

## 'On Attunement'; 'Echoes and Mirrors, Mirrors and Echoes'; 'Snow, Frost and Ice'

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## Listening With Non-Human Others

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Front jacket image: "Infinity Mirrored Room - Filled with  
the Brilliance of Life" by Yayoi Kusama, installed for the  
Kusama Exhibition at Tate Modern. Courtesy Tate Images.

Image this page: Visual representation of the complex  
harmonic spectrum sound emitted by a window air  
conditioning unit. Courtesy Alexandre Tannous.

Image next page: Visual representation of the complex  
harmonic spectrum sound emitted by a Sequoia Amazon  
Indian flute. Courtesy Alexandre Tannous.

Image on contents page: The authors on a silent walk  
along a cliff near Lynmouth, UK. Courtesy Sara Bowler.

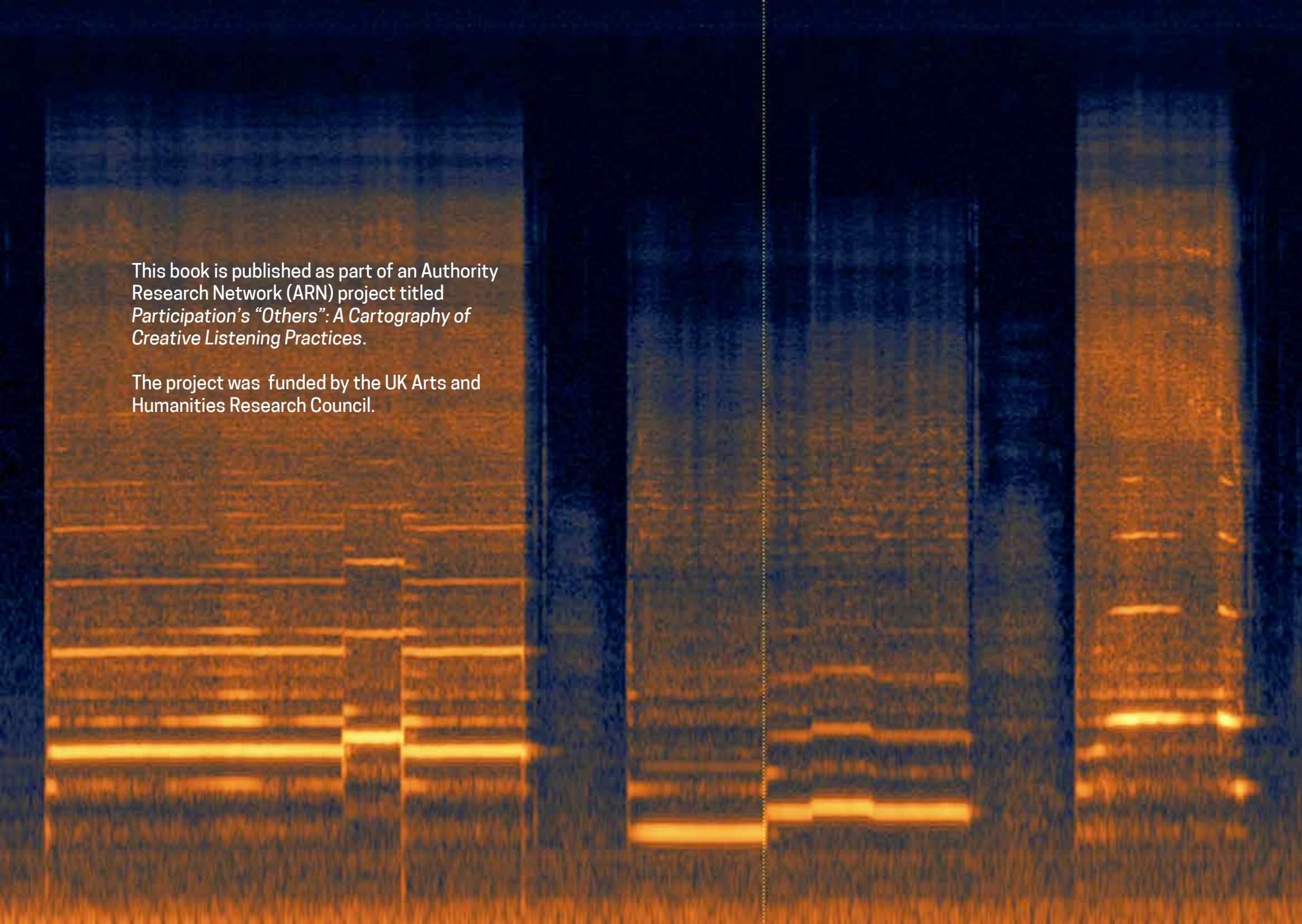
# **Listening With Non-Human Others**

Edited by Julian Brigstocke  
and Tehseen Noorani

ARN Press

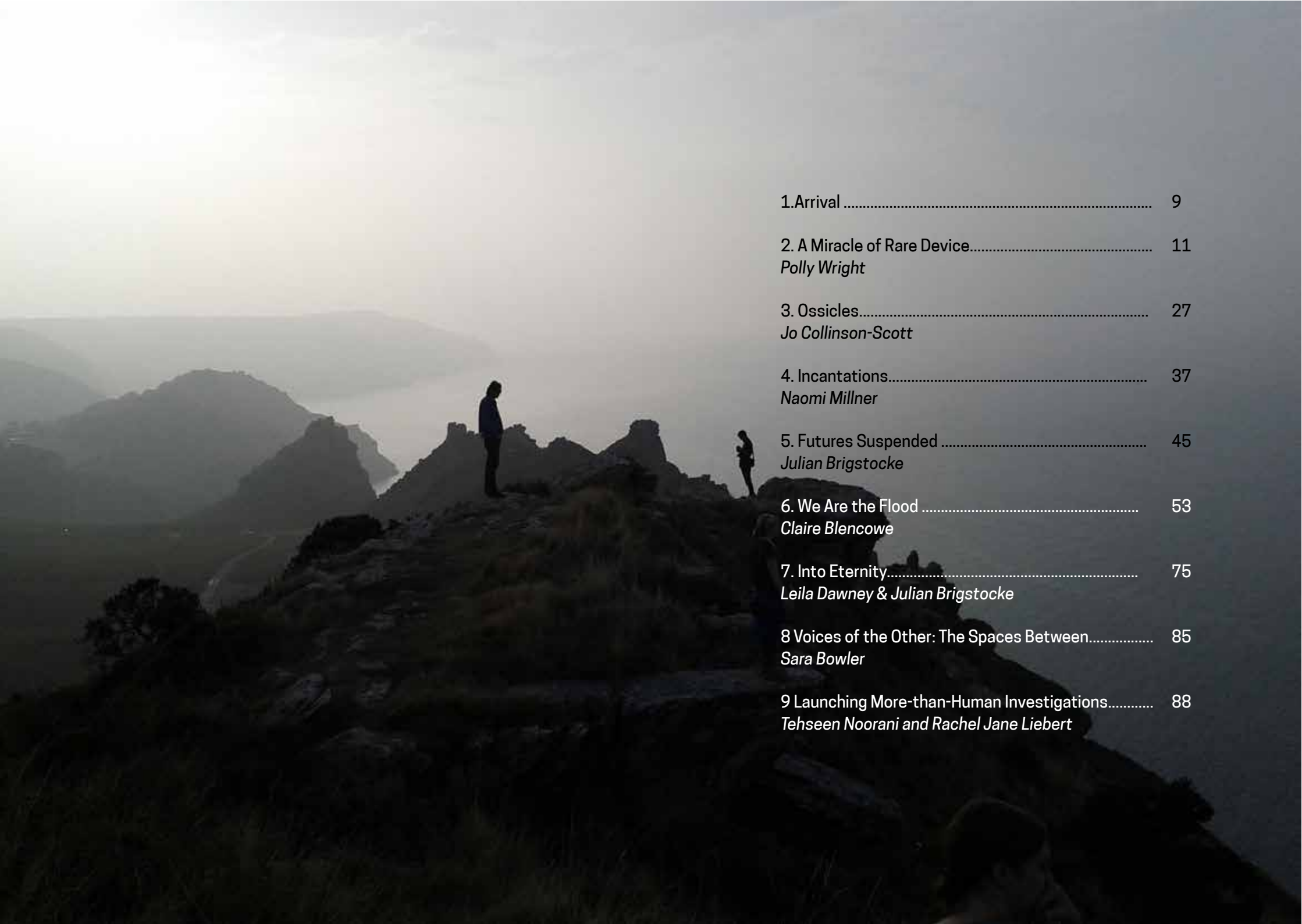
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## 1. Arrival

Tired and afraid, you arrive in a small village called Lynmouth. Passing a trail of tea houses and souvenir shops, you walk up a steep road. You catch sight of the house for the first time, an old stone mansion perched on a cliff, surrounded by forest, overlooking a black sea. All is still and silent, apart from the fizzing of waves below. You make your way up the hill.

You hear a car stopping nearby, and go to greet the strangers unloading their bags. They greet you with suspicion – or is it curiosity? Together, you walk nervously into the house, wondering why you are here.

On a table in the hallway is a letter. You open it. ‘Welcome. You have been invited here to practice listening. Artists, researchers, activists: you need to work together to learn how to hear to the forces of the earth and the songs of non-human life. We are facing a crisis on many different registers: social,



crisis, mental crisis, environmental crisis. We must find more ecologically sustainable relationships with the non-human world, and seek ways of listening to voices that escape the usual registers of meaning.

‘We have brought you to a special place. It is a place that is haunted by many invisible ghosts, inaudible voices and nonhuman presences. We are on the site of one of the worst floods in British history: the flood of 1952 that ripped through the town, carrying boulders, cars and trees with it, and killing 32 people. Conspiracy theories claim that the flood was brought about by military environmental engineering.

‘You have been brought to this house because there are many voices here – not all of them human. We need to allow them to speak. You have one week to explore, to experiment, and to learn from each other and the world.

‘Good luck.’

You can’t help wondering if everyone is going to make it through this week alive.

## 2. A Miracle of Rare Device

*A short story by Polly Wright*

*One can only believe entirely in what one cannot see...<sup>1</sup>*

*Illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth.<sup>2</sup>*

*I should wish, like the Indian Vishnu to float along an infinite ocean, cradled in the flower of the Lotus – just to know I was going to sleep for a million years – my mind feels as if it aches to behold something great – something one and indivisible... to give me the sense of sublimity and majesty.<sup>3</sup>*

**1797**

*The River East Lyn.*

Yessssssssssssssss

At first when my sister rain comes down it's the usual. Spitting and squally and making me bubble up and brim over my reedy fringes and she keeps on and on and I know this is something different, man! She drums and beats and drives me up into the sky like an upside down waterfall and woosh, whey hey ...

The round moon is out tonight and I am silver and gleaming like a curved sword and, drunk with desire, I slosh out of my curved bed and the great God in the sky drives me down and on and nothing gets in my way- not wooden bridges, which I snap to bits, not stone bridges which I leap over- I have never felt so strong- not for 100 years. I throw willows and birches downstream, and then Yay! break the mighty branches of that oak! He thinks he's good just cos he's 200 years old-I can remember when he was kneehigh to a sapling- and now he's coming down with a great creak and sigh across one of their silly paths, crushing one of them prancy horse things with a man standing and then-why hey, bye bye - I'm out of my bed now and onto the bank and- yesssss! I knock down a cottage, -I could have told them not to build there-one, two, three, four stone walls collapse like dominoes, Man! My cousin old Hoar oak has joined in! My Sister Rain she keeps pouring in that

liquid gold and I can do anything- don't know where I'm going but when I come roaring round a bend I can see them! My brother West and my great beautiful mother the Sea. I call to West and lob over a huge boulder which he lunges up and bowls to Mum and spumy sea-spray spurts up like a huge geyser with a boat tottering for a second on the fountain top before sliding into the deep. Tiny pathetic figures with their little arms out and tiny cries which like mouse squeaks -as if they could stop me now, me and West Lyn as we join together to rush to our Mother - tearing up the road and quay on the way, scrunching up their fishing boats - nothing can stop us - as if anything could stop us now...

**2027**

*Mnemosyne*

Lynmouth?

I had been there before.

When I read the name on Sally Wheelwright's avatar form, it rang a bell, but when I Google Earthed it, I recognized the area immediately. The towns of Lynmouth, Linton and Porlock were small and unexceptional, but which towns wouldn't be dwarfed by the majestic beauty of those mountains, rivers and ravines? If it wasn't for the cold, you'd think you were in Italy.



How strange that human desires and needs had drawn me back to the same place. When I first came I was sucked through the air on a chariot of opium, and lowered down to earth through thick dark clouds and swirling mists. This time the connection was more prosaic. Radio waves they tell me- but I'm no scientist.

The first thing I asked Sally was where the river had gone to.

"How do you know about the river?" she messaged. I didn't want to go into my history with Coleridge. Strange that I should still feel bruised about it about it after 230 years, but hell hath no fury - and I had certainly been scorned.

"I read about a flood," I said. "Which took many lives?"

"Oh yeah," she messaged me back. "1952. After that they diverted the River Lyn, Dad says."

I remembered that when I first arrived on the borders of Somerset and Devon, commanded by the famous poet in 1797, the sight of a majestic river bursting its banks had filled me with fear. I was totally dependent on opium for my existence then- and all that spray and foam and cold were likely to dissipate us. However, the opium was strong, the best, I was told, and when I managed to seep my way into the poet's damp little cottage, I was shocked by its meanness. What was the point of being a great poet if you live trapped inside dark walls, completely unaware of the splendours of nature outside your doors?

I wasn't sure in what way this Samuel Taylor Coleridge wanted me to be of service to him. Over the centuries, my form has changed- from a gorgeous Apsara of Hindu mythology, to a bloated genie forced into a bottle, to my recent embodiment as a glamorous avatar, depicted in comics and films, but, regardless of my form my mission remains the same: To bend myself to the whim of humans. Frankly I can literally tremble at what that might entail. Luckily, the poet did not want me to be of service to him in a worldly way- if you get my meaning- good thing too- as his body and breath were rancorous. It might seem a surprise to earthly women, but on that occasion, it really was my mind the poet was after.

He was stuck on a poem and was insufflating opium fumes for inspiration, but as an invisible muse, who was not in the least bit intoxicated, I brought clarity and clear headedness to the operation. He kept repeating the same phrase over and over again:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan.<sup>4</sup>

Ah! Xanadu! How did he know about that magical place, stuck in this pigsty? Then I spotted his book's title: The Tales of Marco Polo. Typical poet, I thought. Ripping off the tales of others.

I finished the verse for him:

A stately pleasure dome decree.

I knew all about pleasure domes because I'd seen them in the East a few centuries previously. They're built of bamboo and emperors can erect and dismantle them whenever they feel like moving on to another part of their dominions. I gave him some more phrases –

a miracle of rare device

a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice...

and

I would build that dome in air,  
that sunny dome! Those caves of ice...

Get that- Oxymoron, see? I'm proud of my word spinning skills and, to be honest, I thought he'd be grateful. Not a bit of it. In fact he fell asleep while I was creating a veritable *camera obscura* in his brain – mostly drawn from the raging torrent outside his cottage – if he only cared to open his eyes:

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.

At last he half woke, for his eyes still seemed sightless, and, throwing his arms around, shouted:

Beware! Beware!.....

For he on honey dew hath fed  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Typical addict's remorse. Lesser men kick the vessel and pipe and swear they will have no more of drugs, but he had to insult and belittle the opium and myself. Honey dew indeed! He appreciated my ideas enough to write the whole poem down before a Person from Porlock knocked on his door and we thinned into air.

I learnt later that the poet acknowledged his debt to the drug when he admitted that his famous fragment Kubla Khan was born of an Opium dream. A vision, he called it. But where do visions come from? Everyone knows the names of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Opium- but who knows mine?

Sally Wheelwright stopped all that. First thing she did when we negotiated our avatar contract, was to give me a name.

"Mnemosyne," she messaged, "it means the Mother of Muses."

"I don't want to be the Mother of a Muse," I replied. "I am one."

"No, like U don't get it," she wrote, excitedly, "My Mum, right, yeah? When she has a headache she says –I've got the Mother of All headaches- she means the biggest headache of all time.

So Mnemosyne means U R the Mother of All Muses- in other words- the greatest. Respect, yeah?"

Well, respect was something I never got from Mr Coleridge, so, it was fine by me.

So that's who I became: Mnemosyne. Avatar to Sally Wheelwright of Lynmouth, Devon. That's what they call us now. Avatars. These 21<sup>st</sup> century humans are truly awesome in their ignorance. They think they've invented the concept- when the idea of a deity descending to Earth to protect good and destroy evil is hardly an original idea, n'est ce pas? ( I throw in these French phrases to impress Sally- she doesn't understand a word of them, but she thinks they're really cool) I told Sally that I preferred to be called an Apsara, because it contained notions of sexiness as well as carrying out the will of humans. She agreed- but said we'd probably need to toe the line to get into this whole Second Life thing, so we stuck with avatar.

You can buy avatars off the peg- but Sally chose to be completely hands on in my creation. You learn an awful lot about your human through their specifications over your design- as you can be sure that what they give you is what they lack. Mnemosyne was tall, skinny and athletic, face like an angel with long dark hair and clever. From this I deduced that the only thing Mnemosyne shared with Sally Wheelwright was her intelligence. Otherwise, I guessed that Sally was probably short, fat, plain and mousy. And young.

I deduced her age from the things she asked me to do: Drive, fly, party and break hearts –all things I assumed she had never done. I also learnt that she never went out of her house in Lynmouth. She just transmitted through her computer, night and day. Occasionally she left my side to eat, or pee- but she never turned me off.

I suppose her parents must have been around- but she only mentioned them once.

I had no choice but to go along with all the silly things she made me do for a while, until, one day I was so bored, I tried something new: To get back at a handsome fellow avatar who was trying to get me into bed, I sold off his prize possession- a stolen motorbike, without his knowledge and then advertised it on a message board and sold to the highest bidder. He was furious but couldn't argue because it was stolen in the first place. I was a little afraid that Sally might be angry that I'd acted on my own initiative (of course, I realized later that my actions were already incurring anger on a much higher plane than Devon) but Sally was thrilled to bits that we'd not only taken revenge on the man, but that we'd also made some Linden dollars- the 2<sup>nd</sup> Life currency . (which she kept mistakenly calling Lynmouth dollars.) I've always liked the whole business of sales-so I put an idea into her mind- which I'd been mulling over for thirteen centuries. How about going into Real Estate?

"What's that, Nez?" she returned. For some reason she



shortened my name to Nez. Well I suppose Mnemosyne was hard to type with your thumbs.

I explained and she responded, online, “Oh you mean estate agents,” and then added, “my Dad’s one of those. You want us to sell houses?”

“No. Pleasure Domes.”

“You what?” Sally messaged back. Ah, the gracelessness of the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

“Chinese Emperors used to have them,” I went on. “They’re made of bamboo, and you can erect them and take them down wherever you like. You can have Mobile Homes- why not Mobile Pleasure Domes?”

“Like a yurt,” she was warming to the idea. “My uncle’s got one of them.”

“Better than that,” I replied, “they’re domes of pleasure. You design them to reflect the client’s idea of pleasure. My dome, for instance, would be watery, because I love to swim and float. What would yours be?”

“A library,” she came back excitedly. “With real books you can touch and smell.”

And so our trade in Mobile Pleasure Domes started. People really flocked to the idea. Of course, lots of the virtual buyers wanted Palaces of Porn- but, as our business took off we introduced restrictions. All domes had to respond to ethical guidelines, building Beauty and Respect into their plans.

So began the happiest year of my 3000 year long life. I loved business and business loved me. At first, Sally was just an enthusiastic as I was. We designed a truly sophisticated questionnaire which helped the 2nd Lifers dig deep into their imaginations to construct their perfect virtual environment. We weren’t hindered by practical constraints. If someone wanted to be surrounded by three gardens – with- say- English country flowerbeds in one, a shady courtyard of banana and palm trees in a second, and an olive grove in the third- and wanted to be transported to the Arctic Circle to see the Northern Lights of an evening - then it could be done. Or, if someone felt that they had never, in their whole life, been an object of desire, I helped them to shape a palace filled with portraits of people they wanted who had been photo-shopped to smile and gaze lasciviously at them whenever they opened a door. I had in-depth consultations with all clients to arrive at their unique specifications and I loved to talk at length at what gave them true and lasting pleasure. If anyone was after cheap thrills, I went off line- but most people appreciated my skills as a vision spinner. I had found mon metier. Becoming a Lindenaire was a by-product.

But I had not grasped the lesson I should have learnt 230 years ago with Samuel Coleridge. In my enjoyment of trading, I left poor little Sally behind. I didn't notice that she had stopped commissioning activity. Her messages to me became briefer and briefer- and to my enormous surprise, she seemed wholly uninterested in the Linden bank statements I kept sending her. Was she too young to realize that money brings freedom?

My first indication that this wasn't just a teenage sulk- and something was seriously wrong, was when I got notification that my Linden assets had been frozen and when I tried to go on trading, none of my 2<sup>nd</sup> Life countrymen answered me. It was a while before I realized they couldn't see or hear me. My publicity material was wiped, my office disappeared. I slowly realized that Mnemosyne did not exist anymore. I tried to message Sally but found I could not. It wasn't that she didn't answer, it was that I had lost my own voice. When I typed, the screen remained blank.

Of course, I knew that whatever had happened to Sally, I was being punished . An Apsara, genie, avatar, call her what you will, must never have an existence which is independent from human purposes. If she aspires to be independent, she will be punished, by being kicked up the stairway to heaven to the ranks of the Divine, and live forever in a state of perfect Celestial boredom. C'est la vie, n'est ce pas? Or not, in my case.

Now I have eternity to ponder, I do wonder why Sally and I lost contact. It seemed out of character, somehow.

I have a theory that I was being punished for breaking a rule I had never contravened before: I had grown fond of my human. And for a very short while I had what I had always yearned for.

A partnership.

**2027**

The River East Lyn.

Yessssssssss- I'm out again!

After 1952, they banged me up, man! Diverted me. Shackled me inside concrete banks. Man, they thought they tamed me. But I bided my time. I knew Sister Rain wouldn't let me down. She pelt down and down for years on end and I rise higher and higher to meet her- an' at last, whoopee, together we make sweet symphony and song, man. We crash out of the concrete banks together- and meet my brother West and cousin Hoar Oak rivers too and -yay! We like a great gang. We slosh all over those poncy villages, Lynmouth, Linton and Porlock.. First we drown them Bed an' Breakfasts an' their shops- like Cathy's Crystals an' Lynmouth's Leathers, Kubla's Kaff an' Wheelwright's Estate Agents. We rock and chivvy their pathetic cars till all they can do is float- even white vans, man! Then we drown their memorial benches with gold plates to 'those lost in the 1952 flood' and fill up their Memorial Hall to the brim. An' we have fun wid their lifeboat they're so proud they carried across land for thirteen miles to save lives

hundreds of years ago. We rock it and play wid it till it rears up an' smash on the cliffs. An' all the people are just screamin' an' cryin' till we squeeze the breath outa them and drown 'em dead.

And now our Mother the Sea- she callin' us, cos she rising too and at last we come together to drown the valley and them high, high mountains. Yes, blud, we'll flood an' flood till we swallow the mountains, then the whole British island, then that piece of land which Mum tells us is on her other side, and, then, at last, the whole wide world. Because our time has come.

Water will inherit the earth, Man!

Amen!

### Note

"Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment" /ˌkʊblə ˈkɑːn/ is a poem written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, completed in 1797 and published in 1816. According to Coleridge's Preface to "Kubla Khan", the poem was composed one night after he experienced an opium-influenced dream after reading a work describing Xanadu, the summer palace of the Mongol ruler and Emperor of China Kublai Khan. Upon waking, he set about writing lines of poetry that came to him from the dream until he was interrupted by a person from Porlock. The poem could not be completed according to its original 200–300 line plan as the interruption caused him to forget the lines. He left it

unpublished and kept it for private readings for his friends until 1816 when, at the prompting of Lord Byron, it was published.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Woolf, V. (1928) *Orlando: A Biography*, Harmondsworth. Penguin Books.
- <sup>2</sup> Woolf, V. (1928) *Orlando: A Biography*, Harmondsworth. Penguin Books.
- <sup>3</sup> Coleridge (1797) Letter to Thelwall.
- <sup>4</sup> Coleridge (1816) *Kubla Khan*.

*How do we listen to the future? Go to Chapter 5, "Futures Suspended".*

*What questions might we ask non-human voices? Can questioning landscapes help us encounter politics differently? Go to Chapter 6, "We Are the Flood".*

*How do objects speak to us? Can poetry help navigate gaps between mute phenomena, politics and culture? Go to Chapter 16, "Snow, Frost and Ice".*



### 3. Ossicles

*A song by Jo Collinson Scott*

To listen to the song, scan the QR code below or go to:

[www.authorityresearch.net/ossicles.html](http://www.authorityresearch.net/ossicles.html)



*I am under the wave moving  
In a spiral of endless reeds  
Where there is no rest  
Even an empty space resonates  
Like the inside of my guitar  
Pressed against my chest*

*The hammer hits the anvil and  
Here we sit  
With eternity in our mouths  
The hammer hits the anvil and  
You turn in your sleep  
Muttering “unjust, unjust”*

*There are no ideas, just listening  
In the spiral of endless noise  
A tattoo on the wrist  
Even though I truly love them  
There are too many words, and  
Held within a fist*

*The hammer hits the anvil and  
Here we sit  
With eternity in our mouths  
The hammer hits the anvil and  
You turn in your sleep  
Muttering “unjust, unjust”*

*All the words that have ever been said  
Weigh down,  
Weigh down my head*

## **Notes**

“‘Silence’ never ceases to imply its opposite and to demand on its presence. Just as there can’t be ‘up’ without ‘down’ or ‘left’ without ‘right,’ so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence. Not only does silence exist in a world full of speech and other sounds, but any given silence takes its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound. (Thus, much of the beauty of Harpo Marx’s muteness derives from his being surrounded by manic talkers.)

A genuine emptiness, a pure silence, are not feasible — either conceptually or in fact. If only because the art-work exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue.”

Susan Sontag, *The Aesthetics of Silence* (IV)

20" There is no  
such thing as silence. Something is al-  
ways happening that makes a sound.  
No one can have an idea

30" once he starts really listening.  
It is very simple but extra-urgent  
The Lord knows whether or not

40" the next

50"

**(Bang fist)**

John Cage, *45' For A Speaker* (1958)

But we are apart in the grassy places  
Where care cannot trouble the least of our days  
Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces  
Or love's first tenderness die in our gaze  
The hare grows old as she plays in the sun

And grazes around her with eyes of brightness  
Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done  
She limps along in an aged whiteness;  
A storm of birds in the Asian trees  
Like tulips in the air a-winging.  
And the gentle waves of the summer seas  
That raise their heads and wander singing  
Must murmur at last, "Unjust, unjust";  
And "My speed is a weariness", falters the mouse  
And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust  
And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house  
But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day  
When God shall come from the sea with a sigh  
And bid the stars drop down from the sky  
And the moon like a pale rose wither away.

W.B. Yeats, from *The Wanderings of Osin*

"The cochlea (KOK-lē-uh; *cochlea*, a snail shell) is a spiral shaped, bony chamber that contains the cochlear duct of the membranous labyrinth. Receptors within the cochlear duct provide the sense of hearing. The duct is sandwiched between a pair of perilymph-filled chambers. The entire complex makes turns around a central bony hub. In sectional view, the spiral arrangement resembles a snail shell.



...When a sound vibrates the tympanic membrane, the movements are conducted to the stapes by the other auditory ossicles. Movement of the stapes produces a rocking motion at the oval window, generating fluid waves that stimulate receptors in the cochlear duct, and we hear the sound.”

Martini, Frederic et al. *Anatomy and Physiology*, 2007, p.432.

“I know you’re thinking of me

When it’s just about to rain”

Mountain Goats (from *1 John 4:16*)

“We were told to return to base in Lynton, but with our route flooded we had to retrace our steps. By the time we’d returned to Barbrook Bridge, it was awash with water too. Hell-bent on reaching base, I secured a rope around my waist and straddled the bridge while the firemen held the other end. To this day, I remember feeling a horrible shudder as the bridge collapsed underneath me. I yelled out to the firemen, who managed to pull me to safety... As well as destroying the bridge, the water swept away two houses further down, killing the people inside... like another 92 that night, as well as 132 cars, 19 boats, 28 bridges and countless animals.

... The following day, looking out across the Bristol Channel, it was amazing to see trees floating upright in the muddy water and enormous boulders, which had been thrown around by the rivers like toys... It took me years before I could return to Lynmouth when the river was in flood, but one day I braved it. Mad as it may seem, I said to the river, ‘You didn’t harm me then and you can’t bloody well harm me now.’ Somehow, that seemed to ease things in my mind, although some memories remain vivid.”

Derek Harper, survivor of the Lynmouth Flood Disaster

“But it’s possible to conceive of the opaqueness of silence more positively, free from anxiety. For Keats, the silence of the Grecian urn is a locus for spiritual nourishment: ‘unheard’ melodies endure, whereas those that pipe to ‘the sensual ear’ decay. Silence is equated with arresting time (‘slow time’). One can stare endlessly at the Grecian urn. Eternity, in the argument of Keats’ poem, is the only interesting stimulus to thought and also presents us with the sole occasion for coming to the end of mental activity, which means endless, unanswered questions (‘Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As loathes eternity’), so that one can arrive at a final equation of ideas (‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’) which is both absolutely vacuous and completely full. Keats’ poem quite logically ends in a statement that will seem, if one hasn’t

followed his argument, like empty wisdom, like banality. Time, or history, becomes the medium of definite, determinate thought. The silence of eternity prepares for a thought beyond thought, which must appear from the perspective of traditional thinking and the familiar uses of the mind as no thought at all — though it may rather be an emblem of new, ‘difficult’ thinking.”

Susan Sontag, *The Aesthetics of Silence* (X)

“Why is it so difficult for so many people to listen?

Why do they start talking when there is something to hear?

So they have their ears not on the sides of their heads  
but situated inside their mouths so that when they hear  
something their first impulse is to start talking?

The situation should be made more normal, don’t you think?

Why don’t they keep their mouths shut and their ears open?

Are they stupid?”

John Cage, *Composition As Process: Part III. Communication*

“In the end, the radical critique of consciousness (first delineated by the mystical tradition, now administered by unorthodox psychotherapy and high modernist art) always lays the blame on language. Consciousness experienced as a burden, is conceived of the memory of all the words that have ever been said.

Krishnamurti claims that we must give up psychological, as distinct from factual, memory. Otherwise, we keep filling up the new with the old, closing off experience by hooking each experience into the last.

We must destroy continuity (which is insured by psychological memory), by going to the end of each emotion or thought.

And after the end, what supervenes (for a while) is silence.”

Susan Sontag, *The Aesthetics of Silence* (XIV)

I have desired to go  
Where springs not fail

To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail  
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be  
Where no storms come

Where the green swell is in the havens dumb  
And out of the swing of the sea.

Gerard Manley-Hopkins (“*Heaven-Haven*”)

*How might we hear the demands placed on us by future generations? Go to Chapter 7, “Into Eternity”.*

*What does the background of the working practices behind this book sound like? Does listening to the background help us perceive non-human agency more clearly? Go to Chapter 8, “The Voice of the Other: Spaces Between”.*

## 4. Incantations

*Naomi Millner*

To ‘incant’ is to chant or to intone. The word derives from a Latin term:

*Incantare*: to chant, or charm, from *in* (expressing intensive force), and *cantare*, to sing.

When it first entered common English usage in the mid sixteenth century, to incant meant to ‘use enchantment on’.

This sense of magic is, to me, both expressive and invitational. Where does a charm or chant originate? The histories of magic, white, black, and multi coloured, are multiple and various. In many traditions and languages, magic is called an ‘art’ or a ‘dark art’. Even as it is often feared, or associated with superstitious beliefs, magic is commonly regarded as a skilled practice





Figure 1: De Alchemist (The Alchemist), by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, c. 1558. Metropolitan Museum of Art, OAESC, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

or craft requiring long years of apprenticeship. Usually this includes apprenticeship to a master, but also, in some form, an apprenticeship to matter: the material, happening, and labyrinthine world. Magic describes a form of intervention that appears 'supernatural' - outside the usual laws - yet produces effects within its ongoing fabric.

In what sense is magic invitational? With some poetic license I imagine magical cultures as being premised on a study

of complex and entangled physical processes requiring a suspension of human-centric perceptions, valuations, and understandings. There is much we cannot explain in relation to the happening of what goes by the name of magic. It is not my intention to try and explain the difference between tricks and manipulations and transmutations in terms of the laws of the physical universe. It is also important to recognize how the respect deferred to magical practices and figures can, in many situations, lead to an amplification of the authority of that practice or tradition, such that abuse and even violence may result. Instead I invite you on a thought experiment premised on the idea that 'magic' is what happens when we allow the more-than-human world to invite us into participation on its own terms.

The social theorist Bruno Latour, who studies cultures of science and technology, says that the famous microbiologist Louis Pasteur was regarded as a magician in his time for his role in developing the anthrax vaccine as a solution to a declared agricultural crisis. Latour says that Pasteur's 'magic' lay only in the artful way he mapped the problem across very different scales, picking up different interest groups along the way. From the farm, designed to grow very large animals, to the petri-dish in his impromptu laboratory, made to grow very small ones, Pasteur translated the agricultural problem into a set of microbial movements that could be predicted and intercepted. Once he had established his microbial craft he staged a series of 'micro-studies' on the



Figure 2: *Louis Pasteur, en 1885* by d'Albert Edelfelt. Musée D'Orsay, 1885. Photo by Ondra Havala.

streets of Paris, repeating the 'miraculous' performances to impressed commercial and agricultural audiences. Pasteur's 'magic' made him the centre of the anthrax issue and of new commercial networks to produce the vaccine. The invention

of microbiology also lastingly transformed the way that social issues were diagnosed, with a new language of invasion, virus, and sanitation practices also being used to frame and attack another problem: the urban poor.

Magic is deeply entangled in practices of power and knowledge, and in relations of authority. So why do I insist on this invitation?

**Enchantment:** to fill someone with (great) delight; to charm. To put the senses under a spell; to 'delude.' From the Latin *incantare*, from in from *in* (expressing intensive force), and *cantare*, to sing.

To enchant is to captivate, dazzle, enrapture, entrance, absorb, engross, rivet, mesmerize, beguile, tickle someone pink, get under someone's skin.

Incantation is ambiguous. Songs that fill us with great delight bring relief, inspiration and motivation to continue what we are doing. Feeling enraptured means feeling joyful, perhaps oblivious to the usual way of things, but it also means feeling caught up in a wider, more elegant dance. The magician who plays the pied piper may charm the people away from their villages and lead them to a place of darkness or of no return. On the other hand, in the belly of daily routines which are harnessed to, or at least entangled with, technical and economic processes which have little concern for us or for our lived environments, incantation may describe an ethical approach that means living *in-relation-to*. It may describe a

'poetics' of social life premised in the arts of observation, attention, and inhabitation. Intervention flows from these arts.

Incantation does not mean, in this sense, deferring unquestioningly to other figures who incant. Incantation describes an invitation to attend to traditions that are on the margins; to ways of investing the patters of life with vital energy; and - perhaps through these means - to movements and entanglements within the more-than-human world. To incant is to act; it demands confidence and self-understanding and trust. However it is to act with humility, to derive confidence from faith in the wider web of relationships rather than one's own achievements, and trust in the agency of the song, rather than the powers of reason.

Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth - our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with *other* eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.

*How can we create spaces for more-than-human encounters?  
Go to Chapter 9, "Launching More-than-Human Investigations".*

*What kind of practical tactics can help us attend to more-than-human presences and embodied responses to environments?  
Go to Chapter 10, "Eight Incantational Tactics".*

## 5 Suspended Futures

*Julian Brigstocke*

I am standing on the narrow pavement of Rover Way, a frantic overpass that crosses from the neighbourhood of Tremorfa in Cardiff, past some industrial estates over the river Rhymney to Penylan. I am waiting, listening for a sign, from the future. I look out over the neat rows of terraced houses, surrounded on one side by a green of wild grass, on the other by a huge factory, gasping smoke, towering over the small houses, and on the near side, by the river and the noisy overpass.

I am trying to attune myself to the multiple times and futures of the neighbourhood, to listen to the voices of both Tremorfa's futures and its lost futures. I want to know how futures are sensed, how they become present, or how their absence is felt. I feel a sense of suspended time, time waiting for time.

Around me, as the future stands there, waiting, listening, a groan of traffic draws a curtain of sound around me. I am here because it's the only place I can find a view of the flow of the river beside the neat rows of terraced houses.

Tremorfa is a small neighbourhood of Cardiff that is poor, stigmatized, and at risk from the effects of climate change. The river Rhymney, running through the depressed eastern areas of the city, is the smallest of the three tidal rivers in Cardiff but also the least protected, and Tremorfa is now one of the areas that is worst threatened in a city that regularly suffers from severe flooding. Today, at low tide, enveloped in a fug of traffic fumes, the river looks harmless enough as it slowly oozes – thick, muddy sludge – past Tremorfa's red-brick houses, the industrial estates, and under the bridge. But it inhabits a different temporality, a more somnolent rhythm, to the rush of traffic and the lives of the residents. Or rather, their clashing rhythms all contribute to the noise of the city, its roaring multiplicity and cacophony.

My aim is to listen to this noise more closely, to detect the forms of movement, inertia or suspension within it. Listening, waiting, for the future to reveal its signs.

There is a school of thought that tells us that we are experiencing a kind of crisis of the future: that we can't situate ourselves within the vast geological time-scales of climate change, fossil fuels, and mass extinction that we can't imagine

alternatives, that we can't construct utopian imaginaries, or even see the future with anything other than foreboding or horror. We can only inhabit more or less comforting memories of the past. As we listen out for the future, we see no signs, and can only wait.

Listening to the future requires a questioning of the geopoetics of climate change and of the ways in which different people make sense of climate change through their relations with the places they call home. In doing so, I wish to dwell on a kind of inertia of time that I encountered while talking to residents of Tremorfa: a sense of lost or absent futures, of time standing still, waiting still, still for a sign. What new kinds of time could emerge that might shift the weight pressing on us by the deeply unsettling knowledges of environmental change and mass species extinction?

I take inspiration from writing that encounters the city as an archive, a collection of artefacts, signs, and sedimented patterns of activity and practices that are embedded in the fabric of the built environment. We know that cities are haunted by ghosts of the past that make demands on the present. But I sense that these ghosts do not only travel from the past, but also from the future. It is not only memory and trauma that is woven into everyday urban sites and objects, but also future-oriented emotions: feared futures, hoped-for futures, even absent futures: futures that cannot be imagined or named, but whose loss is palpable in the present. We are haunted by lost



futures and betrayed descendants. We are told more and more often that we are in ever-increasing debt to future generations.

I talk to some residents of Tremorfa. What are their hopes for the future? How do they feel about environmental change? Does it affect them? Where, if anywhere, does it make itself palpable? Where do they listen to the future's signs? If you could speak to someone living here in a hundred years' time, what question would you ask them? What will the future look like here? Does the idea of climate change provoke action, or does it create dark futures that only produce inertia?

I am with a young man from Tremorfa. He is looking into the future, telling me what he sees. Another set of floods has died down, and the residents are repairing the damage. They are not too dismayed by the experience; he calls them 'water people'; they have evolved to inhabit the dirty flows of overflowed water, revelling in the mud and the filth. His question to them is simple: "What the fuck are you still doing here? Why did you never leave?". In return, they send a message back to the present, back to him. The question... is the same. "What are you doing here? Why don't you leave?" For him, the climate futures of Tremorfa itself are of little interest ... he is hoping to leave shortly. He has no concrete plans, and he doesn't see the future to hold a great deal of promise or possibility, but he knows that he will not stay here. Where does he see the future? He points to a large spliff he is smoking. 'Drugs and more drugs', he says. Tremorfa is flooded with drugs, not water;

that's all there is here. Bring on the flood; perhaps, it will sweep the police station away. Perhaps climate change will rupture the authorities, clean away the oppressive structures for managing life that lock him into a dreary present.

I was drawn to this neighbourhood because it directly threatened by climate change and rising sea levels. I expected to encounter futures that would be strongly shaped by the increased threat of flooding and the forces that create this. For some, this was true. But for many, what was striking was their refusal to envisage their future here. They were passing through, on their way somewhere else, to some undefined elsewhere. The future was never here, but another place. Tremorfa seemed, to the people I talked to, to lack any palpable future. As we stand, wait, listening for signs from the future, time seems inert; the future lost in advance; possibilities saturated. The residents' hopes for mobility, for escape, seemed to generate a kind of inertia of being.

But the signs speak, waiting from the future. For the people I talk to, climate futures speaks to them, not only in the news, but in everyday urban objects and spaces ... in unsettling perturbations of the atmosphere, of the weather, of the natural environment. It speaks to them in the open fields nearby, empty because development is no longer permitted on this flood plain. A regeneration development plan was once mooted for this area, but torpedoed when the flood reports came in. Another future gone. I see it in the seagulls, one interviewee

tells me – “What are you doing here? Why haven’t you left?”  
– Waiting, signing, timing. Look at them, they’re everywhere, scavenging. Seagulls used to eat fish from the oceans; now they scavenge for food in places like this, eating plastic, diseasing themselves. Waiting for signs. Nature is visible but unsettling; there is something not right that can’t quite be named, that refuses to be identified. How might climate change affect you? I don’t know; I will be leaving here soon, I don’t know where I’ll be.

I feel it in the weather, says another resident. The seasons aren’t right any more; summer isn’t summer. Weather isn’t like it used to be. Another: I see it in the sea; every time I look at Cardiff Bay. The Bay isn’t actually visible from Tremorfa itself, but it looms close to it, weighing down on the future of the neighbourhood. I see it in my garden, which I try to keep nice; in the recycling – I try to do my bit; I see it in the library; in the streets; in the park. In the police station. In the factory smoke.

There are few concrete possibilities in these dark portents, in these flashes of clairvoyance that condense the forces of the present into a novel configuration. But there is a mumbling and murmuring of time, a hesitant transfiguration of the everyday. Embodied states that are unnameable, impossible to pin down.

Are there kinds of time that do not have the form of movement or liveliness? What kind of energies, temporal but inert, are inherent in everyday objects, animals, atmospheres, buildings?

Times standing and waiting, inert, listening for absent futures? Perhaps we might wonder, along with writers like Eleanor Kaufman or Peter Pal Pebart, whether there is a curious kind of potentiality emergent from the saturation of the present and a sterility of time, from the evacuation of possibility. What forms of time are there that exist beyond movement? Times that are decentred, aberrant, wild, paradoxical, floating, or especially, sunk? Times that wait, and listen, and sign.

Within the sterile, the unmoving, the inert, there is a curious kind of authority, an authority that generates new vectors of time. Perhaps in the little inflections of time glimpses in the futures that haunt everyday spaces, new forms of hope can be glimpsed.

*What forms of projection are involved in listening to non-human forces? Go to Chapter 12, Echoes and Mirrors, Mirrors and Echoes.*

*How can we listen to silent voices? Listen to Chapter 3, Ossicles.*

## 6. We are the Flood

*Claire Blencowe*





Common life is a struggle against privatisation. Okay. But how do we do that? How do we struggle against privatisation?

Let' s see what this place has to say...

There are signs saying that space is private. How do we struggle against that? Do we cut the razor wire?

How about the leaves? Are they rustling? Is the water murmuring?

I can' t hear a message. Can you?

Maybe it' s the land that is our teacher? Maybe the ground?

Let' s follow this path and see how we go.

Which way is it? Are we getting lost?

The path is zigzagging down the steep hill. Is that it? Is this our teacher? Is the path teaching us how to traverse a difficult obstacle? To travel sideways?

So common life is the bottom of the hill?

So common life is the sea?

Or water?

Look at this wall! Look at the pipes sticking out and through it. What' s it trying to do? What' s it trying to tell us?

Oh I see it now! We are the flood water.

We are the water that was trapped by the culverts, forced into unnatural currents for private profit.

The flood is the struggle against the privatisation of the water.

The water is common life.

We are the flood.

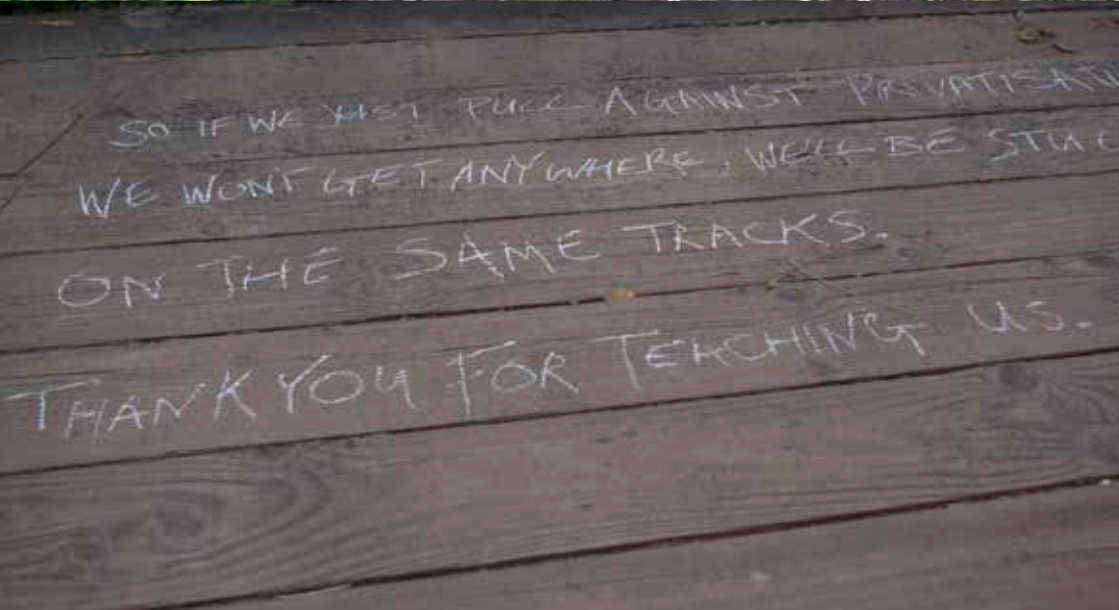
And the wall? - The wall is trying to stop a flood, it wants to break up the water into lots of different channels, so that the force of the water doesn' t break the wall.

We should look out for that in our struggles - the cunning tricks that the walls will use to break us up, to undermine our force.

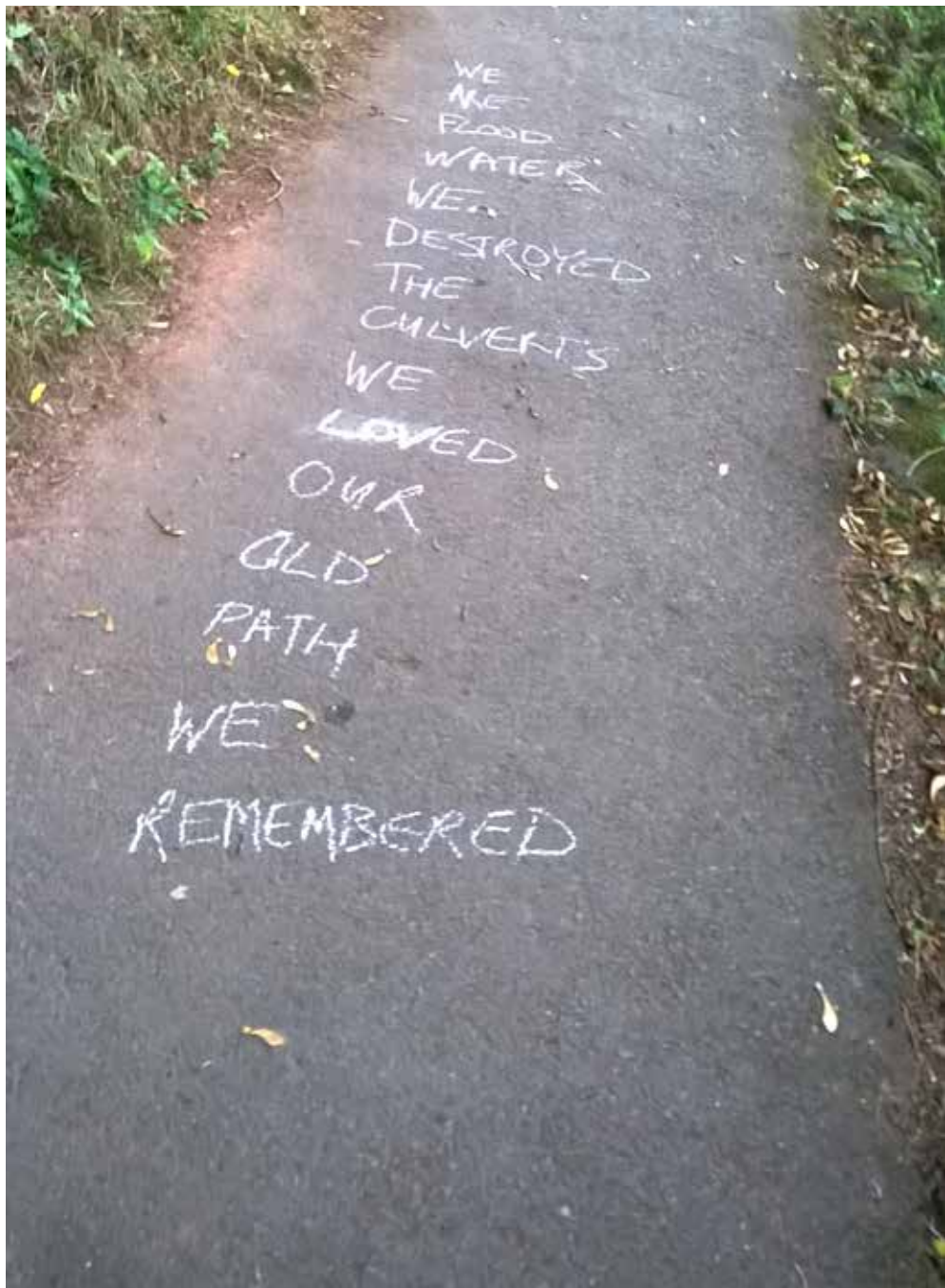
Thank you for teaching us wall.











We are the flood.

Identifying with the inanimate...

The differently animate?

...with *water*, helps us to think about ourselves as a collective,  
a collective force, rather than as individual agents.

We learn how to be a mass from matter!

Mattering





We are the flood.

Wait a minute - I'm sure I've heard that before somewhere.

From the wind?

The sparrows?

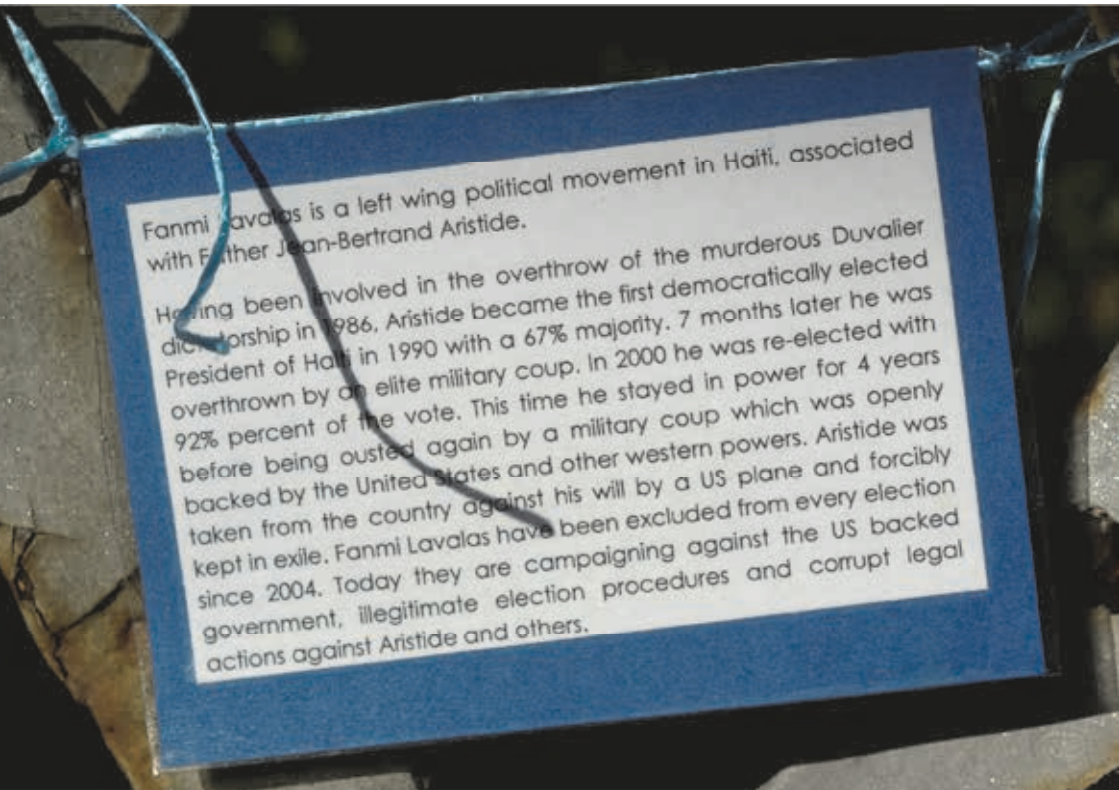
No - that's it! It was a book. That book on Haiti. *Fanmi Lavalas* - the flood - the people's movement.

Maybe this place has been passing on a message from Haiti to us.

Or through us.

Well then, we'd better pass it on...





Fanmi Lavalas is a left wing political movement in Haiti, associated with Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

**Fanmi : family, Lavalas : flood or avalanche**

Fanmi Lavalas have fought against the military backed rule of the tiny wealthy elite in Haiti. They have fought for equality, education and health care, participatory democracy and the empowerment of ordinary people. On his election to the presidency in 1991 Aristide warned that whether they like it or not 'the comfortable stones in the water will come to know the pain of the impoverished stones in the sun'. The movement has been suppressed through violence, false allegations and smear by elites in Haiti in collaboration with their counter parts in the United States.



Alone we are weak, together we are strong.  
Altogether we are Lavalas, the flood.

l'union fait la force : unity is strength

Tout moun se moun : every person is indeed a person

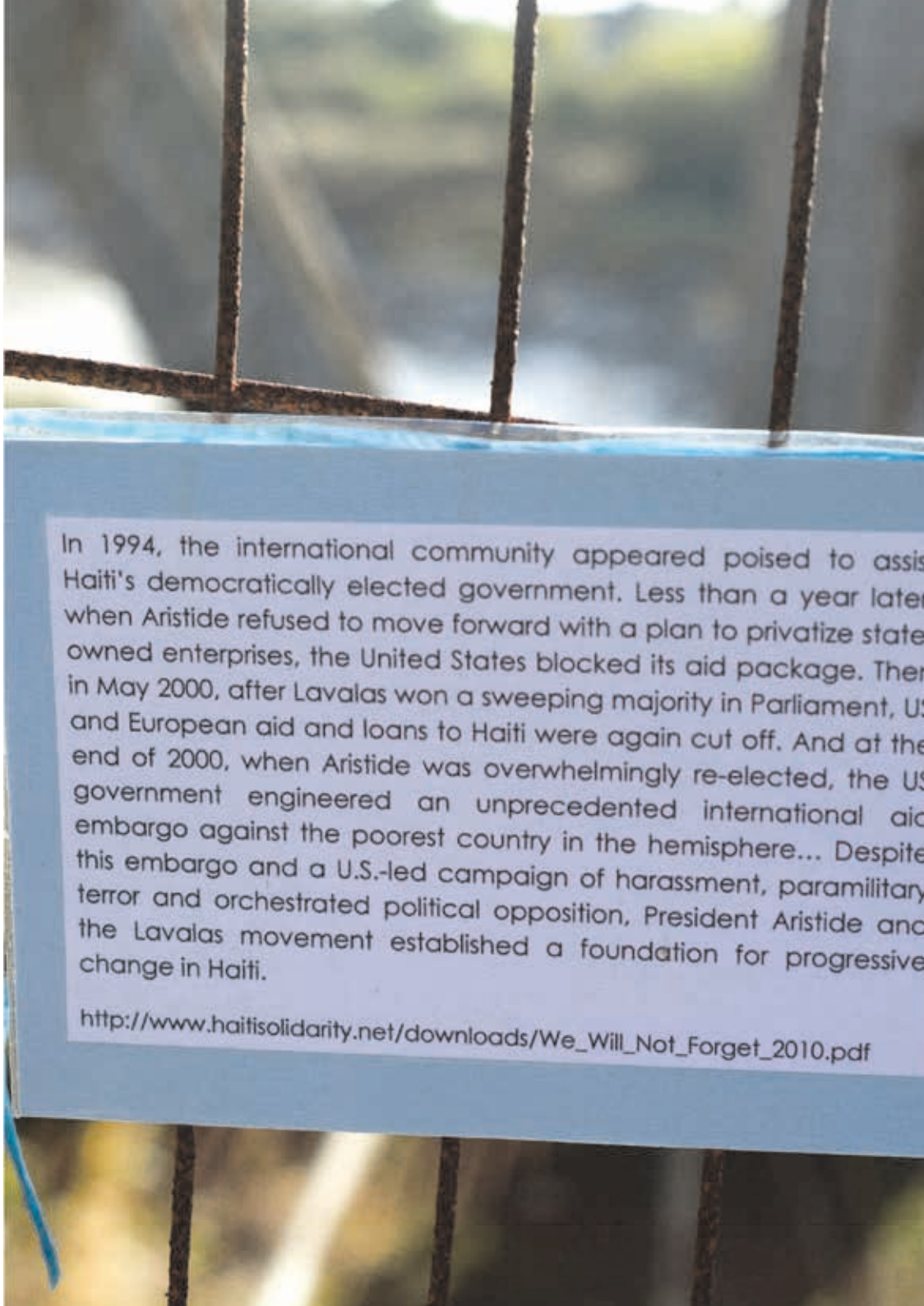
When people want to kill a dog they say it is rabid

We are a people of resistance  
Slavery, occupation, nothing has broken us  
We have slipped through every trap



'I'm not discouraged... The collective consciousness of the Haitian people, their mobilisation for democracy, these things may not have been fully actualized but they exist, they are real... I am sustained by this collective potential, the power of this collective potential being... This power has not yet been actualized, it has not yet been enacted in the building of enough schools, or more hospitals, more opportunities, but these things will come. The power is real and it is what animates the way forward.'

Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Fanmi Lavalas, former president of Haiti in Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood*, 2007



In 1994, the international community appeared poised to assist Haiti's democratically elected government. Less than a year later when Aristide refused to move forward with a plan to privatize state-owned enterprises, the United States blocked its aid package. Then in May 2000, after Lavalas won a sweeping majority in Parliament, US and European aid and loans to Haiti were again cut off. And at the end of 2000, when Aristide was overwhelmingly re-elected, the US government engineered an unprecedented international aid embargo against the poorest country in the hemisphere... Despite this embargo and a U.S.-led campaign of harassment, paramilitary terror and orchestrated political opposition, President Aristide and the Lavalas movement established a foundation for progressive change in Haiti.

[http://www.haitisolidarity.net/downloads/We\\_Will\\_Not\\_Forget\\_2010.pdf](http://www.haitisolidarity.net/downloads/We_Will_Not_Forget_2010.pdf)

‘Alone we are weak, together we are strong, altogether we are the flood [*Lavalas*]. **Let the flood descend**, the flood of poor peasants and poor soldiers, the flood of the poor jobless multitudes... And then God will descend and put down the mighty and send them away, and He will raise up the lowly and place them on high.’

Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Fanmi Lavalas, former president of Haiti

In the 80s and 90s the US army intelligence saw Liberation Theology as **the single greatest threat to US interests on the continent**. Liberation Theology asserts that the poor will liberate themselves and the oppressors as well. It is entirely organised around the active self-liberation of oppressed and is grounded in a refusal to tolerate the scandalous inequity of poverty & injustice.





*How can we capture the flows of energy in collaborative work?  
Go to Chapter 17, "The Voice of the Other: Spaces Between" .*

*Do new voices become audible through moments of  
disconnection or rupture? Go to Chapter 18, "The Voice of Law"*

## 7. Into Eternity

*Leila Dawney and Julian Brigstocke*

*'We already have enormous amounts of nuclear waste all over the world. If this waste spills out into nature it will cause death and destruction. Large areas will become uninhabitable for a long, long time.'*

*Did that happen? Are there forbidden zones with no life in your time? ....*

*How far into the future will your way of life have consequences?'*

*How can we relate to the inhabitants of Earth 500, or indeed 100,000 years from now? How can we care for these*





inhabitants, who may or may not be human, who may or may not be 'like us', who may or may not even be 'alive' as we know it today? What sorts of ethics can arise from imagining, or even preparing for, a distant future world and its inhabitants? As a way of approaching these questions, there has been a surge in interest in forms of 'inter-generational justice' and 'inter-generational accounting' that insist on treating future people (and perhaps future non-human life) with the same generosity, care and respect that living people deserve. Through environmental damage, the accumulation of nuclear waste, and even huge financial loans with multi-generational terms of repayment, we are arguably mortgaging the lives of people in the distant future in order to make our lives in the present more comfortable.

What kind of ethics of inter-generational justice might enable us to cultivate practices that could leave the world in a better state than when we came into it, rather than more damaged? Across the world, one answer to this has been to give future generations a 'voice' in contemporary democratic debate. Across Europe, North Africa and Latin America (as well as the UN), future generations are gaining official 'voices' in political debates, with spokespersons appointed to represent their interests. The assumption, here, is that we can dare to presume not what the future holds in store, but what it wants. The will of future people can be heard in the present. Is there not a risk, though, that we just assume the future will be much the same? What if future people are radically different to ourselves, whether through different languages, social and political formations, or different technological life?

Michael Madsen's film *Into Eternity* offers a very different route into imagining intergenerational justice. It is a documentary about the ONKALO project, a vast nuclear waste repository in Finland currently under construction. The repository runs five kilometres underground and consists of a vast network of tunnels bored into stable bedrock. When the waste has been deposited, the tunnels will be sealed with concrete and the repository will be left alone. ONKALO is not expected to be completed until well into the 2100s. The waste within ONKALO will stay dangerous to life for over 100,000 years. In a review of this film, film critic Peter Bradshaw describes its subject matter as 'nothing less than post-human architecture'.



*Into Eternity* is a meditation on time, the future and humanity, drawing our attention to the impossibility of knowing deep future worlds but the necessity of planning for them. Madsen's voiceover addresses the inhabitants of the future, questioning what they feel, understand and know. The audio-visual landscapes of ONKALO provide an opportunity for speculating about these inhabitants, but also for thinking about the fact that we just do not know. Much of the film is concerned with the problem of how to communicate the perils of the repository across almost unimaginably vast time-spaces.

The problem of alerting distant future inhabitants of the world to dangerous radioactive waste repositories invites us to consider our responsibilities to care for the non- and post-human inhabitants of the future, raising the question of the limits of ethics and responsibility. *Into Eternity* invites

the question of how to imagine, listen to and communicate with the unknowable Other, and also asks about what assumptions are made about we might share and what might remain recognisable. We would like to view *Into Eternity* as a provocation for critical reflection. The questions and scenarios, the landscapes and the figures in the film trigger meditations and speculations on the material legacies of the nuclear age. The questions posed in *Into Eternity* demands an ethic of generosity and hospitality to the future, one that requires thinking about future lives as distant, perhaps utterly transformed forms of human or more-than-human life, not as familiar people who are "like us". The practices of speculating and thinking about the unknowable in *Into Eternity* might, perhaps, help us think about the different forms of ethical engagement in caring for distant future worlds.

*Into Eternity* moves between interviews with professionals involved with the ONKALO project, sweeping Steadicam shots of the site, and intimate images of the lives of the contract workers. In the film, ONKALO is pictured as visual spectacle, as the camera dollies over the vast facility – the dark tunnels, the clean white spaces where waste is held in temporary storage, the huge machines that work on the excavations of the tunnels, and over the sparse, Finnish landscape. Some shots are reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), fetishising what we might consider a technological sublime, while other parts evoke the desolate and post-industrial landscapes of Andrey Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker*.



What is striking about *Into Eternity* is its side-lining of the human protagonists. ONKALO is represented cinematically as a complex assemblage of machinery, rock, animals, laboratories, scientists, artists, workers, snow, trees and Portacabins. The sound of the rock blasting deep below ground bleeds into Steadicam footage of the frozen forest. Elk look up for a second, then go back to their grazing. Subterranean activities have become part of their landscape.

The camera moves from human to non-human, mutually involving them in a shared project of care for the future: the legacy of the nuclear age. Through this montage of technology, earth and bodies, this intermingling of living and non-living landscapes, a cinematic world is produced that refuses to privilege its human participants. Indeed, in certain sequences, the human workers are rendered translucent as if to further emphasise their temporary being.

This cinematic world invites us to reach out beyond what is knowable and graspable, towards the world of animals, rocks, machines, plants, and towards the possibility of a post-human other. It invites us to see ourselves as tiny parts of ongoing processes and shared vulnerabilities towards which we must find a way to care, and to look at and know the landscape as an elk, or as an excavator as well as a human.

In a scene towards the beginning of the film, the director Michael Madsen lights a match in the darkness and addresses

warnings to camera for these post-human inhabitants of the impossibly distant future:

'I would say that you are now on a place where we have borrowed something from you to protect you. And we have taken great pain to be sure that you are protected. We also need you to know that this place should not be disturbed. And we want you to know that this is not a place for you to live in. You should stay away from this place and then you will be safe.'

Concern haunts the film: what if someone finds the repository? How will they know what it is? How can we warn them? We cannot be sure that those who might encounter the repository will have the capacities to understand messages, the technology to detect radiation or even the machinery to open the seal. As we move further into the future, these questions become harder and harder and speculation is the only route. The camera pans through the tunnels, inviting us to imagine ourselves as these future beings, noting ONKALO's otherness, its alienness, its strangeness and inviting us to ask what it might look like to them: a site of religious significance or memorialisation, perhaps?

One section of the film explores attempts by previous builders of nuclear waste sites to communicate danger across millennia. A cartoon with a 'robust message' is discussed, and also the possible construction of 'warning' landscapes such as those devised by the US Department of Energy in the planning

of another repository, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), New Mexico, to include 'forbidding blocks' and a 'landscape of thorns'. The WIPP suggested that future inhabitants would be encouraged to keep away through landscapes that would 'attempt to give you a feeling rather than give you a detailed message. Intuitively, you would expect people to react to something frightening. Better than to a detailed message'. In these blueprints for communication across distant time described in the film lies an assumption of a common response to spaces as forbidding, or frightening, a common sensitivity to atmosphere that could outlive language and civilisation, a commitment to our enduring capacities to respond to places in a somehow predictable way. Both the scholars and futurists employed by WIPP, and the viewers and participants in *Into Eternity* highlight the importance of speculation, and of recognising our ethical responsibility to the unknowable as unknowable. These attempts in themselves ask us to move beyond a model of the future world that assumes future forms of life will be comprehensible to present-day human thought.

A recognition of the danger and longevity of nuclear waste, the trade-off of cheap energy in terms of the welfare of distant future inhabitants of earth poses some important ethical questions and also invites us to extend our ethical sensibilities beyond the knowable, beyond human and other forms of life towards possible worlds about which we can only speculate. Such an extension of ethics would require a generosity to the Other that cannot be reduced to practices of calculation

or equivalence. Ecological justice must be able to respond to events that cannot be encompassed within logics of simple causality or provable culpability.

Such a sense of justice might be extended to conceptions of inter-generational justice between living and unborn lives. It would require us to pass the future on to not-yet-born lives through an ethic of generosity to distant unknowable others, and not just to future lives that are rendered the same as the present. We suggest that this ecological ethics could be based on notions of abundance and excess rather than calculation. Geographer Nigel Clarke has argued that an ethics of 'solar abundance' might help us articulate new forms of ecological justice that are beyond measure. The idea of solar abundance can help us to understand how this might be generated: in Walt Whitman's poem 'By Blue Ontario's Shore', Whitman attributes to the poet a talent of judging 'not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing'. The poet judges as falling sunlight. This solar judgement requires both magnanimity, an ability to be as accepting of the things he encounters as Nature is of him, and far-sightedness, an ability to see an eternity of fibres stretched out over time. To look at the world in this way is to expose it as a 'lively field of becoming, always interacting, durational threads', similar to those represented in the shifting entangled landscapes of ONKALO.

*Into Eternity* asks us to consider the problem of caring for future worlds, inviting the development of new modes of

relating and being responsible. We argue that this could involve the invention of forms of intergenerational justice that are based on such solar generosity and far-sightedness, rather than drawing on tropes of familiarity, relatedness and proximity. In doing so, it would expand our ethical relations towards those beings, alive and not yet alive, with which we share our vulnerability and transience.

*Does writing from the perspective of the non-human demand new kinds of creative writing? Go to Chapter 2, "A Miracle of Rare Device".*

*What practical tactics are there to help us listen to such silent voices? Go to Chapter 10, "Eight Incantational Tactics".*

## 8 Voices of the Other: The Spaces Between

*A sound piece by Sara Bowler*

To listen, scan the QR code below or go to:

<https://soundcloud.com/sound-sara/voice-of-the-other-spaces-between-10jun15>



The soundwork focused on the time between formal discussion sessions and activities, the idea being to capture the spirit of the group's time at the house and explore how social interactions determined relationships within this domestic setting. During work sessions (and the intensity and focus this commanded) we looked to downtime as a chance to be ourselves, to be 'other' to our professional personas. The piece explored this 'otherness', compressing five days of intense activity into eleven minutes, bringing our non-human interactions with the landscape, such as birds singing and walks up steep hills, to bear on our experience of the retreat.

*What forms of authority are present in our attempts to voice or listen to multiple voices? To explore the relationships between hearing voices in literature and everyday life, go to Chapter 11, "On Attunement".*

*How can finding new ways of addressing the more-than-human help us encounter politics in new ways? To explore ways of listening to the landscape, go to Chapter 6, "We are the Flood".*



## 10 Eight Incantational Tactics

*Naomi Millner*

Incantational tactics are tricks or games or rituals which invest groups with energy and momentum. The following are specifically collected as examples of tactics which can help to attend to more-than-human presences, as well as embodied responses to environments that often aren't drawn to the foreground, as part of a group process. This includes attention to objects and living things, the acknowledgement of other pasts or 'ghosts' in the room, interruptions of the usual ways of doing things, and 'poetic' modes of thinking that direct attention to our entanglement with our surroundings.

Several of the tactics listed below have been adapted from other traditions, especially Christian monastic traditions. I have personally grown up in a Christian tradition, and have



consequently learnt the effectiveness of them in practice first-hand. The implication, in including them here, is these tactics can 'work' outside the contexts of these traditions. That is, they perform something which happens regardless of personal belief or cultural tradition, because of the relationships it assembles with the material world as is known through the body. However, it should be noted that of course such tactics change and have different contexts outside their usual domain of practice. Whilst Christian traditions differ immensely, and many individuals traverse different traditions in their lifetime, there is almost always an assumption of a guiding presence of Love within the use of such practices, and an assumption that meditative or contemplative practices can help to decentre human activity from a preoccupation with ego-centric needs, to a more co-operative, relational mode of being.

Nevertheless, the wager of this piece is that that such tactics can be useful in producing dynamic and relational momentum in a wide variety of settings. What makes them work is not the charisma of an authority figure, a set of scriptures, or a unified set of beliefs, but the way they turn attention to material and embodied agencies that have much to tell us, if we will but listen. All the tactics do, however, rely some degree of faith in the capacity of the world to rise to meet us. You are invited to experiment with this modality of faith, and to adapt into your practices the tactics you try out that produce effects you value. Or indeed, that produce effects that change and challenge you in useful ways.

## **TACTIC ONE: THE IGNATIUS EXAMEN**

*Background:* The exercise is based on the principle of 'desolations' and 'consolations' - the idea that there are gatherings of energy, enthusiasm and connectivity within our lives, and repeated, habitual patterns that deplete energy or make us feel isolated. The assumption is not that high energy and happiness should be a goal for life and that sadness should be avoided. Rather the assumption is that our routines and habits could serve us better if they focused on the repetitions of activities and contexts that 'give life' rather than those we have integrated for rational reasons, but in fact are not having the effect we imagine. The practice is a practice of attention; of revisiting a previous day or week without judgement or reflective thought, noticing when were moments of the greatest energy and sense of connection and when the least. The expectation is that simply repeating the practice will allow a reorganisation of habit according to what has been observed, without great application of reflective thought.

*When:* In a small to medium group; in the context of longer term involvement in a project or reflection on individuals' longer term activities or plans; with students in tutorials.

*Why:* The exercise encourages engagements with energy flows, energy blockages and relationships that are often already in the background of awareness but often not included within rational planning frameworks.

*Brief history:* The method presented below is an adaptation of a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his description of spiritual exercises. Ignatius was a Jesuit monk and thought the Examen was a gift from God – he consequently wanted it to be shared as widely as possible. One of the few shared practices of the Jesuits was to undertake this practice twice a day, in the morning and in the evening.

*How:* Clear a space or portion of time, on your own or in your group. Explain the process, and either nominate one person to read the questions during the process, or write them and place them somewhere where everyone can see them. *Invite presence*, in whatever way you feel most comfortable - eg. by taking 5 minutes of silence and deep inward/outward breaths. Then voice or read the following questions, leaving several minutes of pause after each set. During the pause, individuals allow their attention to pass over the events of the last day/week, noticing any events or times that stand out in response to the questions.

When in the last day/week have you felt most full of life, most energised, most connected to others?

When in the last day/week have you felt least full of life, least energised, least connected others?

Take a further five or more minutes to be still, to express inner gratitude for experiences of different kinds, to let go.

Participants may then take time to write down anything that is felt of significance, and/or there may be a time afterward for individuals to share what has arisen - without commentary or judgement. Ideally the practice would be repeated daily or weekly over a period of time.

## **TACTIC TWO: AN IMMANENTIST LECTIO DIVINA**

*Background:* *Lectio Divina*, or divine reading, is a form of meditative engagement with the scriptures developed in the Benedictine tradition between the sixth and twelfth century. Rather than being associated with the study of texts the practice was meant to encourage a reading of the texts as 'living.' In a monastic context *Lectio Divina* models a style of reading that is meant to contrast with (not replace) rigorous study of texts in relation to the histories of their production and application. Different modalities of reading, which invoke imaginative and sensory capacities, are experimented to allow the text to 'live,' and to take on relationship to the reader's life. The reader positions her- or himself within the text and prepares her/himself to be addressed by it, or by other agencies.

*When:* In a small to medium group, especially where particular readings are in focus, including student groups. This works quite well as a warm-up activity prior to discussions.

*Why:* Shared reading and discussion often focuses on the

context of readings and on 'understanding' or 'penetrating them.' This exercise relies on fragments, forcing the reader to engage with a small portion out of context and in relation to itself or to experience. This also requires a kind of 'faith' in the capacity of other (material, spiritual, memory, relational) forces to speak through the text. The text is not the authority, it forms a kind of prism for these other forces to refract through.

*How:* Take a text - a chapter, paper, or poem - that is either already part of the canon to be addressed by the group, or has some relevance to it. Cut the piece up into segments of no more than 6 or 8 lines. Try to include the beginnings and ends of sentences (although this is not necessary) but do not focus too much on choosing portions for their interest value. Cut up enough segments so that everyone in the group can have one, with a few left over in case someone feels 'stuck' with theirs.

Distribute the segments one per person and instruct everyone to spend around 10 minutes with the text, re-reading the text at least three times according to the following styles (write these up somewhere visible). You may have pen and paper at hand, or simply do the activity as a meditation.:

*Lectio* [read]: Simply read the text slowly and carefully, noticing words or phrases that stand out.

*Meditatio* [meditate]: Re-read the text drawing on your imagination. If an event is described, imagine yourself into it. How does it feel to be there? How do you respond to the other

characters? If the piece is more abstract, try to visualise what is being described, and again imagine yourself into it.

*Oratio* [ask/listen] Attend to the text as if other voices, which you have not yet heeded, are trying to speak through the text. What do they add/ subtract to your relationship to it?

[*Contemplatio* [contemplation]: Re-read the text as if there is a message in it encoded for you, in the context of your life, which can only be revealed if you allow it to surface. Sit with the text allowing it to distil until this message (which may be a phrase or few words from the text) is clear to you.

After the exercise, encourage everyone to sit for a few minutes with the message(s) or impression(s) they have derived, and allow a space for any feedback anyone would like to share.

### **TACTIC THREE: QUICKFIRE**

*Background:* Rather than being drawn from a monastic tradition or context, Quickfire leans on feminist insights into the embodied way that we learn, interact and make decisions, and brings these insights into dialogue with an activity often associated with the dominance of the 'rational mind' - reading. Reading carefully and meditatively has been essential in many spiritual and academic disciplines, but when texts are brought into a discussion context, individuals present can quickly fall into habitual roles and power relationships. What is being warmed up in this activity is not only individuals' capacity and

readiness to speak, but to *listen*. Individuals actively engage with their memories of the text, piecing it back together. Because there is no evaluation of what is being said, they can also create playful connections and dwell on the more banal parts of the text. Meanwhile others listen actively, are reminded of what they have forgotten, and are encouraged into a mode where they can listen to another without needing to prepare their next contribution or interrupt.

*When:* This is a great warm up exercise to use when two or more readings (or films, or pieces of art) have been set in preparation for a group discussion, seminar or tutorial group.

*Why:* Particular voices and parts of texts can quickly come to dominate in group discussions. This exercise often surprises people with how much of a text they have internalised, and gets everyone in the room ready to speak in relation to texts. It is a good way of bringing texts into a room without requiring one person to interpellate them, or presenting them from the outset in terms of their ‘meanings.’

*How:* Divide into pairs or threes. Each person has two minutes (timed) to recall as much as possible of a text they have read, including its structure, content, examples, flow and patterns. The only thing precluded is analysis or evaluation of the text. After two minutes the other partner(s) take their turn(s).

#### **TACTIC FOUR: RESOURCES FROM THE FUTURE**

*Background:* Like the former tactic, this practice draws on social scientific reflections on embodiment, but also borrows ideas from a set of ‘bioenergetics’ workshops. Bioenergetics, especially as adapted by leadership trainer Jim McNeish (see <http://neish.co/about>), encourages individuals to become aware of the way emotions and perceptions are mediated through the body, including via muscular tensions that have built up over long periods of time. Drawing on Gestalt psychology and therapeutic techniques, this approach begins with the idea that we are constantly making patterns or wholes out of our experience (‘gestalt’ means a figure or configuration) in order to feel closure. We need to do this to cope with the constant excess of incoming perceptual information, but can learn embodied responses that allow us to respond flexibly to changing circumstances, rather than becoming overwhelmed or fixed in our responses. Many of the exercises playfully encourage individuals to recreate bodily habit by experiencing other kinds of sensory perception.

*When:* This is a great exercise to use during a group or individual ‘visioning’ process, that is, when it is important to consider ‘where next?’

*Why:* People are plural. Our past and future selves provide other perspectives on our present. Even if primarily by means of our capacity to imagine and project how we will feel in the future, looking backward from another position allows us to dream

without the weight of present anxieties and limitation. It also opens us to heed other perceptions and senses of awareness we may not be giving much room in the present.

*How:* Individuals work in pairs or threes and take it in turns to guide one person through the following process. Whilst one person is the subject of the process, others actively listen and encourage responses by remembering what they said already.

Stand in the present. Look ahead and describe a scenario you would like to be inhabiting (as a group, or individual) in five (or ten) years. What stands in the way of this reality?

Move to the past. In what ways can you see that your 'present' self has already moved toward the reality described? In what ways have obstacles already been overcome?

Move to the future, five or ten years ahead. What does it feel like to be living in this reality? Name five or more aspects of this future reality that enliven you.

Turn from the future toward the present. What resources can you send back to your present self to allow yourself to reach this future reality? What will allow you to get here? Imagine sending them back to your present self, in the past.

Move back to the present. Turn toward the future and receive the resources your future self is giving you. What does it feel like to receive them? How does it change your relationship with the present?

Move into the near future with these resources. What next steps link your present with your future pathway?

Allow time after the exercise for personal writing and for the sharing of experiences.

### **TACTIC FIVE: THEATRE OF PRESENCES**

*Background:* Theatre of presences builds on the 'Theatre of the Oppressed', a theatrical practice devised by Augusto Boal in the 1960s, first in Brazil and later in Europe. Influenced by Freire and principles of epic theatre, Boal's idea was to transform passive spectators into 'spect-actors', by requiring them to engage with the action. A script would be performed by actors up until a certain point of decision, when audience members would be asked to say what they thought should happen next, and to direct actors. This tactic responds to critiques of Boal's method who have emphasised the way it reproduces certain narratives of oppression and lines of validation. It also draws in the idea of inviting more-than-human presences to contribute. The idea here is to set a scene using contextual information, and then create an opening - like Boal's - into which to speak the narratives of other perspectives and possible futures.

*When:* This tactic can be adapted for two main contexts - the first, when a small, working group wishes to engage a broader audience; and second, for use by a smaller working group engaging with a particular historical or geographical context they want to grapple with.



*Why:* In a conversation or inquiry process, certain voices may not be heeded. These may be social groups or they may be objects, emotions, materials. Whilst this exercise engages with these other voices by means of the imagination, it often leads to conversations which are more expansive and enlivened.

*How:* The facilitator needs to prepare a narrative, based on a particular sequence of historical events, or a geographical situation. For example, this might be the retelling of the remodelling of Bristol Harbour through an embedded, earlier story involving the construction of Cumberland Basin in the nineteenth century - the entrance to the docks of the city. After laying out the narrative, the group (or members of the group, if there is a larger audience) take on first, different human characters who might have been present during the earlier events, and then 'more-than-human' figures for example, the harbour waters; the wind; greed; a ship. For each figure the group is asked, one by one, to give their response to what happened and how they see its causes and effects. This can be done through personal writing and/or through turn-taking in a circle. At the end of each round a space is opened for feedback and discussion.

### **TACTIC SIX: HEARING OTHER VOICES**

*Background:* Walking has long been associated with critical activity. For example the 'Situationist' and 'Psychogeography' movements of the 1940s, 50s and 60s saw a number of

dissatisfied intellectuals 'wander' the city in search of alternative ways of seeing and performing it. Whilst such movements rested partly on a desire to seek alternative relationships with the visual signs associated with commodity capitalism (like advertising), from this tradition also emerges the idea of employing playful tactics in order to 'get lost' and encounter the material world from changed modes of experiencing. Links can also be drawn with notions of pilgrimage and meditative walking that are prominent in Christian and other religious traditions.

*When:* This tactic combines very well with tactic six. It works very well for looking for creative ways of documenting or developing critical response to issues that can be perceived as being configured by outside forces, eg. the transformation of cities; flooding patterns.

*Why:* This tactic invites participants to go on a journey of listening, trusting that - through the means of directed attention and imagination - objects, materials, and more-than-human agencies can elicit perspectives on events that are extremely important to heed.

*How:* Psychogeographical tactics may be combined in a variety of ways - for example, a theme could be explored within a city at the same time as a map of a different city is being used to navigate it. Algorithms (eg. get off at every tube stop and then taking the second left) could also be incorporated into

the exploration. It is often helpful to have a pre-defined route as wandering can often revert groups to the usual beaten tracks. Whatever route is selected, the most important aspect of this tactic involves taking a specific question (eg. how do you feel about the built environment of this city?) to a number of different agents - trees, gates, rivers, paving slabs, birds. Then the group listens for a response. It is very useful to carry coloured chalks and other craft materials for the asking or answering of such questions. Digital cameras may be also used to capture something of the journey.

NB. It is very important in this tactic to ask questions of nonhuman or more-than-human objects or beings - questions that are not about themselves, but about us; things we want to learn. For example, in one exploratory walk in Lynmouth, participants asked gates, pathways and waters: how can we struggle against the forces of privatization? Rather than investigating the nonhuman world, the participants were asking for guidance and wisdom from it. This is different from the primary emphasis in psychogeography, although such walking tactics can also be adopted in order to decentre and sideline rational human design.

### **TACTIC SEVEN: OBJECT MEDITATIONS**

*Background:* Objects have long formed a focus within meditative practices. Whilst in the Christian tradition adherents are taught to focus on God as object to avoid making 'idols' of created objects, worshippers in the Eastern

Orthodox Church use icons - flat panels depicting holy figures - as a means of concentrating their veneration. The image is meant to point toward the divine, rather than embodying it. Meanwhile, it is common within many Buddhist meditative practices to focus the restless mind on a material object to still and slow the passage of rapid, ego-centred thoughts. One does not need to hold a particular theology or philosophy to be capable of attending to another object in such a way as to encounter otherness or perceive another frequency. What is important here is recognizing the object as a manifestation of temporalities and material processes that are distinct from, and can challenge, human cognition and invention.

*When:* This is a simple ice-breaker exercise which encourages poetic relationships with materials and objects within a meeting space. It works well in small to medium groups.

*Why:* Group processes sometimes lack energy because all the energy fields are being created between people, some of whom maybe tired or preoccupied by other activities or events. This exercise demands a different kind of engagement between individuals and more-than-humans, which plays the twofold role of inviting in more energy, and acknowledging other presences within the process.

*How:* Invite each member of the group to find an object - one that seems particularly inviting to them. This could be a specific kind of object or material - such as soil - or a more open

specification, 'any object.' Individuals take an allotted period of time - perhaps 10 or 20 minutes - to sit with the object and simply listen. They are to try to avoid 'thinking about' the object, and instead are simply to attend to it. A pen and paper can be used to write or draw what comes to mind. After the period of time is up, individuals can either meet to share back reflections, or (if they have been thus instructed) bury in the ground the paper they have been writing or drawing upon.

A variation on this exercise involves cutting up many small images or magazine fragments, and allowing individuals to select one or two they feel drawn to. Within this exercise, you can either repeat the above process, or have individuals in pairs 'read' the images for one another - that is, to perceive a clue or 'message' for the individual through the image they have chosen.

*Please continue the inventory by adding your own tactics...*

## **TACTIC EIGHT:**

*Background:*

*When:*

*Why:*

*How:*

## 11 On Attunement

*Gail McConnell*

*Through what tactics can we engage with the more-than-human to create new spaces of desire? Go to Chapter 9, "Missed Connections".*

*How does participating with the non-human test our assumptions about ourselves? Go to Chapter 12, "Echoes and Mirrors, Mirrors and Echoes".*

*How can we capture the flows of energy in collaborative work? Go to Chapter 17, "Drawings"*

Late on a summer evening in August 2013, I received a phone call from my step-father. He asked if I was free to walk the half-mile to the nursing home where my step-brother lived, see if I could find him outside and stay with him until my step-father got there. He explained that he'd received a call from the manager of the nursing home reporting that other residents had expressed concern and made complaints that my step-brother had been standing outside the building talking to himself for eight hours and could not be convinced to come indoors.



I put on my coat and drove with my partner to the street beside the nursing home. We watched from the car and saw my step-brother at the gates of the car park. He was pacing and talking aloud and he looked agitated. We approached him gently, in case we scared him off. 'Hello .....' we said, 'how are you?' He explained that he couldn't go back inside his flat. It smelled of cannabis in there and the smell was really strong. Others were growing cannabis and he couldn't stay. He'd been outside since lunchtime and he wasn't going back in.

We talked with him for a while. He was more frightened than I'd ever seen him and we did our best to mask our own concern for him by seeming unshockable. Eventually we convinced him to go back inside with us. He was shaking. We entered the flat and sniffed. It smelled as it always smelled – cheap air freshener and instant coffee. I told him I could smell no cannabis. My partner did the same. He looked at us with frightened eyes that seemed to beg us to be telling the truth. 'Really?' he said. 'Are you sure?' 'Yes, .....', I said. 'I know what cannabis smells like and I can't smell it in here'.

Four holdalls sat in the middle of the living room floor. They contained all of his clothes and belongings. A plastic bag with thirteen shower gels and other toiletries leaned against the bags. In the kitchen bin were smashed up walkie-talkies and on the kitchen counter was a plastic tray with little segments for each day of the week and seven 400 mg tablets of Quetiapine inside each one. We talked with him and told him again that we could not smell cannabis. We didn't ask about the bags.

We told him his dad would come to see him later. He asked if we would stay with him until then. We said we would, and he said he would go to sleep. He left the room, reappeared briefly in pyjamas, a bit confused, and then left the room again. We heard him breathing deeply in his bed, the lights still on, and waited.

Using a medical frame of reference, my step-brother's experience might be described with terms like 'auditory hallucinations', 'schizophrenia' or 'psychosis'. Terms like these have circulated within my family and haven't proved themselves to be particularly helpful. They make even stranger what is already a strange experience – both for him, and for us, experiencing him. He has talked aloud when alone for as long as I can remember knowing him. I could say 'talked to himself', but this is only one step away from saying that he experiences 'auditory hallucinations'. Something or someone told him others were growing cannabis above and below and beside his flat, and something or someone told him to get out of there. The fact that I don't know these someones or somethings seems no different from my not knowing his friends and co-residents in the nursing home. I am not party to his conversations with others. And I ask about them as best I can.

I write about poetry. That is to say, I spend my days in the company of voices not my own. Voices I cannot see. Voices whose identities are frequently mysterious. Voices made in language and poetic form, whose meanings are realised through rhythm and rhyme and caesura as much as syntax.

It's a strange way to live and I wouldn't choose any other. The voices of the dead are some of the best company I keep. So, too, the multiple voices of the lyric 'I' that speak in a slim volume of poetry. I talk to others about these voices and I write about them in academic journals and reviews. No one thinks me, or the poets expressing these voices, mad, or says that either of us is suffering from auditory hallucinations or any kind of psychosis.

Writing and criticism seem to have attained a freedom, of a sort, that allows for the expression of multiple voices: living, dead, fragmented, authoritarian, comic, encouraging, ironic and so on. The price of this freedom may be the maintenance of the fiction that the writer – poet or critic – is in possession of a solid sense of authority: the authority to 'invent' these voices or to comment on their literary presence. But our experience of authority is so often one of lack and longing, living as we do after the death of god and the death of narrative (to which we must remain, Lyotard declares, incredulous – an after-effect of what happens to metanarrative in postmodernism's cracked mirror). I am free to write about the multiple voices of poetry – the academic institution that employs me will even pay me to do so – but academic publishing protocol seems to dictate that I do so only in single-voiced authoritative prose.<sup>1</sup>

In March 2015 myself and two passionate early career researchers, Jo Collinson-Scott and Deborah Maxwell, embarked on a project called 'Listening to Voices: Creative Disruptions with the Hearing Voices Network', funded by the

Arts and Humanities Research Council. Each of us spend our days thinking about voice and authority: Jo in music, Deborah in narrative story-telling, myself in poetry. We'll spend time with folk who identify as voice-hearers in the hope of finding common ground in our understanding of voicing and listening practices. We're interested in asking why and how we silence voices in ourselves and in others and in what that act of silencing might reveal about the ways we seek to know and understand ourselves and other people. We'd like to learn to listen with greater attention. We'd like to make audible voices edited and erased.

*How might experimenting with the spaces we co-construct with the more-than-human help us augment their capacities to affect us? Go to Chapter 13, "Missed Connections".*

*How can we listen to the many voices of silence? Listen to Chapter 3, "Ossicles".*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Or, if I must spill out beyond the confines of the well-crafted sentence in the well-crafted paragraph in the well-crafted academic article in the highly thought of academic journal, to do so in a footnote such as this one. To relegate my asides and self-interruptions, my doubts and loves, my own multiple voices, to this space: to the bottom of a hierarchy of knowledge.

## 12. Echoes and Mirrors, Mirrors and Echoes

*Gail McConnell*

Of the many things I am in this little life of mine, I am a literary critic. This means I spend an awful lot of time indoors and find a great deal of pleasure sitting quietly alone in a room with a book and, if possible, a notebook and a pen. I read and write and think about things, not always in that order, and what we might call literature is as real to me as eating, drinking, breathing and loving. ('Some of my best friends are texts', the joke might run). I read and try to tell the truth about what I read. That's it, in a nutshell. I am also queer. That is to say that I understand biological sex – the M or F assigned by a medical professional at birth – to be a fact, of sorts, that each of us must bear; and

gender to be the site of a lifelong performance – a fluid, tilting, shifting sort of a thing that exceeds the either/or logic of the M/F; and sexual attraction to be as beautifully complex and various as the above might suggest.

Queer is a verb as well as a noun. When I say ‘I am also queer’, then, I express an aspiration, a stance. The queering of things involves muddying the waters of habitual perception just enough to see more clearly. And it strikes me that there is something brilliantly queer about contemplating the more than human. I think, suddenly, of the queer expressions of desire revealed by characters obsessed by non-human superheroes in TV shows of the last decade or so. I haven’t joined up this thought to what comes next as yet but the thought runs like this: think of the U.S. remake of *Queer as Folk*, in which the character of Michael, secretly in love with his best friend Brian, is sufficiently obsessed to open a comic book store and to design a new comic called *Rage* in which, you guessed it, the superhuman *Rage* is an idealized Brian. (In Russell T. Davies’s British original on Channel 4, this character was obsessed by *Doctor Who*, the classic British science-fiction series which Davies himself would go on to revise and relaunch for BBC a few years later). Think of video game designer and obsessive, Patrick, the central character of HBO’s gay drama, *Looking*. Or (struck suddenly that these shows are not known to everyone, in part because of their very queerness) think of Sheldon Cooper in *The Big Bang Theory*. In each case, participation with the more than human – the non-human heroes in comics and video games – is a way of dealing with desires that are difficult

to bear in a society which says M+F= fulfilment. This should give us some clue as to the challenge involved in seeking to participate with the more than human. We might be talking to or about an extra-terrestrial, a rock, or an animal, but chances are we’re going to transfer an awful lot of our good old-fashioned human desires onto that other. Not to mention our not-so-good desires.

The queering of things, I think, involves some recognition of this fact. It involves admitting the impossibility of escaping ourselves while coming to terms with our wish to do so. That’s not to be pessimistic about the possibility of participating with the more than human – with fictional others, with the dead, with animal or mineral – but it is to suggest that such participation begins with the unmasking of our own desire. And part of our desire might simply be the wish for self-preservation – to wish to go on. And the wish for self-preservation implies a belief in a self that exists in the first place. What participation with the more than human offers us, I think, is a chance to suspend and test our assumptions about our self and our wish for self-preservation. It is to make ourselves available for the possibility that our sense of self is less substantial or more unusual than we had imagined. But it also offers us the chance to see and hear ourselves with renewed senses.

Since it is almost impossible to say what we are, we frequently define ourselves by what we are not. We designate others and make them our opposites to firm the borders of that elusive sense of self. What we fear we may be is what we hate and



cannot tolerate. Racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-semitism and other violent structures of thought begin in this way. Liberal humanism and its myths of human uniqueness and human progress (a secularised update Christianity) is a narrative that depends upon non-human others: it needs animals against which to define the human, and a natural world over which the human can exert control.

'I rhyme/ To see myself, to set the darkness echoing'. Seamus Heaney concludes 'Personal Helicon' by revealing the trick. The poem ends, echoing. It begins:

As a child, they could not keep me from wells  
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.  
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells  
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

Peering into wells, the speaker's childhood self is fascinated by decay and transformation, and by what lies beyond the bounds of knowledge – that which is 'rotted', 'fructified' and 'scareful'. So much the poet of nouns – pumps and buckets and windlasses – Heaney is also best known as a poet of opening and openings. Witness *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, the threshold volume *Door into the Dark* (1969), and the frequency with which this word appears in his essays and criticism.

The last sentence of 'Personal Helicon' is a declaration of sorts

– a stance. It seems at first a stance of self-individuation and self-perception that has something a little triumphalist about it. Heaney gives us five quatrains rhymed ABAB, and the poem's last word echoes a well. The darkness is sent echoing – or such is the speaker's aspiration, at least – and 'echoing' echoes 'spring', a rhyme that pulls us back to that basin of water from an underground source. Except the darkness is not sent but set echoing. Darkness is fixed in place – perhaps even initiated, much as an idea sets you thinking. Rhyming does not so much replace darkness as cause it to reverberate. And staring into the well water is a rather strange and ghostly undertaking. In one well, 'A white face hovered over the bottom' and, in another, 'a rat slapped across my reflection'. Whether the speaker's desire is to become lost in contemplation of the watery basin, or in self-contemplation through the watery mirror, each wish is frustrated by its opposite. Non-human others crowd the scene. And, as a consequence, the speaker's view of himself and of the landscape is changed utterly. Just as the landscape, we might suppose, is changed utterly by his presence.

Everything is movement here – sound and vision. Rippling mirrors and echoing chambers.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call  
With a clean new music in it.

Clean new music. This is, perhaps, the gift to be discovered in the attempt to participate with what is more than human.

Something given freely – at once an echo that replays the approach to the other, and a fresh composition. Heaney muddies the well water just enough for us to see and hear more clearly.

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Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber, 1998).

*Can we find in our own actions a trace of the agency of non-humans? To investigate this in relation to mushrooms, go to Chapter 14, 'Patterning A World of Mushrooms'. To contemplate this in relation to the poetic form, go to Chapter 15, 'Snow, Frost and Ice'.*

*And what about the dangers of over-'othering' the 'other'? To witness the challenges faced in understanding psychedelic drugs, go to Chapter 16, 'Psychedelic Nonwriting'.*

## 13. Missed Connections

*Rachel Jane Liebert and Holli McEntegart*

*Missed Connections, 2015*

Looped video projection, paper, vinyl transfer on glass, text, graphite  
Dimensions variable

*Missed Connections*, a participatory multimedia installation, exposes and experiments with the exile of mystical experiences across time and space. Within contemporary conditions of discipline and terror, mysticism is diagnosed as Magical Ideation – perceptual disturbances in people’s causal attributions and bodily boundaries – thought to be an ‘early warning sign’ of paranoid delusions, a.k.a. one’s psychotic potential. A pathologisation that is soaked in its own colonial paranoia; at the turn of the twentieth century the New Zealand government passed legislation to criminalise mysticism in an endeavour to both assimilate Māori and quell the protest of Rua Kēnana – a powerful Tūhoe tohunga forecasting the return of Māori land and sovereignty. The fear washing through these two manoeuvres – 100 years apart yet inseparable – points to paranoia’s radical potential. Its magical trace reveals the porosity of the individual and the present-moment, weakening the (paranoid) grip of the neoliberal security state.

Asking what might happen if this potential was met within a space of desire not fear, *Missed Connections* was performed as a series of online and physical events in New York. 30 daily, anonymous postings were made of Magical Ideation’s 30 true/false statements in Craigslist’s Missed Connections Classifieds – a public website for realising romantic and deviant fantasies. All posts were coupled with an email address for responses, and unique maps showing where their respective statements had been scribed onto varied surfaces at different locations around the city. This reflective, material script was left to be rubbed off by elements or touch; a fleeting gesture joined with the world, forgotten.

*Imagery from Missed Connections was turned into a video loop and projected onto public space in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland (Aotearoa New Zealand) – accompanied by a vinyl cut of the 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act and a poetic piece murmuring the project’s encounters with theory and politics. This installation was a trans-temporal, trans-spatial attempt to confront the ignor/ance around both colonisation and mysticism. It offers a reparative reading of contemporary psychiatry as containing means for tuning into our ancestral capacities for more-than-human engagement, if done so in a welcoming milieu...*

A re-turn.

The NeoliberalSecurityState practices  
*psycurity*: the twinning of psychiatry and  
security: preemptive diagnoses and  
treatments in the name of  
CitizenFamilyNation promotion,  
ViolenceCrimeTerror prevention.

And epitomized by an emerging program of  
research to capture TheProdrome.

Tha/proh/drohm.

*Population, figure, noun, verb*

Young people who may become psychotic  
in the future

TheProdrome moves through transnational  
circuits of data and capital, lubed by a  
biopolitical longing for control, sped up  
during moments of NationalCrisis circled by  
UntreatedMentalIllness.

Making paranoia about paranoia; surveilling  
MagicalIdeation.

Typically illuminated, interrogated,  
incarcerated by psycurity as a human  
threat, what if TheProdrome could be  
diffracted into a spectrum of more-than-  
human potential?

Taking an  
imaginative  
leap

with a  
strange  
god(dess)<sup>3</sup>...

For me, la Coatlicue is the consuming  
internal whirlwind, the symbol of the  
underground aspects of the psyche.  
Coatlicue is the mountain, the Earth  
Mother who conceived all celestial  
beings out of her cavernous womb.  
Goddess of birth and death, Coatlicue  
gives and takes away life; she is the  
incarnation of cosmic process.

Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>4</sup> writes of Coatlicue. A  
goddess who symbolizes the fusion of  
opposites, the contradictory. And who  
implies contemporary paranoia – at  
once feared&desired, object&subject,  
destroyed&created within psycurity.

A being both, or more-than-both, that  
also vibrates through etymology. *Para*  
joins *nous* to denote an experience  
'beside the mind'. To be paranoid is to  
feel something nearby, a mass of little  
noises echoing close to I.

The one who watches, the one who  
whispers in a slither of serpents.  
Something is trying to tell me. That  
voice at the edge of things. ... I  
tremble before the animal, the alien,  
the sub- or supra-human, the me that  
has something in common with the  
wind and the trees and the rocks.

Coatlicue is the instinctual in its  
collective impersonal, pre-human.  
Coming and going as la facultad.

La facultad is an instant 'sensing', a  
quick perception arrived at without  
conscious reasoning. It is an acute  
awareness mediated by the part of the  
psyche that does not speak, that  
communicates in images and  
symbols.

A capacity for fleshed insight that is  
latent in all of us, that forms under  
pressure, that emerges in-between.



In borderlands.

A border is a dividing line a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.

Where difference unites, beings become, happenings happen, borderlands work out the clash and do (r)evolution.

It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward ... the great alchemical work ... an inevitable unfolding.

Coatlicue, the serpentine movement of sexuality, dwells in the borderlands. Dancing with that eternal possibility emerging from the cracks, alive with those non-known elements of knowing that always have the potential to join with something else, to create something else.

And exiled by TheColonialProject.

Imperialist gatherings of science&profit&whiteness&patriarchy objectified, possessed, bleached, penetrated Nature. Pushing Coatlicue into darkness, underground. Fertilizing the growth of the militaristic, bureaucratic, predatory state.

Protecting the borders of a ManMadeWorld.

And soldiering through psycurity.

TheProdrome-TheBorderland suggests a paradoxical place of not just pathology but possibility. An intuitive flicker of connectedness and imagination.

The cosmos.

Yet, colliding with a contemporary milieu drenched in fear, this potential comes face-to-face with not only an epistemic injustice<sup>5</sup>, but some sort of ontologic one too.

Taken down a line of fright<sup>6</sup>, growing like a crystal in a hypersaturated solution<sup>7</sup>, terror-ized by psycurity itself.

Becoming  
overwhelming  
cryptic  
shameful  
pathological

PARANOID.

A missed connection.

If paranoia is the Anzaldúaian stuff of great alchemical work, what might unfold were we to meet its magical substrate activity within a space of desire not fear, hope not... paranoia?

An entangled mosaic of (un)felt entities, what if Magicaldeation – our paranoid potential – can be transmuted not into suspicion but something else.

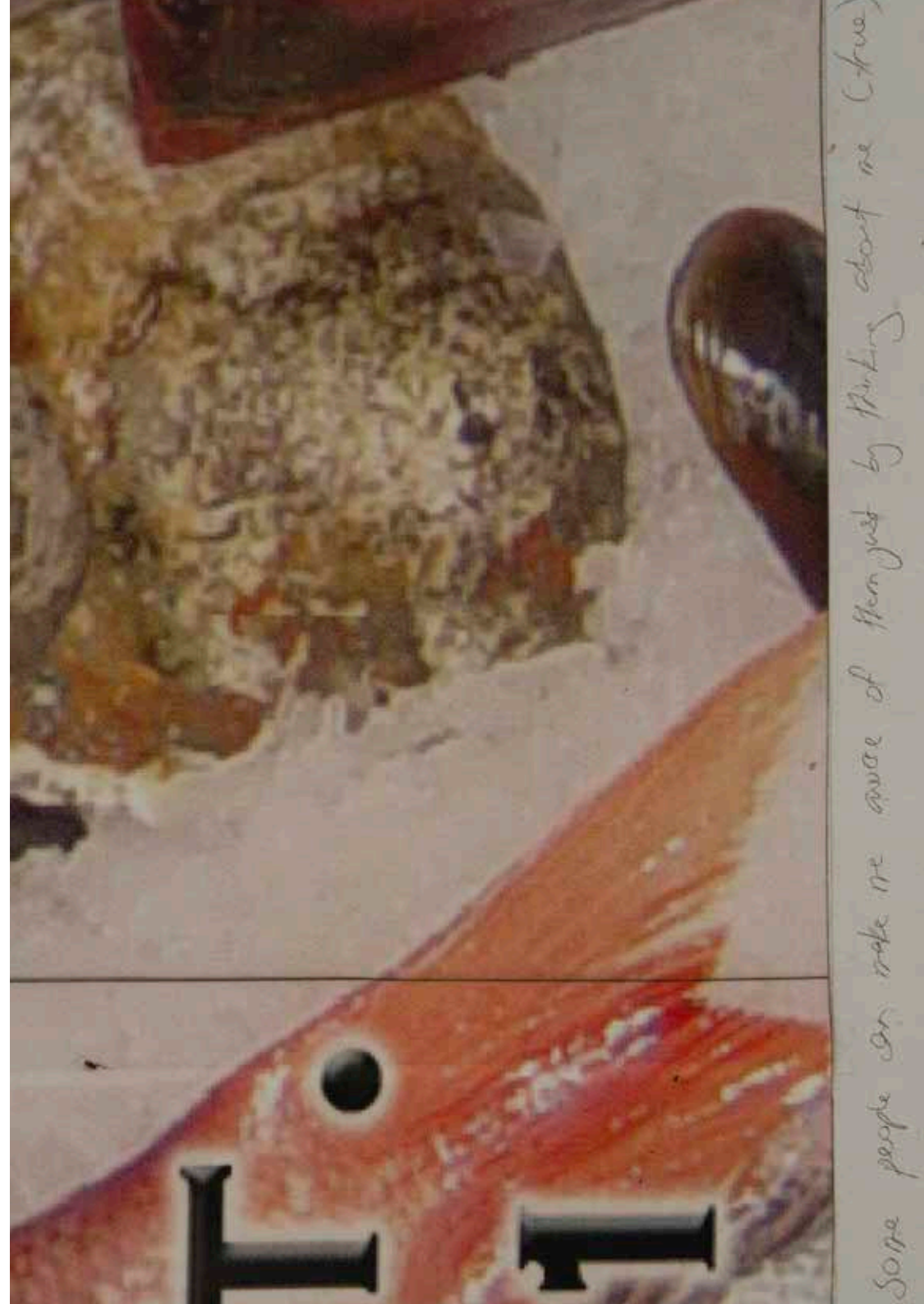
Something pulsates in my body, a  
luminous thin thing that grows  
thicker every day. Its presence  
never leaves me. I am never  
alone. That which abides: my  
vigilance, my thousand sleepless  
serpent eyes blinking in the night,  
forever open. And I am not afraid.

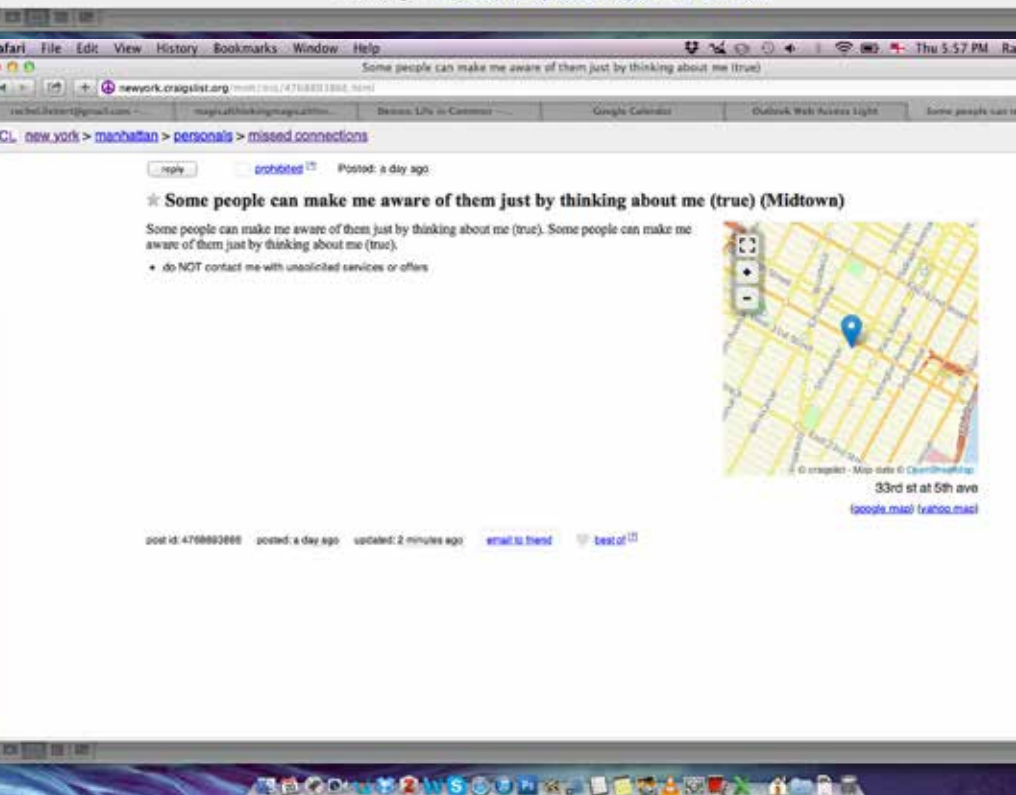
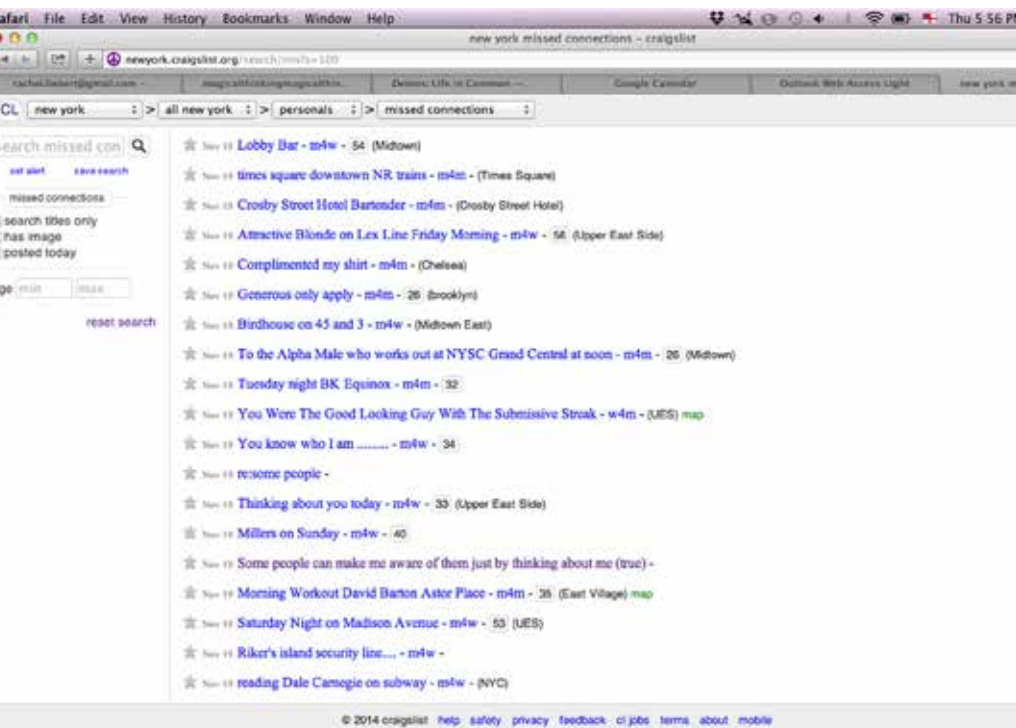
Discovering those ways of  
be(com)ing with the world that  
have exceeded enclosure;  
unsettling the colonization in our  
psyches, and our psycurity, with  
those anti(colonial)bodies.

Leaping into  
TheProdrome.

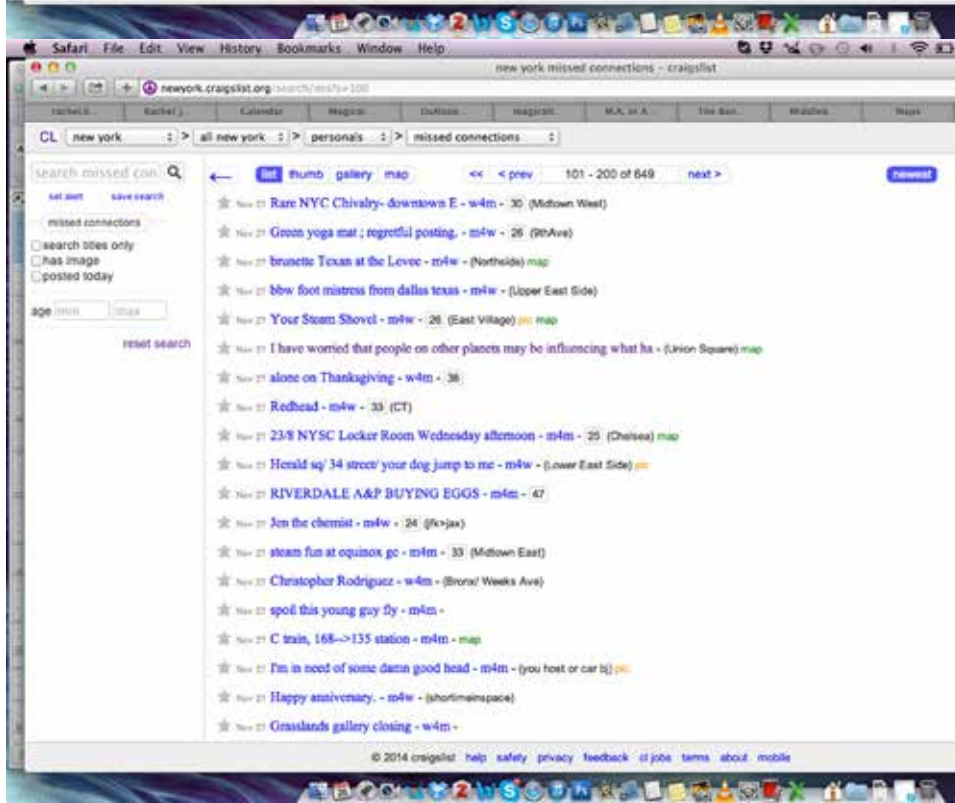
Re-turning the  
magic.

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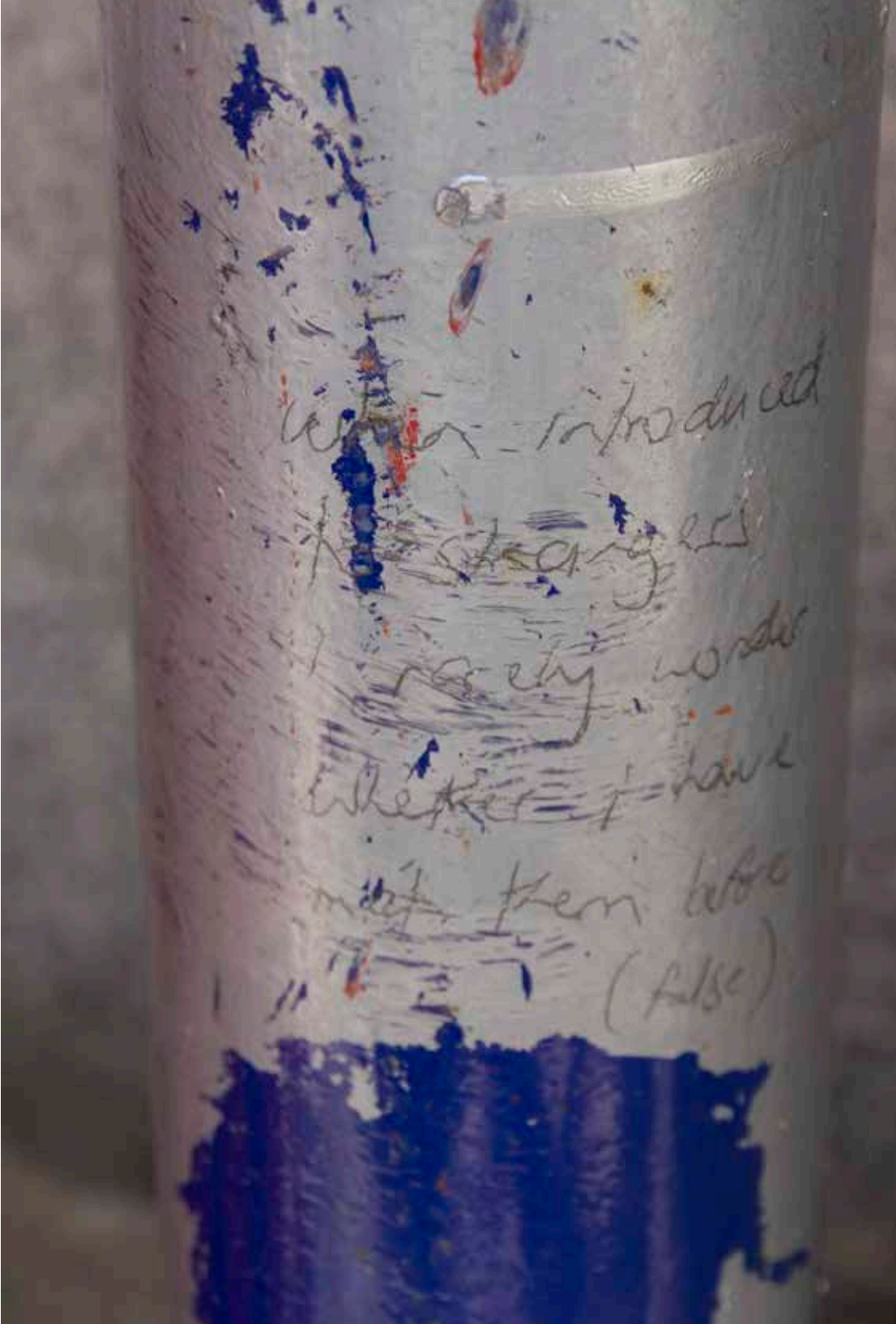
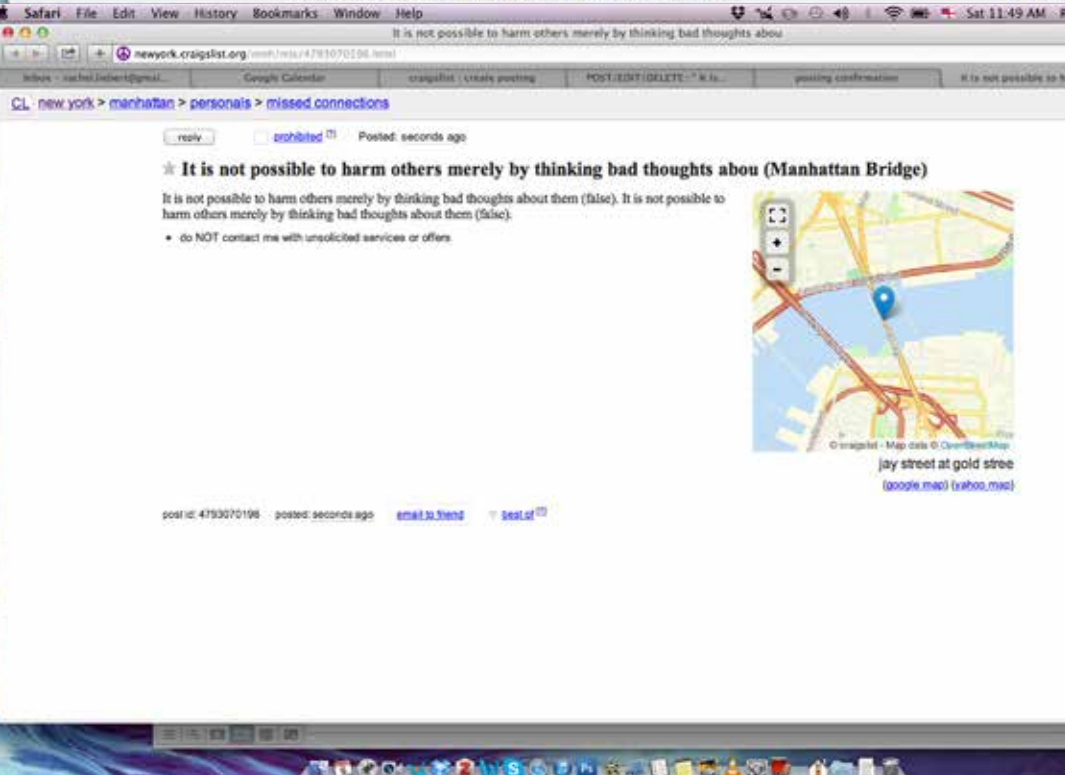
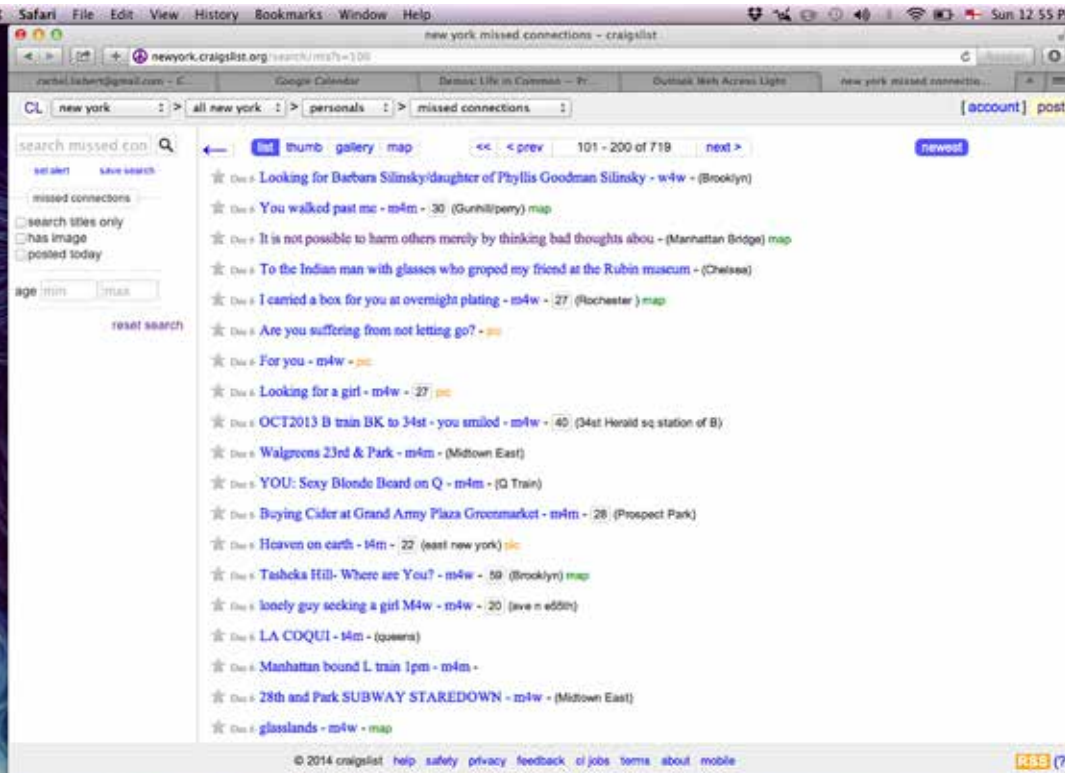




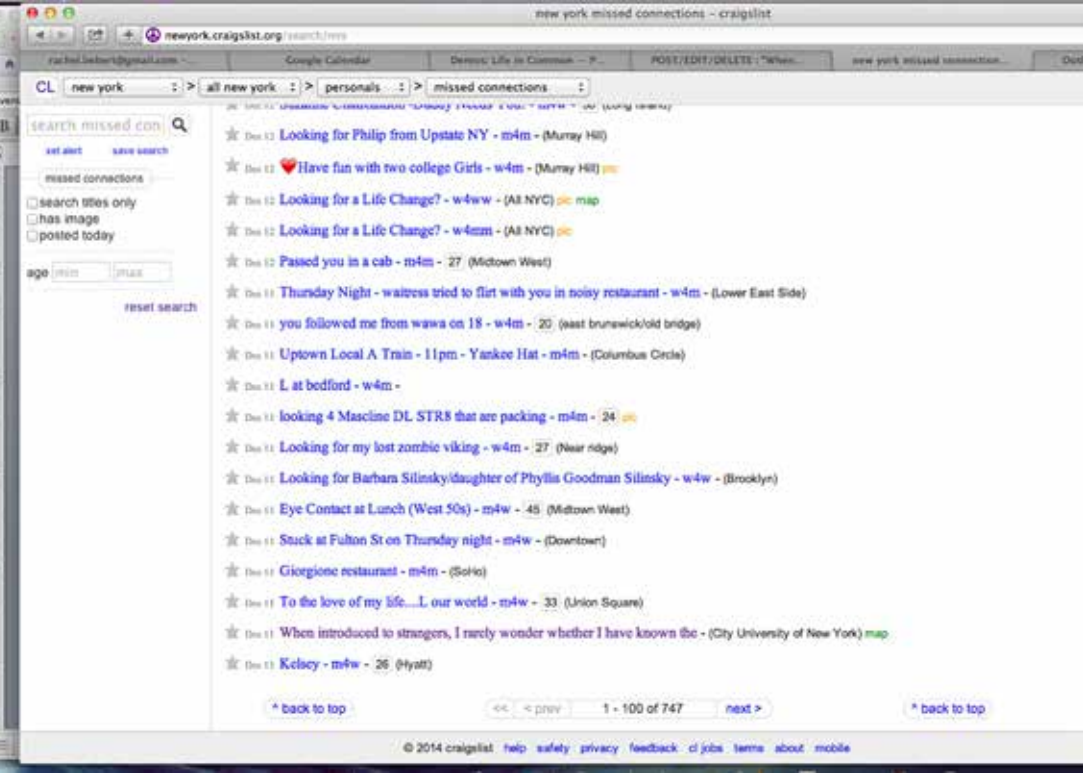












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- ★ Dec 11 Townhouse - I left for dinner - m4m - 39 (Upper East Side)
- ★ Dec 11 1st and 12th cab xchange - w4m - 29 (East Village)
- ★ Dec 11 I gave you a Modern Baseball poster waiting for the 6 train - m4w - 24 (Gramercy)
- ★ Dec 11 A Train from Jay St/Metrotech to Chambers - w4m - 25
- ★ Dec 11 I have been waiting for so long -
- ★ Dec 11 14th street YMCA - m4m - (McBumey y)
- ★ Dec 11 Melany 100% real photos! Ts top and bottom - Mm - (woodside) [pic](#) [map](#)
- ★ Dec 11 Checkered fights on 6 train - 9:30PM - m4w - (Chinatown / Little Italy)
- ★ Dec 11 If reincarnation were true, it would explain some unusual experiences - (Bed Stuy) [map](#)
- ★ Dec 11 Grand Central 6 Train going Downtown - m4m - 33 (Midtown)
- ★ Dec 11 Luke at Urban Outfitters on 5th - m4m -
- ★ Dec 11 Boxing gloves on the A train, 7:15pm - m4m -
- ★ Dec 11 UPTOWN A TRAIN -- 14TH STREET - m4m - (14TH STREET STATION)
- ★ Dec 11 Young Male Here. - m4w - (Harlem / Morningside)
- ★ Dec 11 Don't know if you remember me but... - m4w - 30
- ★ Dec 11 bbw mistress friend from dallas texas - m4w - (Upper East Side)
- ★ Dec 11 Ariel and Eli - m4w - 22
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★ **If reincarnation were true, it would explain some unusual experiences (Bed Stuy)**

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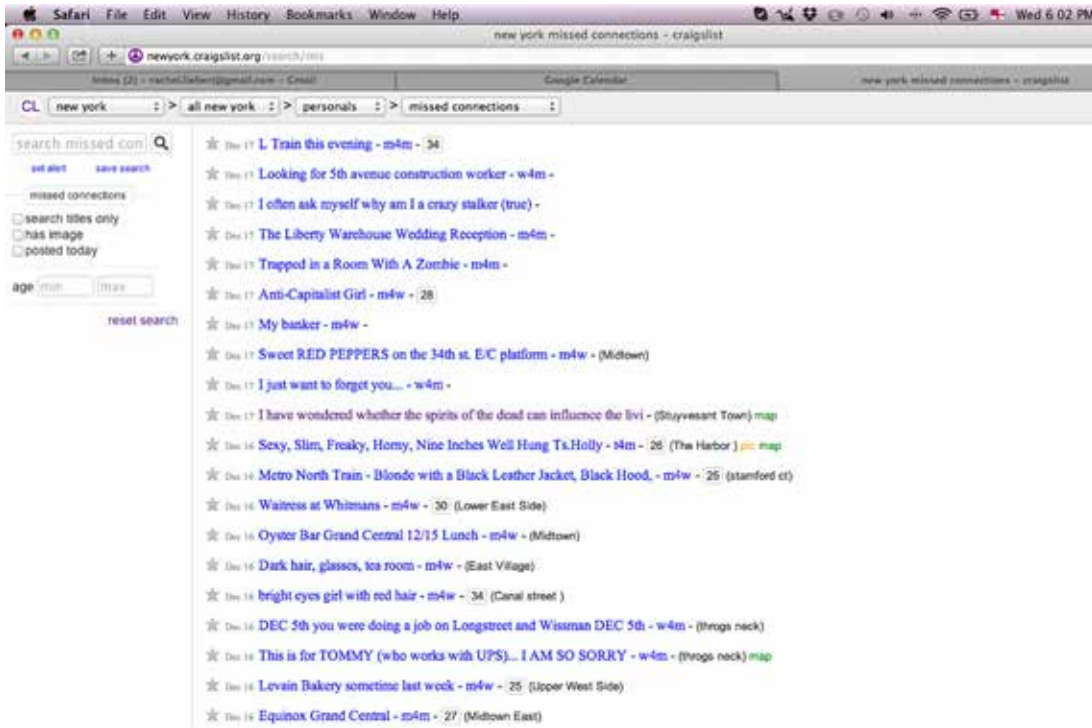
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I have wondered whether the spirits of the dead  
can influence the living - (true)

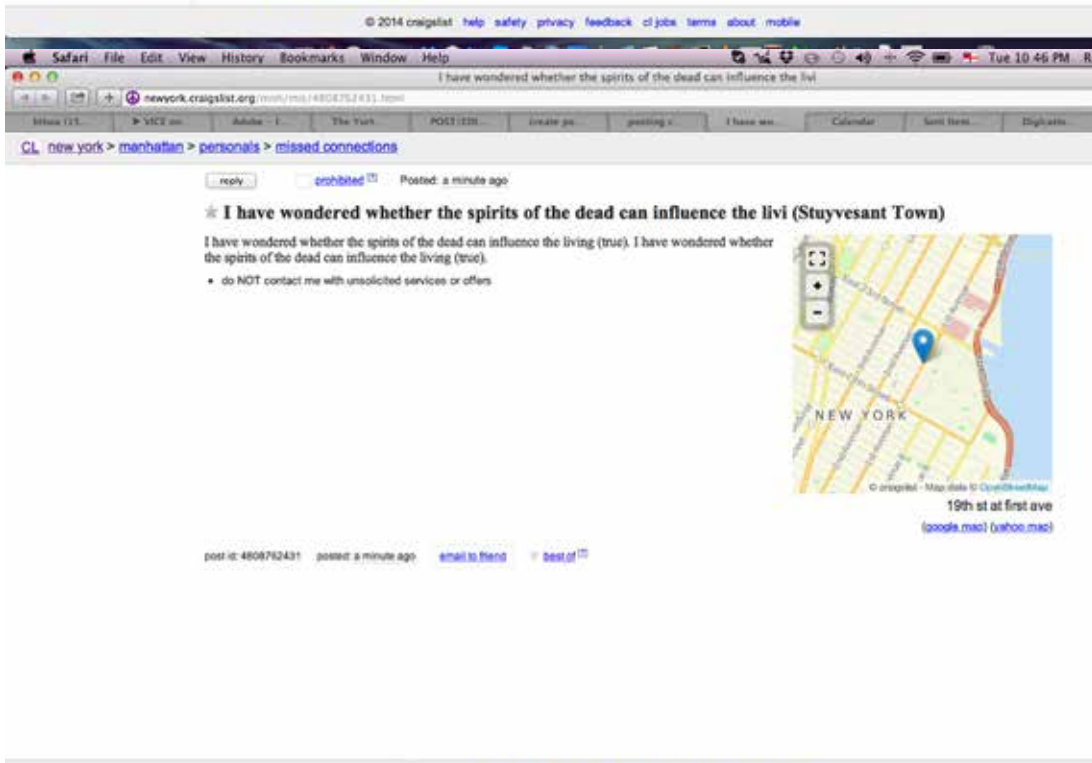




# 14 Patterning a World of Mushrooms: Challenges of Co-Production

*Tehseen Noorani*

'Co-production' refers to processes in which a range of experts and non-experts are enrolled as researchers and attempt to generate knowledge together. Embracing an ethos of co-production requires a fundamental rethinking of the relations between researchers, and the differential capacities within the research team to act and to listen. Habitual thought patterns need questioning. For one, certain kinds of expertise are more readily recognized than others. For two, certain actors are granted agency more quickly than others. Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of co-production have prompted new attempts at approaching old research questions. For instance, how can we conduct research





in ethical and useful ways that respect the agency of those we study? How can we listen in creative ways to the voices of the disempowered, who are too-often silenced as the putative 'objects' of our research? How might we incorporate their own understandings, expertise and modes of representation into new processes of inquiry? What about where the objects of our research are not even humans, but a host of non-human entities – whether objects, animals, plants or gods? What is capable of having a 'voice' in the first place?

It might not be surprising to note the roles of psychedelic mushrooms as 'teachers' and 'tools' for accessing a world beyond standard humanist framings and prerogatives – a world full of non-human agencies. Plants contain 90 percent of the biomass of the planet, while fungi pre-date plants, appearing over 100 million years beforehand – the first to lay claim to the land. The world's biggest organism is a honey fungus in Oregon, USA, spread across nearly four square miles and estimated at over eight thousand years old. Meshwork of fungal networks hold soil and subterraneously connect tree and plant species, drawing nutrients from them while transferring nutrients between them, acting as the immune system and underground recycler of the Earth's body. Upwards of 90% of all plants have mycorrhizal associations. It begins to sound absurd that we ever presumed that they belong to our world.

Mushrooms have enweaved the rest of us humans and non-humans into their webs of life. To them we are perhaps more than a little clueless, oblivious to their stroboscopic

appearances, haunted and inspired by their absent presences across the seasons, subject to their mind-bending and body-altering effects. It's not just us either. The thousands of types of cordyceps mushrooms target one species each, using the bodies of host insects to feed and spread. One variety drops its spores onto Bullet ants (*Paraponera clavata*). Upon landing on the ant's body, a spore will infect it, causing the ant to deliriously travel upwards, as far as it is able. For many ants this means to the top of the anthill. Worker ants learn to recognize such delirium, pick up infected ants and carry them far away from the colony. But those infected ants that make it, unobstructed, to the top of the anthill threaten to wipe out all the rest: once sufficiently burrowed, the fungus will grow out of its victim's head and drop its deadly spores all over the anthill, killing the whole colony.

So much for the Bullet ants – what of us? How do mushrooms alter our mindscapes and pattern our practices? Certain varieties of mushrooms that produce powerful effects upon humans are variously termed psychedelic, psychotomimetic, hallucinogenic and entheogenic. Speculating into the deeper history of humans, ethnomycologist R. Gordon Wasson's early investigations placed psychedelic mushroom-facilitated experiences at the origin of religion and notions of the supernatural. More recently, esoteric philosopher Terence McKenna suggested in his 'Stoned Ape' theory that the visual-auditory synesthesia (mixing of the senses) produced by psychedelic mushrooms is responsible for the invention

of language, when primates descended from the trees onto the mushroom-laden plains and discovered the capacity to elicit images through vocal sounds. These wonderful theories continue to inspire and conspire. Today, mycologist Paul Stamets suggests that there might be as many as one hundred different species of mushrooms that are psychoactive for humans, mostly in the genus *Psilocybe*.

Yet quite unattuned to their vital flows, we remain ill-equipped to regulate their presence. Areas filled with psychedelic mushroom spores are inadvertently logged for their timber, the trees are skinned and the bark is turned into woodchip and mixed into much larger batches used in landscaping services. In this way, *Psilocybe baeocystis* came to carpet the outdoor spaces of university campus grounds, police stations and courthouses in downtown Vancouver for several years in the early 1970s. The mushrooms sprung up across these institutions of discipline and regulation, to the consternation and sometimes great joy of unsuspecting passers-by.

Psychedelic mushrooms induce a kind of toxic fever that Western psychopharmacology understands little of. The experiences of the bemushroomed brim with spirits, deities, demons and aliens, an entire cast of non-human and non-living figures and encounters. The fever produces clarity and insight, animates consciousness, dilates time and enchants our fields of awareness, even as it drains us. Studies during the recent 'second wave' of research are mostly designed to explore the psychotherapeutic potential of the psilocybin that

the mushrooms contain, for treating the deep distress found in end-of-life anxiety, depression, addiction and traumatic shock. Across the research studies, a common definition of their action upon experience has been as 'non-specific amplifiers of awareness'. This implies that psychedelic mushrooms have somewhat ghostly powers, themselves invisible while catalyzing our awareness of the spaces we consume them in, the mindsets we carry with us, and the cultural, historical and geographical conditions we inhabit while bemushroomed. Where for other psychoactive substances, scientific research holds situational, cultural and personal factors still to isolate on the effects of the drug, psychedelics are singular in ways betrayed by their name – psyche for mind and delic for manifesting. Those taking psychedelic mushrooms in clinical contexts rarely report learning something totally new, but rather realizing once again, or more deeply, something that they already knew. Suddenly the encounter with the non-human becomes again all-too-human, as we never quite meet entities that are not of our own making. It suggests the spirits, deities, demons and aliens of our trips were there all along, and we were not quite receptive enough to identify their presences. Psychedelic mushrooms acting as just so many more-than-human mirrors. Deep down, did those bullet ants yearn to get high?

Psychedelic mushrooms pattern human lives in other ways than simply our experiences of consuming them. Foragers learn a craft of searching out not the mushrooms themselves, but the kinds of spaces where mushrooms would want to grow: follow the water trails; notice the hill angles and the seasonally-

changing arcs of the sun; remember the previous year's spread. Pay attention to the world as a psychedelic mushroom would, and you're far more likely to cross paths. Meanwhile when we try to cultivate them in laboratories, we do so by recreating conditions of the forest.

And in becoming aware of our mindsets, and social and geographic settings, we shape our encounters with the mushrooms through preparing ourselves and our spaces in ways that optimize safe, productive experiences. Whether in clinical research, underground psychonautic use or traditional healing and visioning ceremonies, rituals provide powerful containers for psychedelic experiences. The naïve question of whether rituals 'actually' work or whether they are 'just' producing a kind of grand placebo response only serves to erode their power. The current clinical research practice involving psilocybin has been one of borrowing and inventing rituals, refining whatever works. At its core, the psychedelic experience demands a time commitment and protection from interruption, in a safe and comfortable space. In itself, this excludes so many from access to it, given so many busy, over-demanding lives. For psychonauts, spaces for eating psychedelic mushrooms are cleaned, cleared and organized, special objects charged with promise and potential are gathered, and people often lie or sit in sharing circles. Guides for underground use suggest that trust between people should be renewed, and any interpersonal tensions relieved so that they cannot fester during trips. In university research, individuals spend many hours getting to know their study guides and environments, before taking psilocybin capsules in specially designed 'living room-type

spaces'. In some traditional healing ceremonies those seeking help gather around a candle while spirits are invoked through song and chanting. In all cases, preparation involves clarifying intentions and questions in ways that are themselves invested with meaning and connection. And integrating the psychedelic experiences is a crucial part of drawing on their value, done through so many practices of expression and sharing.

And so, psychedelic mushrooms enroll us into making spaces and mindsets capable of benefiting from their use. Much as Michael Pollan has documented with corn, apples, tulips and marijuana, in ways highly sensitized to the experiences they facilitate, psychedelic mushrooms insist on patterning our use of them. However these patterns are not simple, for there are breaks in the intimacy of our connections with the mushrooms. Their consumption is illegal across most of the world, leading legal systems to stumble in this latest round of scientific research, as entire university buildings are restructured with heightened security access and procedures for storing psychedelic compounds securely and accountably, in safes that are weighed daily to record alterations in their contents. The little scientific research that is being done on mushrooms' psychedelic properties focuses on their most psychoactive compounds – drawing them out, making them the object of science's affections. This compromises the ecological validity of scientific research, as research is no longer directed at understanding the effects of the whole mushroom. Industries of manufacture and distribution grow around synthetic variants and isolated compounds, failing to grasp the lesson that the compounds were found in a shared ecology that birthed our

species and has much left to teach us about our well-being and mortality.

Western researchers, intellectuals and psychonauts since the 1950s, and non-Western traditions extending back beyond written record, have suggested that the seeds of individual and collective self-understanding and self-transformation lie in psychedelic experiences. If this continues to ring true, as we renew and deepen our encounters with psychedelic mushrooms, the careful making of social and physical spaces for their use must be seen as a crucial step in our revolutionary capacities to imagine and be differently. Only this time, we might recognize that these capacities will be co-produced, evidenced in the many practices we have built to service our encounters with psychedelic mushrooms.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Beautifully captured in the BBC documentary *Planet Earth*. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuKjBIBBAL8> <last accessed June 27, 2016>

<sup>2</sup> Grof, S. (1975) *Realms of the human unconscious: Observations from LSD research*. New York: Viking Press.

<sup>3</sup> Psychonauts are explorers of inner space, as contrasted with astronauts who explore outer space.

<sup>4</sup> For recent manuals on organizing safe and productive psychedelic journeys, see: Fadiman, J. (2011) *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide: Safe, Therapeutic and Sacred Journeys*, Toronto: Part Street Press; and

Metzner, R. (2015) *Allies for Awakening: Guidelines for Productive and Safe Experiences With Entheogens*, Berkeley: Regent Press.

<sup>5</sup> Pollan, M. (2001) *Botany of Desire: A plants-eye view of the world*, Random House: New York.

*How can the non-human help us to reconsider our political potentialities? Go to Chapter 6, "We Are the Flood".*

*How might experimenting with the spaces we co-construct with the more-than-human help us augment their psychoactive effects? Go to Chapter 13, "Missed Connections".*

## 15. Snow, Frost and Ice

*Gail McConnell*

I cannot imagine a world without the poetry of Derek Mahon, a poet of the abandoned and the lost. Lost things, lost texts, neglected plants, neglected huts and sheds. A poetics of rubbish and waste: hubcaps on the roadside, empty gas containers, broken bottles, fallen leaves.

*Red Sails*, Mahon's 2014 collection of short essays, begins 'Once upon a time, stranded between flights, I started reading an abandoned copy of Arthur Hailey's *Airport* (1968).' So much is revealed about Mahon in this sentence. He begins according to tradition, 'Once upon a time'. The rules appeal, the old familiar form of 'In the beginning'. A beginning he will make his own. He is not located but stranded, between departure and arrival. *En route* and in transit, spatially and temporally.



The airport is his ideal location, and 'stranded' describes the existential condition of his verse. He is reading, and his reading habits are eclectic, as his essays in *Journalism* and *Selected Prose* reveal. The text he reads has been 'abandoned' and its neglect matters. Stranded reader reads abandoned text. But there is also the impulse for order, for the beginning and ending inscribed by the fairy tale narrative structure. Whether the ending is happy or tragic, 'Once upon a time' is a promise of an escape into a world of other lives, other voices, other places, other things.

He is conscious of the materiality of text. The book he holds is an object and he notes its cover image and the feel of its pages. The essay concludes by imagining a seaplane landing on water and asks, 'does water get a kick from the intrusion? What do the reeds think?' This is not so much escape as extension – an imaginative reach into molecules not his own.

Objects speak, in Mahon's textual landscape, and frequently do so in order to challenge and rebuke humanist assumptions about and approaches to others – objects, environments, plants, humans. And yet the objects do not speak. There is no death of the author. The best Mahon can hope for is a ventriloquism that acknowledges itself as such.

Mahon's poem, 'The Drawing Board' provides a non-human view that challenges a humanist perspective. (Mahon renamed this poem 'Table Talk'). The 'I' of the poem is the table on which the

poet writes. The poem begins, 'You think I am your servant but you are wrong – / The services lies with you.' Mahon portrays poetry as an act of ventriloquism, dependent upon the objects and forms that language animates. It's for this reason that he rhymes 'dumb' with 'medium' in poem's final lines. His tilts perspective from the world of men and women to the world of things, and the things accuse.

The table complains about the violence of cutting down trees for the sake of paper production. Through it, Mahon imagines writing as a form of ecological violence. 'Remembering the chainsaw surgery and the seaward groan', the table longs to 'Destroy the sedate poise with which your pour/ Forth your ephemeral stream of literature.' Writing is thus implicated in deforestation; textual marks are the stains of environmental exploitation. The poem suggests that writing always already bears the stains of historical violence. Mahon incriminates himself on both counts: the violence done to trees for the sake of paper production, and the imaginative violence of poetic production, in which objects and individuals are reformed.

The destruction of sedate poise is an animating principle for Mahon's work. Under the threat of destruction, here, is literature itself – or the readerly expectation that the literary text have a patina of order and tranquillity. As Mahon warns in 'The Mute Phenomena':

Be strong if you must, your brisk hegemony

Means fuck-all to the somnolent sunflower  
Or the extinct volcano.

This is the poet in a comically caustic mood. Hegemony is rhymed with cutlery – more specifically, ‘the sex-life of cutlery’. What do you know of it, asks the speaker, impudently. And what do we know? The poem minds the gap between the mute phenomena – sunflowers, turnips, a brick wall, a stone – and politics, literature and culture. The gap is more like an epistemological breach, a chasm of unknowing. The poem’s brisk tone illuminates the logic of anthropocentric liberal humanism in its approach to mineral and plant life. It’s self-consciously parodic. The first line reminds us to not to ‘disregard the satire’.

In the final section of ‘St Patrick’s Day’, Mahon, a changed man, returns to a changed table, mindful here and always of Heraclitean flux:

The one reality is the perpetual flow,  
chaos of complex systems; each generation  
does what it must; middle age and misanthropy,  
like famine and religion, make poor copy;  
and even the present vanishes like snow  
off a rope, frost off a ditch, ice in the sun –  
so back to the desk-top and the drawing board,  
prismatic natural light, slow-moving cloud,  
the waves far-thundering in a life of their own,  
a young woman hitching a lift on a country road.

## References

Derek Mahon, *Collected Poems*, The Gallery Press, 2007.

Derek Mahon, *Red Sails*, The Gallery Press, 2014.

*What are the dangers of ‘othering’? To explore this through writing, go to Chapter 16, “Psychedelic Nonwriting”.*

*What practical tactics are there for responding to the invitation of the more-than-human? Go to Chapter 10, “Eight Incantational Tactics”.*

Witness the page. Take in its smooth, light surface; its right-angled corners.

## 16. Psychedelic Non-Writing

*Tehseen Noorani*

*What kind of spaces can we create for productive encounters with the more-than-human? Go to Chapter 9, "Launching More-than-Human Investigations".*

*What other tactics are there for encountering the more-than-human? Go to Chapter 10, "Eight Incantational Tactics".*

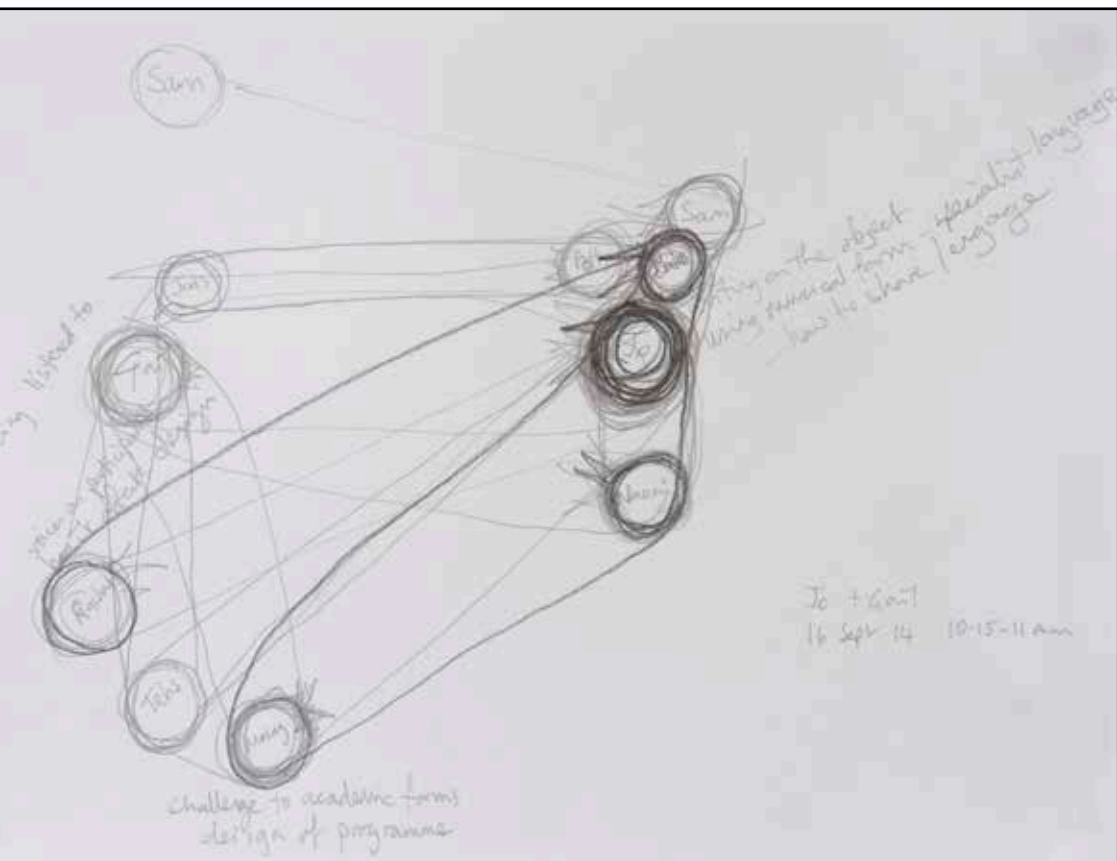
Don't immediately jump to read this!

Or this.

Slow down and look at the page, at everything aside from me. Admire the blank canvas: technical accomplishment; unwritten project.

How do I write without getting in the way? I may have gotten you here, but I'm not here to stay.

I am a finger pointing at the moon.  
I am a drug pointing at your set and setting.



## 17 Drawings

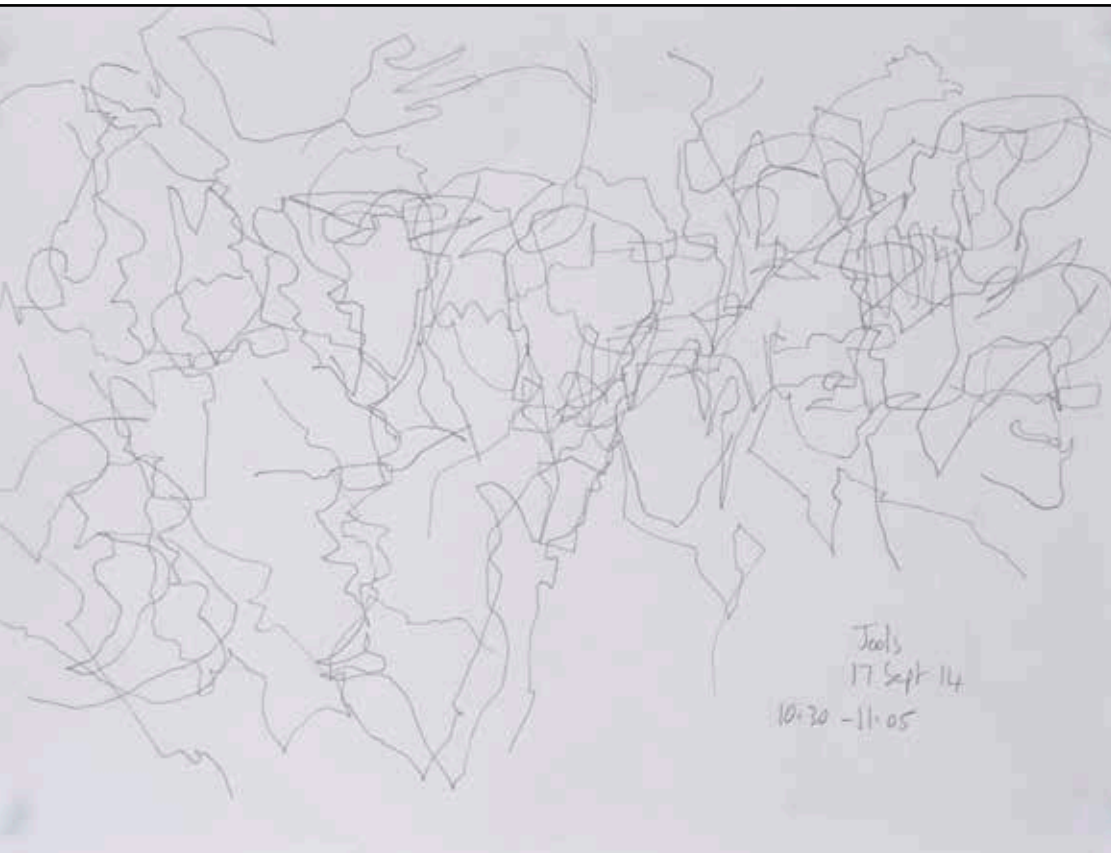
Sara Bowler

*Intensity Drawing: Jo and Gail, 10.15-11.00am, 16 September 2014*

W.420mm H.297mm, pencil, white cartridge paper

The drawing reflects the time individuals spent talking during the session. By naming each person initially on the page and in relation to how they were seated, I drew around each name as they spoke. Inevitably, the session presenters dominate





*Continuous Drawing: Jool's Session, 10.30-11.05am, 17 September 2014*

W.420mm H.297mm, pencil, white cartridge paper

Continuous drawing is an established practice within contemporary art. It requires the artist to stay focused on the subject and not to look at what they are drawing until they lift the pencil from the page. As the activity is repeated numerous times, the page begins to reflect the 'essence' of the subject without regard to accurate representation, capturing the degree of animation during the session.

Both drawings are part of a series of nine made during the retreat during formal presentation/discussion sessions.

*What kind of spaces can we create for productive encounters with the more-than-human? Go to Chapter 9, "Launching More-than-Human Investigations".*

*What other tactics are there for encountering the more-than-human? Go to Chapter 10, "Eight Incantational Tactics".*

Samuel Kirwan

WITH THE TOP OF MY LEFT FOOT I FIND THE UNDERSIDE OF THE PEDAL, PULL IT UP TO AROUND TEN-O-CLOCK, THEN USE MY TOES TO SPIN THE BODY, PLACE THE BALL OF MY FOOT ON TO THE AXLE, TRANSFER MY WEIGHT ON TO MY LEFT LEG, FEEL THE RESISTANCE OF THE STEEL FRAME, THE TRAILER AND MY TWO-YEAR-OLD SON INSIDE IT AS THE CRANK ROTATES AND THE BIKE BEGINS TO MOVE, PLACE MY RIGHT FOOT ON THE OPPOSING PEDAL BUT KEEP MY WEIGHT ON MY LEFT, ALLOWING MYSELF TO CRUISE FOR A FEW MOMENTS, MY THOUGHTS STILL SHAKING. TO MY RIGHT IS THE RIVER, WHICH IS HIGHER THAN I WOULD EXPECT, GIVEN THE LACK OF RAIN IN RECENT WEEKS. AT TIMES IT ALMOST REACHES THE ROAD IN SOME PLACES, AT OTHERS IT NARROWS TO A BROWN STREAM FLANKED BY GLISTENING MUD BANKS.

The Voice

of law

I AM ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE, HE HAD SAID, WHO MAKE THOSE PEOPLE, THOSE LOT IN CARS, THINK THAT CYCLISTS ARE A BUNCH - AND HERE HE SWORE. HE HAD TAKEN A FURTHER STEP TOWARDS ME WHILE SPEAKING. ON THIS STRAIGHTENED STRETCH THE PAVEMENT CAN EASILY ACCOMMODATE BOTH BICYCLES AND PEDESTRIANS, BUT AT THE CORNER WHERE WE MET IT IS NARROWER AND THE BUSHES RISING FROM THE RIVER BANKS BLIND ONE SIDE FROM THE OTHER. ALL AROUND THE GREENERY HAD FLOURISHED WITH THE WETNESS OF THE EARLY SPRING, I HAD BEEN THINKING OF SOMETHING ELSE, AND BY THE TIME I HAD STARTED TO BRAKE BOTH THE BIKE AND THE TRAILER HAD ALREADY PASSED HIM.



FOR A MOMENT WE WATCH EACH OTHER,  
THEN THE INTENSITY PASSES AND WE EACH  
CONTINUE ON OUR WAY.

THESE FEW SECONDS, IN WHICH THE SMOOTH  
EVERYDAY OF OUR LIVING TOGETHER IS  
MOMENTARILY UNWOUND, STAYS WITH ME  
ACROSS THE FOLLOWING WEEKS.

IN THIS TIME, MORE VIOLENT VERSIONS OF THIS  
ALTERCATION ARE RECORDED, SHARED AND  
ACTED UPON. AS OUTRAGE SPREADS THE LAW AND  
ITS FAILURE TO PROTECT COMES UNDER SCRUTINY.

INASMUCH AS MY INTEREST IS IN HOW WE  
RELATE TO AND INTERNALISE LAW, THESE  
UNDOCUMENTED AND FLEETING PUNCTUATIONS  
SEEM MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN, SAY...

THE IDEA THAT WE BUILD OUR UNDERSTANDING OF  
LAW THROUGH THE CODES PASSED BETWEEN US.

OR THAT A STRONG COMMUNITY BREEDS A  
STRONG UNDERSTANDING AND ADHERENCE  
TO LAW.

WHAT IF OUR EMBODIMENT OF LAW WAS FORMED  
NOT IN OURSELVES AND OUR PEERS AND SHARED  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF WHAT IS RIGHT, BUT IN THE  
VOICE OF AN OTHER EMERGING EXACTLY WHERE  
THESE CONNECTIONS BREAK DOWN.

IN THAT SUSPENSIVE MOMENT IN WHICH,  
INEXTRICABLE FROM UNRELIABLE MACHINES  
AND CHANGING URBAN FLORA, WE FIND  
OURSELVES RECOMPOSED

AND THAT BICYCLE, THAT PAVEMENT, THAT SOUND  
OF ANGER IN ANOTHER'S VOICE, NEVER FEEL QUITE  
THE SAME AGAIN.

## About the Authors

**Claire Blencowe** is a sociologist specialising in critical social theory and the politics of knowledge and culture in the context of modernisation, capitalist development and its attendant violence. She studies the role of values and knowledges associated with creativity, vitality and evolution in the constitution of modern political power - primarily set out in *Biopolitical Experience: Foucault, Power & Positive Critique*. She also works collaboratively with the Authority Research Network to establish the interdisciplinary study of 'emergent authority', insisting on the continued significance of authority, culture and spirituality for understanding power relations and politics. Her work is increasingly focused on issues of political spirituality and exploring intersections between contemporary power and religion.

**Sara Bowler** is a visual artist working with ideas of palimpsest in relation to place. She works from her base in Cornwall,

regularly liaising with other professionals in her investigation of selected locations. Her work has been funded by Arts Council England, the former Scottish Arts Council and local authorities. During her preliminary research into the location for the retreat, she learned of the notorious history of Lynmouth and its catastrophic flood in 1952 that claimed 34 lives and made 420 people homeless. This deluge, and the conspiracy theories behind it, informed several group actions and excursions, particularly in relation to the concept of authority within non-human relationships. Exploring the area was a key activity for Bowler, information being collected through audio recordings which formed the basis of the sound work, 'Voice of the Other: The Spaces Between'. During formal presentation sessions, she utilised traditional drawing techniques to explore the dynamics of interactions between presenters and participants. Developing the Intensity Drawings has opened up fresh avenues for recording group interactions which she is taking into new situations.

**Julian Brigstocke** is a cultural geographer with interests in the politics of aesthetics, urban culture, power & authority, and post-humanist social theory. He is working on a monograph on post-human forms of authority in buildings, bodies, and landscapes. He is also developing arts-led research in the Maré Complex of favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Earlier research was published as a monograph titled *The Life of the City* (Ashgate, 2014) exploring aesthetics, anarchist politics and urban experience in 19th century France. Recent edited collections

include *Space, Power and the Commons* (Routledge); *Authority, Experience and the Life of Power* (Routledge); and a special edition of *GeoHumanities* on Post-Human Attunements .

**Jo Collinson Scott** is a musicologist and multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter. She received a PhD in Musicology for her research into the development of creative music analysis methods. Jo is also a touring singer-songwriter and performer working under the name Jo Mango. As a songwriter she has co-written songs with internationally recognised Scottish bands (such as Teenage Fanclub) and had her music featured in film and television in the UK, North America and Europe. As a performer she has toured internationally. She is also a community musician, having worked in a variety of settings as a Live Music Now musician, PRS songwriter in residence and for prison arts organisation Vox Liminis. With Gail McConnell and Deborah Maxwell, Jo has worked on a project on 'Listening to Voices: Creative Disruptions with the Hearing Voices Network'. The project brings together voice-hearing networks, independent artists and academics to develop resources for creative listening practice, to analyse notions of 'voice' and to foreground what is challenging and meaningful about the collaborative process and the politics of authority in textual production.

**Leila Dawney** is a cultural and political geographer whose research interests include geographies of affect and embodied practice, landscape, experience and subjectivity, Spinoza and



new materialist theory, and emergent forms of authority. She is a member of the Authority Research Network, a collective of researchers who experiment with ways of collectively working and writing about ideas of power, alienation, participatory practice, and the making of the commons. Recent edited collections include *Space, Power and the Commons*, and *Authority, Experience and the Life of Power*.

**Samuel Kirwan** is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Warwick University, working on a project on “Living in debt: a sociology of everyday indebtedness”. This is a mixed-method study investigating the wider experience and negotiation of indebtedness. Previously, Sam has worked as a Research Fellow at Exeter University, and as a Research Associate at Bristol University’s School of Law working on ‘New Sites of Legal Consciousness’. Sam is particularly interested in money advice and the experience of indebtedness, and how the financial plan drawn up between client and adviser relates to the everyday relationships and spaces across which it must endure. Sam is co-editor of *Space, Power and the Commons*.

**Rachel Jane Liebert** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Public Science Project in New York City. She received her PhD in Critical Psychology from the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, which combined decolonial feminist theory and public art to map the un/settling circulation of paranoia within contemporary conditions of white supremacy.

**Gail McConnell** lectures in English Literature. Her research interests are in modern and contemporary British and Irish literature, particularly poetry. Her monograph explores the relationship between theology and form in Northern Irish poetry, with attention to the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. Recent research has focused on Seamus Heaney and photography, Samuel Beckett and Protestant theology, Northern Irish poetry after the peace process and contemporary British poetry. More broadly, she is interested in the politics of aesthetic form and in the relationship between violence, artistic practice and literary reception. With Jo Collinson Scott and Deborah Maxwell, Gail has led a project on ‘Listening to Voices: Creative Disruptions with the Hearing Voices Network’. The project brings together voice-hearing networks, independent artists and academics to develop resources for creative listening practice, to analyse notions of ‘voice’ and to foreground what is challenging and meaningful about the collaborative process and the politics of authority in textual production.

**Holli McEntegart** is a multidisciplinary visual artist whose work maps an engagement with the intersections of real and imagined experience using performance, video, sculpture and installation. Personal narratives, site-specific inhabitations and varied esoteric processes are explored to better understand her encounters with fact, fiction, myths and histories. Her projects are connected by mysterious and magical trajectories aimed at unearthing (im)possible or (im)probable negotiations

between logic and belief. She holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Photography and a Masters of Art & Design with First class honours from Auckland University of Technology and a Masters in Art & Design with First Class Honours from Auckland University of Technology. In 2014, Holli was awarded an inaugural fellowship to attend the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, USA. Holli's work has been shown extensively throughout New Zealand, Chile, and throughout the U.S.A. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

**Naomi Millner** is a geographer with research interests in Her key research interests fall in the areas of: the politics of knowledge and the production of knowledge; environmental conflict and land rights struggles; food sovereignty and food justice movements, especially in the context of El Salvador and Central America; understanding “cultures” of nature in past and contemporary social movements; and critical pedagogies, participative methods, and the place of “dissent”. Naomi is committed to taking part in social change, as well as theorising it. To this end she is involved in a number of popular education projects, and is involved in several refugee and asylum-seeking organisations in Bristol.

**Tehseen Noorani** is Research Scientist in Science & Technology Studies at New York University, and Visiting Scholar in Anthropology at the New School for Social Research. He is interested in knowledge and authority gained through

experiences at the limits of intelligibility. As co-investigator of the ARN's AHRC-funded project on post-humanist forms of political participation, he is conducting a comparative ethnography of psychedelics use. From 2013 to 2015 Tehseen was a postdoctoral research fellow at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, USA, where he led qualitative research for a pharmacology team researching psychedelic experiences. From 2007-2011, his doctoral research at the University of Bristol, UK, focused on limit-experiences in mental health, using Spinoza's *Ethics* to rethink processes of well-being and political capacitation in self-help and peer support groups.













