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Mother Futures by Matt Ward

Prepared for: *Memories From the Year 2030, Walker Art Center*

URL: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/mother-futures>

This series was conceived and edited by Elliott Montgomery, in conjunction with the exhibition [Designs for Different Futures](#). Editorial assistance provided by Miriam Young

So many mothers died during the summer of 2020, but some of them survived. Some of them can be found in fridges around the globe... bacterial evidence of the ten year revolution.

During the first few months of lockdown, amidst the chaos and shock of being confined to our homes, there was lots of talk about how the virus would recalibrate our collective future. At the time, we were surprised by the ease at which we transitioned into new patterns of living. However, whilst immersed in the cultural and economic panic, it was difficult to decipher or understand that our new relationship with *L. sanfranciscensis* was key to unlocking a different future.

The intellectuals, scrambling to gain tenure or cultural capital from the situation, settled on the phrase 'new normal.' But the new normal had been around for years circulating amongst the speculative designers and futurists who were discontent with the old. They wished to provoke the *new* through a closer relationship to nature - a new social reality that was less self centred, promoted a human and non-human unity, and a culture of care and mutualism. Their work existed in small online enclaves, conferences and exhibitions that explored new directions, objects or infrastructures. It was a familiar sight to see the accelerationists arguing about how best to manipulate the direction of travel, or how catastrophic the apocalypse would be. But in their scramble to gain attention, as the rest of the world baked sourdough, they missed how the new order would unfold.

When the Prime Minister of New Zealand proposed the 'G195,' she saw the lockdown as a chance to try something new, to highlight and agree to the values of a new relational economy. A new base code for a different world. In the G195, power wasn't attributed through GDP or historical colonial power. It wasn't limited to national borders. It was distributed through the strength of kinship bonds and welfare practices as well as the density of network connections (or 'bacterial load' as it became known). To some extent, it was colonialism (or capitalism) in reverse. Countries and communities that built resilience through the ravages of white supremacy, people who kept community and care at the centre of their value system, flourished.

It was the Prime Minister's ability to ground the geo-political, the 'global economic', into the everyday lives of ordinary people that was so impressive. She started in the kitchen (obviously dismissed by the macho, hard-headed neo-liberal chauvinists in their poorly attended street protests as 'woman's work') because she understood where people found joy and comfort. The universal need for sustenance had been subverted for decades by large corporations fighting for power and dominance. The pandemic had drawn clear focus on the corrupt working conditions of food processing practices around the globe. However, from slow food enthusiasts to vegan activists, from radical black feminists to indigeneous priestesses, people knew the power of the hearth and stove. However, it was the migrating mutation of *L. sanfranciscensis* that started to change how people thought and felt.

Over time, it became evident that the G195 had worked up a strategy based on some strange ideas developed by a little known buddhist bhikkhu and scientist, Yasno Gizienski. Gizienski brought together a deep knowledge of dharma with cutting edge discoveries in quantum mechanics and epidemiology. He

first discovered how to harness the creeping genetic changes happening at the cellular level of one of humanity's longest serving friendly bacteria.

The strategy was enthusiastically promoted by those in Silicon Valley. Some believed the enthusiasm was due to the simple coincidence of the bacteria being named after their beloved city; their inner idealistic hippy revelled in the idea that a bacteria named in San Francisco could be responsible for global ecological unity. However, as with most things from the Bay Area, implementation and reality brought about a vastly unevenly distributed future.

When the KSN (kitchen support network) operative arrived at my door, I thought it was strange. Was this a Government gimmick? An over enthusiastic nanny state sent to ruin my dinner? It wasn't. George was the most charming of guests. They held our attention with grace and humour, like the perfect fantasy dinner guest. George entered our lives and changed the way we saw food, conviviality, and ultimately, the meaning of life. They brought *the mother* with them on the first visit in a specially designed, temperature controlled suitcase. Our starter mother had been allocated to us by the G195 central office. We had been given the responsibility to look after and share the mother amongst those in our neighbourhood. Being a designated hub of our local distribution network was seen as an honour; our closeness to the bacteria meant that we would be the first to feel its effect.

Looking back now, it seems so obvious that we needed to change although none of us imagined the revolution would come from the comfort of our own homes. As the street protests dwindled, as the effects of the bacteria spread, we fell into a strange soporific harmony, a biological synchronicity, where social precarity turned into cellular unity.