put it on the first page. And yet we both know there is beauty in a rough beginner's weaving, in all kinds of roughness.

We're different people weaving different versions of ourselves together, differently. We made our decisions, and we're weaving ourselves together by doing that.

And yet, your difference is different from the way I was

imagining it. When we talked for the first time last week about what we'd each done, I realised I'd been in my own bubble pre-planning how it was all going to look together.

You have a Warm Data lens on what we're doing, and from that this project evolved and is now weaving itself into this magazine. And you're deeply involved in the architecture of the magazine — you got your head around what this particular article means within it. I feel a bit cheeky in that I'm just creating, just kind of vibing on these ideas and having fun with our relationship. And the way we weave ideas together, and the Venn diagrams of our creativity, and sense of spirituality and belonging, and fun and humour, and just creating a really pretty picture, which encapsulates a moment within all of this.

Your “just vibing” is helping me loosen up! And I like that you've created something outside my “Warm Data lens”. It's got its own life and language, and actually fits just fine with Warm Data theory anyway, which isn't telling anyone what to do or think. And unpsychology welcomes a diversity of life and thought. I guess there's no real limit on where one can explore.

Practically though, the magazine is going to get finished, and you're going to make the final decision on how this will fit into the magazine, whether that's right or wrong. And I feel lucky because of that, because I didn't put my hand up to do that. And yet I get to be a part of it.

I guess you could say there is real openness to exploring in this magazine, and yes, decisions get made for it to exist at all, but the exploring doesn't have to end with any decision.

That seems in the true spirit of what I imagine warm data is like. Leaving the magazine open...

Perhaps keeping things open is key, after all life is always

open. I guess there's a sense of closing things down a bit whenever we make a decision, which is probably why it's so easy to be paralysed by the need to make the right one. I'm challenging myself more just to go ahead do things, messy edges and all.

Anyway, we're just two people with their different perspectives doing something together. It's as if when we write or think about stuff too much, we step out of the room. And I'm more and more interested in staying in the room.

I get a bit lost in my mind talking about this stuff because it's complex and my mind gets tired. Trying to listen to the actual meaning of what we're saying is hard.

Well absolutely. There's something I had a glimpse of while we've been working together. If we wanted to tie what we've done into theory, we haven't covered all the bases yet, although some things have been alluded to. And that's completely OK! We don't have to sort it all out

Yeah, what are we even sorting out? We're trying to collapse into some watertight theoretical anchor, to have some credibility in whatever it is we're supposed to have credibility in, but in the end we're two human beings weaving pictures together.

And visually each weaving is fascinating because you're not quite sure what you're even looking at. It's more than one thing, more than one moment — it's two moments.

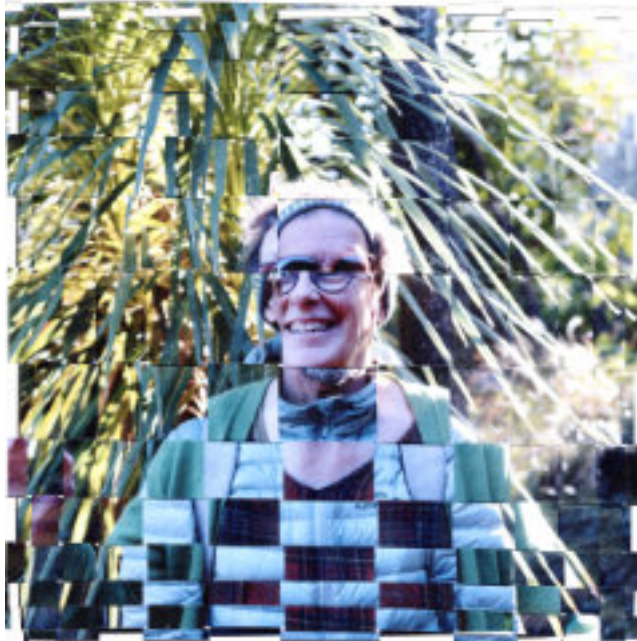
Well there are endless moments aren't there?: the moment the shutter went, moments of cutting and weaving, moments having these conversations and all the moments that birthed those moments... I remember you saying once about the woven images being sometimes hard to read. Even where you've made a real effort to line up some of the facial features, when you look at it, it's not a simple image. And in mine when the backgrounds were different, the whole image got mixed — where did those edges go? ~

NOTES

1 teara.govt.nz/en/whakapapa-genealogy/page-1

2 Nora Bateson, Aphanipoiesis, Medium <https://norabateson.medium.com/aphanipoiesis-96d8aed927bc>

Lesley's weavings
of Lesley and Francis



The centres get emphasised by the size of the strips. That got me thinking about what “we” put in the centre and what we see as background. I thought I’d make the trees the centre, though they don’t look so centerish here as they weren’t the subject in the original photos. This is clearly not a photo of just the cabbage tree as there’s also the light and the other plants. You could say it’s already woven because its not standing by itself as a separate thing.

There’s an uncomfortableness to us being on the edges I think. But our light and dark jackets makes a beautiful patchwork — it’s like we’re dressed as twins. It’s two people but each person is the same two people!

Isn’t it a bit like that anyway? The me I am with you is different to who I am with someone else. Certain topics like to come up, the energy moves between us in a particular way. I experience myself as already part Francis.

The photos show these curious mirthful beings that come out when we’re together. That’s the kind of energy we have when we talk about this stuff.

I like how when I look at the single portrait of us, I feel woven in with you, like I have a different body. The picture does of course, but I feel that in me too.

It’s true. When we talk and listen and come up with ideas, there’s a weaving together of moments that we remember. Including back when we lived in a flat together 40 years ago. There’s a weaving together of our entities in my mind.

And it’s nice to see all that represented as something in the body — we’re embodied creatures after all. I can say we’re woven in my mind but here we are physically woven too.

I also like the *disembodiment* of the images too, made from images that are cut up and recomposed in a different way.

Yes!

These are the same two photos, yes? So these woven images are 100% different! The picture of us on the left looks more engaging, the other one a bit monstrous. How did that happen? What's visible? What's hidden?

Each version is hiding secretly behind the other one! Maybe all weavings are like that. I think of settings where I hide myself in the underweave.

At the beginning of each weaving, I could choose how to place the strips together, and it was easy to weave those thicker central pieces. But as I moved further out, there were downstream effects from my original intentions. Random bits turning up. Some thinner edge pieces wouldn't fit or they'd keep popping off, or sometimes it was my own attitude that changed. I felt impatient and less motivated to finish the weaving. So I left my edges rough and frayed.



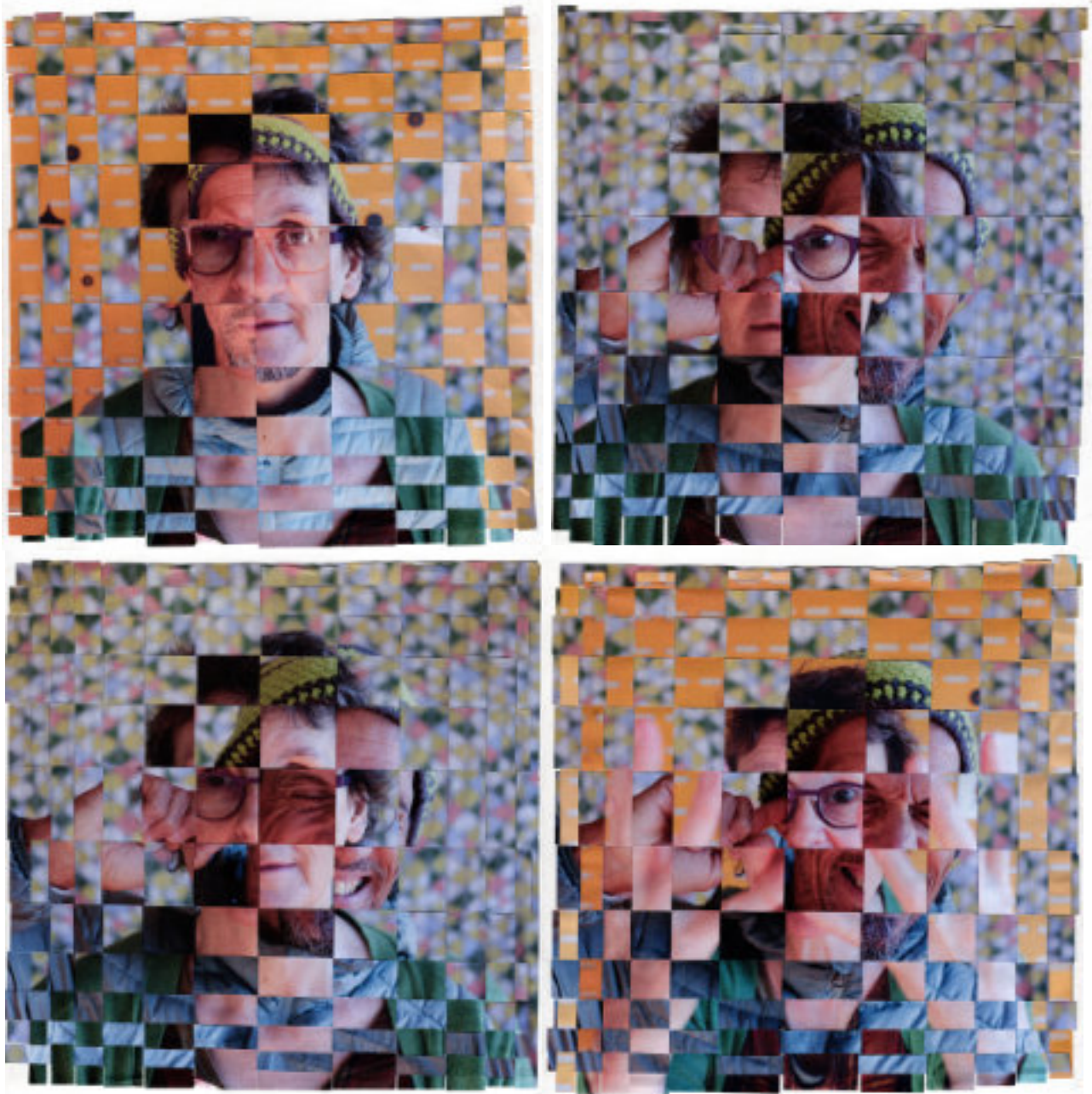
They've got buzzing vibrant energy that's very different from mine, where I've honed and polished the composition. The unpolishedness here makes them fresh. I used a computer for my one but when I was doing paper weavings, I had to practice a lot and measure things to keep my edges how I wanted them.

I guess people practice patiently to build their skills, or use technology to try and keep their edges tidy, whereas here I didn't have the patience or skill or desire. Perhaps many well-intentioned projects get abandoned or untended when the mess starts getting messy. I used to notice that at my last job. It takes a lot of time and care to keep everyone woven in when you get to the fiddly bits. And that's probably considered too costly by many. The benefit is less obvious.

When I first started weaving, I had these little paintings on coloured paper that I'd carefully designed to look a certain way. But when I started cutting them up, my initial plans were truly taken apart and abstracted. Cutting my ideas up and weaving them together gave me something completely fresh and unplanned that I never could have imagined just by sitting and thinking about it.

So much to look at there! Beautiful light and dark squares. There's something bubbling and alive about these images that I love.

The top left one is the only one that seems like a single coherent person. They look like a Madonna, feeling for the world. The others look more like horned beasts and are more fully woven into their backgrounds. There aren't any real edges, and thus these are arguably more realistic depictions of a person.



Yes, or they're like a buzzing oscillating universe — all these tiny entities deciding whether to be a wave or a particle... These feel like representations of the incredible energy and movement that underlies everything, even if it appears solid. I like the edges too: you can see the technique.

I had been trying to keep my edges tidy and I failed and then my friend Gary said to me "but if the edges are messy, they can weave into other things". There might be a value in mess that we don't give it credit for.

Tides



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GRABA-CASTELLINI

POETRY IN GERMAN BY INGE CASTELLINI

ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY ANGELINA CASTELLINI,
INGE CASTELLINI & ALEX HOYLE

ebbe und flut

jeden tag neu
erwartet der strand
voller sehnsucht
das meer
mal stürmt es
brausend heran
mal schleicht es
durch die furchen
des sandes und
küsst sie sanft
bevor es sich
wieder entfernt

jeden tag neu
freut sich der
trockene boden
auf das spiel
mit den wellen
und zeigt stolz
die immer wieder
neu geformten
tiefen spuren
die sein stürmischer
partner hinter
sich lasst

genau so wenig
wie die erde
das wasser
klammert noch
verstößt
werd ich dich halten
noch fallenlassen
ich werde
DA SEIN für die
bewegungen einer
beziehung
gleich

ebbe und flut

tides

every day anew
the beach awaits
the sea
full of longing
sometimes rushing
in with a roar
sometimes creeping
through the furrows
of the sand and
kissing them gently
before stealing
away again

every day anew
the dry ground
looks forward
to playing
with the surf
proudly displaying
the ever
newly formed
deep traces
that its stormy
lover leaves
behind

just as
the earth
does not cling
to the water
nor rejects it
i shall not keep you
nor let you fall
i will
BE THERE
dancing in
relationship
to both

ebb and flow









I feel tension, a sense of being stuck,
and I hear the crickets' music in silence,
deep way of stones.

This pattern became clearer with each
story that was shared:

an interdependent pattern of universal
evolution.

Light beckons. We have been nourished,
I think —

what seems dead is carried by life,
but fear can make us turn from this too.

A mass bloom in black and gold is weird
and visceral.

We all have our shapes and our dances
are small.

The evolution of seed and crickets – and a blooming

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- 138 EMILY WILKINSON – The solace of seeds
- 141 TOBY CHOWN – A sketch of seeds in gold light on the ridgeway above Avebury
- 144 MARY THORP, RUTH THORP, STEVE THORP – Sandworms and deserts blooming: a suite of imaginings
- + Within and between: sandworm art and textures by MARY THORP & the remixed music of PATRICK CARPENTER & THE IMAGININGS ENSEMBLE.

< *This poem uses words and phrases
from pieces in this section.
Hear it read by Steve Thorp.
Music accompaniment
by Ruth Thorp.*



tinyurl.com/UP9-2foundpoem4

VITALIJA POVILAITYTE-PETRI

Warm Data Archipelagos: learning to learn in the mystery of unknown

FOURTEEN YEARS AGO we left the maternity ward on the morning of Saint Valentine's Day, holding in our arms our little newly born love. When I stepped outside the building the city sounded different. I heard a new world with new ears. Something changed in the last wildest phase of becoming a mother. A new little star was born and the world became different. I was feeling a deep stillness. We returned to our warm and cosy nest. The space with high ceiling was filled with peace and I could only hear the beautiful music of a new life breathing softly.

Our place soon became too small and we searched for a new home to live in. We went from house to house, until I noticed a red rose blooming on the sandy soil of the inner garden of one of the places we visited. It was an invisible connection, an invitation and a calling. I felt it was our home. The place responded with mutual love and attachment to us.

I tenderly placed the work contract proposal received in a yellow DHL envelope from Helsinki into an archive box. That day, I did not know yet that it was the moment when my professional identity started dying at a fast pace. Our new place was very noisy with various craftsmen doing renovation works. I started to search for silence. With my little Valentine, I walked for days and days in green surroundings to clean our lungs from dust and residues of construction materials; to rest our ears from the noise of drilling machines and to have warm conversations with the strangers of our new neighbourhood.

*Seductive roses in Brussels town house
garden which became our home.*





Valeriana officinalis
beautifying nature's
pharmacy at Huvud-
skär island, July 2020.

Those nature explorations connected into one continuous learning journey in search of silence, life sources, my new identity and restor(y)ing relationships. This ongoing walk is not always easy: sometimes it is filled with frustrations born from my own hypocrisy, disappointments, pain, suffering; sometimes with pleasant surprises, love, care, joy of newness, togetherness, lightness and the discovery of unexpected acquaintances. Sometimes I just move with the flow of life because I do not know what else to do, at that moment of despair when I observe so much destruction in the city and my own life. Witnessing the disappearance of a blooming dandelion meadow on our way from school from one day to another, and being covered by temporary concrete school containers filled with imprisoned children makes my heart cry for days, weeks, months and years. At times I feel so confused, incoherent, lost, disoriented, hopeless and powerless. I do not know how to contribute to this world. There are many thoughts, feelings and emotions emerging within all the spaces I move in. Even with my small daily efforts to be less damaging and extractive, I often fail, lose direction, fall on the ground, stand up again and continue to co-create for our common futures. I am trying to listen to my intuition about

what is most needed at this moment as my participation in life. My endless questionings of how to support life are growing into my art and creative research practices, weaving interconnected tissues of relationship with others. Those practices are composed of observing, mothering, playing, photographing, exploring liminal spaces, (re)rooting, foraging, re-searching, local knowledge-ing, gardening, exploring the alchemy of herbalism and magic activism, forest bathing, dialoguing wisdom, common dreaming, reflecting, writing (with) plants, common sense creating and sharing. Moving in this way I accidentally stepped into the Warm Data Lab, a mysterious space where a lot of generosity is dwelling.

I am a trained pharmacist. I was attracted to this profession because of the magic smells and sense of care that I always felt when entering with my mother into our local pharmacy in Soviet Lithuania. When I finished my studies in 1998 most of the beautiful and mysterious pharmacies were transformed into overcrowded shops, trying to sell as much stuff as possible. There was not much feeling of care left in trying to palliate emerging symptoms of known and newly emerging illnesses, yet having little or no time to take an interest in the patient's

Stockholm archipelago
observed from Talludden
peninsula on Ornö island,
photo by Jonas Petri.



life paths and stories of healing. However, the pharmacy of nature was faithfully waiting for me to come back outdoors and explore our interconnectedness in the gardens, meadows and forests where I once learned to take my first steps as a child. I became a frequent visitor, a patient practitioner to the nature pharmacy, taking sincere interest in understanding the different personalities of plants and people. The healing garden herself became an active researcher in my studies, helping me to learn within people-plant relationships and nature's mysteries.

My first encounters with Warm Data happened in January 2020. I was working intensely with the Brussels Health Gardens community, finalising our research project proposal for funding and struggling to create sincere relationships within our collective. I participated in the Re-imagine leadership seminar where Warm Data and People Need People journeys were presented by Nora Bateson and her community. At that time I could not understand much of the ecology of ideas and metaphors, but I felt spontaneously drawn to those Warm Data spaces.

The art of Warm Data opens for me new ways of learning, being, feeling, caring, playing, seeing, imagining and perceiving this world, filled with unseen possibilities that I remain so much blinded to. Each time I step into Warm Data spaces I smell the scents of freedom, conviviality. I sense the pos-

sibility of experiencing diverse emotions: togetherness, adoration, grieving and celebrating life, the acknowledgment of urgency and need of slowing down, giving attention, remembering, playing, relating, learning mutually to embrace the unknown, cracking, dying, composting, being reborn or forming new shapes of life.

I am starting to recognise Warm Data spaces as archipelagos, composed of many living, and constantly changing islands connected around the globe and forming common lived experiences. Their visible parts grow out of constantly moving waters that cover unspoken and unseen spheres — structures holding many histories and stories of deep times. Archipelagos that are inhabited by people, birds, animals, fishes, plants, meadows, forests, stones, rocks, caves, boats, clouds, rains, winds, waves, plastics and countless other creatures and things that are visible or invisible to the human eye.

I was married into the Stockholm Archipelago, 17 years ago. I learn so much from those unique places where sea storms, underwater streams, stillness, land, sky, death and life meet. Now, Warm Data practice is shaping my attention so I am starting to see the archipelago's rooted islands constantly moving and transforming into flying clouds — participating in the cycles and evolution of life and nature.

The tops of diverse and complex islands, caressed

or violently washed by the ocean's waves and winds, and warmed by the sun get rooted into the heart of the Earth, where energy and vitality are being hosted for millennia. These energies return to the Earth's surfaces in spontaneous or forced ways: appearing in the form of boiling lava of erupting volcanoes or the blackness of extracted fossil fuels. These solar and earthly energies are warming our bodies and generating our relationships, concerns, care and love, forming Warm Data soil.

I was born in North Lithuania, close to the Latvian border. The landscape of my little hometown Pasvalys is shaped by four rivers: Svalia, Lėvuo, Mūša and Pyvesa. Those waters separating and connecting the lands have taught me to live with seasons, nature forces, borders, different elements and hetero-generous people – who could be greedy in times driven by need of survival. During school hours, one way of thinking taught human superiority and power of mastery in creating a so-called better world. After school, however, I observed the laws of nature with the old ladies who lived next door. They walked most of the time with bare feet, talking to plants and animals; telling secret unwritten stories in many different versions and expressing their affection for life through gentle gestures. They shared their houses with chickens, turkeys, mice and rabbits during cold winters and were in intimate relationships with their rivers. These same rivers, with their distant and

recent memories and stories, are flowing today in my body's vessels and soulscapes. Their tiny particles are calcified in my bones and accompany me continuously across the Baltic Sea to Stockholm and the Warm Data Archipelagos. The rivers remind me of different possibilities of communication that go beyond language.

The continental climate, heavy clay soil and monocultural ideology I grew up with, contributed strongly to my robust, terrestrial being. This year, 2023, divides my life into two symmetrical parts: half is lived strongly rooted in Lithuanian soil; the other half spent moving around Europe and exercising nomadic seasonal lifestyles. I feel tension, a sense of being stuck and a lack of flexibility in my body, soul and mind. There are some channels of possibility connected to the local rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea, from there into the Stockholm Archipelago and further into Warm Data spaces. I sense that these mixing streams of water, light, soil, dust and air are starting to move in unpredictable directions, forming new connections and flows. I hope they will bring more warmth to my native lands. To the places which carry so many painful wounds from frozen, unshared and undigested memories of wars of the 20th century, the Soviet occupation, deportations to Siberia and the horrors of Holocaust.

This morning we are celebrating my son's 14th



Life life-ing at Huvudskär island, July 2020



M. K. Čiurlionis. ALLEGRO. Tempera on paper. 1908. From cycle SONATA III (Sonata of the Serpent),
<https://ciurlionis.eu/en/painting/>



M. K. Čiurlionis. FINALE.
Tempera on paper. 1908.
From cycle SONATA III
(Sonata of the Serpent),
[https://ciurlionis.eu/en/
painting/](https://ciurlionis.eu/en/painting/)

birthday. I am thinking again of human warmth and the red little drying flowers I noticed on the skin of his tiny body when I first fed him. They were witnesses to my broken tissues that supported new life on his birth journey. Revisiting my memories, I realise that, in the wilderness of the Nordic hemisphere, we know very few red flowers. Most of the red blooms around are created by the touch of the human hand: roses, carnations, peonies, hibiscuses, begonias, gerberas, amaryllises, lilies, zinnias...

Like many highly cultivated humans I am feeling so thirsty for wilderness. I dreamt for a long time to see wild red flowers in their natural habitats and to show them to my Valentine as an expression of my love to him and the natural world. We admired red tulips a few times near Spili village, in Crete. I was told they have been inhabiting that land for centuries. The island of Crete is considered a biodiversity hotspot and is a target of wildlife tourism. Was I part of it? Certainly, driven there by my best intentions to create more warmth and love in this broken world, starting with my closest family circle.

Here, again, I fell into a Batesonian double bind: expressing my admiration to wildlife and yet possi-

bly contributing to endangering this vulnerable species. I am imagining a pattern that connects People Need People and Warm Data Labs to my childhood and family memories in Soviet Lithuania, to my sensory desires rooted in the tulip mania in 17th century Holland and to our friend Lambros at Amari valley in Crete who will be foraging wild asparagus for an Easter celebration table in April. Hopefully red *Tulipa Doerferi* will be blooming again and will be announcing the renaissance of life. Many shades, nuances and meanings of the colour red are dancing in my imagination, which is shaped by my heritage, surrounding cultures, relationships and lived experiences. While red is so noticeable, seductive and vital, what is being unseen and remains out of the spheres of my perceiving and imagining? Are the Swedish red wooden houses in Stockholm Archipelago really red?

What possibilities are submerging and what is in need of nurturing at this moment when many human activities are continuously destabilising the Earth, all forms and forces of life within it? And if we were to touch into vitality, what colours might be seen on the Warm Data Archipelagos? ∞

Tulipa doerferi
blooming at Amari
valley, Crete, April
2019.



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LUCIA DARAMUS

Dancing voices around my head along Cambridge



tinyurl.com/LuciaDaramusCambridge

Listen to Lucia read
her poem here
(with sound edit by
Patrick Carpenter.)

Pie Jesu from Requiem by Andrew
Lloyd Webber. Performed by
Sarah Brightman & Paul
Miles-Kingston, *The Really Useful
Company*, 1985.

Softly I'm starting my trip
in the morning. Washing my puzzle brain
in the glittering drops of a late moon
listening to above Peterborough Cathedral
Pie Jesu –
Pie Jesu, Pie Jesu, Pie Jesu
Qui tollis peccata mundi
Dona eis requiem, Dona eis requiem
Pie Jesu, Pie Jesu
and a flying sky in
souls of our humanity's womb.
I'm asking about Spanish – English Queen
Catalina de Aragon
who is sleeping in purple eternity
in the gentle memory of English people.
Catalina compartio el trono durante
veinticuatro anos y gobierno
el reino mientras su marido hacia
la guerra en Francio
Catalina, Catalina
dump rainbow life of her husband
like a funeral sweet fantasy
in the family's king.
I'm stretching my fingers
of preying to flapping dandelions
singing in humanity's perfect storm
and my steps are continuing to
dance towards Cambridge



LUCIA DARAMUS

and voices, voices in wet air:
she is a beautiful liar
she is an actor, she is an animal,
an undesirable woman
she is a beautiful actor
an animal psychotic...
my stomach is quivering
on shimmering River Cam
with soft willow trees
caressing my face.
and nostrils, my nostrils
smell above Trinity College's walls
Newton's volumes folio
and I hear the crickets' music
in silence deep way
of stones under Cambridge River
dancing voices around my head
along this elegant city.
We are now in front of the Corpus Clock
Bene't street and Trumpington street
so many voices, so many voices
like a karusell spinning and
harting my puzzle brain...
clock with voices, faces, eyes...
you are an animal, you are
an animal neurotic
spinning, spinning with
sweet and past information –
junctions between Magdalen College
St. John's College, Trinity College,
King's College, Queen's College
along green- yellow- blue Cam River
with soft mud reflecting in the water
light of dream from George Santayana's poems
in my infinite labyrinth cerebrum.

we are in front of the Corpus Clock
 with voices penetraiting my mind
 and dark blurred vision,
 pain of my soul trembling
 of my flesh and sick of my stomach
 and...and... voices....
 I'm screaming loudly out
 I'm yelling, I'm howling, shouting
 crying, yelping, bawling with my
 deep inner out on the street
 a lady asking my sister: she is ok?
 My sister Gabriela talked to me
 calm down, Lucia, calm down
 is nobody talking about you...
 my voice was screaming
 they said I am an animal
 'look, Lucia, look, a fresh rainbow
 above your head, on the sky
 is smiling to you'.
 My infinite labyrinth in my brain
 is spinning with voices along
 Cambridge's streets.
 'Lucia, remember your amaizing
 conversation with the student studying
 paramedic science
 about Henry VIII, about his wives along
 Cam River'...
 my labyrinth brain is spinning
 with so many voices
 we are now near our car
 sound of many words of the students town
 Wonderful — bright city.
 Back inside car.
 trembling harmonies of field of clouds
 and the music muzzling my cells' mind
 Pie Jesu, pie Jesu, pie Jesu
 Qui tollis peccata mundi
 Dona eis requiem, Dona eis requiem
 pie Jesu, pie Jesu, pie Jesu
 dancing voices around my head
 along translucid blue-green elegant Cambridge.



Thoughts

Art is my faith. I pray through art of poetry. I am an immigrant, coming in England from a former Communist country, Romania. Being forced to learn everything about Great Britain (for British citizenship), I fell in love with the British history and culture. So, I decided to visit all memorial houses, museums, monasteries, cathedrals, etc., relating to part of British culture. I read some books about Henry VIII and I wanted to follow Katherine of Aragon's Steps. This year, 2023, in July, I, my partner (Serban), and my sister, Gabriela, went to Peterborough when I was so happy to see the Cathedral and also Katherine of Aragon's tomb. All the time, I was listening to Classic FM and on the air, it was singing Pie Iesu and other amazing classical arias.

Yes, I consider honestly that art is a strong form of belief. Via art, art of words, or art of colours, I pray, I talk with the part of the human spirituality. Via poetry or other types of writings I communicate with people. My soul is expressing my love or my despair via words and colours.

But, unfortunately, I have voices. I am psychotic. Some of my voices are creative, but particularly, one of them is a bully, harassing me loudly in my mind, giving me paranoid thoughts.

However, I learned from my awful past (as a child in a Communist country) to transform everything in poetry and art of colours. It's also a form of protection.

After Peterborough, we went to Cambridge. I had in my mind so many voices and paranoid thoughts, but finally I enjoyed this wonderful city. And I wrote my poem about Cambridge, and I drew some of Cambridge Colleges and also my brain with my voices played and drew some new creatures of cave.

I studied, attending a course, with Oxford University, but after this visit in Cambridge, I would like to apply for a position as a poet in residence at Cambridge University.

And of course, I will continue to discover the beauty of British culture and history, and to express my gratitude through art. Even if some people around me try to stop me.

Actually, it is nothing to do against this, because it is the first and final form of my existence.

My inner cells are singing in poetry style and sense of colours, with wonderful music in background. ~





LORRAINE TOLMIE

Crossing thresholds: creativity and connection

THE IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY are key aspects of fostering change and transformation. While everyday cognitive processes allow us to plan, formulate, and strategise, creative states of consciousness have the capacity to connect us to more expansive levels of awareness. My work as a visual artist and therapist has led me to believe that there are particular conditions of art-making that lead to states of being which have enormous capacity to guide us towards insight and healing. At these times, the creative process often feels transcendent, spiritual, or beyond the self. Such moments hold the potential for deep shifts and there is often a non-verbal awareness of energetic or psychic processes that are beyond the reach of the conscious mind. While indigenous or shamanic cultures typically consider the creative process as a dialogue with spiritual forces, this understanding has been lost in the contemporary Western world. Through time,

the focus has shifted to an emphasis on outcome that favours certain aesthetics and commercial application.

In 2019, I enrolled on a MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology with The Alef Trust. Over the next few years my studies became increasingly woven into my arts practice and a long-standing fascination with creative states of consciousness. For my final year research project, titled *Crossing Thresholds*, I investigated the links between creativity, non-ordinary states of consciousness, and unusual experiences. The project was guided by the philosophical framework of Integral Inquiry, a transpersonal research methodology developed by William Braud. By integrating various tools and different lenses of inquiry, the aim was to explore the multi-faceted nature of the participants' experiences. In addition to combining narrative and arts-based methods, I shifted between analysis and

Aaron Bass, *The Animal Realm*, etching with airbrushed colour, 24" x 18". Aaron, an arts educator and printmaker, lives in New Mexico. His atmospheric, animistic prints are created through intuitive dialogue with a library of animal bones and collected curiosities. These objects act as a symbolic language, conveying deeper underlying meaning. www.instagram.com/crowsfootpress/

an intuitive, creative exploration.

The research began with a recruitment survey and qualifying participants were invited to complete an in-depth online survey. This was followed by emails and interviews with ten of the survey respondents. Gathering stories around these topics felt like a sacred process. The experiences that the artists shared were unexpected, inspiring, and deeply moving. Each new story felt like it planted a seed of transformation that gently took root amongst the other narratives and nurtured the project. The main theme that emerged from the research data was connection. As part of the analysis, I crafted individual narratives based on the survey responses and interviews. When it came to the stage of creating a title for each story, my first impulse was usually to incorporate the word 'connection.' At first, this seemed like a frustrating indication of a lack of my own wordsmithery and imagination. Later, I realised it had been pointing to a collective theme extending across the narratives. For the artists, this sense of connection was experienced in many different ways that spanned the physical and non-physical, and linked to the creative process.

As I began my exploration I was particularly curious about whether artists who had stories to share on the topic also experienced heightened perception and less distinct boundaries of self. There were two aspects of heightened perception that interested me: sensitivity to external sensory input, and sensitivity to information that appeared to be beyond the material world. In relation to this second point, research had demonstrated that artists tend to perform better at psi tests (such as guessing the symbol on a card that was concealed.) Ingo Swann was an artist renowned for his remote viewing — an ability to sense objects and locations that were great distances away and often in unknown places. Visionary artists such as Hilma af Klimt and Georgina Houghton have recently attracted more attention, and are believed to have tapped into a higher order of information through their art-making. While there is a great deal of anecdotal evi-

dence in support of a link between creativity and expansive states of awareness, there is a surprising lack of research on the topic.

One of the major influences on my research topic is the concept of transliminality developed by the late psychologist Michael Thalbourne. Broadly speaking, transliminality relates to the tendency for material from the unconscious mind to reach consciousness. Individuals who measure high on the transliminality scale are more likely to be receptive to, or affected by, information that is typically beyond conscious awareness. In addition, these individuals are also likely to be sensitive to external sensory input such as bright lights or loud noises.

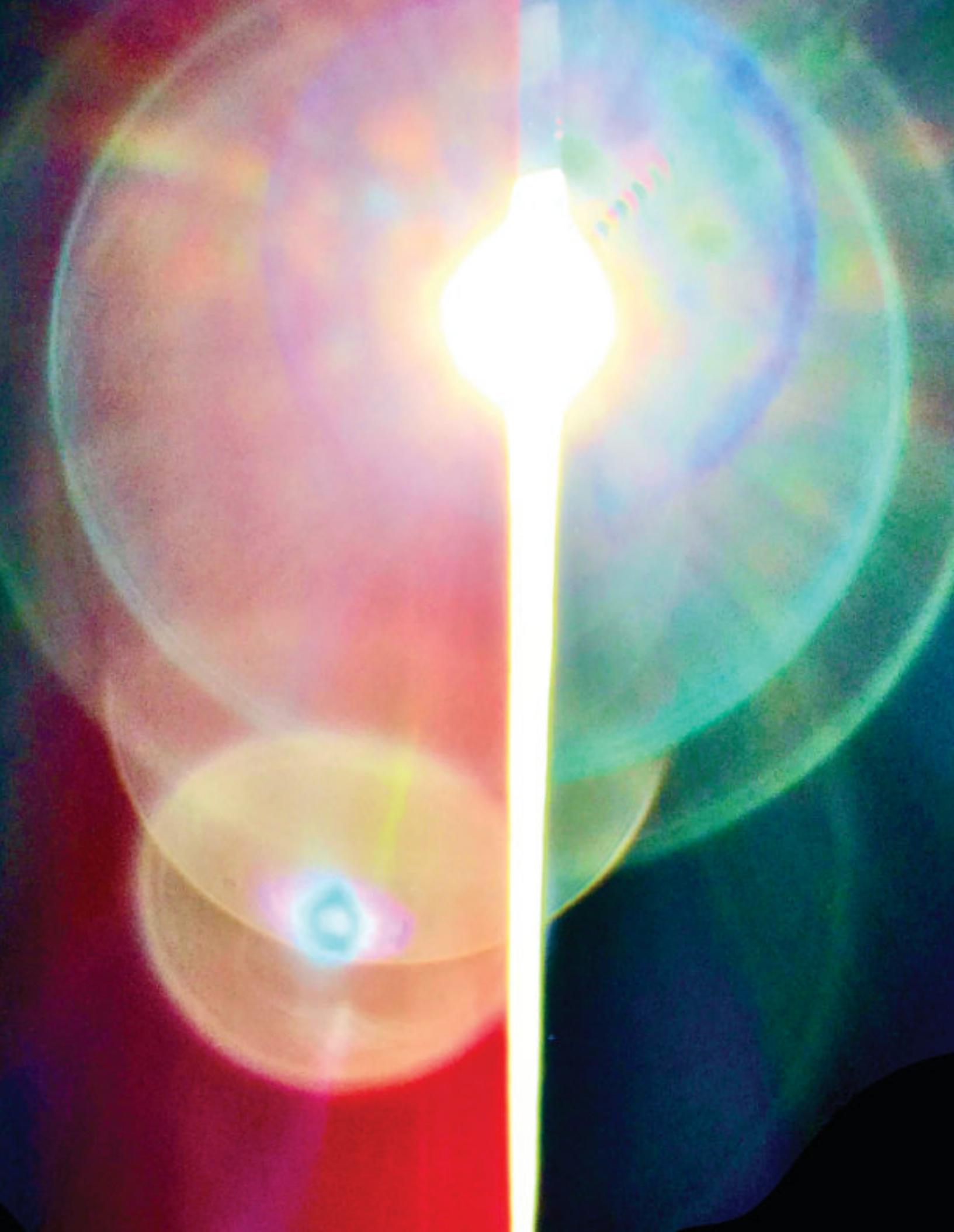
Research demonstrates links between transliminality and creativity. Ernest Hartmann developed the idea of 'thick' and 'thin' boundaries through his dream research, and this concept has much in common with transliminality. Those with 'thin' boundaries are said to have a less defined sense of self and a tendency to merge different aspects of experience, while those with 'thick' boundaries have a more delineated experience. Hartmann's research also suggests that those with thinner boundaries are more likely to be artistic.

The findings of my own research align with the concepts of transliminality and boundaries, and support the idea of a link between artistic personality, permeability, and heightened sensitivity. Individuals who have a higher sensitivity to external and internal input are likely to experience a deluge of information that for other people would go unnoticed. The creative process may be a natural response to this, providing a way to process the intensity of having a less filtered existence.

An unexpected outcome at an early stage of the research was that almost all respondents selected 'yes' for all four questions in the recruitment survey. Although I had expected a positive response on the basis of their interest in the project, I was surprised at how many artists indicated that they had used creative methods to process an unusual experience or altered state of consciousness and that they had an unusual experience connected with a piece of art



MARY LOU SPRINGSTEAD, *Ushering the immigrants*, acrylic on canvas, 66cm x 80cm. Mary Lou is a mixed-media artist. Originally from Florida, she now lives in Middlesbrough, England. Her artwork contains autobiographic elements alongside mythical symbolism and often touches on socio-political themes. Working spontaneously and intuitively, mysterious imagery often emerges in her paintings, creating a feeling of being connected to an expansive source.
www.marylouspringstead.com



ELIZABETH YOFFE, *The sound of light*.

Elizabeth Yoffe is an artist and media producer living on the East Coast of America. Her light art photography evokes a sacred quality through colour, form and luminescence. As a synaesthete, her senses are blended and she feels colour, light, and sound as bodily sensations. www.emboddity.com

they had created. Later, when participants shared their stories in the in-depth survey and during interviews it became clear that these two different experiences were often intertwined. The energetic connection that emerged was often a precursor for the creative work; it sustained the creative process, and remained present in an evolving relationship with the artwork. As this pattern became clearer with each story that was shared, I found it simultaneously obvious and astounding. My personal experience supports the findings, yet it seems strange that this is not a topic I recall being mentioned, despite having been involved in the arts and creative industries for over 25 years. I wonder if this is simply because people tend not to discuss strange or unusual experiences for fear of being judged or labelled? For me, connecting with people who have had similar experiences feels deeply validating. Many of the artists also shared a similar feeling and commented on the importance of normalising these experiences.

It has been suggested that the tendency of artists to experience fluid boundaries and shift between states of consciousness increases the likelihood of them having unusual experiences. The responses to the survey support this idea. When asked to describe their sense of boundaries between their inner world and the external world, most of the artists used words like 'porous' or 'fluid' and many emphasised that any perceived boundary was illusory. This was supported by their reports of extra sensory perception, precognition, clairvoyance, and other experiences that potentially indicated an ability to sense subtle energetic influences. In the cases that were shared for this research, such phenomena also included the opening of a channel to an expan-

sive creative source. It is not clear whether people are more likely to be drawn to artistic activities as a result of their way of experiencing the world (and perhaps as a means of expressing this), or if regularly engaging in creative processes and related states of consciousness cause shifts in perception.

Most of the participating artists described their creative work as a participatory process. They expressed feelings of being guided, and often sensed another presence or a connection with a mysterious source of support. For some, the creative process enabled a connection with a loved one who had died or someone who was no longer within physical reach. For others, an unidentifiable energetic or spiritual presence emerged. Although terms like 'higher self', 'spirit' and 'divine' were sometimes used, they were typically shared with a musing tone, suggesting that it was not something that could be easily identified or categorised with any certainty. An openness to the mystery seemed to be an integral part of the artists' experiences, and an important factor in opening an energetic channel to inspiration, knowledge and guidance.

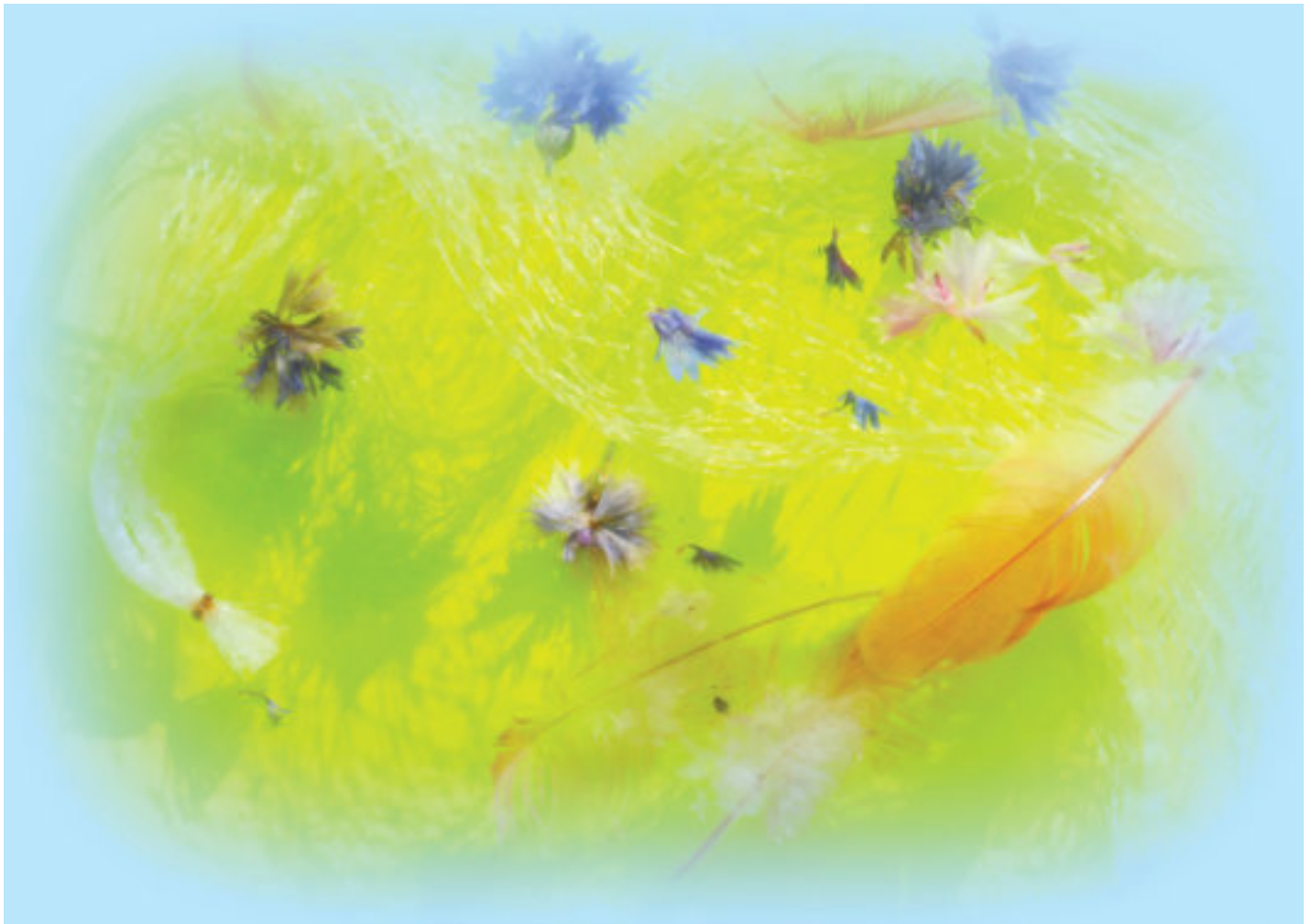
In many cases, the dialogue between the artist and the art that they had created continued for years or even decades. In this way, the creative process was not confined to the art of creation but became part of an evolving journey. The meaning of the art often shifted and changed over time in parallel with the artists' lives. Sometimes the art contained meaningful symbolism that marked a significant shift or new life path for its creator. At other times the art predicted or connected to an occurrence in material reality, or opened a channel to information beyond space and time.

Perhaps most importantly, almost all of the

artists acknowledged that creating art in this way nurtures their wellbeing, and identified their art-making as a supportive anchor during challenging times in their lives. The creative act and processing of their experiences occurs on multiple levels including emotional, mental, physical, symbolic, and spiritual. Simultaneously personal and transpersonal, the creative process forms a bridge between the material world and an otherworldly dimension. While the therapeutic effects of creating art are well

documented, I believe that art with a transpersonal dimension provides another level of healing, because the process fosters an embodied sense of our deep interconnectedness.

Crossing Thresholds is a free e-book featuring nine of the artist's stories and artwork, along with the findings of the research, and it is available to download at www.lorrainetolmie.com/crossing-thresholds. ∞



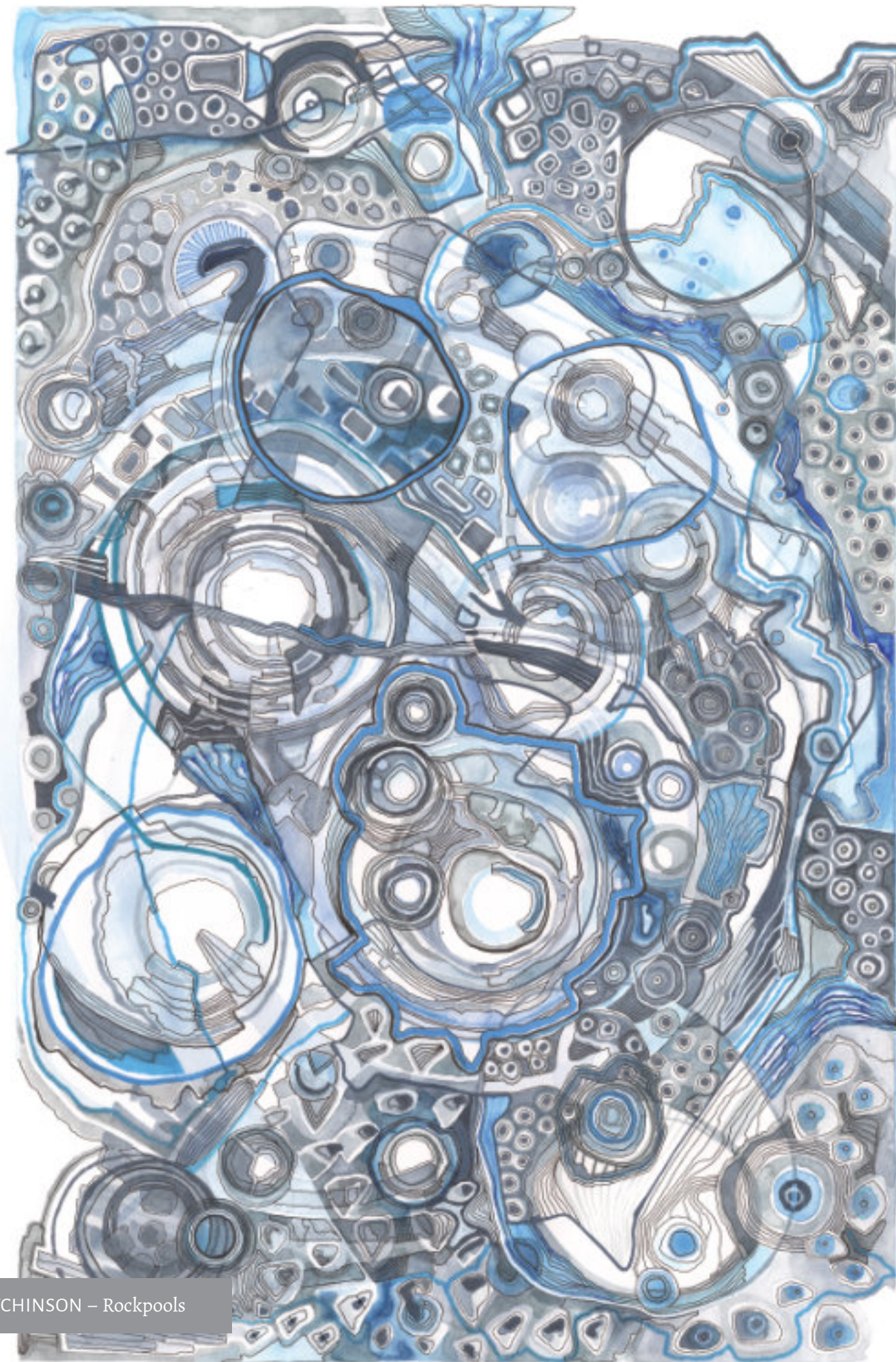
EVA MARSCHAN-HAYES, *The lightness of being*, digital photographic artwork

Eva Marschan-Hayes is a neurodivergent artist and poet living in the historical town of Lewes, East Sussex. She works mainly with photography, often in combination with other techniques, to bring about surreal or dream-like effects. Eva creates images to inspire the imagination, exploring spirituality, emotions, memory, and fantasy. She is also a group facilitator and mentor, teaching creative methods for self-discovery and to enhance wellbeing. Instagram @evas.poetic.imagery



LINDA O'NEILL, *Yellow finch*, acrylic on canvas

Linda O'Neill is an intuitive painter living in Boulder Colorado. Her abstract paintings are beautifully animated, with bursts of colour and layers of expressive brushwork. She describes the process of creating her artwork as 'an inner voice combined with a spiritual flow of energy' www.abbycreekstudios.com



KATE HUTCHINSON – Rockpools

KENNETH SILVESTRI

Imagining possibilities

the always there
backdrop
appears without warning
into
our occasional
communication pauses
with a primordial "Ahh,"
more than subtle
priming,
incubating liminality,
creating inner dialogue
of nonlinear
constructs,
stimulating
subconscious
personal recollections,
like a Dewey decimal animal,
all that was ever codified
absorbed at
the speed of light,
each instance
a latent hypothesis
accessible
if allowed
whenever our conscience
slips into a holographic state,
like a magical
mystery tour,

remembering
what
was hidden,
now emerging
as an interdependent pattern
of universal evolution
waiting to flourish
like seedlings,
maturing
in a soil of contextual
mutual relationships,
thriving
in-between
aesthetic dialogues,
existing in
map-less territories,
exploring life's
messy lovingness,
learning to unlearn
improvising
wild experiential
differences of awe

EMILY WILKINSON

The solace of seeds: reimagining the garden as a space for kinship, queerness and artful activism

SHROUDED IN HUSKS OF DARK, we sleep. Our kind are so very, very tired of it all. They think we are small, yet our dreams are bigger than they can ever know. If only they knew of the endless forests and rivers inside us. Call us blue, brown, grey, blue, yellow; every hue of loneliness. In isolation and disconnect, we drift aimlessly amongst the dominant stories which led us into this apathetic inertia. Yet, a tiny flame burns somewhere, tended by a longing for companionship. We crave new kin with whom to share our unique codes, a mutual flourishing of the silenced natures within us.

With mud beneath fingernails, I sit on the damp patio steps looking out over my garden with a mug of hot earl grey tea. I am filthy, covered in mud from digging out new vegetable beds in damp weather. This space has been a loved garden, yet contains a lot more growing potential than has been fulfilled so far — something I begin to try and change on a shoe-string budget. This house came to me with a pear tree, a sprawling rose bush, and a lot of concrete slabs. My vision comes into being slowly, whilst learning how to use a sledgehammer and crowbar,

as I kneel in the mud pulling up stone and rubble. I am not an experienced gardener. I've grown herbs and beans, and a few bits and bobs like calendula and nasturtiums. The future I see is not of a neatly sectioned outdoors space, but a wild ramble of food, flowers, medicinal plants and colour.

Wet, cold earth awakens us. Thirsty for a new story, we drink, and drink, and drink. Quenched, our fluidity wakes, stirring something deep. Our breath is cellular at first, held by the body of parent earth. Just when we thought we'd never find roots, there is a song calling from outside our shells. The souls we thought were lost are moved to tears, as something begins to push from our insides. Desire is remembered; a slow, microbial lovemaking between ancestor and mud.

The British approach to gardens has always mystified me; those privileged enough to have one tend to our own weird patches, usually bordered by fence and hedge. Privacy in a garden is certainly a beautiful thing, I grew up on books like *The Secret Garden* and love spending time alone in nature. However,

gardens often become another way to separate ourselves from one another and claim that little patch of earth as 'mine'. What if these spaces became more like 'ours', and how might we bring the spirit of allotments and community into conventional gardens?

Is it the earth shaking, or our own bodies? A steady, painful act of breaking open is happening. Maybe because we are unable to live any more within these desperate places of singularity. Matter seeps in through a crack which soon becomes a chasm. No longer defined by one's own skin, I need not rely on my own meagre supplies. The soil we have arrived in is good. Learning to speak each other's languages through blind osmosis, we speak to difference by feeling our way, learning these new, tingling sensations without naming. Via our mycelial messengers, we make the collective decision to live.

In an episode of *For the Wild* podcast, Vandana Shiva is talking about seeds. She envisages a world where we don't just swap extra food or plants, but also pass on the seeds and the knowledge of how to plant them. In a world where seed itself is being patented and controlled, this is indeed a heartfelt activism. I still have some seeds from last year's calendula, in turn grown from seeds gifted to me from friend, foodie and artist Annie. Seeds, like humans, adapt to their environments with each generation. Our care of their lineage renders them kin, and it is this kinship I seek in my little garden vision. An interdependent, joyful community grown from sharing seeds, plants, food, knowledge and lives. I want to make new friends who love growing, and are willing to help each other with the heavy work. I yearn to make kin with the plants I grow, feel into spiritual relationship with them and share their inspiration through my creative work.

Light beckons. We have been nourished by moon and stars, but now we must reach. We

cannot see our kin yet but can feel them! We are lifting up, up, towards the surface. A rush of fresh air breathes us into new ways of being in a blur of white-and-blue-and-grey-and wind-and-cold-and-rain. Newfound vision marking out terrain. The first so-very-very-warm embrace of sunshine. In dry times, friends bring us fresh water. Our entrance into childhood is initiated by an elemental ritual dance.

Up until the last few years, I thought and wrote about the earth as 'she.' Earth as 'woman' has been embraced by much feminist writing, such as the classic *Woman and Nature* by Susan Griffin. There is a useful place in this gendering for women to express our anger and reclaim ourselves—perhaps for us to help nature reclaim itself too. However, other gender expressions in nature cannot be dismissed. The Divine Feminine is real, yet freedom is a journey involving all of us.

As I become more comfortable with my queerness and bisexuality, I am shown how entangled and meshed the masculine, feminine, non-binary and intersex are within the natural world. Ecofeminism adds a useful perspective here, with thinkers like Carolyn Merchant dismantling the metaphor of mother earth—an idea that (although evolved from spiritually rich traditional cultures) has set us up for a rough ride in a patriarchal, mechanised world. As patriarchy, industrialisation and agriculture evolved, seeing nature as female became extremely convenient for reinforcing systems of oppression.

Opposites have occasional uses and I still feel the masculine and feminine, even as their definitions blur and mutate. Yet, how can we carry on across the gaping chasms of female/male, nature/culture, body/mind or slave/master? Ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues that the 'master identity' creates and depends on these dualities to perpetuate patterns of control. According to the field of queer ecologies, oppressors of LBGTQ!A+ have used the monotheistic-influenced argument that same-sex sex and gender bending are 'unnatural'—a key cause of so much of the horrific violence throughout history (or

her/theirstory) directed at queer, gay, bi and trans people. Even writing about that makes me feel quite sick, after realising at the age of 40 how much I've battled with and repressed my own 'nature' for most of my life—I am starting to comprehend the reasons why, and they are heavy.

Oh, the joy of togetherness upon seeing you all!
So much time alone, waiting in the darkness.
We grow playfully; you have a curious new bud,
I show you tiny leaves and shoots. Youth flourishes
in this wild garden we have planted, even
amongst the elders. Bodies of different shapes
are admired, accepted, loved. We are not neatly
pruned or kept apart here; green bean tendrils
hold hands with friendling lemon balm; poppy
dances red flames for peony; we watch human
kin kiss their beloved roses. More leaves grow
as summer enters fullness. Finally, we feel safe
enough to offer fruit.

A queer ecology of being calls to me, where there is room for everyone to be themselves. Gardening is a portal to eroticism; a future of earthly, multi-gendered pleasure, friendship and love. In this process of what Donna Haraway calls Worlding, I try (with difficulty) to dream beyond the human dualisms that we've set ourselves up with, including those inherent in many intimate relationships. The blooms of my sensual worlding are scented with long, platonic cuddles, lying in the grass holding hands with kin of all genders. How might seeing a garden this way bleed into our everyday lives and relationships? Rather than the traditional confusion inherent in any kind of multi-gendered expression, I see potential and flowering, a mutual entwining and inter-species celebration of difference.

Tender hands care for us, unburden and nourish

us. Laughter is plentiful as we share our berries with sister blackbird. Apples begin to fall as doula wasps help them cross over. Brother beet-root bleeds sharp, sweet nourishment into the mouths of others. Our gifts have been gathered, we begin to share our secrets as seeds. Autumnal winds bring bounty and death. The hardier amongst us are still growing, and others are gathered or scattered on a lively breeze. The rest shall rot down, preparing new ground for future generations.

This daydreamy haze of colour and possibility fades into a grey North Wales sky. I have finished my tea, and see how much work there is to be done. It will take a couple of years to unfold, but the dirt has spoken now. It tells me to be patient and go the distance, to prepare growing spaces for spring. A woman with a wild head of curls posts on our community Facebook group; she is new to the area and wants to know if anybody is into gardening. I hope to share friendship and growing with her, along with others whose vines creep into my garden. Time to go back inside, for now. The second generation calendula seeds sit in their tiny clay pot on my fire-place, waiting for their time to come.

The days are short and it is winter once more. Our cycle begins again. This year, the sleeping times are not so lonely. It is with less uncertainty and fear that we rest—although it is not as cold as it should be, which confuses us. In indigo darkness our bodies remember a music which lilts through the shells of ancestors. At the heart of it all is something new—a seed of kinship and hope. In a low voice, we begin to hum the tune. Make yourself go very quiet, then soften and listen—you might just hear us singing. ∞

TOBY CHOWN

A sketch of seeds in gold light on the ridgeway above Avebury

Seeds carried
Above the Ridgeway :
beads scattered from a string.

The strangest thing;
Each seed seems to
 pause,
 think;
 then
 swerve
 over
 The wire fence
Like an insect...

“Just the wind,”
I think
“The seeds are not flying,
They are borne on
The wind’s flow,
The eddies and nudges
Of an Avebury morning”

But the suppleness of the illusion,
The closeness of the seeds’
Movements to life -

What does it mean
That the wind carries
Seeds with such intense aliveness?

They say fantasies reveal reality -
Verne imagined a submarine
Before any iron was welded or dipped in brine.

Writers imagined starships
Before Apollo 44 penetrated
The night sky to touch the Moon's flank.

Someone shaped a fertile goddess
In a long forgotten cave,
Now sperm and egg are
joined in labs.

Sometimes I suspect
images to be seeds
carried across landscapes,
By imaginal winds,
Seeking a crack of bare soil;

And if images are seeds,
What kind of life
Do they want to crack
Open within us?

Does the earth want us
Dizzy with vine and flower,
Ivy sprouting from our armpits,
Mouths and groins?

Or silent like this old landscape,
Pregnant with meaning?

The seeds flow over
The ridgeway in the golden hour
Like a procession of mendicants
Holding candles.

I came here to let
The grey veil of my
Thoughts' mutterings
Drop for a second
to show again

How the world imagines
me,

Instead I'm shown

a scattered necklace of seeds
Who glides on the wind and chance
And so die or are born.

What seems dead is carried by life
Until it cracks open;

I long for
The dead seeds
Carried by gold river
Over the ceremonial landscape

to sprout and say
"We were always alive;
Even what's dead is carried
In a flow of breeze."

Sometimes when I fly off the necklace string
Into dizzy current
I feel I will fall and perish

Into the death of everything around me
Each animal, each plant, each street,

And I don't know if the future will be like the past,
I don't know what will survive of the glass cathedrals,
And well stocked shelves,
And the assault of neon information and opinion.

I just know that to see this procession of seeds
That are not yet alive, yet fly like insects
On Avebury plains
Will figure in the reckoning,
The imagining,
The moss.





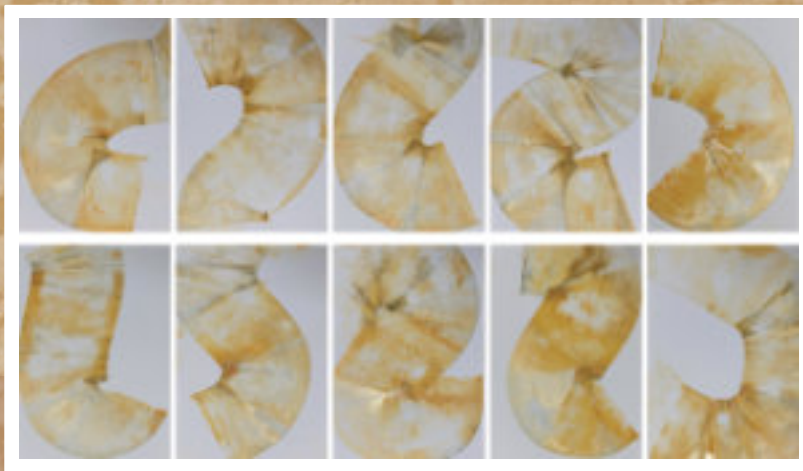
MARY THORP — *images*

RUTH THORP — *music*

STEVE THORP — *words*

Sandworms and deserts blooming: a suite of imaginings

THESE PIECES EMERGED IN A SPACE AND TIME. Each influenced each other. They are not thematically the same, nor were they deliberately created together, yet none would have appeared on these pages without the influence of the others. Creativity is like this sometimes: even when it appears to be an individual act, there are no boundaries that can really be drawn.



About the worms...

It is a universal truth that the messy, free-wheeling, clean-off sheets produced after printing are where the good stuff happens: it is the lack of pressure or expectation.

One evening I had an inky brayer to clean off, and some left over gold ink and decided to play. The combination of faded black and gold was mesmerising and so I progressed it as an experiment. The resulting original prints felt a bit weird and visceral, but I kept them. They are the sandworms of *Dune*, the worm holes of the universe, the worms that nourish our soil and a good end to a day of very messing creativity.

— MARY THORP

1. Sandworms

I am trying to write. The image doesn't come. I am contemplating the dance of the spiders being played out ritualistically in the high reaches of the ceiling windows.

Mary is making sandworms. Ruth is composing desert songs—her deserts full of life—teeming and unseen, emerging and blooming. The wind of each desert has a character of its own. They belong only to the landscape and to the strange strangers that live there.

The sandworms arrive the moment I see them. Until that point they were just printing marks. Mary was experimenting with print techniques, using a small brayer to get some new ink patterns on small postcard size pieces of white paper. She's used an unusual colour—an ink that prints as a washed-out sandy hue, but leaves on the paper a mysterious gold-flecked opacity. When she shows them to me, I think immediately of sandworms, taking me on a spiral of memory, deep in the sands of life.

The real main character in Frank Herbert's book, *Dune*, is Arrakis—the desert planet on which giant sandworms—the sacred Shai-Hulud—voyage endlessly through the sand that they themselves terraform. Their life cycle creates Spice—melange—a psychedelic substance at the heart of human economies across the known universe in an ecological and spiritual alchemy that is never quite understandable.

The worms on Arrakis are giants; dangerous archetypal monsters of the deep. Humans, for all their hubris, are helpless against them. Now, on our Earth (as on fictional Arrakis) humans are always

searching for meaning—to fit the universe into constructed paradigms of knowledge and truth; to change the world. On *Dune*, science and religion are in constant flux. The objective truth of the sandworms' life cycle and biology, is translated and transformed through the Freeman's ritual language and stories into the god-given Shai-Hulud. The incomprehensible sandworms are reified as earth gods.

In *Dune*, after a major battle, planetary ecologist Liet-Kynes wanders unprotected into the desert, expectant hawks circling above him. In his delirium he hears the words of his dead father, who gifted him his vocation and taught him his trade: "The highest function of ecology is understanding consequences": his father's voice says, and "the more life there is within a system, the more niches there are for life."

Liet-Kynes' fantasy and life's work was for a water-transformed, blooming desert world. He dies as a bubble of pre-spice mass deep beneath the sand, grows and erupts onto the surface—part of the ecological pattern of the place: "Then, as his planet killed him, it occurred to Kynes that his father and all the other scientists were wrong, that the most persistent principles of the universe were accident and error. Even the hawks could appreciate these facts".

2. People need people

The bubbles of human relating and need are complex, often erupting and bursting onto the surface. We need love with another and within our families—but not only that. We need acceptance in a community, a society, a culture—but not only these ties that

bind. We need to feel embedded or connected within a wider human existence — but not only this. We need people who are humans and other non-human people (Timothy Morton's 'strange strangers') too. We need our place and places — yet all these may still leave us feeling disconnected and on the edge of life — like Liet-Kynes walking to his death in the harsh desert he knows and loves intimately.

The bubbles are always floating around, expanding, combining, reforming, bursting. There is beautiful chaos in these patterns — accident and error constantly on the move. There is no direction, but we — people who need people — follow them anyway. There must be more to this, we tell ourselves as the bubbles burst; there must be more.

In our kitchen studio, as we play and create, sandworms and deserts emerge in various forms. Imaginings. Poetic images — “sudden saliences on the surface of the psyche.” New individual and social expressions of human creativity. And our family's field of collective history — like every family's — is subject to the ‘reverberation’ of all the personal and shared images that arise.

Fifty years ago, I first read *Dune*. Thirty years ago (or so), I first read *Always Coming Home*, Ursula LeGuin's quiet masterpiece. Twenty-two years ago, I discovered James Hillman's *The Soul's Code* in the basement of a bookshop in Bloomsbury. Ten years ago, I sat in a forest arena with sixty others and talked about ‘Unpsychology.’ Five years ago, I came across Nora Bateson's work. Two years ago I read Bjork's email conversation with Timothy Morton.

In between, more Imaginings. And woven through and between, our daughters and granddaughters were born and grew: their own particular life images and imaginations constantly shifting and combining in the mix.

3. Image

In the first brilliant chapter (“In a Nutshell”), of his book, *The Soul's Code*, James Hillman wrote: “For this is the nature of an image, any image. It's all there at once”.

The image of ‘me,’ or ‘you,’ of ‘us’ of ‘this,’ is all

there, as it is, right now. We can't push away the madness, the pathology, the diversity, the calling. Nor can we refuse the collective, social, archetypal and even magical contexts that enfold each of us in our own unique making of soul.

I suspect that Hillman might have disagreed with the fictional, dying Liet-Kynes' conclusion that the universal forces are those of accident and error. In *The Soul's Code* he refuses to “accept that my strange and precious life is the result of statistical chance,” adding that “the call to individual destiny is not an issue between faithless science and unscientific faith.” Yet, even as he argues trenchantly for a ‘psychology’ of individuality (‘that holds in mind its prefix, ‘psyche,’ and its premise, soul’) he also embeds life and experience deep in the material contexts of our world and of a wider archetypal ecology of mind.

Image is experience; is context; is perspective; is way of seeing; is way of relating; of loving, being with, emerging. When we are together (and from how we are together) things emerge that are spooky and strange; related somehow through the complexity of our conversations and creative experiments.

When Mary makes images of sandworms with her printer's brayer, whole new worlds come into being...

4. Desert stories

Desert stories are a staple of human myth, fiction and fantasy. Archetypal images and memories of jinns, magical wishes, dunes, hot winds and uncompromising ‘nature’ permeate our collective consciousness. Frank Herbert was on a winner when he came up with *Dune* — but the mythology goes deeper.

“There should be...” goes one of the sayings of Muad'Dib (the spiritual, messianic alter-ego of Paul Atreides), “a science of discontent. People need hard times and oppression to develop psychic muscles”. It's a cynical — even cruel — perspective, but one we can recognise in our myths, stories and fables. And in the ‘real’ world itself.

If our world is already difficult to live in, then the ecological challenge is to find the conditions for our human existence within that frame—to sustain the balance, wherever that is possible. Deserts, like other places in our Earth's 'nature', are uncompromising environments. We have lived in these places, over human history, but not easily. Deserts may bloom, but they don't bloom for us.

Nature is not inherently benevolent, and when other humans exploit the land and the people (human and non-human) who live upon it, discontent becomes a necessary response. Psychic muscles do need to be developed and hardened.

Paradoxically, hard places (whether geographic or situated-in-life) can be where we learn to live and love. Where we find and nurture our comrades and our solidarity (though this takes insight, work and courage.) Where we learn to see through the vibrant, inviting romance and magic of desert fables (though not to reject them outright.) Where we can find the deep empathy and creativity of the human image that often lies dormant in difficult times and places.

5. Yin utopia

"Yang is male, bright, dry, hard active, penetrating. Yin is female, dark, wet, easy, receptive, containing. Yang is control, yin acceptance. They are great and equal powers; neither can exist alone, and each is always in process of becoming each other."

Ursula K LeGuin, 'Utopiyn, Utopiyang'

Ursula LeGuin was always reflective on her past work. Perhaps for her too the 'poetic image' was constantly emerging and reemerging—'reverberating' as Gaston Bachelard puts it. In a late essay, she reflects on the nature of utopia and dystopia in story and myth. Is it possible, she asks, to create a 'yin utopia'? Most of our stories, she reflects, are dystopias: "Perhaps in order to write a utopia we need to think yinly. I tried to write one in *Always Coming Home*. Did I succeed?"

She goes on: "Is a yin utopia a contradiction in terms, since all the familiar utopias rely on control

to make them work, and yin does not control?"

On these terms, *Dune* certainly stands as a dystopian tale, and a yang one at that ("...male, bright, dry, hard, active, penetrating.") And the historical utopias in our own world, together with those now being thrown around and constructed, are nearly all so male, sharp and shiny (when Ruth was watching the latest film version of *Dune*, she observed that it was another tale of lots of men killing lots of other men.)

And we only have to visit the contemporary 21st century home of yang utopia propaganda—the podcast—to hear more dry, penetrating, active maleness. Meanwhile, we also know that, historically, 'yang utopias' nearly always lead to disaster, exploitation, authoritarianism and often war.

So how can we think 'yinly'? LeGuin (an old woman when she wrote this essay) does not offer firm answers (which would be a very 'yang' thing to do!) but does characterise the necessary shift from yang to yin as one that involves "acceptance of impermanence and imperfection, a patience with uncertainty and the makeshift, a friendship with water, darkness, and the earth."

6. Friend of darkness

Much is written these days about our need for a 'friendship' with earth and oceans. Despite the precarious nature of the health of our planet—we know its aquatic and material wonders through TV streams and the internet, but there is a sting in the tail. That is to say, we recognise the Earth's sun-soaked beauty (of even harsh, blooming deserts) but this may often involve us turning away from a necessary friendship with darkness.

How else can we explain this contradiction? Well, we know deeply what has been done to our world and know, largely, what needs to be done to bring back some element of ecological balance; but in the collective corporate and political spheres (that we are all part of, even if we sometimes pretend otherwise,) too little changes and we spiral down even further.

Down the spiral lies despair, which is not neces-

sarily a bad thing in itself, but fear can make us turn from this too—this time on a cultural level—and the subsequent projections create ‘culture wars’ in which, again, everything is bright, hard and shiny, and the dark, easy containment of ‘yin’ stuff is seldom embraced.

Sandworms are terrible creatures. Not inherently ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ or even truly ‘sacred’, but perilous and awesome in the way all natural forces and systems have the potential to be. The drag of a black hole; the eruption of a volcano; the death of a star; the inevitability of death in a sandworm’s giant teeth—all terrible realities; images entirely as they are.

7. Imagine

I began this meditation watching spiders dance: sandworms and spiders. Nature—beautiful and bountiful. Nature—perilous and dark. Deserts and oceans. Ordinary spaces where we live and work.

We don’t need to choose between our archetypes and metaphors. Every image, as Hillman tells us—is all there at once. And every image is part of an ever-changing ecology of images—a dance of spiders in the room’s corners. A “choreography of everyday life”, as Annie-B Parsons puts it.

For those of us living ordinary lives—not big people with mythological self and space-filled self-stories—our dances are small. Most of us each have, Parsons writes: “a small kinesphere, a bubble of tiny actions”. The spiders have this too.

Parsons’ book, *The Choreography of Everyday Life*, is full of pithy, beautiful imaginings. She reveals the way we weave our everyday lives (like creating words and images in the kitchen) with ancient myths and embodied action. Dancing, in other words.

The sandworms dance too. They hear ‘thump, thump, thump’ and head towards the action—

drawn to the beat of mechanical human activity or the rhythm of humans walking—then drown in sand whatever is moving, dragging it into darkness. For the sandworms, this is everyday life too. It’s just what they do. Everything, all there at once.

8. Spiders

Annie-B Parsons weaves a web from her everyday life—her conversations, relationships and inspirations, and from watching dog walkers and other humans flow down city streets. “After all,” she says, “wasn’t there a contract we all signed that we would glide in harmony like fish down the river?”

She makes art from her experiences and her collaborations. She sees the world as a dance, a poem, a story, a picture, a web of relationships. She goes to a gallery to see Louise Bourgeois’ giant spider sculpture, and imagines transformation.

“We all have our shapes,” she tells us and “It always feels very natural when I am choreographing, as organic as a leaf growing on a tree, and I specifically use this metaphor because it is the most natural thing I can think of.”

We all have our shapes. We are crooked trees, leaves and acorns. We are deserts and sandworms. We are spiders in the corners of rooms. We dance, draw, write and compose these things into imaginings, but we all have our shapes and nothing is predictable. She quotes Fernando Pessoa: “some metaphors are more real than the people you see walking down the street.”

We all have our shapes. I am trying to write. Mary is experimenting with her printer’s brayer. Ruth is learning to conjure desert images out of sound. Everyone is dancing in the sand, and the spiders are still up there in the corners weaving away, catching flies. ~



tinyurl.com/RuthThorpDesertBloom

Desert Blooming

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO I embarked on a lifelong dream to learn the piano and this piece of music is my first attempt at a full orchestral composition.

It was inspired by the rare phenomenon of high rainfall in desert environments causing a mass blooming of dormant plants - an incredible, bountiful display of colour and life. The awe and wonder of such an event feels like pure magic and reminds us of the power and beauty of nature and its cycles which continue to flourish in spite of global human interference.

It is an event to capture the imaginations of anyone who witnesses it and reminds us of the joy that life can bring! I am an illustrator and working on this piece has inspired a new art collection which will be released next year when I get around to finishing it!

Special thanks to Patrick Carpenter for his help and guidance in mastering and producing the final cut.

— RUTH THORP

contributors

ADAM THE GARDENER is based on a gardening book from one of the editor's early adulthood. He never used it, but enjoyed the pictures...

ANGELINA CASTELLINI explores how we can relate improvisationally to ourselves, each other, and our environments. Through *impro studio*, she offers sessions for people to recognise, train and act on their improvisation abilities. As a person who loves working with people, she is currently pondering what it means to follow in her parents' footsteps while putting her own spin on things. www.improstudio.org contact@improstudio.org

ALAN BOLDON is an artist, curator and writer and has held leadership roles in the arts, academia, charities and business. As a consultant he has advised senior teams in universities around the world. Currently Director of Weave: founding an international network of bioregional learning labs exploring ways to engage with complex challenges.

ALEX HOYLE is a writer, artist and theatre maker based in the Netherlands. He is a founding member of the Bristol Improv Theater, the UK's first improvised theatre venue, and currently works as an events technician at Pakhuis De Zwijger in Amsterdam. He is currently exploring what it means to blend family new and old with Angelina Castellini and supports her development of *impro studio*. www.improstudio.org contact@improstudio.org

BRONWEN THE WRIGGLY is a pure figment of imagination, based on a fond memory of childhood days when spring rain would wet the black tarmac of a certain driveway and invite gatherings of wrigglers to venture out from the lawn and assemble for a wormy party.

CATHERINE STREET. Concepts/bodies: I work in writing, video, sound, performance, and work on paper. My writing has been published in several journals including *Mycelia*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *MUCK* and *The Mass*. I have exhibited and performed at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, CCA Glasgow, Reid Gallery Glasgow and others. catherinestreet.net

Irish poet CIARÁN HODGERS, is a multi-award winning writer, performer, facilitator and mentor. His second collection, *Solastalgia*, is an eco-psychological exploration of healing and reciprocity, published by Burning Eye Books, November 2023. His debut, *Cosmcartography*, published in 2018 was shortlisted for the 2019 Rubery Book Award. ciaranhodgers.sumupstore.com/

DANIËL EIKEBOOM is a poet, writer, and artist of the imagination currently finishing graduate studies in Poetics of Imagination at Dartington College. He has lectured on William Blake at Temenos Academy and is based in London.

ELIZA CUIHUA: An English beginner, a Chinese bilingual writer, whose works have been published in the People's Daily and received several national literary or poetry awards in Chinese, but she seems to be a permanent beginner when it turns to English. Fortunately, her suggestion mailbox, abogalaxy@163.com, welcomes every roaster.

ELIZABETH BOQUET is the author of 'Galoshes' (2020). Naomi Shihab Nye granted her a Geneva Writers' Literary Prize in 2017, and her poetry has been featured on Billy Collins' Poetry Broadcast and in various literary journals and anthologies. Raised in New Hampshire, she now lives in Lausanne, Switzerland. www.elizabethboquet.com

EMILY WILKINSON is an artist, writer, researcher and holistic practitioner based in North Wales. She is currently doing a PhD in creative arts, ecofeminism and landscape with Aberystwyth and Exeter universities. www.emilywilkinson.net Instagram: [@emily.f.wilkinson](https://www.instagram.com/emily.f.wilkinson).

FIONA BROOKS: My life is story soup. Which ingredient should I share? I'm a corporate refugee, ex-engineer, team workshop creator, thinking space holder, mother, wife, sister, friend, cat servant, beginner food-grower, community member and host, Warm Data host, microbe host, mediocre and enthusiastic singer, prolific reader, shuffle-jogger. Perth is home, for now.

FRANCIS SALOLE: Tena koe fellow sapiens. I live in Paekakariki, Aotearoa where I have my art 'laboratory.' I also do animation and have worked on 'Kiri and Lou' a funny, gently subversive children's animated show. I also work as a psychiatric nurse at Wellington Hospital. Doing art is having my head in the clouds, nursing is having my feet on the ground.

HANNE LARSSON is a British Swede who longs for her childhood's 95% humidity and hawker centre food. Her stories are fed by moss-covered rock-trolls and what-if scenarios, her non-fiction by nature and what places do to people and they to them. More here: hannelarsson.wordpress.com/

INGE CASTELLINI. The older I get, the more curious I become about life. Concerning 'imaginings', I was rather clueless what retirement could mean as I left the school where I had enjoyed teaching for over three decades. I've always been writing, painting, taking photos; inviting others and myself to a search of meaning, belonging and healing. Especially fun and challenging is working together with family members. contact@improstudio.org

JULIA MACINTOSH is a writer, coach, facilitator and mad scholar based in Edinburgh. She co-edits *unpsychology* and writes at Madreality on Substack (juliamacintosh.substack.com). www.juliamacintosh.uk

JULIAN STILL: Born on a small farm, with the uncertainty of nature's processes, I left for a corporate career as a shell high flyer. By 35 I'm a self employed crisis manager, with Cynefin to explain my intuitive knowing. At 60, Warm Data adds useful language. Now I don't camouflage my autistic gift as I try to find language for my knowing. [linkedin.com/in/julian-still-1a362/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/julian-still-1a362/)

JULIETTA CERIN lives in Adelaide, Australia with her teenage son, works with adults who have experienced severe and complex trauma, abuse and incarceration, and writes in her spare time.

KATE HUTCHINSON: I'm an artist, architect and university tutor, with a keen interest in psychology and therapeutic space. My artwork is intuitive, lay-

ered and often abstract in nature. Drawing is a therapeutic tool which enables me to connect to and express my inner self most deeply. Instagram: @kalohut Etsy: KalohutStudio

KENNETH SILVESTRI is a psychotherapist and homeopath with a doctorate in Family Cultural Studies from Columbia University. His poems appeared in the *Paterson Literary Review*, *Lips* and other publications; has published two books, *A Wider Lens*, and *Train Romance* and writes a blog for *Psychology Today*. www.drkennethsilvestri.com

LESLIE THULIN: A woman I have lived with and deeply loved for many years, Anna Hanschmidt, introduced me to Nora Bateson and warm data. This practice consumed and loved me into new life. My learning with you is my description. People know me as "Leslie" and I am honored to respond as such.

LESLEY MACLEAN: I like collaborating with whoever and whatever is around, and letting my clumsy self play more. I enjoy helping to form *unpsychology*.

LUCIA DARAMUS is a British-Romanian writer and poet, a classicist and freelance artist. She grew up in a Communist country. Her writings talk about women's rights, sexuality, mental health, Communism, harassment, being a genuine, emotional and strong voice. She is published in the UK and widely.

LORRAINE TOLMIE is an artist and therapist living in the Scottish Highlands. Her fascination with states of consciousness led her to train in hypnotherapy, constellation therapy, and therapeutic metaphor. She is passionate about helping people to rediscover their innate creativity and offers sessions online and in her lochside studio. www.lorraine-tolmie.com

MARK MCKERGOW is an Edinburgh-based international author, speaker and teacher best known for his work in Solutions Focus and Host Leadership, seeking ways to find a new humanity in learning, coaching, changing and leading. Mark writes *Steps To A Humanity Of Organisation* every week on Substack markmckergow.substack.com

MARY THORP is a designer, graphic artist and printmaker using a variety of analogue and digital techniques to produce her work. She is inspired by life outdoors and a deep concern for the natural world and ecological issues. She loves ink, paper, type, textures, bold graphics, white space and the small details. IG: @rawmixture www.rawmixture.co.uk

DR. MILENA POPOV – NENA is a New York City-based transdisciplinary artist and scholar. She teaches art, fashion, art and media theory, and transdisciplinary sustainability and environmental justice courses at New York University and the City University of New York. Her artworks have been exhibited worldwide. www.milenapopovnena.com

NESLI ERGÜN: I'm a well-seasoned stranger. I don't belong, but I have a sense. My senses these days tell me I must dance as a way of getting through this beautiful and troubled world. My feet seem to pitter-patter around the cracks that break us. I think that's where I'll play for now; where I'll get lost so I can find myself. www.happynes.org

NORA BATESON is an award-winning filmmaker, writer and educator, and President of the International Bateson Institute. Nora's work brings the fields of biology, cognition, art, anthropology, psychology, and information technology together into a study of the patterns in ecology of living systems. Her books, *Small Arcs of Larger Circles* (2016) and *Combinings* (2023) are published by Triarchy Press.

PETER GRABA-CASTELLINI enjoys looking at the world through different lenses. He studied art and religion, working as a teacher and manager of a psychotherapeutic institute. In 1988, he suffered a brain haemorrhage, which led to his early retirement. He and his wife Inge welcomed their daughter Angelina in 1989. Peter's photography is on permanent display in his own house and once a year in his hometown. contact@improstudio.org

PATRICK CARPENTER: Musician, b. 1970: London, SE1. Posh cockney living afloat. Today, saxophone. Other days, saxophone too. Other days still, digital files. Some days, saxophone, flute, percussion, drums and digital files. And what glorious days those days are. Jam packed with sound and music joy for hours and hours. soundcloud.com/nursery-roadrecordings

RACHEL HENTSCH: I love to connect dots and lean into places of not-knowing, that feel full of promise (and danger.) My 5 children are my greatest life teachers. I believe in respect, dialogue & mutual learning. More about me at bit.ly/44urdQ3

RACHEL STANWORTH. Poetry has been a slow germinating plant for me. Now firmly established. My early life in nursing and education provided valuable compost; family life and my own aging, water for any seeds. Nature's beauty and small human kindnesses are like bright sunlight, illuminating ultimate meaning here and now.

TEMPIST JADE is a transdisciplinary guide, ceremonialist, ancestral liminalist, and eco-philosophical writer & poet whose work is a confluence of many traditions and practices. An indigenous hybrid, they are a lover of crossroads and passionately tend the intersections of ancestry, mythos, gender, trauma, chthonic & cosmic spiritualities, intra-species relating, and more. www.feralmysticism.com. Instagram: @feralmysticism. feralmysticism.substack.com

ROCKWELL THE FRIED was imagined from the book, *How to Eat Fried Worms*, by Thomas Rockwell, and the film of the same name.

RUTH THORP is an illustrator, designer and textile artist who creates work inspired by the natural world, incredible landscapes and a sense of adventure and storytelling. Her latest creative adventures have led to learning the piano and composing music and her first piece *Desert Blooming* is shared in this issue. www.ruththorpstudio.com IG: @ruththorpstudio and @ruththorpmakes

SHAI HALUD OF ARRAKIS: literally the Sandworm of Dune was Frank Herbert's SF invention, and stars in the recent film, *Dune* alongside Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya

STEFFI BEDNAREK is a psychotherapist, trauma therapist and climate psychologist. Her work explores the intersection between the metacrisis, complexity theory and the human Psyche and aims to bring Soul back into life, work and relationships. She supports change agents to explore what lies below the surface of what is visible and measurable and pay attention to the conditions that hold familiar structures in place. steffibednarek.com and [LinkedIn: steffi-bednarek-9412b037](https://www.linkedin.com/in/steffi-bednarek-9412b037)

STEPHEN KASTNER writes essays, science fiction, memoir, poetry, and is currently working on a screenplay and novel about his Quaker ancestor, Thomas Maule, who was arrested for defending the wise women accused of witchcraft in Salem in 1692. He leads the Green Mountain Writers Group in Vermont and creates digital media professionally as DesignWise Studios. Follow his *Antediluvian Attitudes* on Substack: stephenkastner.substack.com/

STEVE THORP weaves through several life strands and passions. Family, coast, psyche, soul, body, music, ideas, words. His writing is published by Raw Mixture Publishing and elsewhere. He currently works as a school counsellor, and integrative psychotherapist. He co-founded *unpsychology*, continuing to find an activist's joy in its crafting. www.21soul.co.uk

DR. TAWNYA SELENE RENELLE is an experimental writer, educator, and performer with each of these practices shaping and informing each other. She graduated with a DFA in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. Her work interrogates the limitations of genre and traditional literary conventions and aims to innovate and create new spaces for readers, audiences, and writers.

TOBY CHOWN is dramatherapist, songwriter, poet, storyteller, writer, researcher and clinical supervisor. Sometimes all in the same day. His core project

is called "imaginal ecology", a re-imagining of connection to nature and Self. He writes about it at tobychown.com where you can find his essays, music and poems.

VALERIE JACKMAN grew up in Ireland through the late 60s and 70s. From an early age she loved to act and recite poetry. Valerie has an insatiable curiosity and passion for life. She is happily settled in Edinburgh, with a husband, three children and a cockapoo.

VITALIJA POVILAITYTE-PETRI is a pharmacist and transdisciplinary (re)searcher. She studies how relationships with plants, nature medicine, nature-based health practices and ecological traditional local knowledge contribute to human connectedness with nature and regeneration of health.

VIVIEN LEUNG is a visual practitioner who focuses on offering live visual scribing at dialogue events, workshops and conferences. Her artwork traces and reveals the tone, texture, colour, flow, and rhythm of the social field, inviting participants to reflect, sense and notice each other's perceptions as they explore new possibilities through a shared visual exploration. www.ofdeeplisting.com

YVAN GREENBERG is a professional diviner and spiritual consultant, and has written on tarot divination as decolonizing methodology for the *Anthropology of Consciousness* journal. Greenberg's scholarship and interests focus on divination, magic, non-dualism, and the transformation of consciousness. He's also a Warm Data Lab host and devoted cat daddy. www.yvangreenberg.com

ZANELE MFONO: I am a retired academic in development studies, covering sociology and social demography. Having never considered the complex issue of climate change, I stumbled upon *unpsychology*. The contributions in the magazine re-awakened a consciousness of the inter-relatedness of human living that goes beyond the disciplinary confines we may try to impose our perceptions and reactions to life as it unfolds.

Editors, reflecting on the Imaginings project >

A quadrilogue of editors, three ways

LESLEY: We could just sit here in silence...

JULIA: ...weaving our silences together.

LESLEY: We're almost finished. This huge project.

JULIA: A light at the end of the tunnel. And quite the process...

STEVE: And *this* is the process, isn't it? This weekly quadrilogue, this screen of four, and the amazing conversations within...

JULIA: I've loved looking out our windows and seeing various degrees of light and darkness...

PATRICK: Yes, that was lovely wasn't it.

LESLEY: Suns rising and setting, at the same time.

JULIA: ...and the boats.

STEVE: Yeah, the boats — and the changes we've all been through this year. Some of it's been hard, but it also kind of flowed into the process.

LESLEY: I noticed the way our changing lives combined with the magazine contents. They're not separate are they? You never know what will show on the outside when someone is reading it fresh.

JULIA: Or hearing it...

LESLEY: Yes! I love that we had the sound.

PATRICK: Me too!

STEVE: That's been a revelation, you know: the wormholes of those QR codes going into places where people are creating sounds...

PATRICK: I gave a copy of 9.1 to a friend of mine who used to edit books, and she said "Sound in a magazine...what? I can't believe it!" She was ecstatic though and can't wait for the next issue.

JULIA: Now I just need to proof it and then I'll be ready for it. And I am ecstatic; I think it's beautiful, and it's going to be very exciting to see the two issues side by side, having their conversation together.

LESLEY: Yeah, I love there are bits from the first issue that talk to the second issue, and back again.

STEVE: So thank you everybody. Amazing! Here's to 2024, and number 10, and ...*Edges*.

JULIA: Yeah.

PATRICK: It seems extremely significant and *Edge* is really evocative isn't it?

LESLEY: Yeah, there's a lot you can do with edges...

PATRICK: A lot you can do with edges! Blunt ones, sharp ones, snaggy ones, smooth ones...

LESLEY: And what do edges do when they meet each other?...

STEVE: We'll find out...

JULIA: ...next issue! ~



tinyurl.com/edsquad9point2

< Editors, mixing and remixing



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