



THE ARROW

A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture & Politics



HEALING SOCIAL & ECOLOGICAL RIFTS

PART 2

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THE ARROW

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THE ARROW

A JOURNAL OF WAKEFUL SOCIETY, CULTURE & POLITICS

THE ARROW JOURNAL explores the relationship among contemplative practice, politics, and activism. Inspired in its founding by the teaching and social vision of meditation master Chögyam Trungpa, *THE ARROW* welcomes the insights of multiple contemplative lineages for achieving a kinder, healthier, and more compassionate world. We encourage dialogue on wisdom and knowledge arising from methods of contemplative inquiry, ways of embodied knowing, and intellectual disciplines. In doing so, *THE ARROW* provides a critical and much needed space for investigating the meeting point of contemplative wisdom and pressing social, political, and environmental challenges.

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Introduction from the Journal Editors



We are thrilled to share the second installment of this year's double issue, *Healing Social and Ecological Rifts*. Authors in Part 2 offer unique and provocative insights that both build on and take in new directions the contributions of authors featured in Part 1. Heather Williams' opening narrative of a road trip through southern California aflame and dehydrated—and the hubristic denial that led to the region's development—gestures toward discussions of death denial and “eco-sin” from the first installment.

Adam Lobel's article also deals with death symbolically and literally, inviting readers to learn as much from the messages of dying animals, plants, and ecosystems as from the vibrant life that persists. Lobel further makes an incisive critique of how modern society has conceptualized and enacted a false binary between humans and nature that efforts to “reconnect with nature” subtly perpetuate.

Keri E. Iyall Smith provides a timely and necessary call to learn from Indigenous wisdom as we face the climate crisis, offering guidance for rejecting colonial mindsets and actions through democratic, participatory community building. In what could be read as an answer to Iyall Smith's call to learning, John C. Dawsey invites readers into the worldview of the Amazonian Yanomami people both on its own terms and through the lens of the performative power of shamanistic ritual.

Kirsten Mundt's article draws us into embodied awareness of touch and sensory experience as a

means to face fully and heal the wounds of colonialism. Mundt examines how touch is at once intimate, political, vulnerable, and transformative.

Two articles offer specific frameworks for putting into practice the lessons of this issue. David Manuel-Navarrete introduces a three-part practice of reciprocity to help overcome what he refers to as “possessive individualism”. Brooke Lavelle, Abra Vigna, Zack Walsh, and Ed Porter offer a model for transformative change in communities based on methods developed and tested through the organization *Courage of Care*.

To close, we feature a conversation between guest editor LaDawn Haglund and contributor Adam Lobel examining topics raised by authors in both installments of the issue. Our aim is for these creative insights to stimulate further reflection and contributions from a rich diversity of scholars, activists, and change-makers that can together tackle the social, political, and ecological crises we face.

Thank you to LaDawn Haglund for her vision and exertion in guest editing this robust two-volume issue, to Chetna Mehta and Rae Minji Lee for their captivating artwork, to our editorial team and peer reviewers for insightful feedback, and to all of the authors for offering wisdom for this time. We hope you enjoy reading!

Gabriel Dayley, Chief Editor
shah noor hussein, Managing Editor
The Arrow Journal



Unfolding Universe L'univers desplegant-se CARLES IBÁÑEZ

It was one,
—I still keep it all—
and the light burst naked

It came from nowhere,
—nothing from me either—
and space was everything

It started from never,
—I don't remember either—
and time was ever-present

It cooled down, twisted,
and became many,
—myself, too—
everyone who stands now
in the illuminated darkness of the whole
was hinted at in the never, the naked,
in the ever, the light

Then came the combat,
the victory of the first imperfection,
the imbalance,
—myself, the umpteenth—
and it all began to boil and bind,

Fou una,
—jo conservo quelcom—
i la llum esclatà nua

Vingué d'enlloc,
—quelcom de mi tampoc—
i l'espai ho fou tot

Començà mai
—jo tampoc recordo—
i el temps ja era sempre

Es refredà, es recargolà,
i fou molts,
—jo mateix—
cadascú dels que som
en la il·luminada foscor del tot
ens insinuàrem en el mai, en el nu,
en el sempre, en la llum

Després el combat,
la victòria de la primera imperfecció,
el desequilibri,
—jo l'enèsima, jo l'enèsim—
i tot començà a bullir i a lligar,

to vibrate,
to show facades

And in a small, beautiful blue house,
through an open light-filled window,
tiny erratic energies
learned to dance
to the sound of creation

A new combinatorial art,
spontaneous, unstoppable,
shook every corner
till someone found a key,
opened a door
and everyone began to walk,
—insecure steps, onward—
with no course, no matter, no reason

I see myself walking too,
and I wonder where,
and I need to know why,
and I struggle to know how...
too many questions for one alone?

a vibrar,
a mostrar façanes

I en una petita, preciosa casa humida,
com una gran finestra il·luminada,
ínfims pobladors erràtics
aprengueren a ballar
al so d'energies creatives

Una nova ars combinatòria,
espontània, imparable,
sacsejà tots els racons
fins que algú trobà una clau,
obrí una porta
i tothom començà a caminar,
amb pas insegur, cap algun lloc,
sense saber on, ni perquè, ni com

Jo també em veig caminant,
i voldria saber cap on,
i delero saber perquè,
i em capfico en saber com...
massa feina per un hom?

The original poetry is written in Catalan. Special thanks to Brian Cutts and Silvia Panisello for reviewing and improving the English version.

CARLES IBÁÑEZ is scientist, writer, and environmentalist. Currently Scientific Director of the Climate Resilience Center at EUECAT (Catalonia, Spain), his main field of research is aquatic and coastal ecology, water resource management, and climate change impacts and adaptation. He has published over 100 peer-reviewed papers and several books. He is a member of the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of the Government of Catalonia. He has worked for several NGO's to protect and restore the Ebro River and Delta, where he lives. He was founder of Riet Vell, a company of organic food and nature conservation. He writes poetry.





'If you give us the best place in the world, it is not so good for us as this:'
Some Reflections on Catastrophe,
Consciousness, and the Right to Home

HEATHER WILLIAMS

*How can we cope with the fear, if we cannot overcome the causes of the fear? How can we live on the volcano of civilization without deliberately forgetting about it, but also without suffocating on the fears—and not just on the vapors that the volcano exudes?*¹

Ulrich Beck

*Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option.*²

Anna Tsing

BY THE END of August 2020, in a year that seemed to serve up nothing good, a fresh contagion had broken out in the U.S. West. Wildfires blanketed much of a sweltering California in smoke and falling ash. In Claremont, a southern California bedroom community 35 miles east of Los Angeles, I live in the shadow of two transverse ranges where the bone-dry forest was combusting in two bookend fires. The temperatures had risen in parts of the region to 117 degrees over a hellish Labor Day weekend, and a thick haze of smoke made me conscious of every breath I took behind the mask I had on for the simultaneous emergency of particulate matter from the fires and from Covid-19. With air conditioning broken, the days inside my home had become unbearable. The nightly ritual of opening all the windows to usher in the evening cool only sent ash and soot through the house. As I brushed ash off my t-shirt when I walked outside, I wondered at the knowledge that these were bits of trees that had been alive the day, even hours, before. My eyes burned, my throat burned, my chest hurt.

In the jagged San Gabriel Mountains that rise over Los Angeles and Pasadena to the north and west of me, some unknown spark, probably from an electrical wire or a transformer, set the forests ablaze in a fire that would rage for five weeks through September and early October and burn 116,000 acres. To the east, where the San Bernardino Mountains tower over harder-luck and hotter cities of Fontana and Colton and Riverside and Jurupa, the fires and smoke compounded to make a toxic atmospheric soup in a mountain bowl that captures air circulating from the east and leaves it to linger for days at ground level, lung level.³

The San Bernardino fires had become, in the stifling moment, a source of popular outrage. In Yucaipa, a semi-rural hamlet at the base of the majestic 11,000-foot Mount San Gorgonio, a young couple, eager to share their joy about a son they would soon bring into the world, used a pyrotechnic device for what was meant to be a burst of noise and blue smoke. They ignited the smoke bomb in a field of grass in a county park and set off a fire that consumed 23,000 acres of forest in two counties.⁴ This inferno, soon dubbed the “El Dorado fire,” in what I wondered might be a touch of official irony by the marshals at CalFire, prompted a familiar round of popular recriminations, violent memes, and death threats to the couple sent over social media.

Whether the couple’s lethal stunt was born of willful malice or just wholesale ignorance of their surroundings is of little consequence; the collective outrage said more about what our real problems are. Recrimination for wildfires is a macabre pastime in California. The news media report the details of fire marshal investigations, and the culprits—be they willful arsonists or feckless recreationists using fireworks or barbecues—become the target of imagined medieval punishments or at the very least, life sentences in prison.

Meanwhile, our golden state burns, and we do our best to suppress our deeper knowledge that large fires here cannot be controlled so long as we live here the way we do. The fires will come because the heat waves are longer and more intense by the year, the trees are dry and increasingly afflicted by billion-bug armies of shot hole borers and bark beetles. Southern California, with its luxury subdivisions and mini-ranches climbing the foothills and mountains, has also maintained a policy of strict fire suppression to protect private property for a century and a half, even as other parts of the U.S. in the southeast and Midwest have long allowed some fire or even light burning as tool for forest and range management. The result of fire suppression in Southern California, as fire historian Stephen Pyne points out, is a built environment that generations of firefighting families—mostly fathers and sons—have treated a field of ground and aerial warfare, with helitacks, air tankers, hot-shot crews, wildland fire engines, and incident command systems.⁵

In this round of conflagrations, our woes in Southern California were dwarfed by fire catastrophes to the north of us. Fires around the San Francisco Bay Area burned 700,000 acres between them in five weeks. And those fires in turn were smaller in magnitude than the monster August Complex fire, an inferno set off by dozens of lightning strikes from Tropical Storm Fausto. This wildfire—a dreaded convergence of four separate fires in the Mendocino, Shasta, Trinity, and Six Rivers Forests covering parts of seven of California’s giant counties—burned so hot and rapidly that by late August, much of the Coast Range had become its own raging weather system, a monstrous wind-fueled and wind-producing blowtorch consuming more than an acre of forest every ten seconds.⁶

This fire, along with two other burns of unthinkable proportions, have given rise to a grim neologism, a “gigafire,” for fires that burn through more than a million acres.⁷

“I cannot be here anymore,” I heard myself say out loud as I walked in the late afternoon through the superheated bank of air and smoke. I looked up at the electric wires across the railroad easement that runs parallel to my street and thought about the voltage pulsing through them, powering the fans and vents and the air conditioners and the refrigerators and computers that make my home seem like a space capsule on a hostile planet.

With my work as a professor converted to a virtual format because of the pandemic, I had the bitter luxury of being able to drive away from this for a few days. I thought about the ways that I, too, am a vector of megafires, with my car and my climate control and meals made from food grown with petroleum and preserved with it too, in thousand-mile-long cool chains. A skill I have acquired in these days of climate change is deftly corralling my own guilt while letting it talk to me from the sidelines. I considered the ethics of escaping Southern California when in fact my actions were contributing to the heat that is combusting the forests. I thought about the people who didn’t have the option to do their work remotely, or whose jobs had evaporated in the pandemic.

Accepting the fact that one is implicated in the obliteration of the sheltering landscape—its forests and its songbirds and its coastlines and tree-lined arroyos—is as excruciating to me as the spectacle of watching it burn, smelling it burn, even tasting bitter ash on the tongue. I heard Alice Walker in my mind. “The Earth holds us responsible for our crimes against it, not as individuals, but as a species—this was message of the trees,” Walker wrote. “I found it to be a terrifying thought. For I had assumed that the Earth, the spirit of the Earth, noticed exceptions—those who wantonly damage it and those who do not. But the Earth is wise. It has given itself into the keeping of all, and all are therefore accountable.”⁸

These are fires in fire ecologies. By some accounts, what is happening now is simply overdue clearing of brush that is part of forest regeneration. But megafires in this era are more catastrophic than generative, burning hotter and deeper into the soil, burning through the bark of ancient evergreens such as the redwoods and the Giant Sequoias that have survived centuries of fire,⁹ and leaving landscapes that are heavily characterized by non-native plants and grasses. Ecologists use the term “type conversion” to describe this ecological change from one plant community to another.¹⁰ What were largely pine forests before these fires and the megafires that have preceded them over the last decade in 2018, in 2017, in 2015, in 2012, will give way in many regions of California and the U.S. West to shrubland ecosystems. Evergreens will likely be replaced by oats, forbs, pampas grass, waxy scrub, low woody bushes and some fast-growing deciduous trees.¹¹

Scanning maps of air quality through the southern half of California, I determined that I would breathe better in the desert east of San Diego. It is a peculiar wonder that in these days when the federal government and the South Coast Air Quality Management Board work to roll back air quality regulations, their diligent career employees continue to produce more abundant and more precise data on air pollution, including the quantities of particulate matter, the ozone in the air, and daily forecasts of air quality for each Zip Code.

For the next day, I booked a motel. My two dogs were uneasy as I packed. I distracted them with squeaky toys and treats, but I knew they could read my face and they sensed that I was on edge.



...

Voluntary displacement such as mine, even temporary, carries with it a grief at what is disappearing as one drives away. On the I-10 driving eastward, the fires mixed with the everyday crush of traffic, with a smoke so thick that slow-driving cars and trucks had headlights on at mid-day. Trucks, always a heavy presence on the freeways, reminded me that commerce doesn't stop, never stopped,

and that if at some point they did, we would be about 24 hours away from empty shelves and widening regional panic.¹²

Driving east and then south, one appreciates how much people continue to want to live in Southern California, or perhaps how much people need the jobs available in the tangle of 1.1 billion square feet of warehouse space and transport depots that make up the region's logistics industry that moves 40 percent of the goods going in and out of the United States through two gigantic sea ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach.¹³ Despite the housing costs and the hazards, the inland expanses of this region are among the fastest-growing regions in the United States.¹⁴ Heading east and then south from my home on the I-15, I drove past thousands of new homes under construction, stretching into the dry grasslands around Lake Elsinore and Murrieta.

This corridor, hilly but not mountainous, these days looks to me like a Marine recruit getting a buzzcut, with patches of the sage-chaparral vegetation in place alongside strips that have been shaved bald. Near the Cajalco Road turnoff in the boom city of Corona, where colossal warehouse complexes and big box stores have replaced citrus orchards, ranches, and dairy farms, I instinctively steered into the left-most lane of the freeway to take a glimpse at a hillside that was covered in orange poppies last year. It was now scraped free of its topsoil where a housing subdivision is being built. Looking down from the freeway, one sees a small canyon with a corridor of elms, cottonwood, and sycamore where the ephemeral Temescal Creek runs through in wet years. As the hillsides go from poppies to lawns, the ferruginous hawks, orioles, woodpeckers, and tadpoles I saw a year ago will have to find another place to go. This, too, is an ecosystem that would burn periodically in its natural state from lightning strikes, but now will simply disappear because the urban areas upstream need to store the rain when it falls for lawns and taps and even, yes, demonstration conservation gardens.

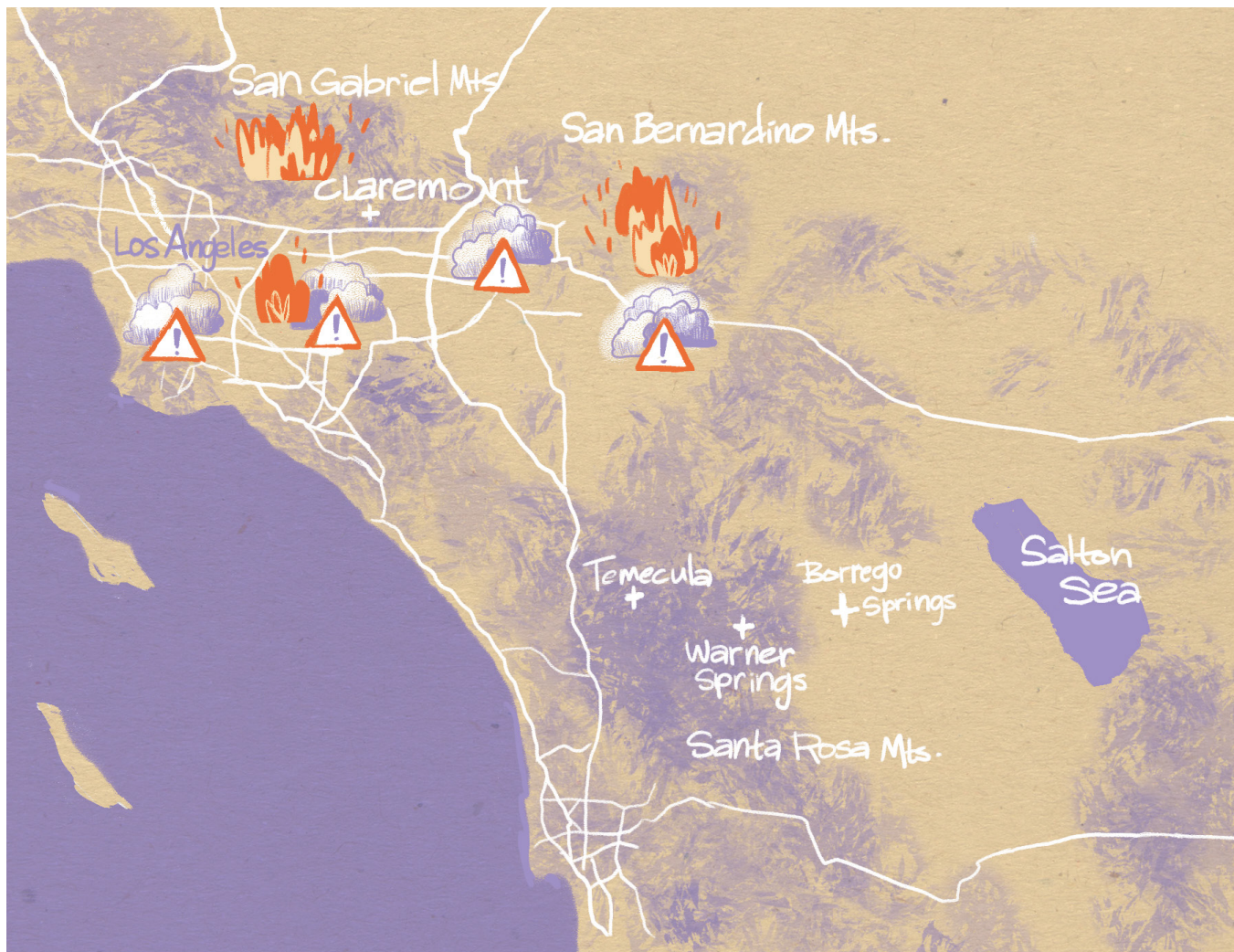
An hour south of where I live, at the city of Temecula, I exited the interstate onto California Highway 79. This corridor stretching down from Lake Elsinore put me further on edge. The cities here are new developments, outposts of a peculiar kind of debt-fueled 21st-century middle-class striving. The distances to white-collar jobs in Los Angeles and Orange County are long, but the monthly mortgage payments on single-family homes with modest yards are in reach for people willing to put up with the sprawl. It is an area that is incongruously white and reactionary in an increasingly nonwhite, Latinx and stalwartly left-of-center California. The city attracted attention from the Anti-Defamation League in 2020, when it published a heat map of white supremacist hate groups and ballooning extremist right-wing propaganda,¹⁵ with Temecula earning one of the largest heat polygons in the region. I am reminded

of this as I pass the Rancho Community megachurch campus. At a stoplight, I found myself behind a white Ford pickup that a few seconds back had swerved in front of me. I stared at the scratches in the chrome next to a bumper sticker with an assault rifle on it.

During these pancaking calamities of disease and pandemic and economic crisis, I wondered what other people in traffic were thinking. Temecula is the heart of California's deep-red 50th district, on the border of Riverside and San Diego Counties. In 2018, Duncan Hunter, a congressman already indicted for campaign finance violations, won over his opponent Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Latino-Arab candidate, in a rancid, race-baiting campaign.¹⁶ After Hunter resigned to go to prison in 2020, the seat remained empty as a multi-way race left Campa-Najjar running a second time for Congress, this time against Darrell Issa, a notorious influence peddler, race-baiter, probable arsonist *and* gay-baiter who represented a next-door district San Diego County until 2018. Even in a national election that went heavily toward Democrats, in a state where Biden won over Trump by nearly 30 percentage points, Issa won the election in Temecula's District 50 by nine percentage points in November 2020.¹⁷

Temecula stretches some ten miles east along the main highway. A rural outpost twenty years ago, the city of 114,000 has been assembled in giant blocks of planned subdivisions of single family homes and commercial centers, exemplars of what Marc Augé has memorably called "non-places."¹⁸ The grocery chains and the fast food outlets announce themselves with precision curb cuts and uniform signage until the city simply peters out into half-built lots. The highway narrows and the view changes to ranches nestled in oak and chaparral landscapes. Here and there beyond Temecula, gated communities of mansions lie incongruently among the small wood and stone houses of people who settled here to gain distance from the sprawl. The gated communities, though, with their manicured hedges and covenants and elaborate iron fences and urban amenities, are like prospectors' stakes; it is only a matter of a few years before the space between them and the outskirts of the mass subdivisions disappears into more concrete and commerce.¹⁹

The smoke that had hung overhead for 70 miles since I left Claremont finally eased; a hazy blue sky emerged as Temecula disappeared behind me. After 30 minutes, I passed the oak-lined village of Sunshine Summit and drove through an area of wide fields and low peaks of sage scrub meadows near the town of Warner Springs. The town of 1500 people, almost none of whom are ever in sight from the road, is eternally on the cusp of a leisure-industry boom. A sign indicates that a local country club with manicured greens is again for sale.



Map of the
author's
journey
*Illustrations for
this article by
Rae Minji Lee*

There was no smoke in Warner Springs, no helicopters dropping fluorescent slurries of fertilizer and viscous water on the forest. Fires of a different sort lingered in the air. Warner Springs is an eerie place, the site of the most significant regional revolt of native peoples after the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1846 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 that made Alta California the property of the United States. The new California state legislature was eager to rid the new U.S. acquisition of any prior claims, and in 1850 passed the perversely named Act of the Government and Protection of Indians that subjected native Californians to forced labor, fines, and crippling local taxes. Two years later, the legislature would drop any pretense of protecting native Californians and would allocate \$1.5 million to pay bounties on their scalps. Realizing that land invasions, violence, and hunger would be a calamity for the

native bands in the region, Antonio Garra, a cosmopolitan in the native California world—a man who was possibly Quchan by birth, but who spoke five Indian languages and had been appointed a *naat*, or headman of the Cupeño people near what is now Warner Springs—assembled a coalition of tribes to resist the invaders in 1851. “If we lose this war—all will be lost—the world,” he declared to the fighters in the coalition.²⁰

The revolt was short-lived; a betrayal by one of the leaders of the coalition resulted in Garra’s capture and execution. Anglo settlers meanwhile burned Cupa to the ground, and the Cupeños were denied the right to live on the lands they had occupied for a thousand years, and to which they had a U.S. Constitutional right under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. With some in exile and others in defiant occupation of lands nearby, generations of Cupeños continued to insist that the land was theirs, and they fought their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1901, in the case *Barker v. Harvey*, the Court reaffirmed California courts’ opinion that the village of Cupa belonged to the white men occupying it. Two years later, in what the Cupeño call their Trail of Tears, an Indian Bureau agent arrived with 44 armed guards to evict the Cupeño holdouts and force them on a march to the Pala Valley, where the federal government had purchased reservation land they considered more than suitable for the needs of Cupeños.²¹

The loss of home was a wound that yet had not healed. Chief Cecilio Blacktooth, explaining to government agents in 1902 why one “suitable” piece of land could not be exchanged for home, said:

You see that Eagle-Nest Mountain and that Rabbithole Mountain? When God made them, He gave us this place. We have always been here. We do not care for any other place. It may be good, but it is not ours. We have always lived here. We would rather die here. Our fathers did. We cannot leave them. Our children born here—how can we go away? If you give us the best place in the world, it is not so good for us as this.²²

Contemplating home and the loss of it, my eyes began to follow a turkey vulture circling above a rural airport built for glider planes on a flat plain that was once a carefully fire-managed pasture and vernal pool. Stopping for a few minutes, I noted that the heat was still intense, but the air did not burn when I breathed, and now, finally away from the incessant din of freeways and generators and endless construction and lawn maintenance in Claremont, there was silence. The vulture, never once flapping its wings, rode a thermal upward. I marveled at its prowess in flight.

The turkey vulture, *alowwahkah* to the Cupeño and the Luiseno,²³ remains a bit player in the animal pantheon of the Anglos who took over here. Chalk

it up, possibly, to the compound name that evokes orneriness and a holiday dinner, on the one hand, and cadaver-eating on the other. The *Cathartes aura* evokes few appreciative nods when compared to the awe expressed at sightings of bald eagles or the red-tailed hawks or ospreys or even the scavenger cousin of the turkey vulture, the California condor.

According to Luiseño scholars, vulture feathers were prized in regional trading circles for skirts and ceremonial uses.²⁴ Vultures elsewhere are also noticed and venerated. In antiquity, Egyptians assigned their native vulture a hieroglyph for the letter “A” and believed that they were all females and were born without the intervention of males. They symbolized purity and motherhood and the endless cycle of birth and death.²⁵ The *aura* in the North American vulture’s taxonomic name means gold. *Cathartes* comes from the Greek word καθαρή, meaning “to purify.” In Tibet, vultures are sometimes viewed as disguised *dākinīs*, “unpredictable, semiwrathful, dancing spirit-[women] who [appear] in visions.”²⁶ In a death ritual still practiced in parts of Tibet, the deceased are offered to the vulture and the consciousness is transported to the sky, where it awaits reincarnation.²⁷

Is it because of its smaller wingspan that we make so little of its presence among us, or is it because the turkey vulture has done relatively well in peri-urban landscapes? Dissimilar to the California condor, who in earlier times the vulture often led to food sources, *Cathartes aura* have not succumbed to the bioaccumulation of chemicals and heavy metals in the carrion they feed on. They in fact appear to have considerable ability to adapt to us, to thrive with us on our discard landscapes. Biologists have noted their ability to use methane vents from landfills and power plants to scavenge extra hours of the day and thus to increase their staying power on land scarred by our ambitions or our negligence.²⁸ Their innovation recalls the essays of biologist Helen MacDonald, who remarks on birds’ nests made from cigarette butts, old wire, or underwear stolen from clothes lines. “Their meaning is always woven from things that are partly bird and partly human,” she writes.²⁹ Adding to that, one might consider *Cathartes aura* our golden purifiers, living with us in what anthropologist Anna Tsing has called a “contaminated diversity.”³⁰

Tsing and her collaborators in the Anthropocene Project conceived at Aarhus University provide a path to collective self-understanding in ways that could allow us to act with greater care toward one another and the planet. Eschewing much of standard social science conventions that place walls between observed fact and the experience of observing fact, they experiment with narrative form in their writings to incorporate discussion of loss, grief, guilt, and disbelief at the speed at which both whole ecosystems and our collective will to spare them are coming undone.



In their recent volume of brilliant, often non-linear accounts of people dealing with death and life, madness, and memory in the wake of environmental plunder and exploitation in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, Tsing and collaborators offer the idea of ghosts and monsters as frameworks for describing experience during capitalism's final, sputtering stages. "Monsters are bodies tumbled into bodies," they explain, pointing to the inextricability of the human from the nonhuman, of species from species, of life-forms from the inorganic. "The art of telling monstrosity," they insist, "requires stories tumbled into stories."³¹ Ghosts, in turn, are events of the past that lose form in imperfect memory in their absence as a community of beings. They haunt events of the present, shaping outcomes. The Cupeños are no longer their natal village, no longer harvesting acorns and managing the bunchgrasses, manzanita and sage, no longer tending vernal pools. After their expulsion from Cupa, the landscape changed dramatically as Anglo settlers put cattle and sheep on the land and suppressed fire. With livestock and orchards on the land, plants like mustard, clover, bindweed, and orchard grass became part of the Santa Rosa Plateau. By the mid-20th century, chemicals and mowers changed parts of the land again into manicured golf greens. Is *Cathartes aura* the ghost who haunts this place, wordlessly witnessing the changes and adapting to them in ways that make us uncomfortable? Again, MacDonald's reflections on non-human sentience of birds come to mind: "What have they made out of what we have made of this world?" she asks.³²

I drove onward from Warner Springs into a borderline ecosystem where oak and chaparral give way to high desert. Around the tiny hamlet of Ranchita, one emerges from the chaparral-oak forest into grasslands punctuated by giant granite boulders. They are neither cliffs nor gs, but simply giant boulders strewn about, as if a deity had begun assembling a toy, and then had wan-



Santa Rosa Mts.
Photograph by author

dered away in frustration when a part went missing. Geologically speaking, the boulders are remnants of ancient magmatic explosions of the Cretaceous period that created the Peninsular range of the Santa Rosa plateau and the Sierra Nevada to the north. The light and the aroma of the desert meeting the scrub forest at this place are so unique that time folds and brings me back to the first time I passed through here twenty-five years ago. My partner at the time, an avid outdoorsman, told me that he had hiked in groups many times in the surrounding desert with a guy he called Ranchita Ted, an itinerant man who, my partner told me, had made a pledge sometime in his youth to live on no more than \$5,000 a year. No one in hiking circles knew much more about him, even his last name, where he slept, whether he had a family, what he did to earn the tiny allotment he lived on. But he carried the respect, even veneration, of other hikers, who wondered why they labored for so many hours a week to earn multiples of Ted's pledged maximum, mostly to gather their greatest happiness in the same desert wilderness that Ranchita Ted lived in every day. I never met Ranchita Ted, never saw a picture of him, but whenever I pass through, I look for him. Or his ghost.

Beyond Ranchita, the Santa Rosa plateau ended, and the vast Sonoran Desert came into view 3,000 feet below. The valley is not flat, though; the far-off horizon is slanted, with the southern horizon rising over the north. This is the contour of the Imperial Valley tilting into the Salton Sink, now the Salton Sea, another haunted landscape with bodies tumbled into bodies, stories tumbled into stories.

On a winding ecotone road leading into the valley below, sage scrub becomes dormant brittlebush becomes cholla, cacti, and creosote. I stopped in Borrego Springs, nestled at the feet of the Santa Rosa range. My dogs were antsy—it had been a long drive, and they are stalwartly home-accustomed



creatures. The car was artificially cooled, but their noses were up against the windows in 108-degree heat. They knew we were not where we should be.

Given that this is a destination for the masses in springtime when rains are followed by wildflower blooms in the Anza-Borrego State Park that surrounds the town, I had imagined that I would be joining hundreds of people escaping the smoke in Los Angeles and the Inland Empire. But I seemed to have bucked a trend. I checked into the Borrego Palms Motel and RV Park, a low-brow, unpretentious place themed as an Old West town.

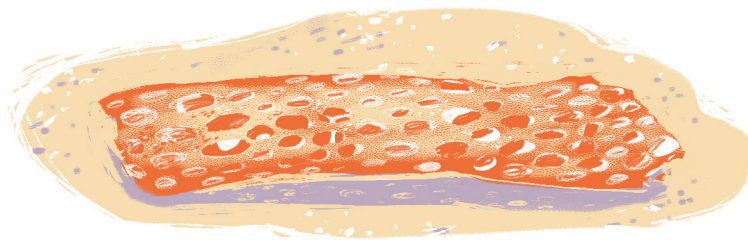
On the false fronts built into the motel buildings, there were jaunty signs for a bank, a dry goods store, a cantina, a Miss Kitty's Dance Hall. My room was in the barber shop, complete with a red, white, and blue barber pole. As I clambered up the stairs with my suitcase and two dogs in tow, the other guests—two sunburned blond men, waist deep in the swimming pool holding beers in foam cozies, yelled up to me, asking me jovially about getting a haircut. I was reminded, thinking back to the crawling normal traffic on the smoky freeway, that most people were normalizing the moment, forests on fire, world pandemic and all.

I ensconced my dogs in the motel room, with water and treats and beds brought from home. I decided that I absolutely could lose my mind entirely

Borrego Palms Motel
Photograph by author

here, in an ersatz barber shop. Drinking seemed like the right thing to do. The attendant at the front desk generously gave me four bottles of cheap prosecco as a welcoming gift, so I descended to the pool area to chat with the sunburned men and I quickly downed one of the bottles of fizzy wine and started on another. The sunburned men were from Newport Beach. One told me he managed an ultra-luxury Pavilions grocery store; the other said he built houses. They remarked that they were there for a four-wheel driving expedition, and they explained all the features of the grocery manager's new 2020 Ford 150 Raptor. This is an off-road truck that has, I now know, a 3.5-Liter EcoBoost V6 that lays down an impressive 510 pound-feet of torque, climbs rock piles with ease, and propels the truck to 60 mph in 5.1 seconds.

Through the haze of heat and the prosecco, buffered by the pool, I looked at the empty motel-cum-Old West town, and I decided that the resort was neither imitation nor irony. Jean Baudrillard would call it an instance of the "hyperreal," in which there is no distinction between the real and the represented. In one memorable essay where he developed his theory of the simulacrum, Baudrillard theorized about Disneyland, in Orange County, where the men are from, deciding that Disneyland was what he called "a third-order simulation," in which its Frontierland and its Tomorrowland and its Main Street, U.S.A. were neither representations of reality nor distortions of reality, but instead markers of the absence of a fixed reality. "Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which IS Disneyland," Baudrillard wrote. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and simulation."³³ Like Disneyland, this Old West motel functions as a necessary counterpart to Temecula and Lake Elsinore and Corona and Claremont, which present themselves as real and sustainable urban settlements but which ultimately are as ephemeral as this pretend Old West town at the edge of the desert.



• • •

Southern Californians mask the aridity of their arid region with tropical vegetation and lawns and work assiduously to suppress the fire in their fire ecologies. But they are also obsessed with the true desert that lies beyond their mountain barriers. From the Sonoran Desert up through the Mohave Desert and the Great Basin stretching through Nevada and Utah to Salt Lake City, they party in them, create art in them, build jackrabbit weekend homesteads in them, build empires of irrigated fields in them, explode nuclear bombs in them.

William Fox writes in his brilliant book, *Playa Works: The Myth of the Empty*, that “the low humidity and lack of verticals play games with our visual field. Light does not scatter on droplets of water; colors often don’t shift to blue in the distance. The far and the near are not clearly distinguished; this makes deserts transformative spaces—perception of paleo brain is at once one of danger from the lack of green, but also of fascination...If the lack of visual cues leads to our walking in a circle, it can also dramatically increase our haptic, or whole-body, perception of the landscape. In the desert you can feel as if, by being radically diminished in size, you are properly scaled to the planet.”³⁴

In this corner of California, a calamitous illusion of the empty was the 19th-century quest to turn the land a stone’s throw southeast of Borrego Springs into verdant expanse of farms and orchards. The idea was to use the new science of irrigation to “reclaim” the land for white Christian civilization, in an explicit reference to Genesis. Irrigation was not just a technology conveying water from rivers to fields. It was men wielding a tool of the divine: reversing God’s expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. As California Governor George Pardee proclaimed to reclamation boosters at the National Irrigation Congress in 1903, referring to the triumph of the City of Riverside and its surrounding orchards, “With the factor of moisture under the control of man, his control over the creation of wealth is vastly enhanced. Civilization is based upon the existence of wealth, since empires are based on population ... Man can by his will create [irrigation] States, and in the exercise of his power he does most truly resemble the gods.”³⁵

Land developers were ecstatic at the prospect of transforming these lands of creosote and cholla into farmland and towns, seized decades before from the Kumeyaay and the Tipai peoples with Spanish missions, smallpox, and bullets. The developers painted a picture for investors of a forsaken desert giving way to anointed fields of wheat, alfalfa, and apricots. Charles Rockwood, the founder of the California Development Company, recruited irrigation *wun-*

derkind George Chaffey, who had built celebrity and a fortune in the Inland Empire in the 1880s building “model colonies” of irrigated, ready-to-buy citrus homesteads along the new Santa Fe and Standard Pacific railroad lines. Now, Rockwood had Chaffey turn his sights to this bigger, more ambitious venture in the Sonoran Desert. As Chaffey had done in Etiwanda (now Rancho Cucamonga) and Ontario, Chaffey and Rockwood’s company would build alcohol-free, white, Protestant townsites complete with electricity, schools, and town squares laid out in grids for well-heeled buyers who would have clean air and a salutary rural life, but also avoid the drudgery of farm life through the magic of a seemingly endless supply of East Asian and Mexican immigrant laborers and native Californians, whose reservations, where they existed, lacked the water and acreage to provide their own subsistence.

Demigods in the local broadsheets they often published themselves, irrigators had made fortunes previously with water engineering in the Inland Empire. But in this place, they did not begin to know what they did not know. Issuing stock certificates for the land company to gather cash for expansion but not overspend it on water operations, the California Development Company engineers built a 14-mile-long canal with a wooden head gate connecting the fissiparous lower Colorado River to the northward-trickling channel of the small Alamo River.

Chaffey and his engineers understood little of the workings of the Colorado River that brought the snowmelt of 246,000 acres in six mountain states from Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Their first problem was its enormous silt loads. Named by the Spanish for its turbid, red waters, the Colorado River carried 500,000 tons of silt and sediment per day—enough to fill 1,400 ship cargo containers every 24 hours.³⁶ When the river was low in the dry season, the canal simply silted up faster than workers could clear it. By 1905, the company was near bankruptcy, and George Rockwood ordered a makeshift diversion into the Alamo River from the Colorado, this time with no gates to control flows of water. In the spring of 1905, following high snows in the West the previous winter, floodwaters poured into the diversion at a velocity that scoured the tiny Alamo, and the entire river changed course, now flowing backward, northward, toward the Imperial Valley and into the Salton Sink, which lies 269 feet below sea level. From 1905 to 1907, the Salton Sink filled with Colorado River water until makeshift levies made of odd materials, including old train cars thrown across the river’s path, forced the river back into the channel leading southward to Mexico and the Sea of Cortes.

It was not the first time that water flowed there: over a period of 40 millennia, water had appeared and disappeared for intervals lasting centuries. In its last iteration ending in the sixteenth century, the ancient Lake Cahuilla had

supplemented mixed economies of agriculture, gathering, and fishing in the region.³⁷ Absent new deliveries from the Colorado River, the Salton Sea would have dried up once again after some decades in the searing heat of the Sonoran Desert. But in the 20th century, California's newest, largest lake, 40 miles in length and 10 miles in width, would have a new role. In 1928, the U.S. government set about building a canal running parallel to the U.S.-Mexican border and diverting enough Colorado River water to irrigate 650,000 acres of desert in the Imperial Valley and the Coachella Valley that borders it to the north. Wastewater from the irrigated fields in turn drained into the Salton Sea.

In a place where water is more precious than gold, the portion of the river the U.S. federal government diverted toward farmland in this desert was a king's ransom. Here, where it rains on average just 3 inches a year, over 1,000 square miles of fields receive enough water to cover them to a depth of five feet. Even today, with federally mandated cutbacks to Southern California agriculture from the lower Colorado River, desert irrigation in the Imperial and Coachella Valleys puts as much water on land as the rainiest state in the continental U.S., Louisiana, where precipitation averages 60 inches per year.³⁸

The Salton Sea became the ghostly photonegative image of a 21st-century California wildfire—an unsolvable dilemma of what to do once settled water rights and river basin engineering together created a regional economy, a way of life, and a powerful cohort of landowners who in turn would shape local water agencies. The agencies ostensibly exist to build and maintain the infrastructure that sends the water to people who hold legal claims to it, but they also advocate ferociously on behalf of the landowners themselves, who can use their allocations to water their fields or sell their year's water to thirsty agencies in Los Angeles and San Diego.

The Salton Sea encodes a history of these arrangements. Its placid, broad blue surface for a brief time became a chimera of American mid-century utopia: a world where modern industrial agriculture could provide win-win arrangement for farms and people. In the early decades of the 20th century, sport fishermen flocked to its shores and bird watchers delighted at the flocks of migratory birds that descended in multitudes. But by the 1980s, where Rock Hudson once water-skied, and where Frank Sinatra and Jerry Lewis visited their friend Guy Lombardo on his yacht in the Salton Sea in the 1950s, where the Beach Boys lounged at the North Shore yacht club, and where President Dwight Eisenhower golfed, there was little left of leisure culture.³⁹ Within a generation, the lake fell from favor as salts and nitrates accumulated in this sea without an outlet. A sulfuric stench took hold of the basin, a smell so strong that on days when temperature and humidity are high, even the tony residents of Palm Springs can smell the sea 30 miles away.

Plans for exurban subdivisions that would line this desert vacationland were mostly scrapped by the 1980s. In Salton City, on the west side of the sea, a web of curvilinear streets and home pads lie mostly unoccupied. The curbs have crumbled, the streets are decaying. A few boosters remain. Salton City Realty, ensconced in a decaying, two-story building clad in salvaged metal siding and rimmed at the top by a broad wooden sconce painted to resemble Spanish tile, advertises “Lots for Sale! *WILL FINANCE FOR \$100 DOWN!*”

The east side of the Salton has fared better by embracing the irony and catastrophism of the place. The Skin Inn bar at Bombay Beach, on the stinking shore of the sea, surrounded by sand, animal skeletons, and pieces of machines that have come apart, is now a destination for Those In The Know. A motley assortment of drifters, artists, musicians and filmmakers have taken over the ruins of a World War II U.S. Marine Corps training camp at Slab City and stage concerts and parties on the weekends on a makeshift stage for Los Angeles hipsters who arrive for an off-the-grid desert experience. The venue creates the sense of what anthropologist Victor Turner theorized as liminality, or ritual participation in which individuals briefly find themselves in an in-between space, beyond the reach of social hierarchies and expectations of rule-bound behavior.⁴⁰ At the entrance, one passes by the massive art installation of Leonard Knight, who over decades has used tens of thousands of gallons of paint and innumerable reclaimed objects to make Salvation Mountain. At the center of the installation, in giant red and pink letters on a painted hillock, built up over years of daily labor with layers of adobe clay, is the message, “God is Love.”



Salvation Mountain
Photograph by author

A memorable part of the movie, *Into the Wild*, with Leonard DiCaprio playing the part of a doomed Christopher McCandless, was filmed here. Referencing the film or simply each other's online stories, thousands of people now pass through, taking pictures of themselves in the thin desert air, the riotous colors filling the frame around them.

Art world weekend sojourners come and go for selfies with this desert Thanatos, but the Salton Sea remains an essential habitat in decay with which no one knows how to deal justly. The Audubon Society notes that the sea has become one of the most important homes for birds in North America, identifying 400 species who nest, stop over, or winter on its shores or in the riparian zones of the drainage canals and the two embattled rivers that feed it.⁴¹ The accumulating salts, however, require a heavy energy output for even salt-tolerant birds' glands to filter, leaving them hungry and vulnerable to disease. Meanwhile, other species who utilize the less saline riparian areas of the New River and Alamo River in the south are vulnerable to pathogens, such as the avian cholera outbreaks that in recent years have cut down legions of birds at the outlet of the New River. A grim task for the biologists at the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge is to collect tens of thousands of cadavers for disposal in an on-site incinerator, hoping to contain the avian pandemic.⁴² Even with a steady incineration of the birds in the refuge, bird cadavers litter the sides of the sea outside the reserve where their systems were overwhelmed by salts, by poisons that have accumulated in the fish, or simply by hunger as even the salt-tolerant tilapia and crustaceans in the sea diminish in number. The successive die-offs are such that the Salton Sea's beaches are now an accumulation of carbon matter and bleached bones that crack underneath the shoes of anyone who walks its spongy shores.

The Salton Sea is an anthropogenic succession ecology. A federal agreement that had kept water going to the sea until 2017 has now expired. The Salton Sea will recede again, this time because water rights holders in the Imperial Valley are increasingly leasing their allocations to the Metropolitan Water District that serves 19 million urban customers from Los Angeles to San Diego, and to growing desert cities like Palm Desert. The Salton Sea has a small number of champions who tout the possibilities for its rehabilitation as a recreation zone, but the greater number of people who pay attention to calls to save it are doing so for two reasons. First, managers must maintain the embattled surface of the sea for birds; and second, they must keep the bottom of the sea covered because it is, effectively, a toxic waste dump.

The Salton Sea floor scares even the most sanguine politicians and career officials in the state's health and air quality agencies. The areas of greatest population in Imperial County lie to the southeast of the Salton Sea in and



Salton Sea
Photograph by author

around Imperial Valley agriculture. Brawley, Niland, Calexico, Westmoreland, Calpatria, and El Centro are decidedly un-fancy towns where many residents' employment is tied to agriculture, and where the cost of living is lower than any other part of Southern California. Median household income, at around \$45,000, is a third below the national median, and at any given time over 20 percent of the county's mostly Latinx residents live below the poverty line. Country living, however, is anything but healthful here: the air quality is often the worst in the state, and the county has the highest rates of emergency room visits and hospitalization for children in California.⁴³ With the Salton Sea receding and desert winds frequently blowing over 10 miles per hour in the valley, particulate matter reaches dangerous levels for months at a time. The aerosols and dust coming off the fields and the exposed sea bottom are a witches' brew of toxins. Selenium and arsenic are in high concentrations, as are pesticides. Georeferenced maps of pesticide use on the websites Tracking California and CalEnviroScreen show pesticide use per square mile in the southern Imperial Valley in the 90th to 99th percentile statewide. Several heavily-treated square mile quadrants show yearly applications of insecticides, herbicides and soil sterilizers at twenty times the state median level.⁴⁴ Also, due

to dust and tillage, outbreaks of a disease borne of a fungus endemic to these soils, Valley Fever, sends scores of people, especially children, to the hospital.

As California's population grows and the state warms, the multi-year droughts will force the state and federal governments to reckon with so many people living up against its forests and, in so doing, unwittingly setting them ablaze. The state will also have to make choices about what to do about its engineered hydroscares that also have wide-ranging effects on the lower atmosphere.



...

In Borrego Springs, I spent my days mostly indoors conferring with my students and colleagues through the bizarre and yet not wholly impersonal electronic environment of a Zoom room. Saffron and Jupiter were confused but remained mercifully patient while I mostly ignored them for hours at a time. We all looked forward to the periods just before dawn and at dusk when the desert's blistering heat lifted and we could hike on paths leading north, east, and west of us toward open land, hills, and mountain canyons. I felt grateful for the desert. At dawn when a raven flew overhead, I could hear the air displaced by its wings. The faint scraping sound of beetles digging holes in the ground called me to stop and watch in wonder.

We walked slowly. I rid their paws every so often of cactus spines; a little cholla ball broke off at one point into Saffron's wiry fur and she fussed as I disentangled the cactus and ended up with a hand full of spines myself. I worried that these suburban rescue mutts would have no residual instincts to steer clear of rattlesnakes. On one morning before sunup, silence and soft pink light around us, we listened to a column of coyotes in high pursuit of some prey, probably one of the hundreds of jackrabbits we saw in great abundance all around us at the motel. The coyotes made short work of their breakfast, whose capture they celebrated with whoops and screams. Seconds later, the

pack emerged from the brush, ready for a second course. They spotted us, a hundred yards away and on the other side of the road. I knew they knew that I was too big for them to risk attacking the three of us, but there was a long staredown with the well-fed, muscular alpha female who trotted up the side of the road toward us. She neared, and then sauntered back into the brush with her pack, sending an insouciant look at my bigger dog Saffron, who stared in wonder at the pack leader.

Overhead, the skies were turning hazy. The smoke from the fires was thickening, though it was far better than in Claremont. Reading the news, I noted a story reporting that the smoke in the high atmosphere had reached the East Coast.⁴⁵ Other stories indicated that the fine ash from these millions of burned trees will travel thousands of miles more, even disastrously, to Arctic glaciers, where the black soot from the fires absorbs solar radiation, reducing the heat-deflecting albedo of the white snows, and thus accelerates melting and temperature rises.⁴⁶ None of us are outside this loop.

The smoke clouds streaking the sky were a brownish-white—more Aarhus ghosts, colliding temporalities. We live on this planet, breathing, moving, living and dying in an ancient atmosphere that now bears the measurable physical accumulation of carbon and chemicals that we have sent into it for generations. And we are led to believe that we are locked into pumping out exponentially more of them for generations to come.



...

Realistically, can we—can our culture, can our states and institutions of law—back away from base assumptions of ever-normalcy, of business-as-usual? In 1903, the Supreme Court, assured by federal agents that Cupeños would be moved to land just as good as their ancestral homelands, held that John Trumbull Warner's ranch had been obtained illegally, but that sixty years of white owners made it theirs in perpetuity.

Similarly, does the profligate burning of fossil fuels and the release of persistent toxins over generations render claims of youth and future generations to a homeland null and void? As a professor, I honestly did not think I would be facing college students in the year 2020 with no binding global restrictions on carbon emissions. As evidence has mounted through my lifetime of carbon and nitrogen cycling out of control at a planetary level, I find myself dumbfounded at the enduring power of business and political actors who are intent on further deregulating chemical and mining industries and subsidizing a minimally regulated and already obscenely subsidized fossil fuel industry.

In the face of foot-dragging, inaction, and even violence by national states and legislatures, and outright lies and strong-arming by the world's behemoth oil and chemical companies, the calls for climate justice that should call our attention most are lawsuits around the world being filed by children. They are, in every sense, a revisiting and a planetary escalation of the Cupeños' legal claim a century ago—a right to home.

Many respected legal analysts consider cases being put before courts by youth plaintiffs in venues such as Holland, Portugal, Pakistan, Colombia, Ireland, Canada, Uganda, Norway, New Zealand, Australia and the United States as risky long shots.⁴⁷ But what if they are the only substantive long shots we have? Much as the Cupeño continue to claim, following Chief Blacktooth more than a century ago, that land and home are not fungible and that Cupa must be returned for future generations to the descendants of its original occupants, we are living through a period of pivotal claims-making in the courts by members of communities elsewhere insisting that their earthly homes are not theirs for others to obliterate.



...

In Borrego Springs, the night before I returned to Claremont, I walked with Saffron and Jupiter in the warm, dark desert. I looked up, but there were no

stars. The smoke had covered them. Or rather, the stars were still there. We had simply altered our atmospheric view of them. I remembered a line from Amitov Ghosh's meditation on climate change in *The Great Derangement*, when he considers what future generations will make of the absurd ever-normalizing ideas and cultural forms we clung to. "What can they do other than to conclude that ours was a time when most forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight?"⁴⁸

I thought about the cases being argued by intrepid youth, who are so like my own college students, terrified of the future the adults around them have conceded may be unlivable, and hopeful that their teachers, their leaders, their neighbors, their fellow citizens, will set them, all of us, on a path of seeing and healing.

It is worth asking what would happen if judges in these atmospheric trust lawsuits permit climate trials to go forward. What would it look like to have children speak directly to adults in a court of law, explaining their fears about the livability of their own future? In courtrooms packed with children, as has occurred during procedural hearings where judges have presided over arguments about standing, magistrates' discomfort with the situation is palpable. In a trial, a generation of adult jurors would be asked the harrowing question, point blank, if children's lives have value.

Again, as Alice Walker imagines of Earth, the planet has given itself into the keeping of all, and all are therefore accountable. As the intrepid Judge Josephine Staton wrote in a searing dissent from a U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel denial of standing to a group of youth plaintiffs in the climate lawsuit, *Juliana v. U.S.*, "Waiting is not an option," she wrote. "Those alive today are at perhaps the singular point in history where society (1) is scientifically aware of the impending climate crisis, and (2) can avoid the point of no return."⁴⁹

We grownup humans, we who have allotted ourselves some modicum of voice vis-à-vis states, we who did not ask to inherit this crisis of impending self-exile from home, have no choice but to face the fires and acknowledge why they are burning and why they will not be readily extinguished in our lifetimes. By stepping away from the fantasy of a changeless now, of the subdivision as solidity, of reclamation of paradise from desert, of care of self and property over care of the environment, we step toward the possibility of a compromised but real continuity of life for those just barely here.

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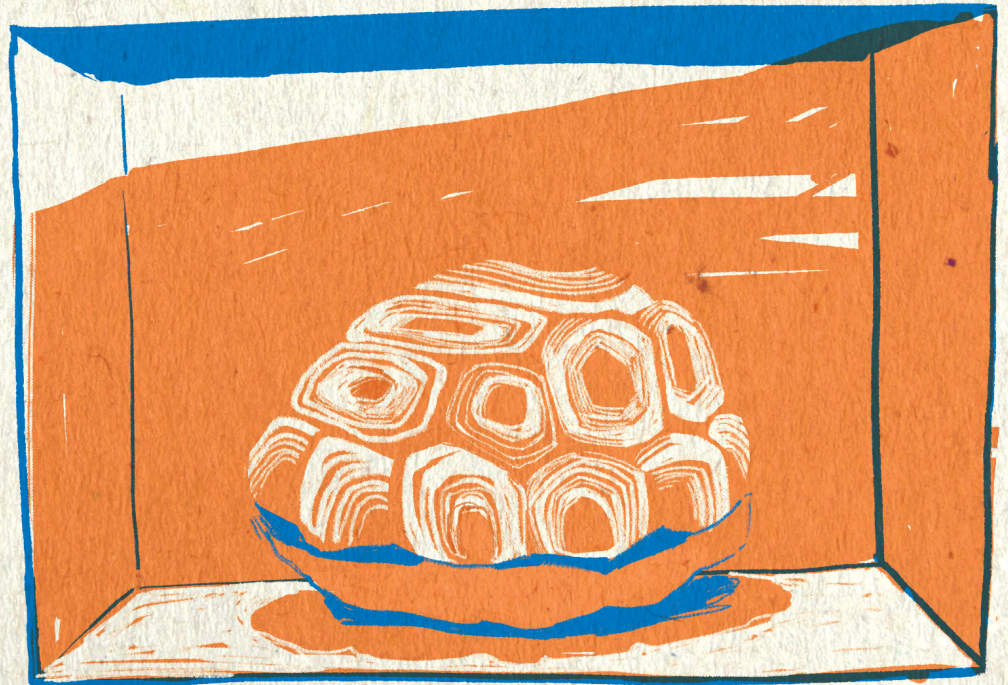
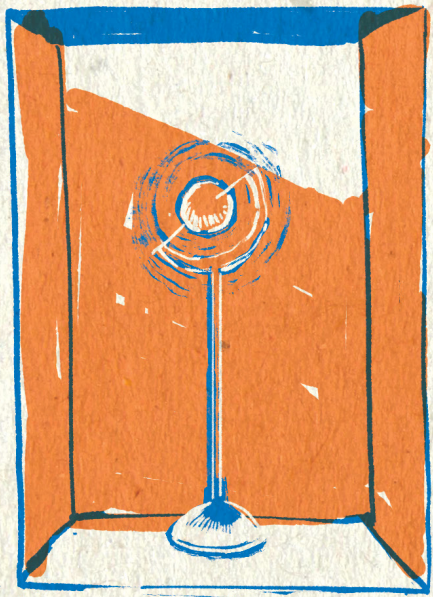
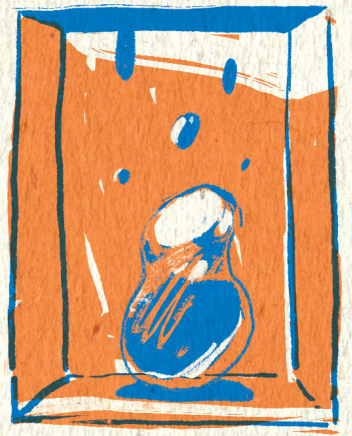
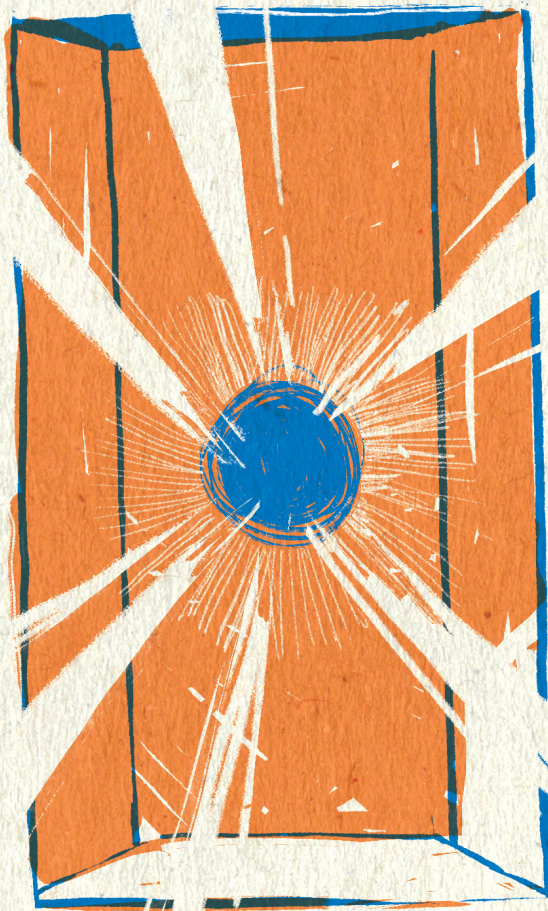
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Dead Turtle Animist: Towards a Non-Natural Ecopolitical Spirituality

ADAM LOBEL

I WAS NOT SEEKING a turtle, alive or dead. Yet there she was, dried shell and crusted claws, long dead under the dappled shade of a Sweetbush. Technically she is a Sonoran Desert tortoise, but I did not know at the time. Nor do I know the names that she would have been called by the Pascua Yaqui (Yoeme), Gila River, Cocopah, or Seri peoples who live, or once lived, in this desert. The Tohono O’odham name for desert tortoise is *komkicud*. Unsought, this reptilian form presented herself in what felt like an undeniable response to my own cries. You see, as I hiked up the arid red-rock cliffs of the mountainside, ascending towards Safford Peak in the Saguaro Desert, I was holding a prayer. This was my task in the context of a land-based contemplative retreat in the desert. Experientially entering the unknowns of not just our psyche, but also entering the collective “dark night” of ecocide, socio-political collapse, environmental injustice, and ruined relations—the retreat invited us to open to communication from the land itself. What might rock, cactus, deer, and desert moon say if we ask for guidance on how to face human-caused climate mutations and mass extinctions? For me at least, this also meant listening to bulldozers scraping away desert rock for more housing developments. What is the geo-materiality and animate skin of the earth saying about environmental violence, if anything at all? What did a dead turtle say?

And yet, said another voice, perhaps my own mind projected meaning on the turtle. Wasn’t it just a carcass, some insignificant dead fibrous proteins? The turtle shell was not a response to me at all; it was typical anthropocentric hubris that forced this object into my own meanings and desires.

But what if the turtle was an intrusion, an intervention, a corpse remaining after a hunger strike on behalf of the land? Sonoran tortoises are listed as

threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Perhaps this shell was a political agent, communicating on behalf of its species. Much contemporary ecological theory advocates for the agency of the more-than-human.¹ How might we learn to witness such agency? Where are the borders between nature and human mind, between materiality and culture, between our fantasies of untouched, natural ecosystems and the reality of extinction and contaminated places?

Beforehand, on the first day of the gathering, we searched for an object in the desert that seemed to call to us, and then we offered it to a wind-sculpted “altar” rock with aspirations for our world. I was drawn to the elongated, spiky pod of the Palo Verde tree—a small, elegant tree with striking green bark, standing out against the browns and reds of the desert. Holding one pod in particular, its sharp shape seemed uncannily filled with meaning, evoking a religious symbol from my meditation tradition. Clearly, I was in a particularly hypersensitive state, looking for meaning from the scattered symbols in the landscape all around. A few slow days alone in a tent, sitting and walking quietly through the land cultivates more sensitivity, as if uncovering fresh senses. More appreciation of the fleeting directness and exposure of being a body. And perhaps you start to go a bit mad, projecting human meanings where there are none?

We were alone for the next days, each holding our “prayer.” The prayer was intended to be a crying out for the ways industrial activities have shifted ecosystems towards hot, bleak death. So many of us conceptually know the information about our trajectory towards an uninhabitable earth, yet it is difficult to feel in our bodies, difficult to let in, to catalyze concrete changes in our collective forms of life. Despite the fires and floods, we tend to just carry on.

A few hours into hiking straight up through the desert towards the peak, skirting around cacti and scrambling over boulders, my prayer began to feel strong. And as I stumbled through spiked brush and red rocks towards an unknown goal—the dead turtle showed herself, withdrawn beneath the Sweet-bush.

A large, green-brown, domed desiccated shell. Striated hexagonal pieces like miniature topographical maps. A few missing fragments, leaving bleached, white absences on the crest of the hollow carapace. Four curled, dusty black, scaled feet with white claws emerging from beneath. A dehydrated, ripped, headless broken neck, perhaps long ago eaten by scavengers or insects, absorbed back into the land.

This was it? This was the message, the sign from the land in response to my prayer? Here, on what is known by some Indigenous communities as Turtle Island, what does it mean when the land presents you the material sign of a

dead turtle? It is said that the difference between an omen and a sign is that an omen comes entirely without warning, whereas a sign is in direct response to a question that you ask of the land. A sign is a semiotic act, a dialogical response, a gesture amidst a conversation that has already begun. Material omens and signs from the land are happening all the time—a hawk over the highway, stumbling over roots, mouse poop in your cupboard, record-breaking annual temperatures—though modern folks often need a particular pedagogical context to hear what is being “said.” This is one reason why time spent in the unbuilt environment engaging land-based practices are particularly revealing. Signs abound. But they are not always pleasing and not always clear. What appears as a sign could be mere projection, fantasy, or anxious superstition—a potentially narcissistic and even psychotic rendering of the world as meaningful for me. I recall that in modern interpretations of Tibetan Great Perfection, or Dzogchen meditation tradition, it is said that the sacredness of the world is neither for you nor against you. Yet, something in us almost instantly interprets protrusions from the landscape as either for or against us. If this is true, what does it mean to learn from the biome in your region as it responds to global warming? Would we not simply be listening to the echo of our own interpretations? How do we get beyond a correlationism that only knows how to attend to the relation between our thinking and a natural world “out there,” the real object of a dead turtle shell?² Signs endlessly defer, and the outside land becomes text. As my eyes read the turtle almost directly in front of my face on the steep mountainside, all I could do was utter, “thank you;” “I see you.”

Watching myself rush to catch the indeterminacy of the sign, I just let be and sat quietly for a while. Pausing to drink from my water bottle, I gazed across the valley stretching out to the highway towards Tucson below, marked with new suburban sprawl and recently bulldozed patches of scarred land, readied for new construction. From my pocket I took a few seeds and raisins to offer around the turtle shell. I sat longer.

“Perhaps I should bring one of the fallen pieces of the shell with me,” I thought after a while. Just as I reached down to grasp the largest and most intact of the thin, brown hexagons, I noticed what appeared to be a curling dark tail sticking out from beneath the piece of shell. “A scorpion tail? Now wouldn’t that be astounding.” I was about to steal a part of the body of this dead turtle and would have been stung by one of the only truly dangerous animals on this land. Taking a stick, I gently lifted the shell to see.

It was not a scorpion, but the long, dried, spiky body of a Palo Verde pod.

Where does the human stop?

Where does the elemental materiality of so-called “Nature” begin?

If there is a world utterly beyond human interpretation, is that where we look for guidance to face and change anthropogenic ecological violence?

But if we have already altered the very climate of the planet, and spread our plastics and radioactive traces across the globe, is there still a “pure” Nature out there to guide us?

Was there ever such a Nature?

How might a dead turtle destabilize the obsolete duality between Human and Nature?

Non-Natural

This essay is an inquiry into the concept of Nature, and the Human who seems to stand outside of Nature.³ When I capitalize ‘Nature’ and ‘Human,’ I am referring to these concepts as they tend to function within modern thought. Instead of arguing for a reconnection between these two opposed terms, I question the terms of the duality in the first place and invite us to explore an ecopolitical spirituality without an idea of Nature. Ungrounded in some pure Nature “out there,” this would be neither a nature-centric spirituality, nor an anthropocentric, humanist spirituality, nor an imagined reunion of the two, but something different—an ecopolitical spirituality ungoverned by an obsolete dualism that no longer serves this earth. By “ecopolitical spirituality” I mean inclusive arrangements of cosmologies, ecologies, rituals, ethical cultivation, and collective, embodied practices that may or may not be associated with a named religious tradition or political movement. Such spiritualities are nonetheless political, working in a variety of ways to remediate, learn-with, protect, occupy, and advocate for both ecological and social justice. Examples could include the Standing Rock encampments, aspects of the Zone to Defend or ZAD in France, and the influence of Indigenous resistance on forestry practices in Bolivia.⁴

Drawing upon a range of contemporary theoretical perspectives, speculative realism, new materialism, posthumanism, world-ecology economics, and ontological anthropology, I am in search of new perspectives for ecopolitical spirituality. I also explore how contemporary spiritual aspects of environmentalism such as neo-animism are at risk of being appropriated and nullified by dominant capitalism. Throughout this essay, I present and amplify a mosaic of interpretations from contemporary theory that not only go beyond the Nature-Human dualism, but gesture towards a different terrestrial perspective.

In what follows, I first rehearse generalized reasons to rethink the concepts of Nature. The next section locates the Nature concept within colonial contexts, and subsequently in terms of an anthropological “provincialization” of

the opposition between Nature and Culture. That is, to make the dualism seem kind of quaint and unique to a specific, and strange civilization called European modernity. I also take stock of the world-ecology view which sees modern, industrial civilization as *too intimate* and *too interwoven* into the material web of life. This essay then turns to collective ecological trauma in the Anthropocene, considering how ecological spiritualities get caught in fantasies of Life in response to such trauma. I then explore a specific case of such a fantasy of Life within capitalist animism in the desert of Australia. In order to tell the story of a radioactive concrete turtle I then briefly take us to the Marshall Islands and conclude with another dead turtle. One who helps us to pull all of these threads together into a set of conclusions that bring us into a short, elemental practice.

Following various signs from these dead turtle shells and other earthly teachers, I inquire into ecopolitical spirituality for these precarious times. Yet this essay is perhaps more of a critical clearing than a concrete set of new views and practices. It is an attempt first to *unlearn* old environmental models, to *listen better* to the earth today.

In brief, although many of us may presume that human beings—a subset of animals—are a part of nature and evolution, the rhetoric of environmental spiritualities often remains consciously or unconsciously rooted in a dualistic vision in which the Human is utterly outside of Nature. This leads to the sense that reverence for Nature and environmental politics must orient towards the preservation of wilderness without a trace of the Human.⁵ However, when we attend to our earth right now—which includes massively distributed human destruction and creation spliced into all levels of ecosystems—it becomes difficult to disentangle this vision into neat binaries; it is far messier and more truly wild than any essentialized concept of Nature will allow. In *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, Jedediah Purdy reminds us that:

There is no place or living thing that we haven't changed. Our mark is on the cycle of weather and seasons, the global map of bioregions, and the DNA that organizes matter into life. It makes no sense now to honor and preserve a nature that is defined by being not human, that is purest in wilderness, rain forests, and the ocean. Instead, in a world we can't help shaping, the question is what we will shape.⁶

Because of this massive anthropic shaping, it is no longer helpful to root ecopolitical spirituality in pure Nature (if it ever was), since such a Nature cannot be found. I do not mean for this perspective to further extend anthropocentric arrogance and exceptionalism, by once again placing human beings in the center of the universe. Instead, I see this post-natural perspective as a humbling recognition of the specific, violent ways industrial civilization has shaped a world

that we cannot help shaping. Anthropogenic contamination is material—we have found non-biodegrading microplastic pollution in every water sample taken from every ocean, including the Arctic.⁷ In this sense, this inquiry into Nature does not come from within a social-constructivist perspective: I am not claiming that the biosphere and various ecosystems are mere cultural or linguistic constructs. Rather, I am interested in the materiality of entanglements and objects and turtle shells, not just in their representations. Furthermore, environmental historians and many Indigenous ecologists remind us that even before modern industrial impacts, human presence actively shaped ecosystems, altering forests, burning meadows, cultivating crops, and participating in reciprocal relationships with the land.⁸

For example, before the arrival of settler-colonists in the Americas, much of the land has been described as a subtle and complex garden, actively shaped by Indigenous practices over thousands of years.⁹ And today, even our attempts to heal and bioremediate landscapes, create global warming-resistant super-coral, spray sulfur-dioxide into the clouds to prevent warming, and sequester carbon, will not cause a return to an Edenic past but will emerge as something new.¹⁰ Whether this novelty will be beautiful and self-organizing, or monstrous and self-replicating, it will surely be different from idealized pure Nature. I am seeking an ecological spirituality that accommodates such difference. I am in search of an ecological spirituality that honors the ways in which ecosystems have agency and creativity in responding to climate mutations. That is, rather than regarding the earth as a passive object that is simply damaged by industrial ecocide, it is possible to see how the earth is also shaping humans, and actively participating in metamorphoses.

At its heart this essay is an invitation to fall in love with this earth *as it is* and stay in relationship with this earth *as it changes*. If environmental spirituality cares only for a nostalgic idea of Nature, and not the earth as it is, we will be in relationship with mere fantasy and miss the elementality as it extends towards us—like a dead turtle. As with any relationship, it matters when we allow and revere someone as they are.

My sense is that there is a need to further prepare an ecopolitical spirituality for what is coming and already here: extinction, floods, privatized water, choking pollution, climactic feedback loops, wildfire-scorched and blasted noxious landscapes, extreme heat and flight from drought zones, and racialized, thirst-driven violence. For centuries, communities who have suffered most under colonialist brutality and capitalist expansion—especially Black, Indigenous, and communities of color as well as women who were often holders of earth-based knowledge—have been fighting for ecological justice inseparable from their own survival.¹¹ Now, the altered climate, pandemics, drought, and

wildfires are increasingly encroaching on the wealthy and dominant classes that have largely caused the destruction. This is a time to share in contamination, rather than base ecological spirituality on escape, bypassing the earth, or hiding behind border walls. This will be an ecological spirituality without (an old idea of) Nature.

I want to confess here that I am attached to the idea of Nature. It is not easy for me to inquire into its limits. I savor the time I spend alone in the forest, mountains, and desert. As a meditation teacher the idea of Nature allows me to move seamlessly from contemplative instructions on “being natural” and “resting in an uncontrived naturalness” to ecological invitations to “be closer to Nature.” The Dzogchen, Zen, and Daoist traditions in which I have immersed myself are particularly attuned to such a rhetoric of naturalness, although as far as I can tell, the specific double-entendre exists only in European languages, and not at all in the many Asian terms. The proximity between contemplative naturalness and the spontaneous unfolding of natural processes also weaves a politics into contemplative life: If we can cultivate more naturalness, perhaps we can help reorient society towards earth’s cycles. While all of this seems helpful and evocative, I want to unearth some of the presumptions about Nature that seem to be foundational to this rhetoric. The devastating material reality of the earth today no longer provides the same context that some traditions presume. At the same time, I do not want to expunge the concept of naturalness from our contemplative vocabularies; instead, I wish to invite such naturalness in new forms situated within mutation, loss, and global warming—to welcome participation in the earth in which we find ourselves.

Thankfully, such participation will also celebrate that which sustains earth’s evolving beauty and brilliance even amidst degradation. There are still thriving habitats that are all-the-more precious as they change or disappear. As Robin Wall-Kimmerer reminds us, “Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy.”¹² Ecosystems’ capacity for regeneration and self-healing is extraordinary and goes far beyond any human technological capacity: when we stop polluting, deforesting, overfishing, and extracting, many bioregions are able to restore themselves. Whatever happens to dominant globalized society, life will likely continue to grow and change on planet Earth for a long, long time. Our practices should encourage falling in love with place and should learn from and protect all that we can, including promoting land and water regeneration, phasing out pesticides and plastics, and localizing our food systems, among other practices. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we should abandon struggles to block gas pipelines and challenge the fossil-fuel petrochemical industry (as I edit this I am on a train to a large fossil-fuel protest). We should develop just, alternative energy sources

attuned to local ecosystems, marginalized peoples, and Indigenous sovereignty. This inquiry into the non-natural is not at all about giving up or simply adapting, but about unleashing potentials that remain constrained by outdated concepts of Nature. Human and nonhuman peoples need an ecopolitical spirituality that can thrive anywhere in the mutating skin of earth—whether deemed natural or desecrated. In other words, if our spiritual politics depends on an essentialized Nature, we will be lost.

Varieties of “Indigenous worldviews,” Buddhist, Daoist, Abrahamic, or other complex ways of knowing, describe a journey into the proverbial desert, forest, or mountains, a wandering away from the human-built environment, to receive a vision or attune to the teachings of the more-than-human world.¹³ Reflected in moon, mountains, rivers, and the sunlit sky, the “nature of awareness” and the “divine mystery” are often expressed through metaphors from the natural world. According to Zen teacher Dōgen, mountains and rivers *are* sūtras (sacred texts).¹⁴ Yet we now live in a world in which there is no “pure Nature,” separate from the impacts of agribusiness fertilizers, plastic residue, climate alteration, genetically modified fish, and radioactive traces.¹⁵ Are we ready to read these sūtras? In what mountains or “desert of the real” shall we find our way?

Our age calls for new spiritual metaphors. Mountains, moon, and desert are always available; they just might not be what we expect. And they never have been. There is a need for new rituals based on the spliced multispecies sympoiesis of inevitable contamination. For instance, communities in places ranging from the burning Amazon and Pantanal in Brazil, to new concrete sprawl in Hangzhou, China, to the oil-saturated rivers of Ogoniland in the Niger Delta, to the refugee neighborhoods living near Superfund sites in Newark, New Jersey have had no choice but to root into a toxic space. The geophysical reality of our earth often calls for a non-natural, living contemplation that “stays with the trouble.”¹⁶

Though this inquiry questions some sacred eco cows, I trust that we may still write poems in fresh desert silence in the world to come and I long to celebrate in convivial symbiotic solidarity with all life and nonlife on our gorgeous, sacred planet. After all, globalized capitalist peoples are not the first forced to discover hybrid political spiritualities amidst cultural and ecological violence—and may not be the last.¹⁷ So it is a good time to ask about a terrestrial spirituality without a grounding in an ideology of Nature, an ecological spirituality that listens to dead turtles, and more. Contemplating these questions now, when we still can, serves the peoples to come and responds creatively to the grief and longing of living and dying fully in our rapidly mutating home. Let’s not give

up out of fear, let's not cling to nostalgic hope, let us stay with what is. Love this world.

Denaturalizing Nature

Much environmental thinking tends to agree upon a story to explain our ecological crises: the story of the dualistic severing of Human society from the Natural world. Whether deriving from Biblical notions of Man given dominion over other creatures, or ancient Greek devaluations of natural bodies in favor of rational ideas, there are various origin stories of the split between Human and Nature. Inheriting this split—the story goes—modern humanity conceived of itself as not just separate, but as the highest form of life on earth, justified in dominating all. There is a ground floor called Nature, and then an ascendent penthouse called Humanity. From these heights, the Humans enact an anthropocentrism which colonizes and objectifies the living planet, reducing it to mere dead resource. Such a diagnosis tends to lead to a proposed remedy: we must “reconnect with nature,” healing the dualistic division by descending back to the ground, and once again see Nature as an animate, living whole. This is a spiritual as well as a political task.

Despite its simplicity and familiarity, this Romantic environmentalist story cleaves to the very dualities that it seeks to overcome. It begins and ends with two reified and fragmented dimensions: one called Nature and the other called Human. We are then left asking about their relation and how the two may be harmoniously reunited or correlated.

However, as influential anthropologist Phillipe Descola reminds us, the idea that we live in a two-story building in which the bottom floor is Nature and the top floor is Human culture is not the only way to divide up reality. In his influential *Beyond Nature and Culture*, he writes, “the opposition between nature and culture is not as universal as it is claimed to be.”¹⁸ He shows that with people from the Amazon to the tundra of the far north to the Pacific islands, from the Gobi Desert of Mongolia to the plains of India, a dualism between Nature and Culture is not to be found. Almost no cultures even have a word comparable to the European ‘Nature.’ In the Buddhist traditions with which I am most familiar, for example, there is not an obviously analogous, single term or concept. The assumption that there is one dimension called Nature and another dimension called Culture or Human has prevented the acknowledgement of a “pluriversality” of worlds in which many humans live in relation with *people* known as plants, animals, mountains, and deserts. Descola seeks to “provincialize” the modern opposition between Nature and Culture. That is, to make it seem kind of quaint and unique to a specific, and strange

civilization called European modernity. A blunt way to say this might be “Nature” is not natural: the *concepts* of Nature and Culture were concretized by modern Europeans. The Nature-Human binary is just one way of dividing up the world. Countless other ways abound.

Specifically, he names four other ways, or four other ontologies, based on the relation between interiority (mind, consciousness, soul) and physicality (bodies). First, we could have sameness of both interiority and physicality, and he calls this totemism. This would be an ontology in which human beings and non-human beings such as rock formations or reptiles share analogous physical bodies and interior ways of knowing, dissolving boundaries between human and non-human. Physical turtles could be our ancestors in totemism. Second, we could have differences in physical bodies but sameness of interiority, and he calls this animism. Here it is the animating soul or spirit that is shared across different bodies, allowing for humans to identify with the spirit of a peccary, a woolly monkey, or a dog. This again removes any two-part opposition between a realm called Nature and a realm called the Human: things are more fluid and shared. Third, some peoples express an ontology in which both interiority and physicality are different, and he calls this analogism. This is a worldview in which all bodies and beings are different, but meaningfully related in a “great chain of being.”

Finally, we have what Descola calls naturalism, which is the exclusive modern view that physical objects, plants, and animals “out there” are devoid of any interiority and only share with us physicality, or materiality. On top of Nature there is an additional phenomenon called Culture, which supposedly only Humans have. It is only this modern European view which presumes a definitive split between Nature and Culture.

I am rehearsing Descola’s research here to make a simple point: the idea that environmentalism should be based on “reuniting” Humanity with Nature operates from within the specific, modern European ontology which opposed two realms in the first place. Environmentalism then somehow wants to bring the two back together. By establishing the ecological task in this way, it also locks our language and thinking into the very binary that we presumed from the start. There is something “out there” called Nature which is the desert, the dead turtle shell, and a Palo Verde pod. Then there is something “in here” called the Human mind. We are left trying to “correlate” the two by bringing them back into harmony. But what if it is precisely this binary, and the very concept of Nature and “the natural” that is part of the endless violence modern civilization enacts on biosystems, waterways, and species? Is it true that the cause of our ecological suffering is because we have separated from something called Nature?

Other diagnoses of environmental ruin are also available. For example, we could instead show that the destruction of habitats is a result of capitalist practices that are too closely woven into our planet. As world-ecologist Jason Moore maintains, “Rather than separate humans from nature, capitalist civilization has enmeshed individual life-activity into a web of life whose interconnections are much denser, more geographically expansive, and more intimate than ever before.”¹⁹ That is, the ecological issue is not that Humanity has *separated from* Nature, but that modern civilization has *enmeshed with* the ecosphere with such increasing intimacy that the very bifurcation of Nature from Human is rendered inoperative. As economic drives swallow and liquify mineral and carbon deposits, remaining boreal forests, countless species of insects, and non-capitalist ways of life, the issue is not one of disconnection from the planet, but of a specific mode of fusion. *Globalized, fossil-fuel based capitalism is too intimate with earth*. This world-ecology perspective is quite distinct from the aspiration to re-unite human society with the natural world because it instead shows how capitalism is always part of the planetary metabolism and could never be separated from it. Perhaps the diagnosis of separation subtly plays into the idea that human actions are somehow autonomous and will not scar and desecrate the planet.

The colonialist practices and epistemes that have formed into our idea of Nature are part of the story of ecological violence. As Timothy Morton pronounced in *Ecology without Nature*, “Environmentalism worries that we are disconnected from the world. But what if one of the problems were this idea itself?”²⁰

The concepts of Nature and Human have a history. When we question the concept of Nature, we simultaneously see that there is no modern Human without the notion of a Natural background from which he (often presumed to be a white male) is distinguished. Similarly, there is no European Civilization without abjected colonized lands; black and brown peoples, images of Africa, the Americas, and the “Orient,” the slave trade, witch hunts, and the non-human animals, plantations, and mines from which the white European male was distinguished. As Moore states,

It’s no coincidence that our familiar words Nature, Society, and European all assumed their present-day meanings in the century or so after 1550; an era of brutal colonization in Ireland and the Americas, murderous witch hunts and the violent regulation of female bodies, the first great boom of the African slave trade, the neocolonial subordination of Poland, interminable warfare, the continental-scale reorganization of Andean life and work, rapid deforestation from Brazil

to the Baltic, and the vigorous spread of sugar plantations across the Western Hemisphere.²¹

Dividing the world into substantial categories such as civilized versus uncivilized, Human versus Nature does not simply create a schism, it establishes and repeats those very concepts. Even attempts to reunite this fracture creates—and holds apart—Nature and Human as the two poles of the division. Yet these categories obscure the ways in which nearly every aspect of living and dying on planet earth is beyond this polarity.

The old language—Nature/Society—has become obsolete. Reality has overwhelmed the binary's capacity to help us track the real changes unfolding, accelerating, amplifying before our eyes. And yet, a new language—one that comprehends the irreducibly dialectical relation between human and extra-human natures in the web of life—has yet to emerge.²²

Novel ecopolitical spiritualities become thinkable from within such a language yet to emerge, a language limning the wild edges of colonialism.²³ Within such a language we will encounter a dead turtle or desert sands or even the water coming from our tap, free from carving up the world into a schism between Human and Nature. What fresh questions and stirrings might dawn if the diagnosis and remedy of ecological damage was different from the standard environmental story, a story that has been repeated for decades? What forms of eco-spirituality would remain without the category of Nature? These questions open-up communication with a dead turtle.

Anxious Life Symptoms in the Anthropocene

The geomaterial interconnections on planet earth are nearing their limit points. Climate feedback loops already set in motion, charred animals, floods, plastic-filled oceans, and virus-laden climate refugee camps: these form our anxious environmental visions in the Anthropocene—a proposed name for our geological age.²⁴ The Anthropocene is a time in which human beings and our technologies are a decisive force on the planet, becoming materialized in the plastics, concrete dust, and radioactive traces now marking earth with an unerasable sedimentary layer. Because human forces shape and influence the entire planet, the Anthropocene “finds its most radical expression in our acknowledgment that the familiar divide between people and the natural world is no longer useful or accurate.”²⁵ Anthropogenic material impact could be read as a geological scar by those who come after us. With Jami Weinstein and

Claire Colebrook, we might wonder: *What questions would a being who arrives after humans have wanted us to pose today?*²⁶

Within the Anthropocene, there is so much dread, just barely covering grief. I cannot believe that the songbirds in my home are dying (North America has lost about three billion—more than a quarter—of its songbirds since 1970) and that 75 percent of coral reefs may die off in my lifetime. It can feel impossible to love what we are losing, and impossible not to. Object Relations psychology and trauma theory make it clear how much human beings require a loving and safe holding environment for our nervous systems. We need specific therapeutics if the very living systems of the planet are not experienced as supportive and trustworthy.²⁷ This need binds the material to the psychological in the Anthropocene.

The immense timescale of our geological age is often invisible to us humans busying through the day, a barely noticed metamorphosis. Yet during global pandemics and with 74,000 square kilometres of eucalyptus forest in southeast Australia, the Pantanal and Amazon regions of Brazil, the Chouf area of Lebanon, taiga forests in Siberia, and huge swaths of the western US scorched or on fire, the presence of climatic transfiguration can at times erupt in felt experience. Two of my closest friends just lost their home in one of the largest fires in Californian history. The pressures of ecological ruin press upon nearly all facets of living and dying on planet earth, rippling through social bodies, economies, and the online news, saturating the very atmosphere of your morning anxiety, before you even open your eyes. This is an age of collective climate trauma.²⁸ Spiritual and psychological responses to this trauma are becoming increasingly necessary.

Such responses should not merely be meant to ease our minds so that many of us can continue to perpetuate the systems and habits that created the disasters in the first place. *They should instead be modes of healing that lead to material and radical reorientations.* All-too-often, eco-spiritualities, eco-psychologies, and eco-dharmas are only focused on our inner, mental health within climate change, and fail to lead to concrete and rebellious, but also material changes. This, too, is a legacy of an opposition between Nature and Human: our spirituality tends to address the inner, human, mind side while abandoning the material Nature side to activism or politics. An ecopolitical spirituality that denaturalizes Nature might help to overcome a binary between the spiritual and the political, between psyche and lands, between the Human and Nature, not by “joining” the two but by living in such a way that a single existential, material tissue is our shared field of practice.²⁹

Increasingly hot and devastated ecosystems are the context in which politics, protest, and psychological experience now take place. Just as political geogra-

phies are “ecologized” by environmental disruptions, calling for a new climate politics, so our psychology and spirituality is ecologized, calling for new forms of political spirituality.³⁰ Any contemporary spirituality that has not faced collective ecological trauma and opened itself to a corresponding transformation of its practices risks its own extinction.

But signs of good news abound in this realm, perhaps, as all around us new expressions of ecological spirituality surge forth. How many of us read the Pulitzer Prize winning *The Overstory*, or *Braiding Sweetgrass*, or *The Hidden Life of Trees* and experienced a palpable shift in perspective, a sense of the animacy and intelligence of the living natural world of which we are a small part?³¹ Not only do we love this earth, but earth is *alive* and loves us back. New expressions of animism and vitalism are now thinkable for modern people, supported in part by the popularization of biological research into the intelligence and emotional life of moss, mycelium, and maples.³² At the crucial Oceti Sakowin Standing Rock encampment, water protectors cried out “water is life, *mni wičóni*.” Resisting the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline braided inseparably with the Sioux women’s early morning water offering to the river. Ecological spiritualities of life emerge in relation with ecological politics.

Life and animacy, like Nature, are defining categories through which to organize thought and action today, so I will hereon capitalize Life as I have capitalized Nature and Human. A “turn to Life” is visible in philosophical vitalism, panpsychism, and feminist new materialism, as well as what is known as the ontological turn in anthropology.³³ For example, this is a conclusion from Jane Bennett’s influential *Vibrant Matter*: “One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world.”³⁴ Notice how the two poles of the binary are subsumed within a story of pervasive vitalism: that we are non-human means that we are pervaded by and dependent upon non-human actors (the bacteria in our guts, an electric grid, etc.) and that the things in the world are vital actors, rather than simply dead matter. Things are alive.

Concern with the figure of Life is also evident in critical political accounts of “biopolitics” (a politics of life) in which power is conceived as operating through the control, organization, and optimization of populations—the power “to make live and let die,” as Foucault wrote.³⁵ By attending to issues such as health, reproduction, and disease security, state and corporate power claim their legitimacy through securing Life.

I see this concern with Life as an extension of the binary opposition between Nature and Human. That is, the story of dualistic separation presumes that Humans have forgotten that Nature is alive and animate. Therefore, by rediscovering the animacy of the earth and all Life, we can help reconnect Hu-

manity with Nature. One of the aims of this essay is to show how even these turns to Life might be reappropriated by dominant capitalism.

Radically emplaced ecopolitical spiritualities are often described as forms of *neo-animism*, in the sense that they see all things—water, mushroom, rock, shark, and raven—as alive, sentient, and sacred. Graham Harvey distinguishes between an older animism defined in colonial anthropological literature as a belief in spirits, on the one hand, and those who use animism “as a shorthand reference to their efforts to re-imagine and redirect human participation in the larger-than-human, multi-species community,” on the other.³⁶ Furthermore, these neo-animisms are often synced-up with a decolonial politics, anti-racist environmental justice, and a concern to learn from Indigenous knowledges.

Yet there is a risk that the new animist ecologies of today are both symptom and diagnosis of the complex scale of entangled, ecological traumas mentioned above. As is so often the case, ethical and spiritual imagination may coil around a fantasy: at precisely the moment when late capitalist human beings have unleashed irreversible damage upon the very ecosystems that sustain us, these Humans suddenly (re)discover that “nature is alive” and that we are in love with the living earth community! I find this beautiful and sad, in part because this way of sensing the living world rings true for me. Yet why is this epiphany, experienced in *different* ways for millennia, dawning in late capitalist society today? Is it a timely revelation of ecological insight at the very moment when we most need it? Or is it the supplement of a fantasy, a traumatic response to help ease our hearts as we try to love what we are losing? I question if this turn to Life materially changes the direction of global capitalist civilization, and am concerned that it may be a coping mechanism for the destruction in which our everyday lives are entangled.

The Animist in the Desert

Let’s explore how this unfolds in another desert location. Two Women Sitting Down is a rock formation sacred to various Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory of Australia.³⁷ In 2013, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority won a lawsuit against mining company OM Manganese Ltd. for significantly damaging the sacred site. The ontological status of these rocks, and the related cluster of economic, legal, and metaphysical questions, provides the perfect opportunity for theorist and anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli to question the power relations of “settler late liberalism” (her term for the dominant arrangement of power today).³⁸ Is this rock formation animate and alive? Who owns the site and who owns the ways of thinking that determine how to understand Life and nonlife? The answers to such questions matter.

To this day, the conception that a rock formation might be alive has little power against a mining company's rights. Some of the Aboriginal people Povinelli works with see manganese as the "blood" of Two Women Sitting Down.³⁹ In fact, it is possible that manganese mined near Two Women Sitting Down shipped to China in 2009 caused 1,300 children to suffer extreme lead poisoning from breathing toxic air from a Chinese manganese smelting factory.⁴⁰

Povinelli describes the tactics and strategies through which these people have navigated "the cramped spaces" of colonialist capitalist occupation, while still maintaining a world in which Two Women Sitting Down might bleed, speak, and listen. In this sense, Povinelli is concerned with the perdurance of a non-modern metaphysics that challenges the Human/Nature Life/Nonlife binaries, right within settler capitalist occupation.

Yet Povinelli is wary to simply associate this Indigenous metaphysics with the popular neo-animism and vitalism in contemporary theory. To describe the global forms of power that operate today, she names three figures: the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus. The Desert is the figure of inert Nonlife, death, and desertification. The Animist represents Life and animacy. The Virus stands for the tense relationship between both Life and Nonlife. I will focus on the Animist. We should clarify in advance that Povinelli's figure of the Animist does not stand in for actual Indigenous spiritualities. Instead, it represents a facet of power and imagination in today's settler late liberalism. This Animist also stands for the vital materialisms of today's theory.

The Animist represents the attempt to blur any distinction between Life and nonlife by claiming that anything has the potential to be vital. Nonlife is not death; it is that which is not vital; it is extinction as well as the time before there was a split between life and death. Undoing the schism between life and death, the Animist conquers nonlife by expanding Life everywhere. "The new animism is extending Life into all entities and assemblages."⁴¹

Today's capitalism animates the world by transforming everything into commodities. Paradoxically, this is the opposite of the expected sense in which we see capitalism as the killer and destroyer of life. Instead, power comes from claiming to foster thriving and Life. Think of greenwashing. Many corporations today—even climate destroying fossil-fuel companies—want to appear Green and present themselves with images of resilient communities, clean skies, lush green meadows, etc. To support this animating tendency, capitalist ideologies claim images that align with Life. The Animist is a figure who wants to bring everything to life, to see value in the world as green, resilient, and animate.⁴²

Such capitalist animism devalues vast stretches of this cosmos that are not about human life or Green life or growing profits. In other words, manganese has no voice and no agency of its own within capitalist Animism. It is not

allowed to be nonlife: the rocks are forced into familiar senses of Life and profit-value. Today's environmental spirituality may be in part a traumatic symptom of late settler power, seeking to bring everything into what we Humans value, protecting us from the Desert. The Animist doesn't simply widen the circle of animacy, but suppresses a fear:

The Animist says, Life no longer needs to face its terror—the lifeless, the inert, and the void of being—because we can simply refuse to acknowledge the existence of any form of being other than our own... we can saturate Being with familiar and reassuring qualities.⁴³

In this way, capitalist animism might seize upon a beautiful longing for a living world and distort it by means of our fear of what exceeds the familiar. Like many of the most profound apophatic mysticisms, ecological spirituality should include nonlife and the “void of being,” bravely extending beyond Green comforts, facing our fear. When listening for elemental communication from the land to help guide humanity in the years to come, how do we not force the desert and the dead turtle shell into the categories of Life that are mere familiar products of the lifestyles to which we have become accustomed? Our earth is not just alive; it is also death and nonlife.

Finally, this same fear that seeks to animate all of being can turn back towards our own bodies. Although I will not have space to fully explore his thinking here, I want to at least gesture towards philosopher and postcolonial theorist Joseph-Achille Mbembe's observation that a feature of late capitalism is its “return to animism.”⁴⁴ Mbembe has recently warned against the ways that capitalist animism forces modern peoples to subjectify themselves by *animating* themselves, turning human bodies and spiritualities into commodities.

Radioactive Concrete Turtle

Let's learn from another dead turtle shell. After dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, bringing an end to World War II, and initiating the Cold War, the US infamously exploded 67 nuclear and thermonuclear blasts in Bikini Atoll, the Marshall Islands, between 1946 and 1958. Radioactivity, nuclear debris, displaced indigenous residents, contaminated coastal seas and fisheries still haunt the islands. Entirely obliterating four of the 40 islands that make up Enewetak Atoll, nuclear blasts also left two gaping craters on Runit Island. As Karen Barad tells the tale:

In the late 1970s, the US government, in the process of washing its hands of the radioactive mess they left in the Marshall Islands, did a rudimentary “clean up.” Four thousand US servicemen were de-

ployed to the Marshall Islands to do the dirty work, which included putting hundreds of pieces of plutonium, the debris of a detonation gone wrong, into plastic bags and throwing them into the crater, along with other nuclear debris from the tests. This constituted a “cleanup” of approximately 0.8 percent of the total radioactive waste. The servicemen had no protective gear or education about handling nuclear waste. The crater, which is made of coral, a very porous material, was then covered over by a dome of concrete.⁴⁵

This farce of a cleanup left behind a 377-foot 18-inch-thick dome comprised of rectangular and square segments. Uncannily, the dome looks like a *giant, dead concrete turtle shell*.

In part because of their long lifespans and in part because of their diet of sea algae and grasses that bioaccumulate radioactivity, the sea turtles around the Marshall Islands carry extremely toxic traces of radioactivity. People native to these islands have abandoned eating turtles and many sea creatures, often living instead off Spam and other prepackaged meats shipped in from outside.⁴⁶

Sea turtles are also sacred to many islanders and in some places are considered taboo, to be eaten only by priests as a food of the gods. Sea turtles can swim both above and below the water and are therefore seen to transcend the boundaries between worlds, and between life and death.⁴⁷ Sometimes playing a totemic role as way to organize human society, turtles cross between the sea and social life and feature prominently in Marshall Island political traditions and arts.

The non-natural ecopolitical spiritualities to come might listen to, attend to, and attune to the teaching of a concrete turtle shell as much as attuning to the moon, an old growth forest, or a raven. What are the spiritual teachings of this radioactive sculpture marking the Anthropocene, a materialized metaphor for the injustices that poison the waterscapes, islands, and deserts of planet earth, the traces of war, the turtle-shaped child of our atomic age?

Turtle at the End

Around the time I began work on this essay, my family and I traveled to Sandbridge Island in Virginia. One day, as we sat on the beach, we saw what looked like a large clump of dark seaweed floating just beyond the waves crashing ashore. One of us swam out and pulled it in. As we walked closer to have a look, I saw that it was a massive, dead sea turtle. Before it died, the turtle must have been many decades old. A huge crack in the turtle’s coppery, dark brown-jade shell exposed soft, cream-colored flesh flowing out into the sea, most likely struck by a metal boat propeller strong enough to shatter the old plated dome.

The flat, curved flippers moved gently as the waves washed around the turtle, making the dead body appear to swim. Also moving with the waves, the turtle's large black neck like a fleshy accordion gave the further impression of being alive. Yet this turtle was dead. Never completely washing back to sea, as the huge turtle drifted down the beach, we could hear children shouting for their parents to come look. Rather than remove the turtle in some way, we thought it best to let this dead, shelled body continue to teach the humans vacationing on the sea...

Following the teachings of these dead turtles, we could draw out a few possible (dis)orientations for an emerging ecopolitical spirituality:

It is a time to love the earth as it is and as it changes, not merely as we wish to remember it;

The categories and the relations between Nature, Life, and the Human are remnants from a colonial metaphysics that is metamorphosing in the Anthropocene;

The framework of "reconnecting" the Human and Nature may no longer serve ecopolitical spirituality today;

Ecopolitical spiritualities should participate in material transformations, not simply "inner" change;

Spiritual responses arise in part as a symptom of collective ecological trauma. Sensitive to the ways in which fantasy might suppress rather than heal this trauma, we should see how power appropriates our longing and grief in new formations;

Emerging spiritualities such as neo-animism could learn from theoretical critiques of capitalist animism;

If our ecopolitical spiritual approaches seek only the Green life that is familiar to modern consumer humans, we would do better to attend to the nonlife that makes up much of our universe, not just the universe-for-us;⁴⁸

The above is part of a new language in which spirituality is materially situated in the existential tissue called earth: an earth that is not Nature.

So how might we cultivate ecopolitical spiritualities free from capitalist animism and Natural Life? How might we learn from the teachings of dead turtles?

I will not attempt to directly answer such questions here at the end, instead trusting that some of what I have written might open the way for different, and perhaps non-natural modes of ecopolitical spirituality, contaminated by the miraculous planet as it is. Instead, I will close by describing a slight mutation

of an elemental practice adapted from the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition, to exemplify how the critique and possibilities offered above might be practicable. I aspire to develop this hint further.

Try going out to a source of polluted or clean water in the middle of your city or out on the land near where you live. Sit near the water source, audible sewer system, waste-water recycling plant, or contaminated flowing river; close your eyes and listen to the sound and let it saturate your awareness. Feel the flow of water in your own body, veins, and organs. When you are there, find and toss small smooth rocks, clods of clay, or broken asphalt, back and forth. Close your eyes and listen to their sound as they slap against your palm. Gaze at rocks, pavement, concrete, or glass buildings—whatever is around—and breathe softly; touch their materiality and sense the solidity of earth, analogous to your own bones. Then, perhaps at another place, stare into a fire, furnace, or a methane flare from a fracking well and feel its heat inside you, analogous to the warmth of your own body. Later, lay on your back in a field, a rooftop, or in a park when the sun is behind you and stare into the open blue sky, or the smog and smoke-filled firmament, letting your breath dissolve out into the vastness, like the spaciousness of your mind at ease.

And here is a key point: engage these practices without the categories of Nature, Human, or Life; release any notion of a “pure nature;” free yourself of the sense that there are two opposed and distinct entities called Nature and Human that need to merge; suspend the sense that society or culture are severed from ecosystems. Let go of the concept that all is either alive or dead. Rest in the potent, elemental freedom from the categories that have defined modern industrial civilization. Listen and feel the material trace that remains. Hear the teachings of the dead turtles.

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currently developing what he calls “four fields” of contemplative practices for potential worlds.

NOTES

1. On non-human agency and actors see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime* (Polity, 2018), and Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).
2. Correlationism is the term coined by speculative realist philosopher Quentin Meillassoux to refer to philosophies that follow from Kant’s division of the noumenal world (which is “really out there” for itself), from the phenomenal world, (which is the world as experienced and perceived “by humans”). Some contemporary philosophy rejects the trap of this correlationism and attempts to speculate on the real itself. For a good overview, see Graham Harman, *Speculative Realism: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018). Timothy Morton’s ecological philosophy comes from a speculative realist intuition, see *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
3. A critique of the concept of Nature is nothing new in philosophy of science and ecological thought, especially for feminist thinkers. For an early review see Judith Genova’s article, “Tiptree and Haraway: The Reinvention of Nature,” *Cultural Critique* No. 27 (Spring, 1994), 5-27. See also Hasana Sharp and Chloë Taylor, eds. *Feminist Philosophies of Life* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016); An influential critique of the Nature-Human relation is in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995). For a revealing history of the Western philosophy of Nature see Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). For a groundbreaking critique of Nature aesthetics with implications for ecology, see Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Within Ecopsychology, Andy Fisher’s *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life; Second Edition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), has sought to overcome divisions between psyche, nature, and society since the 90s.
4. See Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon, eds., *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). On the ZAD, see S.G. and G.K., “ZAD: The State of Play,” trans. Janet Koenig, *The Brooklyn Rail*, July 4, 2018, <https://brooklynrail.org/2018/07/field-notes/ZAD-The-State-of-Play>. On Bolivian forestry see Michael J Dockry and Nancy Langston, “Indigenous Protest and the Roots of Sustainable Forestry in Bolivia,” *Environmental History* 24, no. 1 (2018): 52-77.
5. On the concepts of ‘untouched nature’ and ‘wild’ see Gary Snyder’s seminal essay, “The Etiquette of Freedom” in *The Practice of the Wild* (NY: North Point Press, 1990) as well as Cronon’s critique, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground*, in which he historicizes the ideal of the wild within Romantic and American images of the sublime and the frontier. See also Rebecca Solnit’s *Savage lands...* As I wrote this sentence a yellow butterfly flew all around my computer.

6. Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 3.
7. Peter S. Ross et al., "Pervasive Distribution of Polyester Fibres in the Arctic Ocean Is Driven by Atlantic Inputs," *Nature Communications* 12, no. 1 (December 2021).
8. For a classic statement on humans actively molding landscapes in the Americas see Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). See also Enrique Salmón, *Eating the Landscape* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2012).
9. Ibid.
10. Elizabeth Kolber, *Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future* (New York: Penguin, 2021).
11. Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury, "Worlding beyond 'the' 'End' of 'the World': White Apocalyptic Visions and BIPOC Futurisms," *International Relations* 34, no. 3 (2020): 309-332.
12. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Canada: Milkweed Editions, 2013).
13. I place "Indigenous worldviews" in scare quotes to resist the now-prominent assumption that there is a single, universal Indigenous worldview as opposed to the literally thousands of different and sometimes-conflicting perspectives within the vast range of Indigenous communities. See David Chandler and Julian Reid, *Becoming Indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International), 2019. David R. Loy's *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis* (Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018), explores the importance of the non-human-built environment.
14. See Graham Parkes, "Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology," in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection between Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997).
15. Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
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17. Mitchell and Chaudhury, "Worlding beyond 'the' 'End' of 'the World'".
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20. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 482.
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24. For an assessment of the Anthropocene trope see Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), and Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018). Recent critiques of the term 'anthropocene' have come from Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Returning the Gift," *Center for Humans & Nature*, 2014, <https://www.humansandnature.org/>

- returning-the-gift, Donna Haraway: *Staying with the Trouble*, and Andreas Malm and Alf Hornberg, "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," *The Anthropocene Review*, 1, no 1: 62-69. There are numerous alternative proposed terms which may be more accurate, (Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Cthulucene). I appreciate Anna L. Tsing's suggestion that the term Anthropocene is useful if it opens perspectives and inspires conversations, which it does.
25. Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*.
 26. Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook, eds., *Posthumous Life, Theorizing Beyond the Post-human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
 27. This may not only be a modern issue within the Anthropocene, for we need not presume that non-modern cultures experience ecosystems as supportive and trustworthy: they may seem unstable, violent, and threatening.
 28. Zhiwa Woodbury, "Climate Trauma: Toward a New Taxonomy of Trauma," *Ecopsychology* 11, no. 1 (2019): 1-8.
 29. I do not want to claim that the distinctions between Nature/Human and Outer/Inner are identical. There are certainly some non-modern and non-European philosophies that distinguish between Inner and Outer that do not uphold the strong Human/Nature binary, as is evident for example, in much of Indian philosophy. Nonetheless, I see a kind of family resemblance between a Cartesian duality which bifurcates the *cogito* from the *res extensa* and the notion of the Human subject separated from, and dominant over, the outer Natural world. For a thorough description of psychology embedded in the natural world, see Andy Fischer, *Radical Ecopsychology*.
 30. On the ecologization of politics see Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).
 31. Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (New York: WW Norton and Co, 2018); Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; and Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees* (Vancouver and NY: Greystone Books, 2015).
 32. For often cited examples, see Suzanne W. Simard et al., "Net Transfer of Carbon between Ectomycorrhizal Tree Species in the Field," *Nature* 388, no. 6642 (1997): 579-582; Monika A. Gorzelak et al., "Inter-Plant Communication through Mycorrhizal Networks Mediates Complex Adaptive Behaviour in Plant Communities," *AoB Plants* 7 (2015). See also John Gardiner, "Insights into Plant Consciousness from Neuroscience, Physics and Mathematics: A Role for Quasicrystals?," *Plant Signaling & Behavior* 7, no. 9 (2012): 1049-1055. Kimmerer's *Gathering Moss* is another popular eco-spiritual and scientific text.
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 36. Graham Harvey, *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (London and NY: Routledge, 2013), 2.
 37. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Duke University Press, 2016). Povinelli has lived in community with numerous Aboriginal groups, especially

- those of Belyuen in the Northern Territory.
38. Ibid.
 39. Ibid., 31
 40. Ibid., 44
 41. Ibid., 34.
 42. This is close to Adrian Parr's Foucauldian concept of Green governmentality in Adrian Parr, *Birth of a New Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) 41.
 43. Ibid., 55
 44. Joseph-Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
 45. Karen Barad, "After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice," *Theory and Event* 22, no. 3 (July, 2019), 524-550.
 46. Ingrid Ann Ahlgren, "The Meaning of MO: Place, Power and Taboo in the Marshall Islands" (PhD Dissertation, Australian National University, 2016).
 47. Ibid., 136.
 48. This is perhaps but an extension of the original insight of Deep Ecology: ecology is not just about human well-being but the value inherent in the earth.



Recreating Our Communities to Respond to the Climate Emergency

KERI E. IYALL SMITH

SOMETIMES IN SLOW MOTION, other times in time lapse, climate change is underway. People are already experiencing the ill effects of climate change, and if we fail to act quickly things will only become more dire. In one stark example, the town of Kivalina in Alaska is at risk of being washed away by the sea, and efforts are underway to relocate the community.¹ The Inuit Circumpolar Conference has been gathering data on climate change for decades as they seek to preserve their right to be cold.² Forest fires now burn in Alaska—some burn all year, going underground as “zombie fires” during the winter. Beyond the rapid changes in the Arctic, change is underway at lower latitudes as well: Cities in Florida now routinely experience sunny day coastal flooding as a result of high tides. Communities must be ready to adapt to a rapidly evolving natural environment.

Indigenous nations such as the Western Apache in the United States have witnessed changes in the natural world around them in the past, and they have learned to adapt.³ A place called Snakes’ Water is dry today, but at the time of its naming it was an active spring. Western Apache people know that water used to flow there because of the place name: “The names do not lie... They show what is different and what is the same.”⁴ The land and climates have changed before for Indigenous peoples, who can often trace the history of their habitation back thousands of years. Indigenous Peoples have adapted to previous climate and natural changes, and they are well-equipped to do so successfully again.

The Western Apache are not the only nation with this experience: “Indigenous peoples have lived through environmental collapse on local and regional levels since the beginning of colonialism.”⁵ Elders have cautioned about societ-

ies rooted in conquering—not only of people but of nature—emphasizing that conquering nature is not sustainable.⁶ What happens when people try to conquer nature? Actions that seek to conquer nature are actions that regard nature as an object to be utilized. For example, the extraction of oil is an action that seeks to conquer nature. People and corporations drill for oil, send it through pipelines, and burn the fossil fuels to create energy for economic benefits. But oil—the fossilized remains of those who were our relatives⁷—is not consulted in the process; our relatives' permission is not sought. The seeming conquering of this resource is false—oil is slippery and escapes its confines in the pipelines. The land, water, and air that oil pollutes becomes carcinogenic. Oil burns dirty and emits carbons and particulate matter. Yet this practice of conquering and controlling nature is one that settler colonialism brought with it and has sought to position as the norm. There are myriad other examples of attempts to conquer nature: industrial farming, fish farms, arboreal forest clearcutting, and the entombing of nuclear waste, to name a few. The result of these attempts to conquer nature are a natural environment that is maximized for capitalist development with little regard for the consequences of the conquest.

Indigenous Peoples have lived in these territories since time immemorial. Western science now dates Indigenous Peoples' occupation in what is today the United States at least nineteen thousand years.⁸ Over hundreds of years, the climate has changed many times, both with and without human intervention. Indigenous Peoples also have experience with social upheaval and breakdown, which occurred during the genocidal era of European expansion and colonialism. As Indigenous communities experienced large numbers of deaths from violence and illness, new communities formed among those who remained.⁹ Indigenous Peoples have written their own survival narrative. In a time of climate precarity, people living in the United States and beyond must be ready to write our own survival narratives, nimbly reshaping our communities, reconfiguring our norms and values, and cultivating a willingness to embrace radical change. Indigenous Peoples' participation in these processes affirms their presence and thriving in these lands and allows them to inform the work of remaking our social, economic, and political institutions. In particular, changes to the economy, conceptions of community, and decision-making processes will be essential.

To explain my own interests in these topics, I credit my teachers for nurturing my passion for the environment and nature. I still very vividly remember reading the definition of “environment” in a textbook in first grade. I am also an Indigenous woman, an enrolled member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, located in what is today Western Washington State. Like the majority of Indigenous Americans, I was raised and now live in an urban environment, not on a reser-

vation. My family maintains ties to the land and our tribe. The Iyall family has a long history of political participation within the Cowlitz tribe and activism pushing for federal and state-level reforms. Finding a strong pan-Indigenous community at the University of Washington, along with a supportive community of “Minorities” (as we were known in the 1990s), allowed me to deepen my knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and my identity as an Indigenous person. These communities supported me in my pursuit of post-graduate education in Sociology. I went into Sociology intentionally, wanting to situate my work as an Indigenous scholar within a traditional academic discipline.

I have seen Indigenous people from around the world asserting the essential role of Traditional Knowledge in responding to climate change at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Under colonialism, “the people have endured the pain of being bystanders to the degradation of their lands, but they never surrendered their caregiving responsibilities.”¹⁰ After decades as bystanders, Indigenous people are demanding the right to care for and protect the lands. While there is the risk of appropriation and exploitation by non-Indigenous actors, many argue that Traditional Knowledge from Indigenous people has a vital role in the global and local responses to climate change.¹¹ As people who are Indigenous to the territory, we have the knowledge and relationships that will be needed to effectively respond to climate change. To protect our homelands, along with the human and more-than-human-beings¹² who live there, Indigenous individuals insist on participating in the work to build a robust response that recreates economies and communities that are diverse and participatory. In particular, Indigenous Peoples offer knowledge that can reshape economies and recreate communities that are diverse, inclusive, and participatory.

Rejecting Capitalism

The logic of capitalism drives the colonial era, spreading profit-seeking, for the purpose of growing individual wealth, and the extraction of labor for low wages or no wages. This logic promoted Indigenous dispossession of land and primitive accumulation—the appropriation of lands by Europeans.¹³ Rejecting older narratives that explain colonialism as either the result of a desire to find out if the earth is round or a desire to commit genocide, Truer states that “Columbus sailed west for money. The colonists came for money and they stayed for money.”¹⁴ Taking the lands was deeply harmful to Indigenous Peoples and their lifeways, not because it robbed them of property, but because it perpetrated an “apocalyptic devastation on our lands and plant and animal relations.”¹⁵ Colonial pillage continues to this day, with rapid deforestation in Canada,

mining for resources in harder-to-reach places in South America, the push for oil and gas extraction in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge and Chaco Canyon in the U.S., and beyond.

Reactions against scarcity narratives and unchecked capitalism are on the rise, articulated by politicians such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, Ilhan Omar, Cori Bush, and many others within and beyond the U.S., who instead advocate for equality and community building. Within the capitalist system lie assumptions that justify poverty and inequality. We come to see poverty and inequality as due to a scarcity of resources, rather than being due to the way that resources are distributed. But is there really not enough money to pay for health care for everyone? College education for everyone? Food for everyone? Homes for everyone? Can we redistribute resources to attend to the needs of the impoverished, responding to poverty as if it is a policy failure, not a personal failure?

The potlatch tradition in the Pacific Northwest was a tradition of the redistribution of resources. Gatherings held to witness landmark events such as the birth of a child or weddings ended in a giveaway. The host of the potlatch would give away everything that they owned. The guests left with gifts from the host as a way to honor their presence at the event—their witnessing the transition or life milestone. This redistribution of wealth was not codified in law; it was simply what people did. Examples of these practices can be found across the continent of North America—from the potlatches in the Pacific Northwest to the powwows on the Plains. Among the over 500 nations of Indigenous Peoples, several specific nations such as the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe also have normative systems that discourage the concentration of wealth. Indigenous Peoples prioritize the welfare of everyone in the community over the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Historian Nick Estes underscores the relational aspect: “There are class relations, and there are kinship relations. Kinship—human or otherwise—is radical solidarity. The class system creates strangers among relatives; it makes kinship coercive (i.e., heteropatriarchy) or annihilates kin entirely.”¹⁶ Indigenous Peoples have anticapitalist practices in their past—indeed, they lived without capitalism for centuries—and in their futures. Anti-capitalism is a component of their relationship to land, and vice versa.¹⁷

While trade and exchange pre-existed settler colonialism, as well as the surplus production of goods, Indigenous societies did not follow the capitalist form of economic exchange, which prioritizes surplus wealth development that is primarily owned by a few elites. Indeed, the idea of selling land and the non-humans that live on land would break the law, because “the majority of Indigenous societies, conceives that we (humans) are made from the land; our

flesh is literally an extension of the soil.”¹⁸ Selling the earth is “tantamount to selling yourself... It’s just not allowed. Let me put it another way – it’s unconstitutional. It is against the law – it’s illegal.”¹⁹ While pre-colonial Indigenous societies generally rejected the idea of owning land and nature, in the Northwest region of the U.S. there was ownership of “the rights to local resources such as fishing, berrying, and hunting grounds.”²⁰ The ownership of the right to resources demonstrates that there was a tradition of ownership in at least some pre-colonial Indigenous cultures, but it is distinct from the capitalist ownership that constitutes the private possession of things.

The alternative to settler-colonialism’s extraction and accumulation that is identified by Simpson is deep reciprocity, which takes the form of respect, relationships, and responsibility: “My Ancestors didn’t accumulate capital, they accumulated networks of meaningful, deep, fluid, intimate collective and individual relations of trust.”²¹ Note that these relationships and responsibilities, and the respect given, are not only for humans—they are for all of the natural world. Reciprocal relationships among human and more-than-human kin are identified and examined by many scholars.²² Simpson gives examples of tribal communities leaning on each other for support in times of famine or other hardship and notes that there were normative practices of the redistribution of wealth within communities, such as the inclusion of giveaways at ceremonies and the sharing of harvests and hunting.

“In daily life, greed, or the accumulation of capital, was seen as an assault against the collective because it offended the spirits of the plant and animal nations that made up our people cosmos, and therefore put Nishnaabeg at risk. “Capital” in our reality isn’t capital. We have no such thing as capital. We have relatives. We have clans. We have treaty partners. We do not have resources or capital.”²³

Respect for more-than-human-beings²⁴—sometimes called the personhood of all beings²⁵ or non-human beings²⁶—is an essential component of the lifeways of the Métis, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, the Haudenosaunee, and many other Indigenous nations. Reciprocity mandates asking before harvesting plant and animal life, sustainable harvesting of natural resources, thoughtful use of the gift of nature, and thankful and prayerful bearing in the world.²⁷ Excessive harvest and extraction blocks good relationships, as it shows a lack of regard for more-than-human-beings.

The development of a capitalist system, and the excess that comes along with it, would be a violation of ethics regarding both how people relate to each other and to nature in many Indigenous cultures. Accumulation of excess threatens equality within a community, and it also threatens the sustainability of community members’ lifeways. Today’s greed and excess demands more

resources, threatening the long-term viability of natural resources, particularly those resources that take time to renew. Indigenous Peoples' stories discourage greed, accumulation of wealth, and taking too many plants or animals, while also encouraging everyone to contribute and share.²⁸ These stories run counter to the profit-seeking motive of capitalism, which prioritizes profit over all other goals. They also conflict with the capitalist practice of buying labor cheaply from others in order to maximize profits and wealth for some.

Reclaiming Communities

Community building will be an essential response to a changing climate. Simpson talks about the importance of resistance work that is “collectivized and done in relationship or community.”²⁹ For many Indigenous cultures, community includes human and more-than-human-beings.³⁰ The more-than-human-beings (also known as non-human-beings and non-human persons) concept spans the natural world, including plants, animals, earth, soils, stones, air, and water. Watts notes that “habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies from an Indigenous point of view.”³¹ Non-human-beings are active members of society.³² The relationships among the human and more-than-human-beings are reciprocal. Kinship defines our relationships to each other and includes human and non-human beings. In the precolonial era, banishment or exile were severe punishments in Indigenous societies, designed to punish by excluding people from society.³³ Being banished from one's community was something that impacted the person by denying them their basic needs, their spiritual needs, and their connection to their kin. Peacemaking, a Diné form of restorative justice, uses threats of ridicule, ostracism, and banishment to exert social pressure and change behavior. Exclusion from one's community was a strong negative sanction.

Community is a central theme in two recent novels about apocalyptic futures written by Indigenous authors. In the first novel, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice, phone, satellite, and electricity all unexpectedly fail.³⁴ It is a gradual failing, happening over the course of a few weeks. The Anishinaabe community in Northern Canada have resilience—they have provisions and skills, but they also have community and a desire to preserve the wellbeing of all, not just the individual. The ending is profound: Outsiders attempt to unravel the community by offering incentives to individuals who join them. Instead of creating a new normative space, the outsiders are the ones who experience the unraveling, while the Anishinaabe community and its lifeways endure. The second novel, *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline, takes place in a dystopian future. Climate change has destroyed the world, perma-



nently changing the natural environment, and only Indigenous people dream. Their bone marrow is harvested in an attempt to restore dreaming to the rest of the population.³⁵ On the run from the marrow harvesters, Indigenous people avoid capture by forming new families and working collaboratively to meet their needs in the wilderness and remain free. Both novels illustrate the durability of community, even and especially in apocalyptic conditions. Rather than fighting amidst the scarcity and chaos, the Indigenous communities at the center of these novels prioritize community and family, and they survive because of this priority.

Infinitely Diverse and Inclusive

With the chaos that emerges as people attempt to cope with the effects of climate change and the deep inequalities produced by capitalism, structural opportunities and constraints will call for cooperation and collaboration among diverse groups of people.³⁶ It is likely that people might increasingly find themselves in contact with people who are from cross-cutting social circles. This means that individuals are members of many different groups, based upon our identities and other traits, and these circles overlap somewhat. Individuals are also members of groups that lie in concentric circles. Thus, each of us shares traits with many individuals, while simultaneously there are many ways in which we are different. Diverse group affiliations and the opportunities for the creation of cross-cutting social circles “provide individuals with multiple social support and thereby free them, at least partly, from oppressive domination by society and its agents as well as by one primary group and its predominant pressures.”³⁷ Thus, Winona LaDuke, an Ojibwe writer and activist, is able to describe wind power generation in the Great Plains, utilizing wind power from the local community, financial support from East Coast tribes, and turbines exported from Europe.³⁸ This work to expand wind power is accomplished by a group that is heterogenous across language, class, nation, and race, but shares the goal of carbon neutral power generation and the rejection of the fossil fuel industry and its political power.

There are other examples of collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to protect the lands and environment. Zoltán Grossman’s work examines collaborative work to save fish, remove dams, respond to fossil fuel extraction projects, stop military land use that leaves behind unexploded ordnance, and seeks to protect communities from the byproducts of mining.³⁹ While there remain points of conflict between the Indigenous and Settler communities, there are also points of interest that draw people together for the good of their shared environment.⁴⁰ Grossman identifies instances of

cross-cutting social circles, where people share enough in common in spite of their differences, and they are able to build upon those common interests. He notes that when local and state governments sought to stop the Yakama Nation's work to restore the watershed, the work of landowners then led to federal support. Individuals' membership or lack of membership in the Yakama tribe did not stop their working together, because they shared other identities and interests.⁴¹

Similarly, seeking to clean the toxic chemicals from Onondaga Lake, the Onondaga Nation worked with non-Native allies from the Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation.⁴² Together these groups sought to restore land rights to the Onondaga Nation and specifically required a full cleanup of Onondaga Lake as a part of the conditions of this restoration.⁴³ Unfortunately, the federal court dismissed the Onondaga's legal case, but the collaborative work to restore land rights and the health of the Onondaga lake remains an important illustration of how people from cross-cutting social circles can share goals and work together to achieve them.

Because cross-cutting social groups are diverse, the people within the groups are not beholden to one way of thinking; rather, each individual is navigating complex social identities—each person must balance the pressures from the different constituencies to which they belong.⁴⁴ In this way, disputes are mitigated—each person is working to navigate a balance for themselves and, incidentally, for the group as well.⁴⁵ People belonging to multiple groups with differing opinions and views across the groups are able to see the gray areas and seek to come to consensus in the gray. When we have contact with others unlike ourselves, we adhere less to one particular set of values or beliefs, as we are all pulled in multiple directions by the different groups to which we belong. When we live among people who are different from ourselves, Blau sees us being more likely to approach difference by looking for nuance and understanding, rather than stoking antagonism.⁴⁶

Indigenous people have a deep understanding of cross-cutting social circles that span human social life as well as the natural world. For example, the norms around marriage and kinship practiced by the Cowlitz people prior to European contact mandated cross-cutting social circles in marital relations. Under strict incest taboos, endogamous marriage was mandated and meant that even distant cousins could not marry.⁴⁷ As a result, Cowlitz people of the interior prairies of what is today Washington State sought to marry people who lived on the coast of the ocean or even across the Cascade mountains.⁴⁸ Endogamous marriage was the norm, and because exogamous relations were very broadly defined, endogamous relationships flourished. The incest taboo creates an enforced system of cross-cutting social circles. Because people were

frequently multi-lingual,⁴⁹ there were fewer social and cultural barriers that we might today confront with marriages of equivalent social and political distance. That this practice was institutionalized shows the value of creating connections across groups, and the importance of having ties across communities.

In this new world, where capitalism is unchecked and the climate is unpredictable, our intersecting differences create an opportunity for people to discover what they share and work collaboratively to preserve their communities and the wellbeing of all—across class, race, nation, gender, age, and more. With new technologies, our cross-cutting social circles can now be both local and global. In this way we can connect with people around the world to promote new lifeways that are carbon neutral, as Greta Thunberg seeks to do by creating a global movement of children demanding climate action. The choice to strike to gain attention was inspired by the actions of young people from Parkland, Florida who went on strike to protest gun violence.⁵⁰ While all participants in this “school strike for climate” are children, they represent different countries, economic classes, genders, and races, and they speak different languages—but they share a frustration with the inaction of adults and decision-makers on climate action. They work collaboratively both locally and globally to coordinate strikes.

As we do the work to rebuild communities, we all benefit from establishing social spaces that cut across boundaries of class, nationality, neighborhood, culture, and more. Societies that are integrated and interdependent are more likely to conceive of creative solutions to climate change precisely because of their differences in approach and thinking. Valuing creativity, community, inclusion, diversity, and equity, these communities will be better situated to respond to unexpected changes and create desirable outcomes. With technology, our communities can span the globe. Alternatively, we can set aside our technology and deepen our relationships with the people and environment where we live.

Bryan Stanley Turner proposes a model for working collaboratively with diverse groups of individuals via Critical Recognition Theory.⁵¹ In Critical Recognition Theory, people share ideas as equals, hearing each other without judgement, recognizing and respecting others at the same time that they do not take their own positions too seriously.⁵² Within our communities, as we build understanding and relationships across our differences, we are also building skills and confidence in working collaboratively. Communities that are interdependent and integrated are better equipped to empower their members to think creatively and confidently, allowing them to propose and enact real changes.

Deeply Democratic

Indigenous nations, city-states, or towns were self-governing prior to European contact.⁵³ Decision-making in these spaces was based upon consensus, not majority rule.⁵⁴ Among the Haudenosaunee, peace, equity, justice, unity, and health were and are prioritized.⁵⁵ By centering consensus-building as a decision-making practice, Indigenous communities focused on collective interests over individual interests.⁵⁶ When the Osage Nation authored a new constitution in 2006, they chose to center “Justice, Fairness, Compassion, Respect for and Protection of Child, Elder, All Fellow Beings and Self.”⁵⁷ Note the order of those receiving respect and protection—children and elders come first, followed by other beings, with the self positioned last. In 2009 the Anishinaabeg of the White Earth Nation wrote their own new constitution, which includes language in the preamble expressing the White Earth Nation’s desire “to promote traditions of liberty, justice, and peace, and reserve common resources.”⁵⁸

Participatory decision-making and governance are not limited to the humans for Indigenous Peoples. Speaking about the role of animals in governance, Watts notes that “our ability to have sophisticated governance systems is directly related to not only the animals’ ability to communicate with us, but their *willingness* to communicate with us” (emphasis in original).⁵⁹ Humans can communicate and work collaboratively with the land and with non-human beings to assert their Indigenous lifeways.⁶⁰ In this collaborative relationship, the agency of humans and non-human beings is respected and supported. Alliances can be built across cross-cutting social circles that span diverse species that also acknowledge their shared heritage and shared connections through the land to ensure the safety and engagement of all. Indeed, Cowlitz stories, as told to Thelma Adamson, describe many interactions among animals and people.⁶¹ Another story features the actions of White Agate and Blue Rock, and Fire is featured in a brief anecdote, as a little boy seeks to escape its burning flames.⁶² Still other stories feature the mountains in the region as central characters. The natural world is full of beings with agency in Cowlitz stories and their interactions with each other are complicated, sometimes leading to peaceful ends and other times to conflict and struggle. But there is no hierarchy among the human-beings and non-human-beings.

Environmental degradation and resource extraction are also doing harm to the natural world, which is our living environment. Climate change, environmental degradation, and resource extraction are all consequences of a capitalist economy that prioritizes profit over all other outcomes. Rejecting a capitalist approach to nature, with its resource and wealth hoarding driven by scarcity, will be an essential step to reviving the less predictable climate and natural

world of the future. Embracing the anticapitalist values of sharing, kinship, and reciprocity—which are deeply rooted in Indigenous political and social systems⁶³—offers a model to assist in the recreation of social, economic, and political institutions. These values will also be key as communities seek to engage in participatory decision-making that embraces the equitable engagement of all.

By localizing our economic and social processes, we can implement participatory decision-making, as the Lakota people have done. LaDuke is very critical of the current paradigm in energy, where the interests of large-scale fossil fuel extraction industries overtake the interests of communities and have an outsized influence in decision-making.⁶⁴ She argues that if energy generation were localized, it would reflect the needs and interests of the community rather than the needs and interests of fossil fuel industry leaders.⁶⁵ In this way, localizing decision-making processes creates space for communities to express and prioritize their needs and interests. For Lakota people in the United States, this means creating the infrastructure and technology to support power generation using wind, which they are coordinating with other Indigenous Nations to establish.⁶⁶ By localizing power production, the Lakota nation is taking steps to promote justice, equity, and self-determination at the same time that they are taking advantage of untapped sources of power.⁶⁷ Indigenous nations in the United States hold the third greatest coal reserves in the world, but the majority prefer to utilize clean, renewable energies that avoid the harm caused by coal-fired electric generation. If other communities prioritized clean and renewable energy sources as Indigenous nations do, the benefits could be wide-ranging.

Diverse communities that value participatory decision-making can promote innovation, creativity, and resilience in our unknown future. Utilizing the Traditional Knowledge and practices of Indigenous people and nations, with deep understanding of the natural world and its teachings, makes it possible to create effective strategies for surviving climate change. Indigenous Peoples around the globe safeguard 80% of the biodiversity and are experts in conservation and sustainable use of so-called natural resources.⁶⁸ This includes the preference to “Leave it in the Ground” because “Mni Wiconi” (Water is Sacred), as we saw at Standing Rock. The protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) drew on the knowledge, cultures, and beliefs of Indigenous Peoples from around the world to assert that the Pipeline should not be constructed and the oil should remain entombed in the ground. The No DAPL movement did in fact win the legal battle, and the oil that flows through the DAPL to this day is in violation of U.S. law.⁶⁹ If the Dakota/Lakota people had legal jurisdiction over the pipeline, it would no longer be operational. With true Indigenous participation and leadership in decision-making regarding climate

change, human and more-than-human communities are more likely to be able to survive climate change. If humans can shrug off their inequalities, the stress of scarcity thinking, and the drive to excess, in this process we will rediscover the humanity of others as well as ourselves.

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The Turtle and the Falling Sky: Yanomami Mimesis, F(r)iction, and Performance

JOHN C. DAWSEY

Turtles, Cars, and Falling Sky¹

*In mid-August 2019, it rained in the city of São Paulo. Dark waters fell from the sky. They had the smell of burnt wood. It was as if the sky poured ash-filled waters over the city. São Paulo is a city of many fumes. But the fumes this day, mixed with rain, came from afar. The clouds came from the Amazon. Trees were burning. Modernized napë (a Yanomami term for the nonindigenous majority of Brazil) people were setting fire to the forest. I remembered the book *The Falling Sky*, by the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa and anthropologist Bruce Albert. It looked like the sky was falling. Not only the Yanomami sky, or the sky of the Amazon, but also the sky of São Paulo.*

I HAVE VERY LITTLE first-hand knowledge of the Yanomami. But *The Falling Sky* captured my imagination. As an anthropologist born in Brazil, my main field of research has been with sugarcane cutters. From the backs of trucks and in sugarcane fields I became accustomed to seeing ashes of burnt sugarcane leaves falling from the sky. In cities of the interior of São Paulo, the state, this was a common experience, several years into the twenty-first century. Now when seeing ashes from the Amazon falling on the city of São Paulo, memories of my experience with sugarcane cutters came back. Some of the families of women cutting cane, who spoke of themselves as daughters and granddaughters of Indian women “lassoed or hunted in the woods” (*laçadas ou caçadas no mato*), are also in my memories, and have been part of my relations for the last forty years.

Because of the everyday playful and stage-like behaviors of sugarcane cutters in Brazil—who impersonate multitudes of characters as a social pastime while working or going to work—I became interested in theater and the anthropology of performance. My reading of *The Falling Sky* challenged me to rethink the anthropology of performance from the perspective of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who discusses the conceptual imagination, or thought, of native cultures of the Amazon.² *The Falling Sky* also brought back to memory some of Victor Turner’s insights into theater and performance as forms of healing.³ The same falling sky I saw with the sugarcane cutters, I also witnessed in São Paulo, and read about in Kopenawa and Albert’s book.

In 2019, I received an invitation to speak at an academic event scheduled for September, in Manaus: “Arcana 6: Decolonial Movements of the Stage and the Amazonian Imaginary—The Unstable Path of the Chariot to Justice.”⁴ Bringing together artists and researchers of the stage arts, anthropology, and other areas, the Arcana Meetings are designed to spark discussions regarding social and cultural imaginations. For each event, one or two cards from the major Arcana of the Tarot deck are selected as thought images. At this meeting, the chosen cards were the Chariot and Justice. While watching the ash-filled rain and thinking about the smoking car traffic of São Paulo, I reached for *The Falling Sky* on my bookshelf. I also observed the image of the Chariot card—a scene with two horses dragging a type of box mounted on two wheels and covered by a canopy, with a crowned man holding a scepter in his right hand. In Portuguese the word for chariot is *carro*, which is also the word for car. I asked myself, what would a Yanomami car be like?

The first edition of *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* was published in 2013, in England and the United States. The Portuguese language translation came out in Brazil, in 2015, as *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*. This was the version that I first read in 2019.⁵

The book consists of the thoughts and narratives of shaman Davi Kopenawa, whose words were collected and transcribed by the anthropologist Bruce Albert. The two have known each other since 1978, when Albert began his second phase of ethnography among the Yanomami. Kopenawa’s shamanic initiation occurred in the 1980s, under the guidance of his father-in-law, a renowned shaman. The book project came about at the request of Kopenawa, who wanted Albert to write down his words. Recordings which became the basis for various versions of the manuscript began in late 1989, and continued until the early years of the twenty-first century.

Mimesis, Performance, and Amerindian Thought in the Amazon

When Kopenawa saw cars for the first time in Manaus, he asked himself, “What could that be? Were they made like big iron turtles?”⁶ He saw the car as a living being, similar to a turtle. According to the Yanomami and other forest people of the Amazon, animals are also human. Would a car also be made like a human being? He saw a subject, not an object. According to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, in Western cosmology, a point of view creates an object, while in Amerindian cosmology, a point of view creates or activates a subject, someone who is similar to and as human as oneself.⁷ An image of likeness or, better, similarity. In *The Falling Sky*, the Yanomami capacity to produce and recognize similarities, while transforming and creating differences, is striking. So also is the portrait of the napë as a people who are incapable of seeing the forest as “the flesh and skin of our earth.”⁸

In my interpretation of *The Falling Sky*, I have found an interesting juncture in the thoughts of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (Amerindian conceptual imagination in the Amazon), Walter Benjamin (creative mimesis as a capacity to produce and recognize similarities as we become other), and Richard Schechner and Victor Turner (anthropology of performance). According to napë—non-indigenous—thought, what is common to all things and living beings is nature. We all have bodies, some of which have souls and are human, others of which are not. In Yanomami thought, what is common to all beings and things is humanity. Bodies create difference. In this sense, on this earth, for the Yanomami—a term which means human—we are all Yanomami.

In cities, Kopenawa searches for the human in things: that which makes things dance, burst into song, come to life. Notable is the Yanomami capacity to recognize and create similarities and connections between bodies and things, revealing the human that may flash from below. Even in cars, Kopenawa sought a connection.

In the forest, napë incapacity to recognize and create the human, to become similar to others, while transforming ourselves, leads to destruction. The trail of the napë is marked by death and disease, and the killing of the forest. Much of this destruction has to do with producing commodities such as rubber, tin, iron, and fuel for cars, a process of turning life—for in Yanomami thought, all these are alive—into things, or objects, and forgetting how they are part of the living. Recall that Kopenawa sought the human in cars, seeing them possibly as turtles. Turtles, like other animals, plants, and things, are human underneath their bodies.

The creative act of bringing things to life, and revealing the human in all things, while becoming other and remaking one's body, is part of Yanomami performance, as seen in Kopenawa's narratives of the arrival of the *xapiri*, or forest spirits. In napë thinking, bodies are a given, already there. In Yanomami thought, bodies are made—created, like masks. They are body-masks, one might say. As Viveiros de Castro suggests, in regard to Amerindian thought of the Amazon, bodies are like the masks and equipment used by underwater divers, through which comes the breath of life.⁹ Body-masks give access to multiple and different universes.

Richard Schechner has called attention to the relationship between bodies and masks, suggesting that some of the most electrifying moments in performance occur when bodies are revealed beneath masks.¹⁰ I describe this process as a type of f(r)iction, with the R between parentheses, a striking of sparks, highlighting the fictive (from *fictio*, to fabricate or make) dimensions of reality revealed in performance.

In napë performance, f(r)iction occurs between bodies and masks. For the napë, perhaps one can speak of person-masks, or masks as *personae*: when wearing a mask, one impersonates. In Amerindian conceptual imagination of the Amazon, bodies are the masks: when wearing a mask, one embodies. Yanomami performance reveals the human beneath bodies, or body-masks. In Yanomami f(r)iction, what is underneath body-masks is revealed.

Yanomami *xapiri* performance is a form of creative mimesis, of becoming other and bringing to life the human similarity of others.¹¹ In shamanic experience this involves becoming, activating, many other subjects and viewpoints, or bodies at risk of disappearing or being forgotten. In Yanomami performance, an energy field, or what I like to think of as a mimetic circuit, is formed between the Yanomami and the *xapiri* spirits of the forest. As the Yanomami activate the almost countless forms of *xapiri*, these forest spirits, created in performance, in turn activate the Yanomami in their everyday social and political struggles in forests and in cities.

In this essay, I will be discussing Kopenawa's narratives relating to cities, forests, and *xapiri* performances. My final remarks will have to do with processes of healing for napë and Amerindian people.

Cities and Wheels

Cities

In cities, Kopenawa is appalled by the lifelessness of things. Even so, he looks for the human, the living spirit that lies dormant or buried underneath, or is in danger of disappearing and being forgotten.

In Manaus, when seeing a car for the first time, Kopenawa sees a turtle. As an image of similarity, in a f(r)iction-like way, the turtle image rubs against that of the car. Could a car be a type of forest creature? Could it be an animal with wheels and an iron shell? A nonhuman being that is actually human, like a turtle? Kopenawa seeks the forgotten reality lying beneath the skins of those who turn into merchandise—their condition as subjects or living beings.

Years later, in defense of the forest, Kopenawa visited other cities. Near London, at Stonehenge, he saw a circle of huge blocks of stone rising from the ground.¹² He saw them as traces of ancestors who died long ago, “the remains of abandoned old gardens in the forest.”¹³ But, the napë could not recognize them. They had lost the stones’ words. They merely looked at the stones for a long time.

In Paris, the Eiffel Tower appeared to Kopenawa as a large antenna covered with lightning vines. It looked like the image of the houses of the xapiri, the spirits of the forest, rivers, and animals. Yet, it seemed lifeless, without resonance. If it were alive, its occupants would be singing, and the light would carry the songs.¹⁴

In museums, he recognized various items as traces of ancestors of forest people. But, the ghosts of their owners were imprisoned in them. Their words, like those of the stones that he had seen near London, were forgotten. Their images, according to Kopenawa, “can no longer dance for us.”¹⁵

In New York, Kopenawa’s attentions were directed toward the edges of the city, its ruins, and forgotten people and places. In a dream, he saw “the sky catch fire with the heat from the factories’ smoke. The thunders, the lightning beings, and the human ghosts who live on its back were caught in huge flames. Then the burning sky began crashing down to earth.”¹⁶ The sky of New York is similar to that of the Amazon forest. It is falling.

In cities and forests, Kopenawa is appalled by the incapacity of the napë people to see and hear the human in things, or to connect with others, becoming similar to them, while we become other, as part of the living.

Wheels

In Manaus, Kopenawa stared at the wheels of the cars. He was intrigued. When observed from the top of trees or from the sky, Yanomami villages are similar to wheels. Yanomami houses are circular, and so are their baskets, and some of their dances. Dancers whirl like wheels. The wheels of these turtle-like beings are covered with live material which comes from rubber trees of the forest. Iron and tin drawn from the entrails and bloodlines of the forest are used to make cars. As he fixed his eyes on the wheels, was Kopenawa recognizing living things and creatures that he already knew in the forest?

The headlights of cars, when turned on at night, were like lightning bolts of the spirits of the forest; they were similar to the lights of the sparkling vines of xapiri houses during celebrations. In dreams Kopenawa saw these lights.

Forest

The Yanomami and the forest in which they live were created by Omama, the napë by his brother, Yoasi.

In The Falling Sky it is written: "It was Omama who created the land and the forest, the wind that shakes its leaves, and the rivers whose waters we drink. It is he who gave us life and made us many."¹⁷ And later: "The forest is the flesh and skin of our earth."¹⁸

As I read this book, as ash-filled rain fell in São Paulo, a startling and self-revealing image of napë people emerged. Not believing the forest is alive; nor believing it feels pain, as humans do; unable to hear its laments, or perceive its respiration, or feel its breath; the napë rip out the floor of the forest. Like cannibal specters they devour it, then are haunted by dark rain, and by the fumes that they themselves produce in cities and in the forest. As sons and daughters of Yoasi, the brother of Omama, the napë leave traces of death wherever they go.

Vulcan, Cars, and Commodities

The automobile industry is intimately associated with the colonization of the Amazon. In 1839, Charles Goodyear discovered the process of vulcanization: with the addition of sulfur to crude rubber at high temperature, rubber becomes more elastic and resistant. By this means, latex from age-old tropical forests can be used for belts and tires. Vulcanization gives impulsion to the automobile and machine industries of the Northern Hemisphere.

In Roman mythology, Vulcan is the god of fire, a destructive yet life-giving god. In 2019, as I looked at the image of the Chariot, I saw a living car made of horses, wheels, a canopy, and a man holding a scepter—all of whom constituted the chariot or car. The man was not simply riding in a car, he was part of it, along with the horses, wheels, canopy, and scepter. In order to see the human and the living in creatures and things, Kopenawa says, a person needs to know how to dream. The napë have forgotten how to dream. Yet, they dream of cars and other commodities. In dreams of progress and vulcanization, cars, automobiles, and other commodities shine as dream images. Apollo, Osiris, Indra, Phaethon, Electra, Eos, Mercury, Mazda, Minotaur, and Jaguar are some of the model names of modern cars. Commodities assume the names of gods and mythic creatures, and take their places as objects of devotion. When Kopenawa sees a car, he calls it an iron turtle, and imagines a creature with a body that is human underneath. The napë give names of mythic beings to their cars, but see them as objects and commodities nonetheless.

Roads and Fumes

The Yawari were the first Yanomami to see napë people opening a road in the forest—the Perimetral Norte highway (BR-210), parallel to the frontier between Brazil and Venezuela. With giant machines, napë people ripped the floor of the forest, knocking down trees, exploding mounds and hilltops, and scaring away game.

In the 1970s, the military regime developed various geopolitical projects for occupying the Amazon, such as the “National Integration Plan,” the “Pol-amazônia Project,” the “RADAM Project,” the “Perimetral Norte highway,” and the “Trans-Amazonian highway.”¹⁹ Seeing the arrival of napë people in the Amazon forest, Davi Kopenawa told himself: “The white people tear up the forest floor.... Now will the epidemic fumes from their machines and bombs finally kill all of us?”²⁰ Many Yanomami died. Napë people went up the rivers, taking diseases: measles, flu, malaria, tuberculosis, whooping cough—and, now, COVID-19. Kopenawa knew the napë in dreams, he said. In mourning for the death of family members and neighbors, his thoughts were overcome with rage. “This white people’s path is truly evil! The *xarawari* epidemic beings follow their machines and trucks on it. Will their hunger for human flesh really make all the rest of us die, one after another?”²¹

Savagery, Terror

The Yanomami are in danger of extermination. In 1993, the Haximu massacre drew international attention.²² Assassinations occurred on the Alto Orinoco.

There was the massacre of the Inhambuaçu River. Garimpeiros (illegal gold prospectors) mutilated and dismembered the bodies of their victims, which included women, children, and elders.

Yet, images of the savagery created by napë people are projected onto the Yanomami and other forest people. Among them are images of violence and wildness such as one finds in the book *Yanomamö: The Fierce People*, published in 1968 by the North American anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon.²³ In *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, Michael Taussig discusses how, in the Putumayo region of the Colombian Amazon, at the height of rubber extraction, images of savagery are imitated by white colonizers in their relations with Amerindian people on whom such images are projected by the same colonizers.²⁴ Blaming the victim, the napë imitate their own projections.

Xapiri

What would a Yanomami car be like? In his first encounter with a car, Kopenawa saw a creature similar to a turtle. After his initiation as a shaman, he saw even more powerful images, some of which flash from the memory of seeing a car with headlights for the first time in Manaus. What would a Yanomami shamanic car be like? And how would it be made?

Arrival

In August 2019, while thinking of the Arcana Meeting to which I had been invited, I looked closely at the Chariot card of the Tarot, which would be serving as a focus of inspiration. In a quick inquiry into the origins of that image, I found a biblical (and cabalistic) source in Ezekiel (1:1-28): the “chariot of Yahweh” (in Portuguese, *carro de Iahweh*), an impressive apparition consisting of winds, fires, lights, thunderstorms, swirling waters, wheels within wheels moving in all directions, and a human being with multiple faces of animals coming and going like lightning.

In *The Falling Sky*, I also encountered a thunderous and radiant image: the arrival of the xapiri.

“These are the paths our shaman elders opened for them in the past. The *xapiri* travel on them making a loud noise, impetuously cutting everything up as they pass. The ground flies into pieces and the trees come crashing down behind them. Their march’s force and violence make our stomachs drop with fear! Yet despite this terrible din, we begin to hear their approaching clamor and, more and more clearly, the melodious sound of their voices. Then we can distinguish the magnificent songs of the *yórixlama* thrush, the *ayokora* cacique, and

the *sitipari si* birds. Finally, the *xapiri* reveal themselves to our terrified eyes. They brandish huge sabers projecting flashes of light in every direction, as if they were waving mirrors around them. They advance in blinding light, like that of *car headlights* [emphasis mine] in the night.”²⁵

Notice the “car headlights in the night.” The shamanic vision includes spirits of rivers, land, and forest, in all their impressive variety. In the above description, songs of birds are highlighted. In other accounts there are bees, wasps, stingrays, electric eels, porpoises, anacondas, alligators, scorpions, beetles, ants, snakes, peccaries, giant armadillos, anteaters, jaguars, vultures, and sloths.²⁶ Great trees gather momentum and join forces with turbulent waters, winds, and storms. But, images from the worlds of napë people are also mobilized. Images of car headlights of Manaus, sparkling vines of the Eiffel Tower, and airplanes flying over the forest appear in different narratives. In one account, Kopenawa speaks of Omama’s airplane taking away the fumes of the garimpeiros, dragging them by the hair.²⁷

Images that may evoke the entrance of napë people in the forest are also mobilized. The *xapiri* arrive “making a loud noise, impetuously cutting everything up as they pass,” But, the *xapiri* are not invaders; they are forest spirits. Among them are the spirits of windstorms, *Yariporari*, and of chaos, *Xiwirapo* “The ground flies into pieces and the trees come crashing down behind them.” As a result of shamanic action, the forest opens up pathways for the *xapiri*. More and more clearly can be heard “the melodious sound of their voices” and their “magnificent songs.” As songs rise from noise, cosmos emerges from chaos.

The *xapiri* arrive with music and dance. They awaken the beings of the forest, transforming movement into dance, and noises into marvelous sounds. The forest manifests itself in an impressive array of sound, light, and movement. The *xapiri* arrive as invited guests to a celebration, a gathering of mobile, multiple, even countless viewpoints—bodies—in performance.

According to Richard Schechner, performance consists of restored behavior. Just as moviemaking involves the putting together, or montage, of strips of film, performance involves the restoration of strips of behavior.²⁸ At the arrival of the *xapiri*, fragments or strips of Yanomami behavior are restored. Also, by mimesis, becoming similar to others, behaviors of other forest beings are restored, producing a stunning and ever-changing variety of gestures, sounds, and images. In performance, the forest is recreated in multifarious and kaleidoscopic montage.

We recall that in napë performance, experience is heightened and f(r)iction is produced between masks and bodies, bringing to light the fictive dimensions

of reality, when bodies are revealed beneath masks or *personae*. Such moments occur in Amerindian cosmologies in symmetrically inverted ways that reveal subjects found beneath bodies, which are themselves seen as masks. In f(r)iction of bodies, or body-masks, living beings play and are reborn. By mimetic action, the capacity to become other, and similar to others, Amerindian performances activate subjects of the forest. The arrival of the xapiri, which recreates forest beings in a performance of their bodies, or viewpoints, can be seen as a manifestation of their deeper and sometimes forgotten selves: they are human beings, children of Omama. Shamans in performance become other, as human revelations of forest beings.

Yanomami shamanic action opens the way for beings to manifest. As Kopenawa told a *rezador* (“prayer-maker”), “we become xapiri ourselves drinking the *yākoana*.”²⁹ By means of the psychotropic *yākoana* powder, made from the *yākoana* tree for drinking or sniffing, the Yanomami are able to see and hear the spirits of the forest. As they sing and dance with the xapiri, entering into a sphere beyond quotidian reality, the Yanomami are transformed. Through shamanic action, a deeper and human reality of the spirits is revealed.

The shaman is transformed into xapiri. However, the variety of xapiri is as great as that of the forest beings. Thus, the shaman activates forest spirits, without becoming any one of them specifically. Being none, the shaman is able to be all of them. One is struck by this negative capability, the manner in which an absence of being is mobilized, so as to become all beings. In velocity the shaman moves in multiple directions, as a liminal being capable of activating the spirits of multiple masks or bodies of the forest. The experience of a shaman in performance, as “not me and not *not* me (emphasis added)” at the same time, as discussed by Schechner, is suggestive.³⁰ In this regard, one calls attention to the primacy of the negative (the “not”), or double negative (“not not”), the capacity to move between different viewpoints, or the lived places of things (*lugar vivido das coisas*), without being limited by any one of them in particular.³¹ In proposing the idea of a negative capability, the poet Keats said that Shakespeare, having the capacity to become all characters, was none himself. If he were to have a personality, he would not be able to become all the personalities that he had the capacity to become.³² In the Amerindian case, if the shaman were to have only one body, or viewpoint, he would not be able to become all of the other bodies, body-masks, or viewpoints, of the beings that he is capable of becoming.

Mimetic Circuit

As a result of shamanic action, there emerges a field of energy, which I liken to a mimetic circuit. Yanomami shamans activate spirits of rivers, land, and forest,

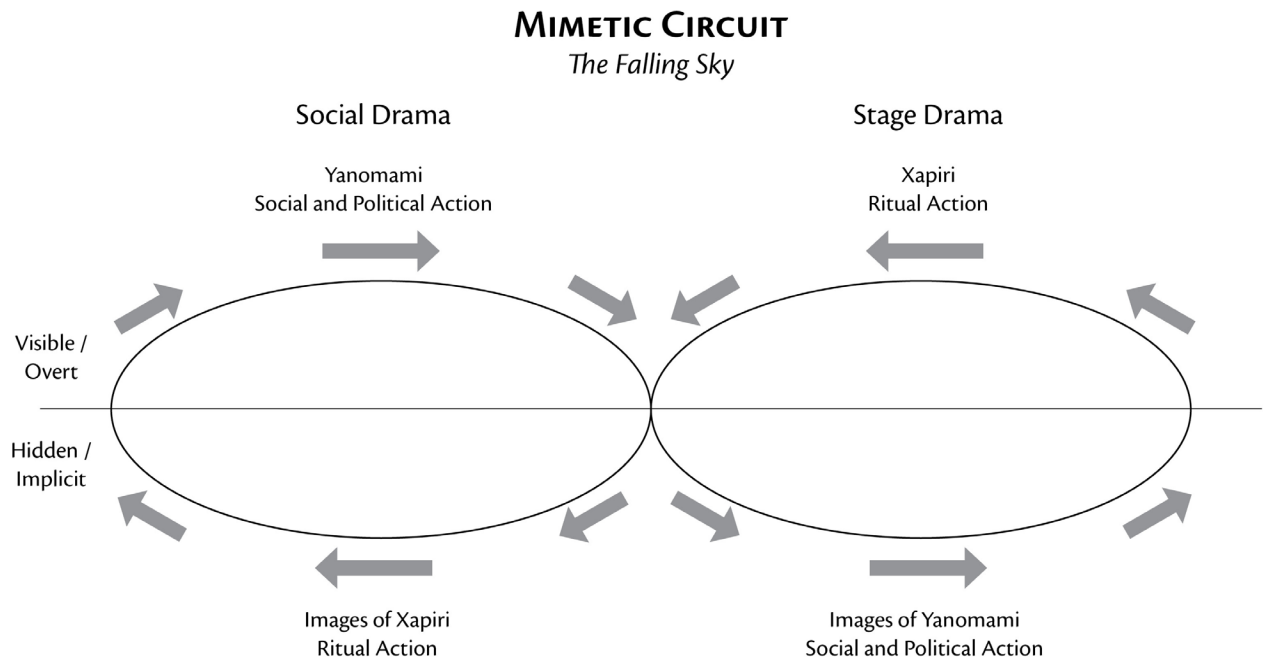
which become similar to Yanomami, and reveal themselves as human. At the same time, in the reverse or looping movement of the circuit, the xapiri that are mobilized by shamans activate the Yanomami, who become similar to these spirit beings, particularly in their efforts to protect the forest.

Similarities between actions of the Yanomami and of the xapiri spirits are remarkable. Activated by shamans, *xapiri* spirits go into battle against the *xawarari* epidemic beings, introduced by garimpeiros, the illegal gold prospectors:

"The wasp spirits sting these man-eaters with their poisoned spears while the caiman spirits strike them with their heavy machetes. The aggressive *xaki* and *pari* bee spirits slash them while the *waroma* snake spirits pierce them. A great number of *ôeôeri* and *aiamori* warrior spirits rush to riddle them with their arrows. The anteater and giant armadillo spirits wound them with their sharp knives. The vulture spirits tear them apart. The images of the evil beings of the anaconda and of the master of cotton, *Xinarumari*, seize them to choke them and skin them alive. The big *aro kohi* and *masihanari kohi* tree spirits crush them with the help of the stone spirit *Maamari*. The spirits of the *remoremo moxi* bee, the *hóra* beetle, and the storm wind *Yariporari* tie the hair of their fumes to Omama's airplane to drag them into the far-off places from which they came."³³

The bravery exhibited by xapiri is also shown, in a similar way, by Yanomami in defense of the forest. With knives, machetes, and arrows, Yanomami warriors resist the garimpeiros armed with rifles and bombs. In this way they protect the forest against evils created by the *napë*: pollution, disease, deforestation, and death. In rage caused by the assassination of four great Yanomami men, Davi Kopenawa confronted garimpeiros for the first time. That is how he acquired his name. After drinking the powder which shamans extract from the *yákoana hi* tree, he saw the spirits of *kopena* wasps descend. On the occasion, the spirits told him: "We are by your side and will protect you. This is why you will take this name, Kopenawa!"³⁴ The name evokes the spirits of the *kopena* wasps.

As a way of speaking of relations between the Yanomami and xapiri spirits, which I have described as a mimetic circuit, I would like to present the figure on the following page. The inspiration comes from Richard Schechner's and Victor Turner's *infinity loop* model³⁵—the sign of infinity crossed by a straight line, showing how aesthetic or stage dramas interact with social dramas. In Schechner's model, the left oval has to do with social drama, the right with aesthetic drama. In Turner's model, the left also refers to social drama, the right to stage drama (equivalent to the aesthetic). This model has been used by anthropologists, art critics, and activists to analyze the way the arts are often used



Source: The figure represents the author's own elaboration of the infinity loop model created by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner.

to engage political issues in subtle and subversive ways, especially in contexts where direct political expression may be repressed by governments.

In my model, I have kept the same type of division, taking xapiri ritual as a type of stage drama. I have also kept the horizontal line. Yanomami social and political action that appears as the visible dimension of social drama (top left) reappears as hidden or implicit images of xapiri ritual action (bottom right); and xapiri ritual action that appears as the visible dimension of ritual (or stage) drama (top right) reappears as hidden or implicit images of Yanomami social and political action (bottom left).

Social and political action of the Yanomami now becomes a mirror held up to xapiri ritual, and, at the same time, xapiri ritual action creates mirror images that mobilize the Yanomami. In performing their lives, they become protagonists in living social drama. According to Victor Turner, "neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life, is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but a matricial mirror; at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost or discarded."³⁶ Turner also uses the notion of "magic mirrors," highlighting the creative action involved in production of images in both social and stage dramas. It is not that ritual or stage art imitates life, and life imitates art, but that one influences the other by becoming similar. In a sense, in shamanic ritual, Yanomami become xapiri, or, more precisely, Yanomami-xapiri; and xa-

piri, in Yanomami social and political action (or, one might say, cosmological political action), become Yanomami, or, better, xapiri-Yanomami.³⁷

In regard to the use of the mirror metaphor, recall that Kopenawa, when speaking of the arrival of the xapiri, also refers to mirror images, describing how the forest spirits “brandish huge sabers projecting flashes of light in every direction, as if they were waving *mirrors* around them” (emphasis mine).³⁸ Kopenawa also tells of how the xapiri begin their presentation “in the *mirror* of the central plaza” (emphasis mine).³⁹

In moments of danger, as Yanomami act to protect the forest, images of forest beings, including Yanomami, that have disappeared or are in danger of disappearing may emerge from hidden (perhaps unconscious or preconscious) regions of social drama. Such images flash in the form of xapiri spirits that, in turn, become characters in ritual dramas, acting to protect the forest. As such, they affect Yanomami social and political action. While xapiri may be seen to be similar to Yanomami as living and human spirits of the forest, Yanomami become similar to xapiri spirits in cosmopolitical struggles to protect forest, land, and rivers.

Being similar to living and human beings that have disappeared or are in danger of disappearing, xapiri enter into relations, here and now, with Yanomami who become similar to the xapiri. Shamanic action opening the way for arrival of the xapiri loops back with the force of an energized field composed of Yanomami and xapiri spirits renewing the Yanomami in their struggle to protect the forest.

In research in Piracicaba, Brazil, carried out during the 1990s, I observed the ritual action of a local artisan known as “Elijah of the dolls,” who populated the banks of the Piracicaba River with many artisan dolls (“when they set fire to five, I put ten in their place”). I found the ritual action returned with the force of a mimetic field formed by bank dwellers and dolls, revitalizing dwellers in their determination not to be displaced from Riverbank Street, and renewing the threads of reciprocity from which the social life and relations with the river are woven. Artisan dolls, seen by the artisan and his neighbors as similar to ancestral riverbank dwellers, enter into relationship with the people living on the banks of the river, who become similar to the dolls. The gesture invigorates the riverbank dwellers in their determination not to be removed from their homes with images of Amerindian *evuevi* “river people” of the past who made their homes and fished there. They give expression to and interact with the present moment of danger, in which dwellers are threatened by a city government project—“reconquest of the riverbanks”—based in *bandeirante* (Indian slave-hunter) imagery.⁴⁰

In both cases involving Yanomami and Piracicaba riverbank dwellers, relationships are formed between the living and the dead, past and present. The xapiri evoke ancestral beings. Manifesting a presence of absence, they are charged with energies of the dead and the living that erupt from hidden, unconscious dimensions of social and ritual dramas.

Theater, Healing, and Shamanic Initiation

By means of Yanomami shamans, pathways are opened for xapiri spirits, protectors of the forest. Drinking powder of the yākoana tree, shamans receive the force that comes from the forest and trees—the force of yākoana. They become similar to forest trees.

Initiation

As part of his initiation as a shaman, Davi Kopenawa began to drink yākoana. His father-in-law, a renowned shaman, blew a large amount of the yākoana into Kopenawa's nostrils. "Then suddenly," Kopenawa says, "its image, *Yākoanari*, violently struck me on the back of the neck and sent me backward onto the ground. I instantly lost consciousness and remained sprawled on the house's central plaza in a ghost state. This lasted a very long time. The yākoana had really made me die!"⁴¹ Kopenawa practically stopped eating. He became gaunt with hunger; his ribs stuck out. "You cannot see the xapiri and become a shaman by dozing with your stomach full of game and manioc."⁴² Spirits are flower-nectar drinkers. One must turn into spirit, becoming a newborn, a baby, a child.⁴³

Children especially, as Walter Benjamin knew, have the gift of mimesis. Born again as a child, the shaman not only becomes other, but acquires the capability *to* other, so as to become many others. Children play not only at being warriors, shamans, potters, hunters, and gatherers, but also bees, sloths, jaguars, windstorms, cars, and airplanes.

After spending several nights in a ghost state, the xapiri start to arrive. "Their troop descended from the edges of the sky, carried by a multitude of glimmering paths that swayed in the air. They were as fast as planes and kicked up a powerful wind. This vast distance was nothing for them. They rushed in without interruption, countless, coming from every direction like television images."⁴⁴

The body is dismembered. "After they cut me up," Kopenawa says, "the xapiri quickly escaped with the different parts of my body they had just sliced off and flew far from our forest, far beyond the land of the white people. I

had lost consciousness, and it was my image they dismembered while my skin stayed on the ground. They flew off on one side with my torso and on the other with my back and legs. They carried my head off in one direction and my tongue in another.”⁴⁵ Initiation has to do with the shattering of a point of view, or of a specific body. The shattering experience is a prelude to restoring strips of behavior, and, particularly, to restoring bodies or body-masks in multiple, surprising, and appalling ways.

“Later, the *xapiri* came to reassemble the segments of my body, which they had dismembered. They put my skull and torso where the lower part of my body goes, and they put that part where my arms and head go. It is true! They put me back together upside down, placing my rear where my face was and my mouth where my anus was!”⁴⁶

Theater and Healing

Dismemberment of bodies, *sparagmos*, as found in Dionysian theater, is enacted in various traditions of theater and ritual. As shown by Victor Turner, it is associated with liminal experiences of “tomb and womb,” death and rebirth.⁴⁷ Turner also suggests that there is a deep affinity between theater and healing rites.⁴⁸

In a quest for a cure for the collective body, Antonin Artaud calls for a theater in which masks are removed.⁴⁹ As seen before, in regard to my notion of f(r)iction, some of the most electrifying moments in performance occur when, beneath masks, in a flash, are revealed the bodies of actresses and actors. But in Yanomami and Amerindian performance, bodies are the masks. The healing process occurs when, beneath bodies or body-masks, the human and living spirit is revealed.

From dismemberment or brokenness of bodies, as made known in shamanic experience, innumerable bodies in extraordinary variety can be made. Through surprising forms of body-making and the art of becoming similar to others, the Yanomami create connections and activate the underlying human spirit in human and so-called nonhuman beings alike.

No longer able to communicate with the universe, or connect with the world in which they are born, modernized napë people become a danger to themselves. In the attempt to dominate nature, from which they have set themselves apart, they come under the dominion of the forces that they themselves have created and unleashed. In a fragment called “To the planetarium,” Walter Benjamin suggests that “nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former’s absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods.” It is a dangerous error, says Benjamin, to consider

this experience as irrelevant.⁵⁰ Will the napë, in this moment of danger, be able to learn from the Yanomami, seeing and hearing the spirits of the forest, and participating in a living cosmos?

In Benjamin's words, printed on skins of paper made from the substance of forest trees that are being slashed and burned in unprecedented numbers, does one hear sounds of other words spoken in different places and times? Do they resound, as Davi Kopenawa might say, with echoes from the words of Omama? The Yanomami shaman sounds the alert: everywhere we turn there are signs of falling sky. The forest is on fire. Whether in cities or woodlands, we are engulfed by fumes. Benjamin suggests that the question before us has to do with mastery not of nature but of the relationship between nature and the human. We forget that we ourselves and our bodies are part of the nature that we would subjugate. Amerindian peoples might say: we forget that the forest and so-called nonhuman creatures that we would subjugate are actually human underneath.

• • •

In cities and forests, Davi Kopenawa sees signs of the "falling sky." As forests burn throughout the western United States and around the world, some napë people, including scholars such as Isabelle Stengers, have heard and sounded the alarm: we "live in catastrophic times."⁵¹ In such circumstances, it is not enough to preserve the Amazon or other parts of the planet, while continuing to see them as natural resources that fuel napë industry and progress, or as assets that guarantee human domination over nature. The irony is that in our attempt to dominate nature, so as to assure napë well-being on earth, napë modernized people have themselves become endangered species. But, as Stengers has said, the living planet, Gaia herself, is not threatened. Although a considerable number of species may be swept away, many others, such as the microorganisms, "will effectively continue to participate in Gaia's regime of existence, that of a living planet."⁵²

In the Yanomami xapiri enactment of wasp spirits attacking xawarari epidemic (and pandemic) beings introduced by illegal gold prospectors, it may be clear to napë readers that the prospectors—whether legal or illegal—are bound to win. What would it take for wasp spirits to win? That is a hard question. The napë themselves may well be playing a losing and catastrophic game.

Perhaps Gaia has her rites of passage. Indeed, it may be that Kopenawa's story has less to do with shamanic rites of initiation than with the rites of Gaia, showing not only how a Yanomami shaman becomes similar to the kopena

wasp, but how wasps, underneath their bodies or masks, are deeply Yanomami, or human.

Finally, let us note that, in Amerindian fashion, Antonin Artaud became increasingly aware of bodies as masks. In his writings on the Land of the Tarahumaras, even the mountains and rocks cry out as living beings.⁵³ Had Artaud made a journey to the forests of the Yanomami, he would have been impressed by the art of seeing the humanness within a turtle, even an iron turtle, and further, by the art of body-making, including not only electric but also living cars, such as the xapiri with headlights. Had he been around to attend the Arcana Meeting in Manaus, he would certainly have appreciated the animated car of the Tarot.

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NOTES

1. Research by John C. Dawsey for this essay was financed by CNPq – Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq – PQ 307685/2019-5) and by FAPESP – São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp 2018/19609-9).
2. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002), 373.
3. Victor W. Turner, “Dewey, Dilthey and drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience”, in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1986), 40–41.
4. I am thankful for the invitation made to me by Alexandre Nunes (UFG), Luciana Lyra (UERJ), Robson Haderchpek (UFRN), and Verônica Fabrini (UNICAMP). I also thank Luiz Davi Vieira Gonçalves (UEA), who does research with the Yanomami, and was one of the main organizers of the Manaus event.
5. The French version, *La chute du ciel: paroles d’un chaman yanomami*, was published in 2010.
6. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, trans.

- Nicholas Elliott and Alison Dundy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 216.
7. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002), 373.
 8. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 27.
 9. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002), 394.
 10. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 6-8.
 11. The notion of mimesis, as a creative capacity to other, and to produce and recognize similarities, is developed by Walter Benjamin. See the chapters "Doctrine of the Similar" and "On the Mimetic Faculty" in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 694-698, 720-722. Assuming a Benjaminian perspective, Michael Taussig speaks of mimesis as a capacity to other. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).
 12. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 317.
 13. Ibid., 317.
 14. Ibid., 344.
 15. Ibid., 345.
 16. Ibid., 350-351.
 17. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 27.
 18. Ibid., 283.
 19. Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018), 561.
 20. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 234.
 21. Ibid., 235.
 22. Ibid., 476-487.
 23. Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).
 24. Michael Taussig, *Xamanismo, colonialismo e o homem selvagem: um estudo sobre o terror e a cura* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987).
 25. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 101.
 26. Ibid., 262.
 27. Ibid., 294.
 28. Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior", in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 35-116. Schechner is well known for creating the concept of restored behavior.
 29. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 277.
 30. Richard Schechner, "Points of Contact between Anthropological and Theatrical Thought," in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 3-34.
 31. Schechner's idea is inspired by *neti, neti* ("not this, not that") formulations of Vedic Hinduism. John Dawsey and Richard Schechner, "Anthropology in Performance: Interview with Richard Schechner," *GIS – Gesture, Image, Sound – Anthropology Journal* 1, no. 3 (July 2018): 361-419.
 32. See Keat's letter to Richard Woodhouse, sent on October 27, 1818. John Keats, *Letters of*

- John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).
33. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 293-294.
 34. *Ibid.*, 19.
 35. See Richard Schechner, "Selective Inattention," in *Performance Theory* (187-206), by Richard Schechner (New York and London, Routledge, 1988), 190; Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 300.
 36. Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 301.
 37. Note the interesting parallels in the use of "cosmic mirror" by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (an indigenous Tibetan) to refer to "the unconditioned ground of existence from which conditioned phenomena arise." See, for example, Holly Gayley, "Society as Possibility: On the Semantic Range of the Tibetan Term *Sipa*," *The Arrow: A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture & Politics* 1 (2014): 1-10.
 38. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 101.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. John C. Dawsey, "Bonecos da Rua do Porto: performance, mimesis e memória involuntária," *Ilha: Revista de Antropologia* 13, no. 1 (2012): 185-219; John C. Dawsey and Cláudia da Silva Santana, "Brincando de bonecos: um ensaio benjaminiano sobre mimesis," *Horizontes Antropológicos* 26, no. 56 (2020): 29-56.
 41. Kopenawa and Albert, *Falling Sky*, 78.
 42. *Ibid.*, 81.
 43. *Ibid.*, 83.
 44. *Ibid.*, 91-92.
 45. *Ibid.*, 95.
 46. *Ibid.*, 95.
 47. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 94-130.
 48. See Victor Turner, "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, eds. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 41.
 49. See Antonin Artaud, *O teatro e seu duplo* (São Paulo, Martins Fontes, 1999), 29.
 50. Walter Benjamin, "Rua de mão única," in *Obras escolhidas II: rua de mão única* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1993), 68-69.
 51. Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015).
 52. *Ibid.*, 46-47.
 53. See Antonin Artaud, "Concerning a journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras," in *Antonin Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1965), 69-83.



Touch as Passage: Inhabiting the Colonial Wound

KIRSTEN MUNDT

*"I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy."*¹

Donald Trump

*"Touching you, I propose to you to receive, to touch. To touch is not to manipulate. I cannot force you to touch. I can coerce you, I can take your body against your will, but I cannot evoke purposefully, in you, the response to my reaching toward you. To touch is to tender, to be tender, to reach out tenderly."*²

Erin Manning

IBEGIN WITH the above quotes by Donald J. Trump and Erin Manning to illustrate an important paradox around touch; touch can be both a violation of another (grabbing, coercing, objectifying) and an act which co-creates a space of tenderness between living beings. The extent to which touch is violent has much to do with how the one doing the touching conceives of self and other. Touching another nonviolently requires that a toucher listen to and recognize an *other* who can never be fully known or fixed in place. For Donald Trump, there is no reciprocity of being touched himself in the process of touching another, only the possibility of taking what he feels is rightfully his to take. He is not *other*. To him, the "pussies" in question are not full, animate selves with singular life and agency, but are attached to humans willing and available to be dominated. Subject touches object. When circulated within colonial logic, power and dominance are fortified through touch, whether it is consensual or not. The words and actions of Donald Trump as well as the

rise of the #metoo movement serve to highlight how white male masculinity is attributed full personhood status that asserts its collective dominance upon others perceived to be of lesser rank. The colonial ranking system is insidious and can take any form: brown man over brown woman, white woman over brown woman, adult over child, wealthy over poor, human over animal, and so on. While we all deserve full agency and sovereignty, asserting full personhood within this logic leaves colonial personhood intact, perpetuating ever-shifting hierarchies. In this article, I redefine the act of touch not as a solution to violence, but as a portal for expanding beyond colonially constructed traps of self and other.

What follows is an offering from my particular vantage point as a bodyworker and cultural studies scholar. I became a massage therapist twenty-five years ago after dropping out of a graduate program in anthropology. Touching others made sense, while studying others felt wrong. While I eventually turned my gaze back onto my own culture, touch became the vehicle for a sensory kind of knowing that I initially thought had nothing to do with critical scholarship. Until recently I was employed at a residential center for trauma and addiction where my job was to touch people in acute suffering. I was often asked if I needed to protect myself from other people's pain, and many clients would apologize for themselves, as if pain were something to hide. All I knew was that my practice was not to "heal" another, but to meet what was felt yet not easily spoken. Touch became a vehicle for experiencing another in a way that was similar to my meditation practice; if fully located within the present moment, time gives way to lived motion. Pain ceases belonging to anyone; it becomes empty. Sometimes emotions and memories trapped in the body reach out to be shaken off. Sometimes memories play like a movie, or emotions like rage, grief, or joy shake the body. Sometimes people feel themselves hovering just outside their bodies, and sometimes the dead come to visit. My job is not to make meaning or protect myself from what happens. My work is to stay tender and awake in the face of whatever is animated within the act of touch.

What it means to touch and be touched as a challenge to colonial consciousness is the subject of this essay. Colonial consciousness—including where it comes from and how it moves—will be deconstructed, while the act of touch as a decolonial act will be simultaneously animated. I use the word "animate" in this essay to give multidimensional life and vitality to concepts we may take for granted. Instead of providing a resolution to the problem of colonial consciousness, I aim to animate touch as method, as a vehicle for embodying ourselves within interconnected ecosystems larger than we might currently imagine. In this essay, I will alternate between speaking the language of touch and the language of critique as a possible route for softening intertwined tangles of

colonial consciousness as they act upon our bodies and ecosystems. Ultimately, what matters is not just the intention behind touch, but the consciousness activated between toucher and touched. This space, rich with a felt sense not considered real within the Western philosophical tradition, threatens the roots of what Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh call “Western ontological totalitarianism”: ways in which Eurocentric modes of perception shape modern life through the logic of the five senses.³ Since this embodied logic is so tightly baked into Western bodies, please bear with me as I attempt to unravel what Aníbel Quijano calls coloniality, or the ways 500 years of Eurocentric logic continue to order our senses and global power structures, limiting our imagination for how we might sustain life on the planet.⁴

I have learned two important things from twenty-five years of bodywork practice. First, healing a wound requires that a source of wounding be clearly seen, even if it is painful to look. Second, trying to “fix” or banish a wound will cause it to tighten. While any wound must be cleaned to heal, the consciousness that touches the wound cannot exhibit the same confusion as the wound itself. For example, demonstrating a clear argument often means exerting moral superiority over the ideas and experiences of others, perpetuating a “knower” and a “known,” or a subject/object relationship. What I am proposing is a radical shift in the ways we treat ourselves and each other through training our minds to be spacious enough to touch what is incommensurable and cannot be fully known or fixed in place. Through embodying the act of tender witnessing, touch reaches toward intimacy, away from the solid ground of “knowing.” Touch becomes a vehicle for feeling and speaking our way into consciousness in which life itself is the point.

Touching the Roots of Colonial Consciousness

“In the colonized way we think we say that women who are brown are women of color, and white skin make white people, but we’re not talking about that. We’re talking about how colonized we are in our own consciousness. We all have 500 years of colonization under our skin, and how do we deal with that? This whole notion of healing is colonized, too. We have to undo that first before we can even imagine something else.”⁵

Sylvia Ledesma

Within Western epistemologies, touch is considered to be one of our five senses. The word “haptic” comes from the Greek word *haptēstai*, “to touch,” and is related to the word “tactile,” or that which is perceived through touch. Yet, what can be perceived through touch exceeds what we think *can* be perceived

through a framework in which our senses always refer back to a singular, finite self which has been culturally defined and constructed. In Carolyn Merchant's ecofeminist classic, *The Death of Nature*, she traces the history of how ecological awareness, or sensory awareness that sees itself as inexorably bound to the whole of life, was systematically dominated by the male European elite to justify exploitation of labor and mining of the earth. This logic, rooted in cultural values of the European Enlightenment tradition, stipulated that the natural world, a category which included women and Indigenous peoples around the world, could be essentialized *as* nature, whose natural bounty existed to serve mankind.⁶ While this logic had already been under construction for hundreds of years, Enlightenment philosophies during the Scientific Revolution helped garner public support for mining, colonization, and capitalism by creating hierarchies of being to order gender and racial norms. These hierarchies defined who was considered human and worthy of protection and rights, instrumentalizing slavery, subordination, and exploitation of labor and natural resources. This history shaped modern capitalism and still orders modern conditions.

While this is a simplified version of Merchant's argument for the purposes of this short essay, the problem I aim to expose is how the legacy of Eurocentric embodiments continues to order modern life and limit our imaginations. Logic of "self" perpetuates what Aníbel Quijano calls coloniality,⁷ a binding of our bodies, economic practices, and institutions in ways that collude with colonial agreements on what it means to exist as a rational, logical human.⁸ Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh argue that the totalizing logic of coloniality emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and has remained intact through the logic of self and other. The creation of knowledge as a relationship in which a subject can "know" another (an object), created a hierarchy of being that made the world an "extended object of European knowledge."⁹ This hierarchy between knower and known continues to dominate the globe, in which capitalist ventures work with philanthropy, governments, and international institutions to reproduce a global, capitalist "hydra," extracting life, labor, and resources to maintain colonial dominance.¹⁰ In the sections below, I'll show how this dangerous logic is unwittingly reinforced through therapeutic practices and policies that enforce individualism, a colonial construct that limits how we know and experience what lies beyond our own skin. Without the capacity to *feel* kinship with all of life, we return again and again to our own self-interest, bound within colonial logic and institutions.

• • •

There is a young immunologist in the room who tried and failed to take her life. She is blonde and tall and thin. She doesn't want to exist.

You have the group sit and relax with their breath. You ask them to notice how they are relating to the breath.

The young woman says, "My relationship to my breath is fine as long as I don't feel anything."

Afterwards she says, "When I was in college, I studied acupuncture and traditional healing and thought about the relationship between plants and herbs and people. But I got trained out of that way of thinking in my PhD program, and now we're creating all sorts of superbugs. Unless we start thinking in terms of ecosystems, we're toast."

You look at each other for a long moment before the young woman turns away to put on her shoes.

• • •

The above vignette illustrates a desperate need to heal the grief that lives in our bones—that we are killing life through colluding with colonial consciousness—yet cannot see our way out. Here, two paradigms collide: the knowledge of traditional healing and the knowledge of modern science. For this young scientist, breathing with the tangled knot feels like more than she can bear, more than any of us should bear. Conceding to breathe, to continue to exist, means facing existential questions many of us may be asking. *What is mine to do when facing the depth of grief? Is it possible to imagine surrendering privilege, in solidarity with decolonial embodiments, ancestral histories, and the knowledge that our survival is connected to the survival of the whole?* Or, as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson asks, "What if no one colluded with colonialism?"¹¹

Personally, touch is the sense I return to because it is direct and immediate when I don't know what else to do. This is especially true when the shame of my settler status or inherited privilege leaves me no place to ethically stand. Touch bypasses thoughts and judgments about what is acceptable or not acceptable, real or unreal, in order to rest tenderly with things as they are. And yet, reckoning with colonial embodiment is part of what we must do if we are to confront what is killing all of us. For the sake of transparency, I am the descendent of both a Surinamese slave and her Dutch "owner." The fact that my great-grandmother was born in Puerto Rico and could pass as white means I have inherited a multigenerational history of chosen whiteness that denies its roots in slavery. While I have been doing the ongoing work of weeding colonial

bias from my own path, knowing where to step next has always been unclear because this body exists on land, and what it means to inhabit a settler body with white privilege is still an ongoing inquiry.

After ten years teaching in a tribal college in New Mexico, the confusion I felt inhabiting a settler body drove me back to graduate school in American Studies. In the process of writing my dissertation, in which I sought to explore border crossings with more-than-human worlds (ancestors, plants, etc.), I felt trapped within a scholarly language that limited embodied possibilities for what was actually happening, or what could be possible. While critique is a powerful naming tool, I kept finding myself reinforcing a trap of embodiment that felt constrained and limited by terms of agreement that separated me from what I knew in my hands and heart. I agonized over writing a dissertation that wouldn't package healing consciousness for consumption or produce one more ethnography guilty of othering. Sylvia Ledesma, a beloved *maestra* and *mujer medicina*¹² in Albuquerque I studied with, told me that I couldn't write a decolonial dissertation from a colonized mind and said this to me:

"So how is this paper going to serve you and humanity, the human race? Because you are a part of this, not separate. How is it going to serve the earth, preserve the water, the fire, the wind, those elements that we are made of that are also right here, part of this universe, so how's it going to serve that?"¹³

Necessarily, the subject of inquiry became that which stood in the way of decolonial consciousness and embodiment. The subject could not be "me," nor those with traditional healing knowledge I interviewed as part of my research.¹⁴ In order to animate a larger, relational field, I had to confront spoken and unspoken rules, especially those bound within mind and body, human and non-human binaries, as to what experiences count as "real" or valuable. The felt sense in Western scholarship is typically seen as suspect, to be suspended in favor of objective knowledge. Within this logic, explorations of healing spaces are typically presented ethnographically, as a set of shared beliefs and geographies, typically trapping healing perception within Western philosophical frameworks. Healing becomes the province of an ethnic other to be recorded and ethnographically trapped: the Amazonian shaman, the Mestiza *curandera*, the witch doctor. Confined within the logic of coloniality, perceptual knowledge of healing is limited to what is considered "rational," confining academics to write *about*, rather than *from*, perception that expands beyond the five senses.

Scholarship that animates through touch must necessarily challenge either/or frameworks that relate to critique and embodiment, humanities and science,

self and other. Rather than trying to prove the validity of healing touch within Western scientific or ethnographic frameworks, I'm interested in ways that sensory kinship provides a vehicle for creating knowledge together. The definition of the word "praxis" I'm reaching for draws upon Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's work in *On Decoloniality*. Essentially, unlearning Western academic thinking means engaging the world as a thinker-doer in a spiral, non-linear fashion.¹⁵ As an ethnographer, I believe the purpose of recording experience is not to "recognize" experience as legitimate, but to invite our senses to traverse colonially constructed borders that limit what we perceive and how.

Touching the Tangle of Neoliberal Therapeutics

While sensing, feeling, and touching that which can't be directly seen or known has always been within the province of traditional healing, it is not unique or particular only to certain ethnically categorized groups of people, even though healing practices draw upon particular traditions, places, stories, and histories. Instead, cultural specifics are what make healing perception "historically dense,"¹⁶ shaped by a person's specific relationship to culture, land, community, and ancestral legacies. It is simultaneously specific *and* transpersonal as it interacts with time and space that are not neutral, but socially constructed, lived, and embedded in the flesh.

While this perceptual sense has a long history in non-Western cultures, the closest theories I can find in Western neuroscience are studies of "interoception," activated through mindful awareness of one's internal body processes. Interoception, when theorized as an additional sense, is the experience of perception that filters through the felt experience of the body. More specifically, interoception refers to "the body-to-brain axis of sensation concerning the state of the internal body and its visceral organs."¹⁷ Interoception differs from exteroception, using our five senses (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling) to understand the world, and differs as well from proprioception, or awareness of the body in space. If I focus my attention on my hands, I can feel pulsing, tingling, and warmth. If I pay attention to the felt sense of my body, I know when I am hungry, thirsty, angry, sad, cold, or feeling lonely. If I can stay attentive and attuned to these sensations, I can stay present and tender to my own embodied experience. In other words, interoception is not direct sense perception per se, but the *awareness* of sense perception. Within a state of homeostasis, interoception is typically a pleasant experience. I can feel my breath, my heartbeat, my hands and feet, and know that all is well. This can be contrasted with a state of threat or injury, when the amygdala, or reptilian

brain, activates a signal that fires countless neural pathways affecting the musculoskeletal and nervous systems.

Interoception has been gaining traction in Western science over the past several years, and is more often referred to as “mindfulness.” Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens*¹⁸ is a recent Western scientific challenge to Descartes’s argument that thought produces reality, and that reality produces a rational, knowing, individual self. He argues that Descartes’s dictum, “I think, therefore I am,” is fundamentally flawed in that it does not acknowledge that thought itself is already constructed and conditioned. Damasio’s focus on the body, on the directly felt sense, challenges the primacy of our five senses as a benchmark for understanding reality. Damasio’s work theorizes his clinical observation that pain sensation and pain affect (emotion) are separate neurological processes. In other words, while pain and emotion are often linked together as a singular, monolithic and inexpressible experience of *pain*, they can be decoupled through the act of conscious witnessing. If an organism develops the capacity to witness direct experiences of pain and emotion, witnessing creates space to “feel” feelings as well as the direct, physical experience of pain itself, creating a gap between sensation and affect. Further, Damasio argues, this witness consciousness provides a direct challenge to the stability of a concrete and knowable “self.” In other words, that paradox of witnessing—through directly experiencing the felt sense of the body—directly challenges liberal humanist notions of a separate, individual self. Pain ceases to be something that is “mine,” or owned, but a physical experience that shifts, morphs, and provides a window into the felt reality that the self is similarly multiple, shifting, and plastic.¹⁹

Over the past twenty years, increased interest in awareness of the felt sense has given rise to fields such as somatics and mindfulness as legitimate therapeutic modalities. I fully support movement in this direction. However, there is something important to be reckoned with when we yoke Western science to traditionally Eastern practices. While awareness of the felt sense has gained traction through the popularization of mindfulness, when these practices are divorced from context, they can be secularized and adapted to fit any circumstance, ignoring plurality of history and meaning.²⁰ Within decontextualized, secular models, mindfulness can be just another tool for emotional management and survival within violent social fields. Mindfulness is taught in treatment facilities, corporations, prisons, and public schools, where it is used to help people manage their nervous systems within toxic and unhealthy environments. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), is taught to snipers in the military, and to financiers in Davos. In many ways, practices that help people suffer less are a good thing, though without critiquing the conditions

producing structural suffering, opportunities are limited for challenging coloniality and the violence it causes.

An important paradox to face is that while we may have moments of existing beside ourselves through contemplative practice, our bodies are tangled within what Lauren Berlant calls the “cruel optimism”²¹ of neoliberal life. As a tendril of the colonial hydra, neoliberalism is a set of moral and economic values and practices permeating American life. It is the individual who must bear the burden of stress associated with economic insecurity and who alone is responsible for the self-care needed to survive this state of affairs. Neoliberal citizenship means taking on responsibility for oneself in order not to burden others or the state: depression, anxiety, illness, motherhood, and old age are one’s personal responsibility. This cultural obsession with self-responsibility signals a retreat from collective caregiving to the individual, and circulates through laws, therapies, and policies that center individual responsibility and self-management. Since neoliberalism is not just a set of economic practices, but a set of collective agreements that govern our institutions and bodies, the more this logic has been naturalized, the more tightly we become entangled in its net.

William Connolly argues that neoliberalism thrives in a cultural climate of self-responsibility, while simultaneously diminishing conditions for flourishing. He writes, “neoliberal ideology inflates the self-organizing power of markets by implicitly deflating the self-organizing powers and creative capacity of all other systems.”²² In other words, through marrying the free market with a free and ahistorical “self,” power can be consolidated in the hands of the few while the majority focus on self-management, self-discipline, and self-care, each shoring their island against increasingly precarious and arbitrary material conditions. If we are focused on well-being as a technique for surviving colonial violence, we may miss the ways that our actions decrease opportunities for flourishing.

For example, when therapeutics become “evidence-based,” proven through science to do the things they claim to do, they can be commodified and sold, along with regulation of who can teach and practice, how things are done, and how much to charge. Mindfulness has become big business in the United States, although throughout Asia such knowledge is offered for *dana*, the Pali word for generosity. Who can offer these teachings, and under what conditions, becomes less about depth of knowledge gained over time, and more about expensive certificates and state-sanctioned trainings regulated under licensing boards.

• • •

During the break, sitting outside on the sunny patio, you meet a man in his sixties. He tells you he is one of the original authors of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. He says to you that there needs to be a gate-keeping function for who can teach mindfulness, and that a license to practice therapy should be the minimum requirement.

He says this to you, a bodyworker who teaches mindfulness. You so passionately disagree with him that you forget to be polite, patient, or mindful. You can barely contain your frustration, and you can see this makes him more certain that you are proving his point. A young man sitting next to you tells the man he uses his textbook in his classroom at the University of Illinois. He is rewarded with a copy of the man's book.

You feel a vague sense of shame within your strong, clear "no!" You wonder if this is because you were raised to be a nice white woman.

• • •

There is a paradox to be reckoned with here: secularized therapeutic practices can, and often do, reinforce traps of neoliberal selfhood when yoked to profit and regulation. The issue is not the practices themselves, but the consciousness and political context in which they are deployed. The danger is that, in regulating and commodifying evidence-based help or healing, we can unwittingly disempower Indigenous and local webs of care, displacing efforts to freely care for each other as the central task. At least for now, traditional healers in New Mexico are allowed to practice under the "Unlicensed Practitioner Act," which requires them to prominently display the fact that they are unlicensed to protect consumers. This is a profound dishonoring of wisdom gained through long and difficult trainings with elders, wisdom which—in New Mexico—is traditionally offered for donation, not a set fee.²³

In *Therapeutic Nations*, Dian Million argues that the function of state-provided therapies is to produce self-governing subjects who do not challenge the economic and political goals of the state.²⁴ If one primary political and economic goal of neoliberalism is to maintain control of land and resources for exploitation, growth, and gain, it makes sense to produce self-governing subjects. Self-governing subjects are also consumers who will then reap "rewards" from private property ownership with narratives that promise fulfillment through individuation from others. Million argues that therapeutic and humanitarian

discourses serve the purpose of offering (empty) self-determination to the already colonized.²⁵

Deploying the term “trauma” in Indigenous communities locates Native people within a historical narrative that assumes traumatic violence lies in the past, as something to be healed and forgiven. By providing psychological treatments, the state assumes a benevolent role, treating traumatic injury with discourses and tools which exonerate the ways that *ongoing* colonial relationships reproduce psychic and physical trauma.²⁶ Here, self-determination, empowerment, and “healing” become linked to a form of selfhood that necessarily depends upon forgetting violence in order to occupy an ahistorical, multicultural present in which the individual aligns itself with capitalism and neoliberal values based in ownership and self-responsibility. Janis Jenkins and Thomas Csordas’s recent book, *Troubled in the Land of Enchantment*, untangles how neoliberal morality and stigma permeate the mental health system in New Mexico. They tracked narratives of young people prior to trauma/addiction treatment and after, recording ways that narratives of trauma changed after interaction with judicial and health care systems. One example is of a young girl whose initial personal narrative was one of “being Zuni,” who had “bad things happen to [her],” but that shifted to being a girl who has “fucked up [her] life”²⁷ after therapeutic treatment.

While critiquing ways that Western therapies and frameworks reproduce coloniality through promoting neoliberal value systems is important, it cannot be the sole end. In order for a colonial “self” to imagine alternatives for existence, it needs something better and richer to sustain itself. As an alternative, in the following section, I will flesh out touch through the lens of decolonial literature and theory. The felt experience of interbeing has always been a vital part of decolonial knowledge production in Chicana and Indigenous feminisms, feminist science studies, and Black studies. One term to consider is what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call “hapticality”—shared, felt experiences that exceed the limits of individual selfhood, language, and linear notions of time and space.²⁸ The embodiment of hapticality is a lived space in which the pleasures of feeling with and for trump self-interest and self-preservation.

The lack of concrete definition for hapticality is intentional; it is a word that defies concrete definition in favor of what can be felt and lived. If you are a meditation practitioner, you may be familiar with the experience of dislocating thoughts and mental constructs that shape and order “knowing.” In this next section, my words are an invitation for the reader to enter a space of lived motion that feels *with* the violence of history and *this* historical moment as you experience dislocation from a cohesive sense of self. While the adjective

“haptic” means “related to the sense of touch,” hapticality is a place between worlds and words; a vehicle not confined by colonial grammatical structures.

Hapticality, or Love

Hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel though others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem. Or perhaps we could say these are now recomposed in the wake of the shipped. To feel others is unmediated, immediately social, amongst us, our thing, and even when we recompose religion, it comes from us, and even when we recompose race, we do it as race women and men. Refused these things, we first refuse them, in the contained, amongst the contained, lying together in the ship, the boxcar, the prison, the hostel. Skin, against epidermalisation, senses touching. Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other.²⁹

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney

I include this passage here from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons* as an entry point for considering ways those denied humanity (here, human beings on a slave ship) organized and survived colonial violence through hapticality. Here, hapticality operates as a place of both refusal (of colonial personhood) and assent (feeling with and for each other). The slave ship becomes less metaphor than a vehicle we are invited to board in present time. Hapticality, through the touch of each other, provides a safe passage away from collusion with colonial constructs of time and space toward *the feel that what is to come is here*. Hapticality is a space in which lived motion refuses collective agreements that define who is a person, what it means to be a person, how to *be* a person. Instead, dispossessed, affective selves—denied true humanity—live within, between and among bodies, refusing terms of a liberal humanist “self” that is whole, settled, unified.

This felt state exists far outside of Western therapeutic practices because the goal of wholeness no longer applies. Not only does hapticality challenge colonial notions of getting settled, of “making it” on settler terms, but life in the *hold* of the ship undermines all forms of bio- and geo-political manage-



ment: *this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem.*³⁰ By dislocating one's body from all terms of coloniality—history as past, bodies bound by skin in present time, and private property ownership—hapticality becomes a lived feel that is simultaneously personal and vastly trans-personal, completely dislocated from bounded notions of place, home, and self: *Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other.*³¹

Touch, though it is a “sentiment with its own interiority,” is not born of “self,” or “soul,” but connected to shared histories and ancestral experiences that are heard and felt. For example, soul music is an expression of lament for broken hapticality, created and enforced through slavery and forced separation from family, community, and land. Far from historical, these violences continue to live in the flesh through our DNA. Facing this pain cannot be done through historicizing or naming alone, nor does it involve forgetting the violence of history in order to move on and adapt. Instead, coming home, or fully embodying ourselves, becomes a process in which pain must be transmuted through a kind of sharing not bound by one's skin: *This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide.*³² The felt experience of sharing and embodying history becomes the field through which to forge connection and solidarity outside of colonial constructs of time, space, and “self.” It is not just the pain of this lifetime, but the felt acknowledgment of broken ancestral ties, geographies, and oppressions. The felt, living sense of history, then, becomes a crucial space for imagining self-hood beyond the confines of a body occupying a particular point in time. Instead of managing pain as personal trauma, as something to be “healed” in a lifetime, the felt sense of time stretches backward and forward, including ancestors and generations to come. From what vantage point, or what point in time, could we say that “healing” has been accomplished? And to what end?

Erin Manning's *The Politics of Touch* considers how touch interrupts settler constructs of self in time and space, interrupts concrete boundaries between self and other, and undermines the myth of security. Manning argues that the problem of the body in Western scholarship and policy is that we treat it like a distinct agent. Naturalization of the body—marking it as gendered and racialized—renders bodies recognizable and assignable to territories. Nation states rely on these markings to govern citizens through a multicultural politics of difference: as long as people can be made “knowable” through the celebration of difference, they can be marked for inclusion while leaving colonial logic intact. Diversity and inclusion work, when couched within the logic of coloniality, can open pathways for more people to access the myth of the American

Dream, as long as a logic of “self” is left intact. Manning argues that a politics of touch opens the possibility for our bodies to imagine embodied agency capable of refusing notions of ourselves as singular and concrete. The spaces between us transform from objects of analysis to gestures of *becoming-in-relation*:

“The body is never its-*self*. We have several bodies, none of them “selves” in terms of subjectivity. Touch as reaching toward already alerts us to the downfall of discourses of subjectivity: if my body is created through my movement toward you, there is no “self” to refer back to, only a proliferation of vectors that emerge through contact.”³³

Within this continuum, touch provides a strong challenge to dualistic knowledge production. What possibilities emerge for language and scholarship of feeling *with*, both recognizing and evading colonial technologies? Even the term “hapticality” is limited when attempting to access the *feeling* of pain since language has the power to separate experience, the actual feeling of pain, from the body. Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* argues that pain shatters language and the ability to speak. She argues that when pain does begin to speak, it tells a story, and yet, due to its inability to be grasped, it causes a split between one’s reality and the reality of others, making torture and structural violence effective tools of control. Violence, when it is inflicted by war, torture, or structurally through institutions, affects how individuals either speak or remain in silence.³⁴ Sandra Soto suggests that the process of naming, defining, or using metaphors to “footnote the confounding manifold ways that our bodies, our work, our desires are relentlessly interpolated by inequivalent social processes”³⁵ is equally a trap. Instead, she suggests listening to *what is not said* in order to ward off “ontological impoverishment,” or alienation from what we know in our bones.³⁶

Less a project of healing personal pain than of yoking woundedness across space, time, and language, hapticality as a ship, or vehicle, *densifies* the connection between past and present, self and other. While there is no “away” from colonial conditions, pain felt and shared forms a potential bridge. The focus becomes not the personal self in pain, but how pain continues to be inflicted by decontextualizing lived conditions. Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, argues that being and writing *in* the wake, from within the “continuous and changing present of slavery’s as yet unresolved unfolding,”³⁷ means inhabiting history in ways that do not see the past as the past, but as continuously unfolding within and around us. Here, the felt sense of history, of the ancestral continuing into the present, and the felt sense of responsibility for future generations, are a necessary corrective to individual selfhood. Being *in* something, within the constant unfolding of time as it interacts with history

and an unknown future, becomes an act of care and repair. Through decentering a knowing narrator as a hallmark of critical scholarship, other forms of expression such as poetry, touch, and speculative fiction emerge as portals for speaking our way into a decolonial otherwise.

Poetry as Touch, or Speaking for the Dead

Veronica Golos's *Rootwork* is a speculative poetic experiment that moves back and forth through time, fleshing the ghostly body of Mary Day Brown as she dialogues with her abolitionist husband John Brown and other historical figures of the abolitionist period—Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, and Sojourner Truth.³⁸ “Rootwork” is another word for hoodoo, for a form of healing that crosses worlds in order to seek balance and harmony. As part of a poetry project with the Black Earth Institute, poets were asked to pick a date in September and to see where it led them. Golos chose September 16th, the same day that John Brown was hanged in 1857, after the Dred Scott decision inflamed racial tensions. One of the most infamous Supreme Court decisions in U.S. history, the court majority argued that all citizens of African descent—whether slave or free—could not be U.S. citizens (because they were not “persons”) and that a land owner's property could not be taken away without due legal process. Golos draws upon historical documents, letters, and journals, in order to bring the voices “from those drowned, ghosts beneath the sea, from runaways, from the land itself,”³⁹ as a form of world-making that performs a “call and answer between American History and Myself.”⁴⁰ In other words, through embodying and dialoguing with the ghosts of history, Golos explores her own unique vantage point as a white citizen occupying complex historical and social ecologies. For Golos, political activism informs her poetry as an act of animating history in present time.

Golos's own social location as a self-identified white woman becomes simultaneously displaced and centralized as she feels into the words and histories of Mary Day and John Brown, as well as of other abolitionists and slaves, and explores what can be felt and said when feeling *with*, instead of on behalf of. Her poetry shape-shifts in time, space, and voice as she speculates on what has been lived and felt. For Golos, the subject of slavery becomes an entry point for a speculative dialogue with ancestors, land, and ghosts to inform present time. Her writing “self” is decentralized and moves between selves and voices. In coming to know and understand Mary Day Brown—a white woman who committed her life to ending slavery—Golos found herself increasingly inside of her subject. As Golos moves back and forth through time, tracing Mary's

days before and after John's hanging, she records vignettes that fuel Mary's rage and determination over the violence she sees around her:

*That day, my host
called the boy inside & his father followed. "Sing, boy,"
the host said. The boy began to sing all
Christian hymns; after the first song,
he was urged to a second; after the second
to a third. The boy's lips grew dry, we could
see. His father turned to stone as the white
man demanded another, and another, the
boy swaying on his feet.⁴¹*

Feeling history alive via the historical words of another becomes a defining feature of border-crossing between worlds, of coming to know and see more clearly the violence inflicted upon bodies that are not one's own. Less an act of empathy than an act of critical mourning, Golos/Brown endeavors to illuminate history through the practice of hapticality, not only as it is felt between Golos and Brown, but as it expands to include the voices of other humans, ghosts, and land. The felt sense, or hapticality, as it crosses between human, spirit, and natural worlds, becomes a defining feature of coming to embody history in present time. Traditional slave canticles frame Golos's original poetry, shifting attention away from Mary Day Brown's body into a lived, shared space animating relationships between multiple, connected worlds:

*Just before day I feel them. Just before day I feel them.
My sister, I feel them. My sister, I feel them.
All night long I've been feeling them.
Just before day I feel them. Just before day I feel them.
The spirit, feel them. The spirit I feel them.⁴²*

One could certainly critique Golos for imagining herself inside bodies that are passed, bodies that may or may not share her skin color or experiences. One could argue that there can be no truth here of lived experience. It is simply a speculative experiment of the imaginary. She could be accused of misrepresentation or speaking for others. What interests me, here, however, are the ways that Golos's speculative strategy of hapticality opens possibilities for writing that challenge materialist confines of colonial time, space, and self. Feeling with the ghosts of history becomes a necessary method for understanding the present moment, understanding how Golos's current embodiment has been

co-constructed with histories of slavery. The goal is less self-understanding than an embodied, felt exploration of whiteness and patriarchy as they continue to travel through time and history. By assuming multiple locations and bodies, traveling through history as a nonlinear construct that moves backward and forward, Golos challenges embodiments constructed in *this* time, *this* space, *this* body. Bodies become living processes, animated in time and space.

An example of Christina Sharpe's "theory in the wake,"⁴³ Golos looks back at violence occluded through histories of forgetting—an act that contradicts the white masculinist American narrative of Land of the Free, Home of the Brave. Golos evokes the Star-Spangled Banner to juxtapose nationalist songs with slave canticles, physically naming slave women on whose backs America was built. By focusing on the names and songs of women, Golos brings alive the legacy of women slaves, still so often excluded from histories and narratives of slavery:

.ghost code. *america*

Oh Say Can You See

O. Say. cn u c

O sway ships

Desire, Hope, Henrietta Marie, Adelaide, Cora, Margaret

Scott, Sally, Whydah

Womenships slip by

us

away in the waves see sea o can u

in the sea waves of limbs⁴⁴

Perhaps this form of poetry can better be considered the ancestral speculative, or a form of grieving that Donna Haraway might call the work of "Speakers for the Dead," an important job in her imagined future. In her piece of speculative fiction, *The Camille Stories*, she imagines that Speakers for the Dead hold important positions as healers; not for individuals, but for "strengthening the healing that was gaining momentum across the earth"⁴⁵ as a densifying of interconnected communities and ecosystems. Through the act of vital memory, through the work of mourning, the role of Speakers for the Dead is to "not forget the stink in the air from the burning of witches, not to forget the murders of human and non-human beings in the Great Catastrophes named the

Plantationocene, Anthropocene, and Capitalocene, to keen and mourn the dismembering of the world.”⁴⁶

Learning how to embody our way through grief, through the dismemberment of the world as we know it, is a central challenge for bodies conditioned by colonial consciousness. The challenge, or paradox, here is that embodiment does not present an end goal, only a vehicle by which we become continually undone. Through tenderly touching the unbearable, we become other, and other becomes self. Touch loosens our grip on “knowing,” animating a reality always in relation. Seen through this lens, touch becomes a portal to motion, an invitation to cultivate a space in which all beings that one is in relationship to—both alive and dead—can inform and shape worlds we wish to inhabit. My particular hope is that by reimagining ourselves within an always-in-motion universe, tenderly touching grief, dispossession and pain—we might feel empowered to practice singular acts of care for each other. Through expanding sensory capacities, we may begin to see moments of shock, trauma, or “falling apart” as opportunities for expanding multispecies collectivity, reimagining what it might mean to exist together on a rapidly changing planet.

Coda

You are giving a massage to a man from Eastern Oregon who is in treatment for crippling anxiety. During the first session, he tells you about his unionized health care plan. He tells you how happy he is to be taken care of by the union, and how hard he has worked, not like the lazy people who don't want to work and take Medicaid.

You breathe. You are grateful for Medicaid.

When you approach his right hand, you notice he is wearing a ring with a fleur-de-lys, a flower used by the French to brand slaves in their colonies so there would be no mistaking who they belonged to.

You breathe.

You say, Tell me about your ring.

He says, I'm German and it's a symbol of my heritage.

You breathe.

You will for your hands to soften. You keep softening, you keep softening. As you soften, he softens.

Underneath hardness is fear. As you soften together into the sensations of

fear, as he names how this fear lives in his body, tears roll down his face.

This man comes to see you next week and the ring is gone.

This man comes to see you every week for two months. He comes to every meditation class. He learns how to inhabit fear in his body, how to move it into the earth, how to look someone softly in the eyes.

When he leaves, he presents you with a painted stone. He has been painting many stones.

In the center is a man inside of a purple egg, his hands tenderly holding his heart.

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Reciprocity: An Antidote to our Global Crises

DAVID MANUEL-NAVARRETE

*"One thing to remember is to talk to the animals. If you do, they will talk back to you. But if you don't talk to the animals, they won't talk back to you, then you won't understand, and when you don't understand you will fear, and when you fear you will destroy the animals, and if you destroy the animals, you will destroy yourself."*¹

attributed to Chief Dan George, Tsleil-Waututh Nation

*"Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interactions."*²

bell hooks

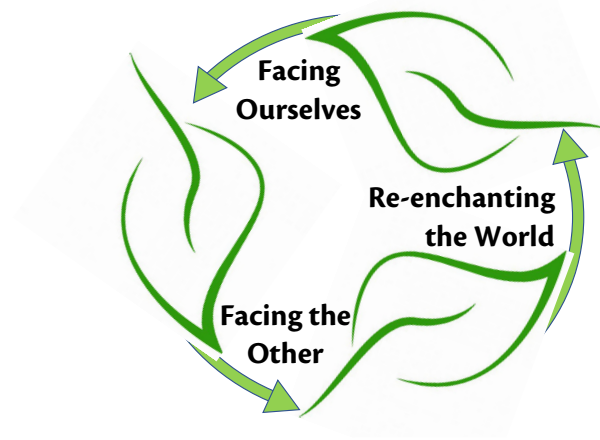
SOME BELIEVED, especially white men like me but not only, that the most exciting challenges of this century would be technological or organizational; such as the conquering of outer space or artificial extensions of our intelligence or life span. Then, COVID-19—ever-worsening fires, heatwaves, floods, and hurricanes, too—gave us a preview of the global devastation that larger disruptions such as pandemics and global climate change may unleash. With the hindsight of this vulnerability, the main challenge of the century appears much more cumbersome: we either *restore reciprocity*, or the planet may well just dispose of us. Some still believe that current crises can be weathered with just technological innovation, such as vaccines, electric cars, or geoengineering. While material inventions will remain important and buy us some time, there is growing concern that addressing global inequality, climate dis-

ruption, and other concurrent challenges will require a fundamental transformation of the ways in which modernized individuals relate to others, ourselves and the planet.³

Reciprocity can be defined as giving back the equivalent of what one takes or receives. Inspired by the cognitive shock the COVID-19 pandemic forced upon many of us, and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings on how to face fear⁴, I outline a cycle of *three existential moves* to guide the restoration of reciprocal forms of relationality as a guide for Western-modern people who feel ready to start restoring reciprocal ways of being. These "recycling" moves can be named *Facing the Other*, *Facing Ourselves*, and *Re-enchanting the World*. Jumping into this existential wheel would require what Chögyam Trungpa might have called the fearless attitude of the warrior; the attitude of recognizing our fears, smiling at them, and eagerly learning to return, over and over, to a state of equanimity in relation to all existence—choicelessly, without hard edges, guided by true compassion towards ourselves and others. Fear here is a tool, an ally to teach us, through the process of embracing, accepting and dissolving it. Fear teaches us how to rebuild communities deeply guided by reciprocity.

Indigenous scholars have convincingly shown that non-Western cultures engage in diverse forms of reciprocity with the more-than-human world.⁵ As a white, male, Hispanic-Catalan settler in Arizona, I am not the first to valorize reciprocity. My approach as a sustainability professor is to teach that the basic currency of life on Earth is *mutually beneficial relationships*; that is, Life—including human life—is fundamentally premised on the state of being reciprocally connected. However, I do so within the four walls of university classrooms, equally square screens, and within institutional contexts that value comparison and competition over relationality, and a cultural milieu obsessed with measuring and rewarding individual success over reciprocal collaboration.

The reciprocity-building wheel outlined above presents a process for people indoctrinated through Western education to transform their ways of being and learning with insights about reciprocity from non-Western knowledges. This transformation should not be purely intellectual, but enacted. Our intellectual capacities for abstraction and objectification, when left unchecked, hinder reciprocity through reifying abstract boundaries and divisions that can get solidified into cultural beliefs and practices. Privileging abstraction over relational thinking (and *emotioning*⁶) is a hallmark of colonialism & modernity, the cultural forms that have sown unsustainability by systematically eroding reciprocal relations in favor of competition, exploitation and accumulation.⁷ For instance, abstracting non-human species from their ecological relations, biological needs, or sentience enables reducing them to meat for mass-consumption, object of entertainment in circus or zoos, or experimental objects



routinely tortured in science labs. Over-abstraction generally supports coloniality as a structure of management based on attaining control through homogenization.⁸ Embracing reciprocity means recognizing that ethical concerns do not arise from rational arguments and discourse alone, but from experience, spirituality, love, desire, or emotions. Walter Mignolo suggests that “[a]s we lose respect for our emotions, we begin to use rational arguments to hide, deny, or justify them. We do so in a path that progressively leads us to the negation of the other.”⁹

The erosion of reciprocity is connected with global environmental change and recurrent pandemics. It also hinders our response to them. At the same time, the effects of concurrent global crises can become opportunities to curb the inertia from centuries of systematic suppression of reciprocity. However, these opportunities will likely go wasted unless people encultured in Western techno-scientific ways (today, it seems like that’s almost everyone) rein in their habits to accumulate, abstract, isolate, and objectify everything, including themselves. The next sections discuss each step of the reciprocity-building wheel.

Facing the Other

Facing the Other is a generative move towards pluriversality; a decolonial concept inspired by the Zapatista’s idea of a world in which many worlds can coexist.¹⁰ Modernized individuals who overdevelop egocentric and purely intellectual forms of engaging the world often feel highly insecure and fearful of otherness. This is because “the other”, by definition, cannot be known as one knows oneself, thus creating cognitive dissonance and division that the intellect alone cannot resolve. A positive feedback loop may arise where we avoid fear by turning our gaze upon ourselves, inflating the ego, isolating us further

from that which is different, undermining reciprocity at its roots, and nurturing even more fear.

Colonial culture sanctions temporary means of dealing with existential fears by eliminating or assimilating the other. Thus, recognition of the other, which is a precondition for listening and reciprocating, is either repressed and eliminated, or subdued and exploited. Modernity and capitalism become natural allies of coloniality as mass media and the market tend to homogenize and commodify everything in order to make it communicable and consumable.¹¹ The resulting sameness and mass extinction of cultures reduce humanity's array of experiences, as well as our ability to adapt and evolve in an increasingly variable planet.¹² But at the root of culturicide is the inability to face the fear that arises from having to deal with the unknowable, which is, essentially, otherness. As an existential move, Facing the Other means dealing with otherness openly, without trying to reduce it to the familiar or already known, and from an awareness that we are connected through a deeper interdependence beyond the intellect's grasp.

Chögyam Trungpa described this move in terms of becoming a spiritual warrior: a person who faces the other, oneself, and each moment of life not merely through the intellect, but rather through the innate courage, faith, belief, and joy that resides within our core being.¹³ Western culture must face and rise to meet the other again; each one of us must turn our gaze away from ourselves, back to the diversely different community of all existence to which humans are inherently connected. In this process, great inspiration can be provided by Indigenous knowledges and Buddhism.

Indigenous cultures have created myriad ways of truly listening and acknowledging others (human and non-human) without objectifying or commoditizing them.¹⁴ Ancestral knowledge can help us to learn to Face the Other again and rebuild reciprocal relationships. For instance, *Etuaptmumk* (Mi'kmaw for 'Two-Eyed Seeing')¹⁵ is a practice that has been passed through generations of Mi'kmaq Knowledge Keepers to equitably embrace multiple perspectives. This practice can be used to see through the eyes of other-than-human beings, as well as from multiple cultural eyes. In this sense, Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall applies Two-Eyed Seeing for "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all."¹⁶

The Buddhist path of loving-kindness for all beings provides useful practices and wisdom that can be mobilized to Face the Other. One of its basic ideas is to build a genuine connection to our world as one cultivates good humor and a state of satisfaction while getting in touch with the goodness inherent in

ourselves and the phenomenological world around us.¹⁷ Another key element of loving-kindness is about seeing clearly—through being in the present moment—the people who are in our lives, our current situation, emotions and thoughts without trying to improve anything.¹⁸ This is important because the impulse of achieving more, acquiring, becoming better as a separate individual, and then “bettering” the other has been a major psychological drive of coloniality and capitalism, which is detrimental because they generate suffering and injustice while homogenizing and destabilizing the planet.

Facing Ourselves

Facing Ourselves entails realizing that human beings are much more than the images and stories that we create about ourselves. There are intricate mysteries about who we are, incomprehensible to the intellect despite one’s best attempts at finding certainty by religious or scientific inquiry. For instance, the mysteries of what happens to one’s sense of individuality after the body dies, or to what extent animals, plants or rocks participate of the same spiritual nature or consciousness as humans do. Creating images of oneself and of others reduces human beings to their social roles and ideologies such as scientists, activists, entrepreneurs, members of the public, liberals, conservatives, or religious people. This reductionism is a basic abstracting capacity of the human intellect. It can be useful for social-political engagement, but Western techno-scientific culture—its equating of perception with physical senses and the intellect—normalizes our total identification with mental images about ourselves. This amounts to a “epistemological fallacy” (as critical realists like Roy Bhaskar put it) that reduces personhood to ideas of oneself, while hindering emotional or spiritual ways of being and perceiving.¹⁹ Living without being able to know what or who we really are can be destabilizing. The plethora of images about oneself (i.e., the ego) distracts away from the acute pain generated from an ignorance of our own nature. Facing Ourselves is fundamentally about accepting and embracing this existential pain instead of trying to escape it through the illusions of the ego.

Embracing a pluriversal perspective opens the possibility of a continuous dialogue, hybridization and interaction of diverse worlds that cannot be reduced to one perspective or culture. Mahāyāna Buddhism speaks of two truths; relative and absolute, which can be seen as two levels of reality or ways of approaching reality. Relative truth encompasses distinguishable phenomena captured by the intellect through the conventional operation of thought: fragmentation, objectification, classification, and so on. The absolute is beyond what our sense perceptions can grasp, but we are fundamentally in unity with

that absolute truth, whether or not we can detect it. Meditation facilitates our ability to perceive this absolute reality permeating us and all things. The absolute creates no distinctions, but the key point here is that both relative, and absolute truths are equally real.

Mi'kmaw Indigenous elders called the practice of speaking and listening in different worldviews *Etuaptmumk* (Mi'kmaw for 'Two-Eyed Seeing').²⁰ *Etuaptmumk* is a practice that indigenous people were forced to acquire when European colonizers imposed their culture and worldviews upon them. However, Mi'kmaw elders ask that everybody cultivates the capacity of seeing the world simultaneously through two cultural perspectives because it provides a richer perception of reality that will help us face the current global environmental crises. Another ancestral Indigenous practice that integrates ways of perceiving is *senti-pensar* (feeling-thinking). *Senti-pensar* combines the heart with the mind by thinking with the heart and feeling with the mind. This practice was explicated to Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda while conversing with fishers from *San Martín de la Loba*, a community of land, rivers, wetlands, and people thriving as an "amphibian culture" since pre-Columbian times. The integration of thinking and feeling takes places in the context of relational ontologies, where people feel-think with the non-human, with the Earth.²¹

Overall, Facing Ourselves entails cultivating our capacity to see and perceive from multiple cultural and human perspectives simultaneously, and learning how to meaningfully weave them together by raising awareness of reciprocal relations. When human experience is grounded on culturally fixed epistemologies, instead of fluid and pluriversal ways of knowing, reciprocity withers.

Re-Enchanting the World

Re-enanting the World entails a return to perceiving beyond what the intellect can grasp. It is about embodying and enacting the world relationally by breaking our experience free from the modern atomistic perspective which portrays individuals as self-sufficient repositories of reason existing outside of place or milieu.²² It connects into Facing the Other with an invitation to embrace Indigenous knowledge, specifically Indigenous ecology and science, which are rooted in spirituality.²³ It connects with Facing Ourselves as it requires ontological and epistemological openness.²⁴ Facing the irreducible mystery of human existence calls for feeling and embodying the world in new ways: "as a place that is sentient and alive, even invested in our collective wellbeing."²⁵ Modernity's deficit of reciprocity is also a deficit of relational, collectivist, and holistic logics. These deficits desacralize nature and conjure up a terrifying sense of

isolation that misrepresents Life as an endless struggle to survive in a hostile environment; a space of demands, mistrust, and control.²⁶

In practice, re-enchanting the world may involve meditation techniques, such as mindful eating, that allow us to be fully present to our feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations involved in daily activities, while simultaneously acknowledging and expressing gratitude for all the beings that co-operate in these activities. A more intense and powerful practice coming from indigenous culture is the vision quest ceremonies.²⁷ Vision quests usually involved a series of guided rituals and trainings in order to prepare people to spend days with mother nature, strictly disconnected from their habitual cultural milieu. The goal is to gain a “vision” of our deep and reciprocal interconnection with all beings. These types of techniques and practices experientially bring to the fore the limitations of Euro-centric ontologies; where the World and the Universe are assumed to be made of inert, purposeless matter.

Holistic logics subsume individuals under the collective; the absolute value resides on the social whole, rather than the individual or private property. Individualism may have helped to balance out extreme forms of collectivism and holism which deprive the self of any sovereignty. Individualism has played its role in countering the hegemony of European monarchs, ideological collectivism, and religious dogma, but modernity has taken it to the extreme by wholly embracing the logics of *possessive individualism*, where the individual is “seen as essentially the proprietor of [their] own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them.”²⁸ The supremacy of possessive individualism leads to the suppression of reciprocity towards others, collectives, and the world at large.²⁹ To make things worse, possessive individualism has been sacralized by some in a “winner takes all” economy, and a dangerous “cult of selfishness”³⁰ which rejects the bearing of any responsibility and accountability for the effects of individual actions and decisions, independently of how harmful they might be to either others, or (even) oneself. Such narcissistic forms of hyper individualism underlie our failures to coordinate collective responses to global crises.

Modern culture needs to balance ego with eco;³¹ and rationality with the magical sensing of the “otherworldly mysteries” that would pervade our quotidian experience if we were open to them. From such re-balancing, new reciprocal practices, social contracts, ontologies and cosmologies may emerge. Indigenous practices and cosmologies can assist in the recalibration of global modern culture. For instance, the Haudenosaunee or Anishnaabe Sky Woman’s cosmology are not abstractions that explain human perceptions of the world or universe, but “literal and animate extension of Sky Woman’s and First Woman’s thoughts”³². The immaterial beings of Indigenous cosmologies are real. Humans generally perceive and experience them through the filters of

our senses and minds, which distort their true being-ness. This is inevitable, but it is also problematic when inevitable partial representations are taken as complete truths. In such cases, the ego takes precedence over the eco; and the balance is broken. However, an attitude of constantly accessing deeper layers of perception and paying attention through the wholeness of one's entire being, can restore the balance by realizing that the ego's discriminating mind is only capable of accessing a small bit of what is going on in any situation. This is consistent with some Buddhist conceptions of humility, which are "not about how you compare yourself with others or place yourself in a larger context, but about denying the reality of such a self"³³.

Buddhist practices such as visualization, and ideas such as right view,³⁴ can assist us in harnessing the ego, transcending culture itself, and realizing that we are all part of one living, spiritual being.³⁵ There are multiple ways of being attentive to the sacredness of life and planet. My own subjective path was accelerated in several ways. Authors, such as David Abram's beautiful use of the written word guided me to re-enchant my experience of the world.³⁶ Plant medicine and cultural immersion in communities inhabiting and guarding the Amazon have unlocked and softened some of my most entrenched cultural boundaries and ego. Yoga training in India, and the easier connection with wild animals there, pushed me towards a more meaningful embodiment of the world's integral magic. A Vipassana retreat, the pandemic years, starting to grow my own food, adopting a pet, and imbuing my days with a more meditative stance have all raised my awareness about the deep presence of current experience. Through this chain of events I have started a path towards deflating my ego-system, softening my cultural boundaries, and paying more attention to the reciprocal relations that sustain Life and Spirit. The most recent episode in my open-ended process of re-connecting consisted of a vision quest ceremony in my indigenous forests near Barcelona. Confronting the fears of spending a night alone and unprotected yielded to an embodied sense of wholeness and reciprocity with all life that I could have only barely hypothesized a decade ago. Words cannot adequately portray this "vision" of connection, but it is within everyone's reach, and it has changed the way I see myself, the planet, and other selves. The challenge is to keep the vision alive while operating within egocentrically unbalanced social systems.

Facing Current Existential Crises Through Reciprocity

Reciprocity is an antidote to global crises rather than a solution. The world is not a problem, but a living being in distress.³⁷ Building reciprocity addresses the roots of the distress, which Otto Scharmer characterizes in terms of

three big divides: social (self/other), spiritual (self/Self), and ecological (self/nature).³⁸ The three existential moves of the reciprocity-building wheel proposed here aim toward bridging these big divides, and can be enacted in many ways. Several Indigenous and Buddhist practices can inspire these enactments, but there are many other helpful practices—quantum approaches, non-duality, transdisciplinarity, or Sufism, to mention just a few—that could not be explored in this essay.

Reciprocity deficits have also hindered some nations' and our global response to COVID-19. Facing otherness, particularly in multi-cultural countries like the U.S. and Brazil, would have resulted in coordinated responses that were in touch with the diversity of realities on the ground. Technocracies have failed to account for structural social and racial divisions within, and between, countries, thus producing asynchronous responses that have worsened inequalities. Uncapable of facing ourselves, many people across the planet and their institutions resorted to old images and stories that reduce the pandemic to a sanitary problem, and were unable to see the existential roots through which current global crises unfold. While myopic responses, such as vaccines or green technologies, are useful and necessary in the short-term, they do little to address root causes. Unable to overcome the possessive individualism that supports modern capitalist cultures, the pandemic has unveiled the problems of our atomistic views of the individual that hinders responses based on solidarity, selfless sacrifice, working towards the common good, and taking responsibility for others and the planet.

Modern and post-modern cultures have failed for decades to respond to global environmental change, which is a much harder test, on an even larger scale and with higher stakes than the pandemic. The wildfires that have engulfed the Amazon, Australia, the northern Mediterranean shores, Siberia, and the U.S. west, should, at the very least, act as a wake-up call, but: Is it too late? The inability of wealthy societies to adequately respond to COVID-19 indicates that just improving our capacity to materially respond to climate change may not be enough. Even the best technical response will likely be dramatically insufficient. We will need to avert it, but the paradox is that our most powerful tool to avoid climate change is to use its most dramatic effects as levers to push us away from our hubris and narcissistic excesses.

Humans would do well to start treating these global crises as fundamentally existential—not climatic or sanitary—and as a creation of Euro-centric culture and institutions (through colonialism, modernity, and capitalism, but also through techno-scientific culture). Science, as we know it, is part of the problem and cannot become part of the solution unless we decolonize it and transform it into a transdisciplinary endeavor in which diverse ways of know-

ing and levels of reality (i.e., ontologies) are embraced as equally valid on their own terms. The ultimate questions are: What do these crises can do to help us change? And how can we use these crises to reduce our deficit of reciprocity and build a global culture organized towards, and around, mutually beneficial relations?

My mother-in-law tells us that, in her native Uganda, when someone died, a relative would explain what had happened to the banana plantation formerly tended by the deceased. The relative would talk to some trees and ask them to pass the word to the rest. They would also explain that leaves would be collected to cook special food in honor of the departed. It was said that failing to engage in this ceremony resulted in loss of crops in subsequent years as plants, too, need to mourn.

From a colonized mind, deficient in reciprocity, it is easy to disregard this ancestral practice of talking to the plants as superstitious and out of touch with “reality.” A colonized mind under decolonial recovery may display sensitivity towards Indigenous knowledges, but still look for the “rational” explanation behind the Baganda practice, even arguing that it plays a key “real” social function in these communities. This patronizing attitude seeks to be inclusive, but still reduces (or collapses) cultural diversity into the rational-empirical model of reality. It attempts at reciprocating with the other, but in truth it is just a hidden move towards making it knowable to the modern mind, thus leaving little room for otherness.

At a higher degree of reciprocity and more advanced stage of decolonization, one may accept that plants actually “feel” the farmer’s absence and that the lack of proper mourning may, via non-empirical processes unknowable to the intellect, end up diminishing crop yields. The colonized mind could still resist and hold its ground by arguing that the material effects of “hurting vegetation’s feelings” can nevertheless be rendered irrelevant through modern agriculture techniques. However, our concurrent global crises suggest that, in the long run, failure to listen and reciprocate will eventually backfire in one way or another. If so, then the challenge of this century is clear: we need to re-enchant the world through re-establishing cultures of reciprocity that are sensitive to the needs of non-humans, and all the mysteries that we cannot fully grasp intellectually. For instance, Indigenous people from Colombia told me that one of the main roles of their leaders is to *talk to* the climate. They have done that over many generations, but our global leaders are not listening or talking to the climate and this is creating an imbalance and a dangerous situation for all.

Crises can foster radical transformations when societies are capable of embracing fear and listening to what the crises have to say about our collective condition. Black Lives Matter, one of the largest movements in recent U.S. his-

tory, is a form of societal feedback regarding centuries of anti-Black racism and brutality. But the dire need for reciprocity will go unnoticed if governments and corporations are more effective at exploiting fear than people are at metabolizing it individually and collectively. The deployment and normalization of surveillance and tracking technologies during the pandemic, for example, has been paired with militarized machinery and used against civilian protesters under the pretense of keeping us safe from imagined threats. Centuries of suppressing reciprocity has allowed Western techno-scientific culture to colonize and assimilate others, to the point of nearly eliminating “otherness” altogether.³⁹ Pathological reductionism has impoverished the human condition, eliminated hundreds of languages, erased entire knowledges systems, and radically reduced planetary diversity.

COVID-19 has forced many people to take a deep breath and momentarily slow down the treadmill of consumerism and capitalistic self-exploitation; others, meanwhile, were immobilized by disease or stuck at the frontline of the frantic fight against the virus. The mere act of slowing down is a radical action in our modern “burnout society;”⁴⁰ where so many define themselves in terms of external achievements and socio-economic success. Countless people have become human projects, entrepreneurs of their selves, achievement subjects, but the images and stories so meticulously put together; the all-inclusive curriculums and fantastic biographies, are now scrutinized under the new perspectives that this pandemic has brought. Now it is time to start listening to, and feeling, Life and Spirit again, before the tweeting and re-tweeting of our own mental chatter deafens us completely and forever.

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eco-centric and kin-centric economies towards global sustainability.

NOTES

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Relationshift: The CourageRISE Model for Building Relational Cultures of Practice

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I CAN'T BREATHE.” The last words of Eric Garner as he was suffocated by a NY police officer’s chokehold summarize the impacts of the crises in which we find ourselves today. Millions of pairs of lungs afflicted by SARS-COVID 19 struggle to breathe. Smoke from unprecedented expanses of raging wildfires fill the air while plastics strangle marine wildlife. By all measures the global immune system is ablaze due to a toxic disregard for balance, reflecting the long-term impacts of the elevation of property and wealth over a reverence for life itself.

As thousands of activists have emphasized, the burden of the devastation falls directly and disproportionately on the shoulders of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Time and again the least valued lives are feminine-of-center, queer, darker skinned, less able-bodied, and so on. The sharp contrast of whose lives were lost and whose livelihoods were destroyed over the past year demonstrate the continued vitality of white supremacist, heteropatriarchal capitalist systems and the depths to which the human psyche has been successfully colonized by the logic of dominance-based social structures.

At the same time, resistance to injustice, unfettered joy, and the spirit of kinship are ever present. The hallmarks of humanity—creativity, cooperation, and compassion—abound; people are building and strengthening mutual aid networks to support and sustain one another, making music from a social distance, dancing in the streets to reclaim them from the violence; creating new technologies and rituals in order to connect, and showing up to march toward collective freedom. Humankind is ignited by the tension between a competitive, scarcity mindset embedded in the logic of capitalism and the conviction

that not only are our lives dependent upon one another, but that we are stronger together.

Beyond this binary is the question of how our ideologies will evolve to regain a sustainable balance across the planet and all her peoples: rock, plant, insect and animal. In this essay, we explore one model for supporting this paradigm shift toward sustainability: CourageRISE. After briefly reviewing the toxic elements of the current dominant paradigm structuring society, we detail our model for sustaining the structural changes that may prevent ecological collapse.

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

The forces that converged to create the dualist logic of domination were not inevitable. While the assumption that humankind is naturally inclined toward violence and competition and that self-interest predominates the western imagination, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy and others have argued that our ability to caretake and make sacrifices on behalf of our community have been key to our survival as a species.¹ Indeed, pre-European contact, millions of people indigenous to the Americas lived in a variety of technologically advanced, rich civilizations with thriving democracies and cooperative cross-national relationships despite conflict over resources and, at times, competing cultural norms.² What many of these varied civilizations shared, however, was a relational viewpoint. The relational paradigm posits that all things exist in relationship, as the conditions of possibility for life and liberation.³ This relational paradigm once predominated on the European continent, as well.

Look beyond the veil of colonization and we find that when people do not orient to land as a resource to be owned, they revere it. Far from representing a relic from the past, this interconnected, relational philosophy is alive and well among the many peoples who have resisted the press of colonization to this day. Indeed, a deeply relational paradigm is not an exception to the rule of human-supremacy thinking; it is endemic across cultural geographies. Evidence of the relational worldview can be found across the globe, from Heraclitus in ancient Greece to Laozi in ancient China. Destruction of relational worldviews and indoctrination within a dualistic Christian paradigm have always been key tactics of colonization. Conquerors have decisively punished the expression of alternative belief systems as heresy via inquisitions, executions, and boarding schools. Among colonized peoples that have been fully assimilated into the colonizing paradigm, acknowledging this loss of lineage and culture is an important act of truth and reconciliation. It is essential to the work of reclaiming the parts of humanity long denied in order to fit into prescribed

boxes of acceptability. Similarly, among those who have resisted the forces of colonization, uplifting and affirming the inherent strengths, wisdoms and value of these traditions are powerful acts for rooting out the internalization of colonizer belief systems.

RelationSHIFT: Building our relational muscles until they (re)define culture

Systems of oppression live in our minds, bodies, and cultures. They are reproduced through hegemonic narratives, codified through institutional policies, and inscribed into our DNA⁴ via interpersonal relations and behavior.

Strategy, political action, or legislation alone have been insufficient for bringing about lasting change. The challenge is that we are very well trained in maintaining the status quo and without great vigilance and practice, we typically replicate dominant patterns. To develop social structures that reflect the inherent value of all life, significant internal and inter-personal shifts must accompany systemic changes. We have to practice new ways of being—new cultures—that help us embody alternative systems. We can't simply legislate—or meditate—our way forward.

Part of the work of shifting a dominant paradigm is to center alternatives already present while rooting out the structures that protect the current system from transformation. The good news is that the relational paradigm lives within existing systems of exploitation. Capitalism has always depended upon caring and cooperative relationships among all peoples—plants, animals, and humans—to reproduce the labor and resources it freely exploits to sustain itself. We collaborate. We cooperate. We common. We provide mutual aid, we invest in restorative justice, we herald the spread of transformative justice, and we experiment with regenerative cultures.

The current paradigm caused harm by tearing apart relationships to our ancestral lands, to our immediate family, to extended family, and with other living and nonliving beings on this planet. Accordingly, we are inspired by the many lineages of healing that advocate for the restoration of community as foundational to liberation. Although the degree of suffering is unevenly distributed, the current social regime has damaged us all in subtle and gross ways.⁵ Just like all healing requires loving attention and access to steady resources, mainstreaming an alternate paradigm will entail disrupting unconscious explanatory frameworks, replacing subtle system-protecting mechanisms with life affirming ones, developing new habits of culture and most importantly, truly opening ourselves up to be changed.

Opening the self to transformation requires reevaluating one's place in the scheme of things and accepting responsibility for one's ability to cause great harm while remaining worthy of love and redemption. It requires broadening one's circle of concern to include those once thought of as enemies or as simply a means to an end and learning to cherish them as deserving of our compassion and as contributors to our awakening. It requires softening around the pain that arises instead of fleeing from its awareness. It requires allowing oneself to be seen as one actually is and not as one wishes to be. It also requires changing the nature of relationships and systems so that they support such transformation. Suffice it to say that transformation ultimately requires a considerable amount of courage in a world that resists change.

A Framework for Building Relational Cultures of Practice

"I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community... and this will require a qualitative change in our soul, as well as a quantitative change in our lives."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The approach we describe here is rooted in the many wisdom lineages and collaboratively developed by a community of practice that expands well beyond this article's list of authors. This approach weaves together somatic, trauma-informed, healing-centered, relational practices designed to foster the stamina necessary for engaging in authentic community building across positionality, faith and age cohort. As the reader will note in the sections to follow, this model is inspired by Tibetan Buddhism, nondualistic Shaivism, contemplative science, human development and family studies, anthropology, gender and women's studies, evolutionary psychology, liberatory and ancestral knowledge. Captured by the acronym CourageRISE, our five-part process is designed to provide a balance of qualities deemed essential by many wisdom lineages: the ability to be open and soft, yet firm and fierce when needed; to see what is with clear eyes and sense that which is unseen, and to discern when it is time to lead and when it is time to follow when embarking on new pathways.

This five-part model grounds in practices that organize the autonomic nervous system in a calm and connected pattern by invoking an awareness of security, connection, and care. We call this first part courage (with its latin

root “cor” or heart) because softening our hearts to the possibility of change is a terrifying and necessary first step to manifesting change. In addition to cultivating and evoking the resolve and sense of support needed to face painful truths, the grounding practices introduced in this first part are what sustain the effort to RISE:

1. (R)eveal truths;
2. (I)nvest in healing;
3. (S)ense alternatives; and
4. (E)nact Beloved Community.

Below we describe each part of the framework as pathways of practice. The model itself is iterative and non-linear, though there are certain scaffolds that support the deeper work of building community. We offer this as one framework for supporting the shift toward a relational paradigm. Over the last six years, our team at Courage of Care⁶ has shared and iterated this model with thousands of healers, facilitators, activists, organizers, and social service professionals who are committed to tending to the relational tissue of our movements for justice and liberation. We have partnered with numerous universities, school districts, human rights organizations, trauma clinics, healthcare centers, sustainability think-tanks, spiritual communities and political movements. Because CourageRISE is a framework and not a set curriculum, we believe it offers opportunities for mutual collaboration and adaptation.

Courage

“Resistance to oppression is often based on a love that leads us to value ourselves, and leads us to hope for more than the established cultural system is willing to grant... such love is far more energizing than guilt, duty, or self-sacrifice. Love for others leads us to accept accountability (in contrast to feeling guilt) and motivates our search for ways to end our complicity with structures of oppression. Solidarity does not require self-sacrifice, but an enlargement of the self to include community with others.”

Sharon Welch

Softening our sense of separation is the goal and the path. Our model begins with training in building and reclaiming relationships. As so many disciplines have demonstrated, responsive and consistent sources of care are essential for supporting us in times of stress. Relational training builds the skills needed to build collective power and develop the networks of reciprocity and mutual aid

that help us respond to the many crises we face. At a deeper level, when informed by non-dual traditions, relational training seeps down and transforms the mindsets that facilitate systems of domination and oppression which ultimately created the conditions for ecological collapse.⁸

Humans are social beings. Ample evidence suggests that humans evolved to thrive when rooted in community and in healthy relationships defined by mutuality.⁹ Moreover, it is clear that humans experience varying degrees of harm inside transaction-based interactions.¹⁰ For example, just as attachment theory demonstrated the vital importance of consistent and responsive caregivers in early development to overall mortality and morbidity,¹¹ Social Baseline Theory suggests that brains encode the presence of companions as bioenergetic resources, like oxygen or glucose, when anticipating the metabolic costs of any situation.¹² For example, when asked to estimate the degree of incline of a hill in controlled experiments, the presence (or absence) of others actually influences how steep people assess the hill ahead of them. Participants who felt more networked than others rated visual inclines as less high than peers who felt less networked; and they also rated weighted backpacks on their backs as less heavy than those who felt more isolated. This data suggests that quite literally, the road in front of us and the burdens we have to carry are lessened when we feel connected. Applied to the work of changemaking, the implications are that the more connected we feel, the more resourced we feel for the work ahead. This is in part what we mean when we say softening our sense of separation and cultivating relationality is the goal and the path.

Yet, there are many times in which we find ourselves physically alone, or in conditions absent of mutuality. In order to access the resources necessary for sustaining long-term activism, we need to be able to call upon that unbreakable sense of connection at all times. This is why we draw on a relational contemplative frame primarily from non-dual Tibetan Buddhist traditions that help us learn ways of sensing ourselves as fundamentally in relationship with others and our world regardless of the physical presence—or absence—of others.¹³

Love and compassion are fundamentally relational capacities that are nurtured and strengthened in and through relationship and community. While we can of course learn tools and practices to strengthen our love and compassion, we learn to love the way that we have been loved in and through relationships. In our relational approach to fostering care and connection, informed by Sustainable Compassion Training¹⁴, we explore practices for receiving and extending care, and resting in deep self-care. The beauty of this approach is that it allows the opportunity to learn new ways of loving and showing up even if they were not modeled for us by our family or community.

Contemplative and somatic practices of receiving care help us learn to experience ourselves as held within a web or field of care. This web of interconnection encompasses the experience of being held in and by nature, community, family, lineage, ancestors, and all who have come before us. In this practice, participants are guided to sense this field in many ways, via memories of responsive and consistent caretakers both human and nonhuman. For example, in our trainings, participants are invited to sense the experience of being held by the earth cradling their body, by the warmth of the sun, by the vastness of the sky, or by the care put into the building of our homes. Participants are also invited to sense into this field of care in the minutia of kindness expressed by a passerby or by figures that have instilled a sense of joy, welcome or warmth. For some, this brings to mind the comforting memories of parents or other caregivers, for others, it evokes nonhuman companions or celestial beings. What results is an opportunity to shift felt awareness from the ego striving in this world to an awareness of the presence of the million acts of love and care and sheer luck that have come together to make life—including our own lives—possible. There are so many simple everyday moments of unconditional support that go unnoticed; moments in which someone or some being was present to us, rooting for us, wishing us well, taking joy in us, or witnessing our deepest potential. Whether the moments of care were intentional or not, we are all being held up in care throughout our days and throughout our lives. We literally wouldn't be alive if this weren't the case.

Nurtured by this memory of support—by this field of care in which all beings are embedded—one can more easily access the resources required to extend that same quality of care to others. With this practice, we guide participants toward connecting with the ongoing energy and activity of the lineages of care and compassion that precede, support, and enable their spiritual activism. By returning repeatedly to the field of care, to this secure base in which one is held and deeply seen, we experience workshop participants as more empowered to encounter others relationally—not as objects but also as subjects, as part of the “we-verse”.¹⁵

Shifting to a relational frame calls us to move beyond solely cultivating strong interpersonal relationships. It is about learning to soften the boundaries between self, others, and the world. On an even more profound level, nourishing the self with an awareness of the field of care is to engage in deep self-care, to rest beyond the dualities of me versus it; us versus them; and ultimately, subject and object. It involves truly letting-be in non-dual awareness. Learning to abide in this non-dual awareness helps one to sense life beyond the limited and distinct sense of self to access the spaciousness, wisdom, warmth, and creative capacities that support the shift to a relational paradigm.

Contemporary contemplative movements have been rightfully criticized for hiding behind the language of nondual oneness to avoid some deep anti-oppression work. For example, many have criticized modern mindfulness-based interventions for their focus on providing tools for individual health and well-being rather than tools for assessing and challenging systemic oppression.¹⁶ While we believe that non-dual practices can support addressing the fundamental dualism at the root of many of our contemporary crises, we also know that without investigating the ways in which we are deeply conditioned by systems of oppression, we may bypass such liberatory work in service of a false sense of relationality through these very practices. As others have paraphrased the seminal work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his treatise on the trouble of power without love, “Love that does not ‘descend’ into the struggle for justice is incomplete, if not irrelevant. Engaged spirituality, therefore, explicitly confronts social, political, and economic structures that are deemed unjust and contributory to the suffering of some needful group.”¹⁷ Our CourageRISE model, therefore, is designed not only to help participants sense themselves as more connected, but also to help them act from that awareness.

(R)eveal Truths

“There’s a way out of this mess, and it requires each of us to begin with our own body. You and your body are important parts of the solution... Your body—all of our bodies—are where changing the status quo must begin.”¹⁸

Resmaa Menakem

Truth is broadly recognized as essential to reconciliation and thus transformation. Revealing truth includes advancing a shared understanding of the various manifestations of domination and oppression, the ways in which it sustains and persists, and how it is reproduced through our bodies. This focus on embodiment and the social reproduction of oppression is crucial, although it can be experienced as threatening in a world that so rarely invites concurrent awareness of the needs of the body when engaging with a community—professional or otherwise. However, we find in the workshops that we lead that grounding in a sense of interconnection reduces the fragility associated with facing unseen stressors such as the truth of hidden injustices and profound suffering. And facing the truth with the softness of compassion and the ferocity of resolve is a nuanced experience that in and of itself brings insight into how to embody new liberatory cultures.

What needs to be revealed is the reality that there is no existence outside of the system. Systems of oppression live in and through everything we do:

our beliefs, our interactions, our institutional policies, our cultural myths and practices.¹⁹ Features of white supremacy culture²⁰—like urgency, individualism, fear of open conflict, and quantity over quality—live in the body, unknowingly shaping how individuals move in the world, do business, and make plans. These features are presented as normative responses via various mediums in western culture including film, print, unspoken family rules, professional norms, and aspects of “polite” culture as defined by those in power. Given the innate desire for belonging as a feature of safety, we consciously or unconsciously shape ourselves to fit in, to find connection, or to survive. We call such habitual tendencies that we use to protect ourselves “stress shapes”.²¹

These stress shapes are safety seeking mechanisms at heart. Revealing the existence of these shapes and honoring their innate wisdom is an important step for loosening their unconscious control over our reactions. Without an awareness and ownership of one’s role in reifying systems of oppression, individuals inadvertently replicate them in periods of stress. For example, coalitions of people committed to social change notoriously crumble under the weight of interpersonal deception and distrust as members rely upon all-too familiar power tactics internally.²² Similarly, responding to any suggestion in a work setting with immediate defensiveness or appeasement is a common and natural response from the over-burdened and underappreciated worker. Although there is a natural wisdom to these shapes, relying upon them as a habitual default results in compromised access to agency thereby limiting our potential growth and healing.

Intersecting systems of oppression such as racism, (cis)sexism, capitalism, and others create axes of privilege and disadvantage for all. To live in a dominance-based hierarchy is to live in a culture predicated upon the conditionality of belonging invariably resulting in considerable stress.²³ Although that stress is distributed inequitably, favoring those closest to conforming to the mythical norm—white, masculine of center, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied adults assigned male at birth—it is clear that it is at great cost to everyone, even those most privileged by the system. In concrete terms, experimental studies demonstrate that the existence of policies and laws that limit freedoms for one group have negative impacts on all groups²⁴ such that areas with high rates of bias toward white supremacy produce higher rates of health impacts upon white people in the area as well.²⁵

Reshaping, or developing a flexibility in our shapes, entails first a reckoning of the ways in which the system(s) privilege certain “shapes” over others, decentering the mythical norm as the ideal, taking ownership for fostering new habits in oneself and others, and then accessing the resources needed for healing that harm. Given that these shapes have solidified through years of practice,

revealing their roots and functions while investing in fostering new responses takes time. With time, intention, and effort expended learning to soften ones' armoring, individuals can re-wire their own nervous systems for lessened vigilance, increased trust and an increased capacity for earning the trust of others. This process requires a delicate interplay of the willingness to co-hold each other's vulnerability and the willingness to be held in one's truth.

Insight comes from understanding how oppression is internalized and re-expressed through the co-construction of norms, preferences and privileges. The willingness to confront the truth of the self as an unwitting agent of a system and the stamina to interrupt and reshape patterns in the presence of community are essential ingredients of change. In their absence, the fragile ego remains defensive of the status quo and the likelihood of baking the same old dysfunctional relational patterns into new systems is high. Uprooting or transforming these cultural practices requires new practices cultivated within and by community. And the truth is it takes a collective to shift a society.

(I)nvest in Healing

*i've been praying,
and these are what my prayers look like;
dear god
i come from two countries
one is thirsty
the other is on fire
both need water.*

*later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?
it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.²⁶*

Warsan Shire

With truth comes the possibility of reconciliation, but not without repair. In addition to physical and economic reparations, repairing the damage incurred from systems of oppression requires healing the wounding those systems have

inflicted. However, healing is a political concept in a culture that commodifies health and relies upon a widely held conviction that the only commonality among humanity is the state of being flawed or incomplete. Yet, an actual, undeniable commonality among humanity is the inclination toward integration.²⁷

As organisms, our bodies are relentless in their efforts to integrate, adapt and move forward. Inevitably, the process of integration entails bringing life force to the wound with its accompanying resources for repair. In the physical body, this looks like stimulating blood flow to the damaged tissue; in the brain this looks like the initiation of new neural connections. In the spiritual body, this is characterized by the application of awareness to the site of wounding, and in community, this looks like holding space. In this way, one can see how the process of bringing attention to an issue is a component of healing the harm. However, this is not a purely intellectual—or individual—endeavor. As so many have noted, trauma lives in the DNA and the soft tissues of the body;²⁸ however, it also lives in the structures that societies build to support a social arrangement. To invest in healing requires an investment that is on the scale of the wounding. It involves intra-personal, inter-personal and systemic repair, as well as tools for resting, releasing, rejoicing, and centering what is good.

With a relational frame, at all levels of social ecology, healing entails tending to and repairing relationships. At the intrapersonal level, it involves shifting self-appraisals of mistakes from failure to growth, from being one's harshest critic to becoming one's dearest confidant. This intrapersonal repair work is political with a focus on releasing many of the tools of systems of oppression like shame, secrecy, and self-criticism. The work of surfacing intergenerational wounds and disrupting the internalization of oppression varies in accordance with one's positionality at the intersection of oppressive forces.²⁹ For those that are just comprehending the depth of harm, the work is often focused on building the stamina to stay with the pain and the fortitude to remain present, nonjudgmental, and accessible to community. For those of whom awareness of injustice is ingrained in their DNA, healing practices are more focused on metabolizing the pain, rage, and frustration, as well as resting and restoring the capacity to access hope and trust more readily.

At an interpersonal level, healing-centered practice includes increasing our capacity to show up in relationships without pretense and to tend to the small ruptures in trust that occur as we navigate competing needs. If we are to shift successfully to a relational paradigm, we must center relationships and the art of practicing love, mutuality, and accountability. The work includes adopting an abolitionist mindset in all relationships. Rather than jumping to punishment, what would happen if one's response was to expand one's receptivity to

the unmet need at the root of the conflict while remaining firm about boundaries? Investing in healing toward this possible alternative entails engaging in practices that improve a sense of grounded awareness of each person's needs and practicing the art of compassionate communication that extends tenderness to all others—our colleagues, our friends, our families, other workers. To do this work, we find it is necessary to cultivate a practice of somatic awareness, consent, and apology. Healing woundedness of the self and others is by no means a passive or submissive process. Tending to what has been harmed takes a ferocity of courage and resolve.³⁰ Repair as a stance allows for growth, change, learning and healing. Rather than a focus on disposing of those that make mistakes, the focus is on becoming freer together.

And at a systems level, healing involves repairing the violent harms and legacies of colonialism and slavery. This call for repair is more than a shift in mindset. As Eve Tucker and K. Wayne Yang remind us, “decolonization is not a metaphor”³¹—it is not a call to simply “decolonize our minds,” but rather to, quite literally, repatriate land to Indigenous peoples. The call, too, for reparations, is about systemically addressing the wealth gap in the US and reckoning with the generations of harm and legacies of colonialism and slavery.

Equally as important as the investment in healing is the framework for healing. In the dominant frame, there is a normative understanding of health and physical ability that obscures the possibility of delight, pleasure, and meaning as existing or accessible in differently abled or functioning bodies. In his book, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling With Cure*, Eli Clare, a white, disabled, genderqueer justice advocate, explores the social and historical roots of the idea of cure—the belief that minds and bodies considered “broken” need to be fixed.³² Eli brings attention to the paradox of the concept of being cured as it presupposes a state of “normal” to which one can or should return. Rather than embrace the multiplicity of ways to be healthy and worthy of belonging despite the fluctuation in functioning to which all bodies are subject if uninterrogated, the concept of healing can be weaponized to reify the status quo.

Too often, notions of “normal” perpetuate legitimizing white supremacist myths which center and reify white, male, and able-bodied norms, thereby rendering all others as abnormal. Consequently, the rhetoric of cure suggests that those who do not conform to this norm need to become more like this norm, or risk being further marginalized, which is one of the ways systems of oppression insidiously structure our world. The degree to which we conform to this norm often correlates to the likelihood of struggling with anxiety, depression, or any other seemingly “negative” psychological states. Although such experiences are natural responses to finding yourself at the margins and potentially

internalizing those harmful norms, the system perpetuates itself by labeling this logical response as “sick” and unwell.

How do we avoid endorsing normative notions of good that invariably cause harm, while also acknowledging the pain and suffering that can and should be addressed? The question therefore becomes something like the serenity prayer: how do we develop the wisdom to discern when to be with what is, and when do we work to change it? This inquiry grounds our understanding of healing as a stance, which is the capacity to hold both the beauty and deep “okayness” of all that is, while also acknowledging the pain, harm, and injustice that needs to be repaired.

Across healing lineages, there are obvious patterns. Wounds require loving attention and regular clearing. Broken bones benefit from gentle but firm holding. Diseases are exacerbated by stress and eased by slowing down and finding the breath. The earth provides comfort and plant medicines that can aid recovery. Those who have known and metabolized this pain can serve as great healers of the pain. The path to recovery entails reconnecting with your center and finding a balance with the world around you. It is within and through the support of community that one finds the resources to survive and heal just about anything. For these reasons, while we stand firm that there are wounds that require tending, much of our own healing trajectory is grounded in the theory of non-fixing, non-doing, and even rest. By “not-doing,” we learn to do something incredibly profound—to connect with our basic nature and our basic capacity for healing or resilience.

We also bow to the wisdom of the Nap Ministry,³³ a rest movement founded by Nap Bishop Tricia Hersey. Hersey is a Black scholar, activist, theologian, and performing artist who teaches a radical form of resistance that highlights the liberating power of naps. The movement itself is a challenge to white supremacist and capitalist culture and its norms of urgency, production, busyness and workaholism. Through rest, we not only resist and decondition ourselves from exploitative systems, but we also provide space to feel effects of these violent, oppressive systems, and to grieve the loss of land, connection to lineage, loss of relationships, loss of people to violence, loss of our own dignity and humanity. Such rest is particularly powerful for BIPOC bodies who have been the target of direct extraction and exploitation around the globe.

Embodying a culture of healing is a call to live in ways that are antithetical to aspects of the dominant culture by which many of us have been shaped. We are being called to nurture community and collective leadership rather than individualism, to collaborate rather than to compete, to reconnect with each other and to the land in non-exploitive or extractive ways, to slow down enough to feel and to heal, and to learn to dream outside of the box.

As we begin to feel more, we may become aware that there is more than suffering here—that there is some basic okayness, or even ease, present in the midst of our despair. Or, perhaps, we may notice that the work of building a more beautiful world can be joyful. We might experience it as the joy of getting more real, or the joy of deepening connection, or the joy of becoming freer. Surely, some of us may resist this joy—how dare we experience joy while others are suffering?!—but the joy we are referring to is not escapist; it is, as Audre Lorde reminds us, a kind of power. As we “begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives,” she writes, “we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that we feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of.” Joy and pleasure, or the erotic, call us to refuse to settle for “the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.”³⁴ In this way, centering joy is not an antidote, but rather an affirmation of our fullest being.

We also know that emotions like joy, contentment, and deep belonging to ourselves and each other can help us tap into our inherent capacities for creativity and innovation. As researcher Barbara Fredrickson’s work on the Broaden and Build theory suggests, when we feel isolated, threatened, or sad, we literally cannot generate the same diversity or creativity of solutions as we are able to when we are experiencing positive emotions.³⁵ And our ability to imagine a different way of being, to soften, and sense the alternatives that already abound around us is the precise capacity that is so often unleashed through the process of healing to our wholeness.

(S)ense Alternatives

*who imagined this world?
this absence of right relationship to earth?
this violent addiction to dominating each other?
these myths of superiority of those with pale skin or external sex organs or
bodies without kinks in the bones, or born on this side of manmade, and
cruelly held, borders?
who imagined that these prison bars or jails and schools would generate
safety?
who imagined a generation or more would tolerate this black and brown
hunger? and this allowance that some will hunger while others feast, not
oblivious, but willfully, and structurally, ignorant?*³⁶

adrienne maree brown

We are living in what adrienne maree brown calls an “imagination battle.” Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are working in service of someone’s vision—through our actions, our work, and how and where we spend our money and our time. We need tools to help us (re)claim our own future visions and the courage to live into them.

Envisioning liberated futures requires a capacity to see beyond or outside of the current oppressive systems’ frame. This is a skill that is not widely taught in mainstream education for perhaps the obvious fact that it does not serve the current systems. However, folks from the margins have long held the capacity to see multiple worlds, because as Gloria Anzaldua explains, they have been forced by the structure of society to negotiate living in multiple worlds.³⁷ Whereas some might be tempted to view the margins as a site of deprivation and despair, bell hooks instead implores us to see the margins as “the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.” It is the margins, in her view, that are the central location for resistance and creativity.³⁸

Centering the margins is an important practice for all of us: when we start from an anti-relational, capitalist, and white supremacist frame, we inadvertently center whiteness. Yet, by centering Blackness and black people in the creation of new policies, we shift not only the frame but also the balance of power.³⁹ Furthermore, by centering both Black and Indigenous⁴⁰ voices in our work, we center the incredible wisdom for nurturing the capacity for resilience that these lineages have faced in response to centuries of extreme oppression and violence.

All truly transformative justice work has begun at the margins. Traditions of science fiction that re-imagine our world but with less suffering are a powerful exercise of world building rooted in our current reality. As Walidah Imarisha, co-editor of *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories for Social Justice Movements*,⁴¹ reminds us, “anytime we try to envision a world without poverty, prisons, or capitalism, we are engaging in a practice of science fiction.”⁴²

Still, some people are critical of envisioning alternative futures, often because they are overly idealistic, abstract utopias, or because the activity of envisioning itself becomes a way to bypass coming to grips with reality, as hard as that may be. Groups focused on adapting to life in an unstable world beset by climate change and social collapse often reject the call to envision positive futures given their conviction that things will get much worse in the foreseeable future. They are already embracing and preparing for this grim reality and sense that visionary ideations are distractions from the hard data in front of us. It is better to grieve the loss of a positive future, they contend, so we focus on the hard work of adapting to and caring for one another amidst societal collapse.⁴³

We, too, embrace the need to prepare for this future. Denying its possibility creates the potential for more harm and less preparedness. Many communities—especially those at the so-called margins—are already feeling the impact of climate change far more than well-resourced folks. Many more of us will die if climate change continues unabated and those of us remaining will be pushed to fight for scarce resources.

At the same time, the future is not written. We believe it is important to hold this truth as well and to embrace the possibility of what some, like Joanna Macy and others, call the Great Transition.⁴⁴ We may organize and mobilize to not only avoid collapse, but to reorganize society to sustain itself in dynamic equilibrium with the Earth's systems. The vision of a way of life in harmony with each other and nature—what some have called Ecological Civilization—is still a viable possibility.⁴⁵ We therefore believe we need to move beyond binary thinking and prepare for the possibilities of both/and. In other words, we need to urgently resist climate change, demand aggressive climate policies, and work to support those most vulnerable to the climate crisis, while also working to build regenerative and life-affirming social systems. Even if we fail in some measure, our efforts could still serve us amidst the chaos.

Developing the capacity to hold complexity is an embodied skill. The practice of staying present to the reality of multiple futures calls one to develop a radical responsiveness and relatedness to the world. Following Rebecca Solnit, we understand hope as a spiritual practice of embracing uncertainty and our capacity to affect future outcomes through our actions.⁴⁶

We draw on various traditions to support this practice. Developing the capacity to question or to critically understand the agenda constraining the variety of stories portrayed in movies, tv shows, and print media takes practice. So much time is spent trying to discern what is “true” that entertaining the possibility that there are many truths can feel strange. This is precisely the point.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote about the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”⁴⁷—the idea that humans often take abstract concepts and impose them upon a reality that is always more complex than our ideas can capture. And in so doing, humans concretize and reify that reality. Problems arise when we mistake the concept for reality itself, or assume things are fixed or as they appear.

This tendency toward concretization is why traditions that help one learn to refrain from reifying one's experience are so important, and why the apophatic and mystical dimensions found in so many religious and spiritual traditions are so critical to transformative processes. These traditions help one to unlearn habituated patterns of reification and illuminate the nature of reality which some describe as empty, co-emergent, interdependent, and responsive. Practic-

es within these traditions also help one get in touch with the field of potential so that we may sense not only that things are not always as they appear, but that the possibilities for what is here and what could be are innumerable. Learning to tap into this field is critical to the project of building a more caring and just world.

(E)nact Beloved Community

"You seek allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. By compartiendo historias, ideas, las nepantleras forge bonds across race, gender, and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism. Éste quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world."⁴⁸

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

The ideal of beloved community popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was by no means conceptualized as a work of fiction, but a reality achievable in our lifetime. The beloved community he worked for was one of genuine inter-group mutuality, achievable through the practice of non-violence and the cultivation of unconditional love for other beings. Dr King's beloved community was characterized by a quality of "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all," an "overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative... the love of God operating in the human heart." This quality of love, or "Agape, is love seeking to preserve and create community." In his sermons on beloved community, the reverend noted that while economic and political power are essential for achieving a state of beloved community, their purpose is for the creation of the conditions that affirm the inherent worthiness and dignity of all life. It is this understanding of beloved community that we uplift.

However, the movement from sensing alternatives to manifesting them is risky. Not only is birthing alternatives arduous and messy, people are reasonably reticent to try something unfamiliar when the chance of failure is high in a culture of competition and disposability. It explains why, for example, someone might line up someone new before leaving a committed relationship. People have been conditioned to want an insurance plan, and in the U.S., people live in a society structured without a social safety net. Yet, paradigms have repeatedly shifted throughout human history precisely because a small group of people had the courage to live differently.

Sustaining efforts to actualize the soul's yearning for beloved community therefore entails adopting an ethic of risk. In her book, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, feminist scholar Sharon Welch describes an action-oriented stance that involves repeatedly showing up for justice in the face of struggle and defeat.⁴⁹ This courageous, compassion-oriented ethic of risk, captured by Welch's inquiry—"What improbable task, with which unpredictable results, shall we undertake today?"—is the heart of spiritual activism. An ethic of risk has long been heralded by those at the margins with very little to lose. Influenced by the work of Alice Walker and other womanist thinkers, an "ethic of risk" relies on one's ability to ground in community, respond to emergent tensions, honor one's commitments, be accountable for one's actions, and take risks. It is the courage of showing up, without any guarantee or even expectation of reward or recognition for one's efforts. An ethic of risk calls us to show up for not just ourselves or our families, but for the many generations to come. It is deeply relational in its vision and its practice.

Embodying beloved community entails sustaining all the skills and habits practiced in the previous parts of the CourageRISE model over time and despite repeated mistakes. This includes acting with full awareness of humanity's intrinsic interdependence with each other and all other aspects of life. It entails undertaking healing practices and learning what it means to sustain them over time; taking a stand and being accountable to one's values and priorities and making amends when one falters. It means practicing consent in all interactions, treating all other beings as sacred, prioritizing the well-being of all over the acquisition of wealth and prestige, and committing to repair harm. It means embodying the courage to live our wildest dreams of unconditional belonging. It requires daring to trust a community with your precious, naked heart and having the courage to hold each other accountable with ferocity and with an unrelenting commitment to redemption when that trust has been betrayed. In short, it entails coming to terms with the fact that each person's life is tied to the fate of all beings—the honeybee, the cockroach, the neighbor next door, and the refugee at the border—because there is no planet B.

Conclusion

While there is no blueprint for the future, there is a collective yearning for (re) connection to the earth, the ancestors, the nonhuman world, and the divine evident across wisdom lineages and social justice efforts around the world. We offer the courageRISE model as a means of connecting diverse lineages of theory and praxis in service of mutual learning and collaboration.

Just as there is no singular path to awakening, there is no singular role that is needed to actualize beloved community. What is needed is every flawed and fabulous person living into their full selves with humility, deep appreciation, a commitment to growth, and the willingness to take a chance. We all have our roles: Some of us are healers, some researchers, some activists, some organizers, some advocates, some builders, some weavers, some defenders, some tenders, etc. Regardless of one's role, embodying a more relational frame means continuing to ask what else is here with a quality of curiosity, tenderness, and the ferocity of a devoted caregiver equally devoted to all beings under their care. Unlike the divisive, incendiary and restrictive status quo, this line of inquiry is expansive, generative, and receptive to the redemptive potential of each moment.

In this essay we have explored one such path to collective liberation: the CourageRISE model. Grounded in connection and hope, the practices detailed in this essay represent a weaving of many lineages of care, wisdom, and freedom. Although we have continuously acknowledged the deep wounding and injustices that abound, we have also outlined a transformative, relational framework that draws on the deep resiliencies and acts of care that abound in equal measure. We hope it reminds each reader that while the world may literally be on fire, our story is not yet over. Each moment presents a new beginning; each breath a new future being born; take courage and rise to meet the moment.

We invite you to join us as we work to strengthen the relational tissue within and between our movements for justice and liberation. To learn more, please visit us at www.courageofcare.org.

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In Conversation

LADAWN HAGLUND AND ADAM LOBEL

LaDawn: We are beginning our dialogue on Part 2 of “Healing Social and Ecological Rifts,” a two-volume issue in *The Arrow Journal*. I’m here today with Adam Lobel, and I am LaDawn Haglund, guest editor for this special issue. Hi Adam!

Adam: Good morning, LaDawn!

LaDawn: I wanted to get started by laying the ground: why we’re having this dialogue, what is bringing each of us to the table to discuss the issues raised by these articles and what they evoke for us in terms of learning or developing our ideas, or for moving forward with heart into the world.

Adam: Why don’t we start with you? You’re a busy professor and have a lot going on. Why did you choose to take up this pretty significant task of editing two volumes and taking on this special issue?

LaDawn: First, I want to thank Gabe Dayley, Chief Editor of *The Arrow*, for asking me what I would take up if I were to do a special issue because, as you know, I’m an educator and I teach my students about issues related to human rights, sustainability, and justice. We explore where we actually are in the world today, factually. One stunning fact that always makes my students nervous is the fact that we’ve crossed four out of nine of our planet’s “safe operating” boundaries (described by Johan Rockström and others): climate, biosphere, land use, and biochemicals, and we’re in the danger zone for just about everything else. It’s a terrifying prospect. As human beings on this planet, we all share these dangers.

But despite the shared heartbreak and terror of what humanity is doing to the planet, not all of us contributed equally to it, as my work in political economy and human rights underscores. In fact, many—in particular Indigenous peoples, displaced and dispossessed communities, and murdered activists—have resisted it for centuries. So, on the one hand, the Anthropocene is a time when humanity is impacting the Earth as a species; but there are also rifts *between* human beings. As a sociologist, I've thought a lot about these rifts and what they have in common with the destruction that we visit on the Earth.

There's a foundational structural violence in colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist ways of relating to people—acquisitive and destructive dynamics. Several authors in both issues explore the consequences of this structural violence. There's also a cognitive and cultural violence, which is twofold: faith in human superiority that allows us to cause harm and faith in technology to save us. These two misplaced faiths blind us to the patterns of domination and exploitation themselves. These occur to me as real challenges at this moment in history, and I don't have answers for why we can't seem to overcome them. What I wanted to do with this particular volume was to invite others to contribute to the conversation.

I hope our dialogue today can help us think through how we might act differently. I was very excited to have you involved because you have a different training and engagement with the world than I do in my professional life, despite us both being academics and Buddhists. I believe you have a lot to offer in this area. Thank you for your contributions to the volume—your poem and your article—and I'd like to ask you: what brought you to think about these issues?

Adam: I also want to thank Gabe Dayley, *The Arrow Journal*, and you for all your editorial work, as well as all the other contributors. I think both of these volumes are very diverse, balanced and complete; it's a powerful package. I was excited to write something for these volumes because this area of ecological practice and responsivity is where my heart and body are; it is at the center of my life right now. I come at this from a few perspectives. One, I've spent the last 15 years or so as a Buddhist minister, in a large international community of meditators, who shared an aspiration to have meditation and contemplative experience go beyond the individualistic or personal level to engage society and our relationship with the Earth. However, I've resigned from that role and over the last few years, I've had the chance to go deeper with the question of what it means to be an ethical, responsive human being on our Earth today.

I'm addressing those questions philosophically and theoretically, using my academic training as a scholar of philosophy and religion. I am also addressing them as somebody who is passionate about and loves the contemplative life,

who cares deeply about our understanding of heart and mind. But I also feel, as many do, that spiritual cultivation divorced from geomaterial reality or the karma of our planet is incomplete. There is heartbreak, fear, and an intense longing to join together the contemplative life with social and ecological justice, a sense that they need to be held together in our world. Talk about a rift! A rift or a division that splits the contemplative life from this kind of material and social reality needs to be healed.

A second way that I approach these questions is as an eco-psychologist in that I am working with holding the experience of anxiety, grief, and paralysis as the world continues to burn and flood, and as the slow violence continues to affect the most marginalized human populations, as well as the more-than-human animal species. We're in pain on a civilizational scale. So I'm curious about what kind of therapeutics responds to that pain, without bypassing, where we're simply healing ourselves in a neoliberal, individualistic way without attending to the structural and ecological causes. So that's the question for me—what is a healing that goes beyond just the individual?

The last way in which I come to this question of healing ecological rifts is as an activist. Over the last few years, I've become much more involved with direct environmental action, much of it focusing on my immediate bio region here in western Pennsylvania, responding to and trying to resist the petrochemical industry. I've been involved with creative forms of protest and resistance, as well as bringing people on direct spiritual journeys and "bearing witness" retreats to petrochemical industries. We go to pipelines, oil wells, and fracking sites, and we immerse our ethical and spiritual life in this geophysical reality. This includes our economy and the history of coloniality and white supremacy that is the context for ecological destruction.

LaDawn: That's a great segue into one of the first pieces that we have in the second issue, by Heather Williams, "'If you give us the best place in the world, it is not so good for us as this:' Some Reflections on Catastrophe, Consciousness, and the Right to Home." I know we both were touched by this piece and the beauty of the narrative. Maybe you could say a little more about how this article relates to, as you just said, really seeing what is happening around us.

Adam: Yeah, I really appreciate this piece, this painful pilgrimage that moves through Southern California, after displacement due to wildfire. In fact, two of my closest friends moved to California, and within three weeks of moving, their beautiful cabin and all of their possessions burned in the Dixie fire. The proximity of these wildfires—if not to our bodies then to people close to us—is really starting to burn. I found the article beautiful because it starts from the

fire, but then it moves into a journey of decolonial mapping of this region of California. Williams does an amazing job of tracking the ecological history of water rights and the commitment to agro-logistics—to extracting as much productivity as possible from the soil, forcefully, by rerouting waterways. She attends to that ecology, but it's always in dialogue with social displacement and cultural forms of racism and xenophobia that map onto these bioregions. Along the way, you learn a lot about how we got to where we are in contemporary Southern California.

LaDawn: Yeah, I liked the way she highlighted how commodification of both land and people undermines life itself, creating these wounds. For example, she talks about the Cupeños, an Indigenous community that was driven out of the area, saying “The loss of home was a wound that yet had not healed.” This really resonated for me: the pain caused by treating people, animals, the environment, and communities in ways that inhibit their survival. Instead, the logic is to protect landowners and agribusiness. I'm drawing here on Karl Polanyi's idea of “fictitious commodities” in *The Great Transformation* and the harm caused by commodifying things that should not be commodities.

There is a parallel with this essay and yours, as well as with John Dawsey's article: the idea that the construction of California (in this case) is a fantasy, and that these communities have been built on wishful thinking. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit about that fantasy world?

Adam: Yeah, a good example of that is the kitschy old western Ghost Town that Williams evokes, and the similarity to something like Disneyland: they valorize a pioneering and colonial heritage to draw visitors and tourism. It's like, “please come share in our collective fantasy,” and reinscribe that fantasy into our world and economy. That collective fantasy, like you said, is not only behind the ecological and social violence, but also right in front of it like a façade. Like these ghost towns where you walk through and the buildings look substantial; but when you step one foot outside of that fantasy its thin surface is revealed. So much of the fantasy that sustains the myth of America is like this thin surface, and it's getting thinner and thinner—it's almost transparent at this point.

LaDawn: ...the dangerous fantasy of our contemporary world. You evoke this on a different level when you talk about environmentalist fantasies. It's not *just* that we're living in a world where the processes of capitalism hide from us the real damage that accumulation is doing, but that entering a different fantasy won't reverse that trend. Could you say more about that?

Adam: This is tricky and painful territory that appears in other articles as well. I approach this question about fantasy from the perspective of a meditation instructor, believe it or not. When you're working with your own or someone else's mind around meditation, there are very subtle orientations that can trap the mind, leading to a dead end. On the other hand, very slight differences in language, tone and orientation can instead liberate and free the mind. If you're a meditator, you can have the fantasy of reaching a completely open, peaceful, relaxed state of mind. But in trying to reach that fantasy, you actually block or squelch your own awareness, including its pain and natural brilliance. So fantasy blocks, disrupts or leads us astray.

Something similar happens with environmental fantasies, in which we enter a Romanticism territory: that to be an environmentalist means to cling to a conservative desire for pure, wild nature that has nothing to do with human beings, civilizations, or contamination. With Williams' article, rather than drive around and talk about how beautiful California is—which it certainly is—we get a much more realistic attention to social and material suffering and its history that's intertwined with the beauty.

Adrienne Parr uses the phrase “green governmentality” (drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality), where a certain mentality allows subjects to be governable. There's a way of socializing human beings into a mentality—a way of thinking and perceiving and practicing—that the biopolitical state easily dominates and governs. Green governmentality is a way that our interest in “Greenness,” capital G—like a thriving, beautiful environmental world—can be coopted into a fantasy that allows individuals and institutions to remain dominated and governed by, and productive of, ecological destruction.

Greenwashing is the best example: the destructive fossil fuel industry wants to appear sustainable and green. It claims to lead to thriving communities for humans and ecosystems. That's a complete deception. So we have to be careful, even on a personal level, that our love of this Earth doesn't become just a way to sustain comfortable lifestyles or assumptions about what a healthy world is. The question “what is a resilient world?” is much more complex than it first appears. Returning to meditation instruction, we need to avoid these subtle traps and fantasies of what it is to be ecologically wakeful today.

LaDawn: I wanted to quote your essay, because I think it sets the stage for how other articles in the issue ask us to do things differently. You say “...this essay ...is an attempt ...to unlearn old environmental models, to listen better to the earth today.” What does it mean to “listen better to the earth”?

Adam: First is the recognition of ongoing communication from the Earth, which is not often acknowledged; even climate mutation, wildfires, flooding, loss of habitat, plastic in our ocean, destruction, and the murder of species are modes of communication. The ecosystems that make up our biosphere are talking to us through loss and change. That communication is pervasive, 24/7. You can hear the call and cry of the Earth, all the time, whether through beauty, or disruption and pain. Recognizing that communication is a first step.

Second is learning to attune and listen to that communication, which requires cultivation. Going back to your question about fantasy, it's so easy to feel like communication from the Earth is only the beauty of an old growth forest or an eagle soaring over our heads and to miss the way that the contamination in a river near us is a mode of communication.

I've been leading monthly meditations by the confluence of three rivers in my region, where we sit silently with a river and inquire "what is the river asking from us?" and remain open to communication. That's not just because the river is beautiful; it's also because it's filled with pollutants. It becomes the Ohio River, which is the most polluted river in the country. The fantasy is that to be an environmentalist means to listen only to the beauty of the Earth, or the wonder of wildness, instead of the full range of communication. Many of these articles ask us to listen to the grief and communication from the Earth beyond fantasy; something akin to a Lacanian "Real"—capital R—where communication is a rupture, destabilizing and challenging to us. What about you? What do you think of when you hear me say in this essay to listen better to the Earth or to unlearn old ways of thinking?

LaDawn: As a sociologist, I think about how capitalism is so deeply embedded in our culture; we're like fish swimming in the water of capitalism. I think of the logics that you've been talking about as capitalist logics: green governmentality is just another example of thinking in purportedly "rational" ways about how we're supposed to dominate the Earth, how our innovative spirit is going to save us, and how self-interested action will serve the greater good. Our action vis-à-vis global challenges is circumscribed by this rationality – that more capitalism is the right or maybe only way to proceed. I'm drawn to deconstruct that rationality, to think of other logics that are purposefully excluded—including the logic of what the Earth is asking, which could be called "environmental logic"—and to consider, again, invoking Polanyi, ways to re-embed our relationships in non-destructive logics.

I'm also curious about what it means to "see" differently. I'm resistant to the idea that we're just going to start thinking like Indigenous people and suddenly we'll be saved. I don't think this is even possible, much less the path

forward. But Indigenous ways of being are different from capitalist societies. For me, the question is how we who are swimming in Western waters can see differently. How do we not spiritually bypass the pain that's here, but actually hear the cries of the Earth? How can we realize that we are "nature protecting itself," in the words of Casey Camp Horinek? How do we see in that way and act from that place?

This leads us to Keri Iyall Smith's article, which explores specific ways of being and seeing that Indigenous peoples offer. She rejects capitalist logics and instead puts forward ideas of kinship, reciprocity, and potlatch as counterhegemonic, anti-commodifying, and anti-privatizing. Many Indigenous communities have survived a long history of colonial violence because of the ways of being and seeing that she describes. "Deep reciprocity" fosters respect, relationships, and responsibility to each other, while "cross cutting social circles" support alternatives by immersing people in diverse perspectives and practices. She goes on to say that non-Indigenous people need to "write their own survival narratives." This raises a question for me: What does it mean for those whose ancestry lies with the colonizers to write our own survival narratives?

Adam: There is a need for a critical moment if we're engaging with different ways of knowing. In addition to genocides, there have been "epistemicides"—this beautiful and challenging phrase from sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos—the killing of different ways of knowing through the process of colonialism. Only certain ways of knowing are valued scientifically, academically, and in the corporate world, and other modes of knowing and measuring are excluded or eliminated. In this context, how do we listen to the Earth, and how do we listen to something truly other or different?

The critical moment is to recognize the role that otherness often plays in colonialism. I'm thinking about Edward Said's work around Orientalism. As somebody trained in religious studies, I am wary of how the fantasy of "The East" compared to "The West" has structured thought since the 1950s and 1960s. For a long time, there was a sense of "Oh, 'the other' is The East." The East meant people connected to nature, less individualistic, and more communal, and the world would be wonderful if we could be more "Eastern"! That structurally played the role of "the other" for a long time. Of course, the environmental reality in Asia contains a lot of ecological destruction, for example, deforestation in ancient China. If you genuinely know, listen to, and are in relationship with Eastern traditions and the history of different parts of Asia, it's incredibly complicated—not just a monolithic thing called The East.

Unfortunately, I think that's happening again with the claims of Indigenous knowledge and Indigeneity as being the fantasy answer to all of our prob-

lems. Instead of the opposition being West versus East, now we hear “colonialism” versus “Indigeneity.” But it fulfills the same structural role, where there is a fantasy of an “other”—call it “Indigenous ways of knowing”—that will solve all of our problems. And what’s interesting is that many of the same attributes that used to be projected onto the East are now projected onto Indigeneity.

I think a good origin point for this structure of otherness goes back to a dialectic between Western enlightenment, on the one hand—with its qualities of rational, scientific, dominating, measuring, technological dominance—and the Romantic movement on the other—which, going back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, talked about the “noble savage” and an interest in a return to nature. As an extension of the latter, the transcendentalist movement, with Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, tried to bring us out into the natural world where wisdom lies. I think this binary between the Enlightenment and the Romantics is what defines Western modernity. In other words, it’s not that the Romantic is outside of Western modernity; it is a driving force of what we think of as Western or European modernity, including colonialism. So the danger—and this is still the critical moment here—is to take care not to project some family rivalry between Enlightenment and Romanticism onto Indigenous ways of knowing. Then we risk saying, “oh, that’s Indigeneity” when actually, it’s just referring to this Romantic tradition.

Having moved through and past the critical moment, then you can truly begin to open and listen to Indigenous communities, philosophers, practices, and ways of knowing, which are diverse. It’s not one thing called “Indigenous knowledge.” We’re talking about a vast, rich diversity of ways of knowing—a Pluriversality, in the words of Ashish Kothari and colleagues. I think what we’ll find when we are willing to pass through the critical moment is *real* difference in *real* otherness that is often challenging and that does not fit neatly within either an Enlightenment or a Romantic framework, but authentically opens us to the world in new ways. That could be helpful for the ecological crisis we face.

LaDawn: We should come back to the theme of Pluriversality because that’s a challenging and exciting way to think about potential futures. I want to turn to John Dawsey’s piece because he seems to be trying to see in ways that the Yanomami of Brazil see. He contrasts this with the view of the *napë*, which are the Western colonizers. The Yanomami are the forest people who engage in practices, sometimes with the use of psychoactive substances, to transcend their bodies and the apparent material reality that they see before them.

One point of contrast is that the *napë* cannot seem to see what they’re destroying. Dawsey narrates their destructive extraction and commodification of

forest materials such as rubber, concluding: “Not believing the forest is alive; nor believing it feels pain, as humans do; unable to hear its laments, or perceive its respiration, or feel its breath; the napë rip out the floor of the forest. Like cannibal specters they devour it, then are haunted by dark rain, and by the fumes that they themselves produce in cities and in the forest.” This is an evocative invitation to *see differently*, and it raises for me a deep desire to *want* us to see differently. I’m wondering how this speaks to you.

Adam: It’s palpable when an aspect of our reality suddenly comes into color and you start to feel or see differently—a tree or a forest or another human or even the stars at night. As simple and sometimes naive as that sounds, what I love about this essay is the way that it performs—and performance is key to the discussion—what it means to know the forest is alive. This is distinct from a civilization and economy that are completely ignorant of that “livingness.” I’m thinking of Eduardo Kohn’s amazing anthropological work *How Forests Think*. Kohn explores the living semiotic network that is the forest in another region of the Amazon rainforest. It’s obvious that something there cannot and should not be destroyed.

Consider another book, Richard Powers’ *The Overstory*, which won the Pulitzer Prize recently. A phenomenological shift occurred where people became completely aware that trees were alive, sentient, communicative beings—at least for a few days or weeks after reading the book. That tends to fade, but for some period after reading the book people experienced an undeniably true attuning or wakefulness. The napë are ignorant of this living quality and can therefore see everything as a commodity to be destroyed and consumed.

Imagine what it would feel like to take a single hatchet or axe to another living body. You know you’re in a reciprocal negotiation with a forest if you know that cutting down even one tree is taking a life; which doesn’t mean you don’t cut down that tree. Indigenous people also cut down trees and hunt animals, but they’re in a reciprocal, entangled relationship with the forest that’s completely different from hot saws and bulldozers clearing the forest.

LaDawn: This gives depth to the meaning of reciprocity in both Keri Iyall Smith’s and David Manuel-Navarrete’s pieces. Western insensitivity contrasts starkly with what the Yanomami are teaching. They see the fictitiousness of a tree being a commodity, and that the commodification of bodies like trees and forests and people actually harms the humanity of the planet. They see humanity in all things: Davi Kopenawa, a seer of the Yanomami, “seeks the forgotten reality lying beneath the skins of those who turn into merchandise – their condition as subjects or living beings... In cities and forests, Kopenawa

is appalled by the incapacity of the napë people to see and hear the human in things, or to connect with others, becoming similar to them, while we become other, as part of the living.”

I wanted to ask you how this seeing is similar to Western animism that seeks to reanimate the world, or to the way capitalists animate things, as you insightfully point out in your article. You talk about how things don’t have value in capitalism until they’re “brought to life” through some process—or commodification as I would put it. The Yanomami are also animating the world but there is something very different about that animation. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Adam: There are interesting overlaps between my article and Dawsey’s. One is an uncanny coincidence of the turtle image. In Dawsey’s, the turtle is a way of relating to a car for this Yanomami seer; his experiencing a car as like a turtle gives life to that object, rather than it being just a tool or technology. There’s an extension of humanity and life to the world in which the Yanomami live. Returning to this question of fantasy and even Green governmentality, part of my essay questions how this very beautiful and intuitive way of extending an animist perspective to all of life can *also* be coopted by dominant forms of capitalism. How does that work? Again, this is subtle: trying to determine what will trap us and what can be transformative or healing.

I’m drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli, an anthropologist, Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian post-colonial philosopher, and Claire Colebrook, an Australian cultural theorist. All three of these theorists point to how animating life, vitality is also one of the driving forces of capitalism. Capitalists, like you said, gaze out over a forest, desert, mountain, or ocean and see what Heidegger would call a “standing reserve”—resources to be extracted, liquidated, turned into profit, and utilized for human thriving. The world, in this “technological enframing,” again to use Heidegger’s language, is simply there to be commodified. In that sense, capitalism has an animating tendency; it brings things to “life” within the global market.

Usually, we think of capitalism as a death machine that destroys everywhere and everything, and that’s kind of true. But the flip side is that capitalism is constantly seeking to animate everything, including our bodies. How do we turn our human bodies into products to be improved, genetically altered, dieted, made healthier, made more Yogic and fit? We become a kind of commodity, which is a way of animating our bodies. The same could be true for our minds, which Mbembe has written about recently. Once you see the pattern of capitalism’s animating function, you can be more critical about simply extending

the quality of animacy or life to the world because there's a way that could just drag everything into more capitalist extractivism and consumption.

In contrast, that which is animated in a non-capitalist animism, like in Dawsey's article, has its own value. It doesn't need to be filtered through a capitalist process to create value. The forest as it is, as it has been, has life and value. The ritual life, the performance, and the culture are in a reciprocal and appreciative relationship with all life. That's a starkly different kind of animacy. Modern environmental neo-animism and neo-paganism risk subtly reinforcing capitalist animism without noticing. When the animacy of the more-than-human world challenges our lifestyle, that's a good sign, whereas when the animacy simply is another way to preserve our consumerist lifestyles, that's a sign of danger that we need to question.

LaDawn: That leads to another question about this piece—and more generally, Buddhist and other practices that involve visualization or vision quests. How do we collectively learn to *see* differently without falling into the trap of bypassing or fantasy? Visualization *is*, by definition, a journey of the imagination, into fantasy, isn't it? Do visualization practices like we see with shamanism (in Dawsey's piece) or as part of Buddhist practice hold a key for seeing beyond the commodified world of capitalism? Not only seeing "the other," but also seeing a larger container of inseparability? And maybe my question is, do we all need to take mushrooms?

[both laugh]

Adam: Yes, the answer is yes. Suddenly we have this resurgence of interest in visionary entheogens like psychedelics or mushrooms or ayahuasca. You have a guy like Michael Pollan write a single book and suddenly everybody wants to be tripping. That's an interesting phenomenon because it shows that even something as radically altering as psychedelic experience can be appropriated into a mainstream perspective. It's not a threat to what is familiar, but is an enhancement of what is familiar. A similar mode of appropriation is present in corporate mindfulness. So this question of imagination, imaginal visualization is huge.

Afrofuturism is a great example. This connects to the article by Brooke Lavelle, Abra Vigna, Zack Walsh, and Ed Porter—and the CourageRISE model—because there's an interest in imagination and sensing alternatives. Afrofuturism questions how we imagine a science fiction future, and to what degree thinking about futures opens up greater possibilities or just projects our own mind further ahead and keeps us further trapped.

My friend Fitzhugh Shaw, who's in radical food systems studies, has noted that most science fiction analyses of food are very bleak—like the brown, gelatinous cubes in the movie *Snowpiercer* that are made from cockroaches. The sense is that the way we eat in the future is grotesque and limiting. Why not write science fiction that imagines foods, food systems, and food rituals—as well as the kinship and community structures around food – as a beautiful, regenerative, delicious feast? Why not take this imaginal capacity of our minds to collectively imagine alternatives? Here I would want to make a distinction between sci-fi and imagination on the one hand and fantasy on the other. There is an important role for ritual and other ways of imagining that other worlds are possible. And yet, as I keep coming back to, imagination is also almost instantly dragged back into the capitalist machinery: once there is something that's imagined it can be commodified for profit. I'm curious from your perspective as a sociologist, how would we avoid this risk of even imagination being commodified? And how do we keep open more rigorous, powerful possibilities of imagination?

LaDawn: That's an interesting question. One way beautiful things get dragged into the capitalist machinery is through a lack of non-commodified spaces, or ways to interact that don't involve spending money. Decommodification of public spaces fosters human interaction, invites creativity and play, and equalizes access. Even in contemplative communities, many spaces are commodified: you have to sign up for retreats and pay big bucks to stay at a retreat center. Of course, those places need money to pay their staff and operational costs, but there is a general shortage of decommodified public space in our world.

Our culture also valorizes aggressive, masculine energy—achieving and transforming everything—and offers fewer rewards for slowing down to allow for creativity and mental space. A less aggressive approach would entail creating space for things to emerge in their own time, as with the work of Otto Scharmer, the Presencing Institute, Arawana Hayashi, and others. Their work speaks to that need, that absence we have in our society of spaces simply to “presence,” where we allow our imagination—shared imagination, as well—to see what's there and let it come instead of always molding it into a commodified form and making it fit into a machine of efficiency.

Adam: For me this brings up two important points. One is Sylvia Federici's writings on re-enchanting the world – also brought up by Manuel-Navarrete in his piece on dominant capitalist logics. The discovery of other reasons and logics is what Federici means by re-enchantment. Imagination, collective ritual, community, and the space for emergence allow re-enchantment that reclaims

actual lands from capitalism. Re-enchantment is understood by Federici not simply to mean a way of thinking or a change in consciousness, but communities that are living together differently, exchanging commodities differently, valuing their time, valuing women differently, valuing the Earth differently—materialized.

LaDawn: Let me underscore that: the spaces are material, not just imagination, though they are that as well. Underlying capitalism is the almost sacred law of ownership and private property that interferes with our ability to reclaim spaces and decision-making about how material wealth is distributed, to what end, and following what logic. We know that under capitalism, decision making follows profits. But why is that the logic that we hold in such high esteem? Why not reciprocity? Why not re-enchantment? Why not creating spaces that are decommodified?

Adam: Right, and I think we have concrete examples—I think of Standing Rock where I had the honor to be present, where the land was reclaimed by communities. The encampments were ritualized, in reciprocity with relationships and land, sharing stories and songs. The Zapatistas in Chiapas are another long-standing example of a Pluriversality, of claiming that we can live the way we want, outside the capitalist system. And even the ZAD (Zone to Defend) in France, which I mentioned in my essay, where French farmers, anarchists, activists, and artists took over acres of land where an airport was planned. They said, “no; the way you want to liquidate this ancient farmland, turn it into an airport, and displace people and other beings is unacceptable to us. We’re tired of this endless growth of the capitalist machine.” They occupied the land and then, of course, were forced to live together, grow food, build community, have relationships, and come up with a form of self-governance. Much of what we long for needs actual physical spaces, occupied lands that are decolonized, or at least on the way to being decolonized.

LaDawn: This also brings to mind the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil, the landless workers movement, which has used a clause in the Brazilian Constitution to reclaim land held as private property that is not “fulfilling a social function,” as George Meszaros describes. Many occupations have followed from this “social logic;” what is land for? Is it just private property, or is it something that communities—not to mention animals—need for life? This represents a shift of consciousness around underlying capitalist assumptions about what property is supposed to be. The Occupy Movements take this analysis directly—to Wall Street, for example—because

that is the logic of Wall Street, of capitalism. Occupy is an attempt to disrupt that logic and ask why *that* is such an esteemed value in society.

Adam: First, I want to acknowledge how challenging this is—I have been in a couple of occupied spaces where the militarized police force defending the fossil fuel industry and capitalist state is unwilling to allow lands to be occupied. It's often Indigenous people and frontline activists that are imprisoned or murdered. Naomi Klein emphasizes that Blockadia is incredibly challenging, life threatening work, and people die. I was recently in Washington, DC at Indigenous-led protests where numerous Indigenous youth were arrested by the militarized police. So it sounds good, and there have been success stories as we noted, but I also want to raise a note of caution that the capitalist state is increasingly unwilling to allow these occupations.

The second point I want to make is personal: as a white man who benefits from settler colonialism, I notice my own hesitation around questions of private property and decolonization. I want to own the challenge of living in a world where to survive, to have a family, seems to require a commitment to our own private property, bank accounts, and so forth. The shift from the private-property focused capitalist state of enclosure to some kind of commons requires risk, decolonizing our attitudes and practices in deeply challenging ways. It cannot simply be imagined but must be brought into practice, and that threatens many of us.

LaDawn: Fortunately people have actually lived in a multitude of ways; capitalism is the aberration in human history, and people have fought it all along. The resistance isn't just coming around now. Resistance has existed for more than 500 years of colonialism. Reinstating different logics in governing the world is absolutely challenging, *and* we're not flying totally blind. That's another reason I appreciate the work of the authors we've been covering.

Going a bit deeper into this history, Kirsten Mundt's article contains evocative imagery of the violent colonial past, including slavery. The example of a slave ship, and the ways bodies touch each other, creating or immersing themselves in the reality and the horror, together, is haunting—the shared experience of touching the colonial wound, the wound of slavery. She defines touch “not as a solution to violence, but as a portal for expanding beyond colonially constructed traps of self and other.” Touch here is a method to embody something larger than individual reality. She invokes the courage of staying present with pain. Could you talk about the courage required to stay present with wounds like this?

It also relates to what you said about moving outside of the comfort zone that is created by being in a white, able-bodied, cisgendered form—male, in your case, female in my case. We have the privilege to shield ourselves from some of this pain. What is the benefit of moving into the colonial wound and actually touching it?

Adam: This is a profound piece. We often think of touching as the contact between a subject and an object, a body reaching out to touch something else in the world—a tree, let's say—and in that moment, there is connection or contact. When we think of touch free from a subject-object duality, we have a very different phenomenon—the hapticality that Mundt points to. There's a totalizing logic of subject and object that Mundt is trying to overcome. I can't help but think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology; in his last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, he talks about the chiasm, which is the simple but beautiful recognition that when we touch, the world also touches back. If I reach out and touch a tree, the tree is touching back. So there's this chiasm or intertwining, as he calls it.

This chiasmatic relationship with touch is woven into Mundt's piece in different ways, even though she doesn't explicitly mention Merleau-Ponty. What does it feel like to have a relationship with touch that isn't defined by subjects and objects, a hierarchy of known and unknown? In this painful example of the slave ship, which she draws from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons*, there is a way in which the intimacy of bodies touching each other in one of the most violent possible contexts breaks down our idea of wholeness. I think this is one of the most powerful parts of this essay: touch does not mean wholeness; to touch or to be intertwined in the world, physically, does not mean reaching a harmonious whole, but rather, to touch this impossible grief and violence of colonialism.

When we reconfigure and decolonize touch in this way, it breaks us out of what Mundt calls neoliberal therapeutics. We can see parallels in approaches to Buddhism and mindfulness that focus on healing individual bodies while rendering individuals responsible for the structural violence of capitalism. She gives an incredibly sad example of a Zuni woman who was told that her trauma was her own personal responsibility to heal and fix. That's an example of neoliberal therapeutics: the idea that to heal the body, to heal trauma is our responsibility as individuals. I completely resist that.

Of course, there's always a role for individual agency, but we cannot defer the suffering of something like chattel slavery, transatlantic slavery, to individual responsibility for healing. This is such a subtle and important part of this article. The author is a healer who is interested in healing bodies and trauma

through touch, but who wants to do so without getting trapped in neoliberal therapeutics. I think this is one of the most, if not the most, important questions for eco-Dharma or ecopsychology, for the future of contemplative practices such as meditation and yoga in our society over the coming decades.

LaDawn: This also evoked for me the path of the *bodhisattva*. Meditative practice can clearly be McM mindfulness, where you seek peace so that you can return to the world of aggression, of producing, being efficient, and visiting harm upon yourself. You give yourself a little corner to regenerate and then go back out and do it again. But actually, the path of the bodhisattva requires stopping long enough to be able to open your heart to the suffering in the world, including your own and that of others, and to recognize the commonality of that suffering. Through that, a sense of compassion can emerge that goes beyond charity to touch a deeper sorrow that we share. Although we don't all experience it in equal measure, we can touch it, and it's there. For me, it gives me permission to be broken, as a human, and also to allow other people to be broken. This reminds me of your call to allow the Earth to be broken, too. Nothing is broken, really. It just is. But we can't always be whole, as you mentioned, and it's violent to force us to be whole when the system that we're part of is broken and breaking things.

Adam: Exactly. It's a violence that we enact on ourselves and on each other to say, we're *supposed* to feel whole, we're *supposed* to feel resilient and harmonious. There's interesting work by David Chandler and Julian Reid called *Resilient Life* about the neoliberal dimension of resilience, which Jason von Meding's essay in the prior issue also discusses. It's a word that's been grabbed by the corporate sector and all sorts of institutions that demand us to be whole, healthy, resilient, functioning, neoliberal subjects, and it's psychotic. That's not healing or wholeness. I appreciate the theoretical and healing sophistication of Mundt's article because it gets at a core question for all of us who care for human bodies and hearts in the midst of radical environmental mutation: what does it mean to take care of ourselves genuinely, to heal each other, to touch ourselves, to touch each other in a way that won't simply place the burden of 500 years of colonialism onto our personal shoulders, but also allows us to feel alive and healthy and joyous?

Your evocation of the *bodhisattva* is spot on here: the path of the bodhisattva is to discover the noble heart that doesn't give up, no matter what, because that heart is not in it for a certain outcome. This is "staying with the trouble" to use Donna Haraway's phrase. I think it's helpful here to use Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing's language of sharing in contamination. The bodhisattva

doesn't just stay aloof and distant, but actually descends into the lowest hells. It is said in Mahāyāna texts that the bodhisattva is willing to descend into a hell realm for a billion years just to alleviate the headache of one person suffering in that realm.

We're entering into a reality where the fantasy that privileged people get to stay in a protected, gated ecotopia is over. We are going to share in the contamination, breathe in the toxins, feel the heat. That is a sign of being an earthling these days.

LaDawn: Your article doesn't stop at grief and mourning; it moves into what you call ecopolitics. How does touching the wound as a practice open space for action and activism?

Adam: I've been trying to free myself from the logic of application, the idea that first there's an inner shift in our consciousness and *then*, second, we apply that to activism. It's not helpful or accurate to fracture thought from action or changes in consciousness from engagement. It's not how the world has ever worked. It's just a concept that we need to drop. Instead, I'm curious about an experience that is engaged yet transforms self-conception and understanding of the world. Our practice is a single existential tissue, a materializing of spirituality, and a willingness to see that wakefulness, freedom, and compassion look like *a different Earth*, not just new feelings about that Earth.

LaDawn: There's a quote in your piece that I love, "The non-natural ecopolitical spiritualities to come might listen to, attend to, and attune to the teaching of a concrete turtle shell as much as attuning to the moon, an old growth forest, or a raven." I think that captures well this sense that detaching from the pain of the world is not actually helpful.

Adam: That quote helps get to the heart of my essay. I think we are entering into, or maybe have always been in, an age where we have as much to learn from a giant Royal Dutch Shell petrochemical plant as we do from the beautiful forest and the Ohio River that the Shell cracker plant is destroying. If we're only listening to the moon, mountains, coyotes, or wolves and we're not listening to fracking sites and oil spills, we're only hearing half the story of Earth. Going back to the Casey Camp-Horinek quote: to say we are "nature protecting itself" can get very profound. We have to recognize that the *whole thing* is nature. *If* we want to talk about nature, which I don't think we do—it has to include the Shell cracker plant, cities and slums, the destruction of fish-

eries. The whole thing is a play of nature and we have to attune and listen to the complete story, not just one part of it.

LaDawn: David Manuel-Navarette's piece brings in a similar element of wanting to include "the whole story." But in spaces like academia, rational thought is valorized while emotions and relationality are swept aside. He, like Lavelle and colleagues, discusses strategies for retraining ourselves to be more relational. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about how bringing together the heart and the mind can re-enchant the world and foster action.

Adam: Manuel-Navarrete's piece is really brave for an academic to open this embodied "thinking heart, feeling mind" (*senti-pensar*) quality, and recognize that the logics of scientific enframings often exclude our hearts. He refers to Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's spiritual warrior as someone brave enough to let their heart be broken. The willingness to feel and let our heart be broken for Manuel-Navarrete does seem, almost naturally, to lead to action by facing ourselves and re-enchanting the world, by respecting the sacred and going beyond what the intellect can grasp.

LaDawn: Courage is part of that, and a theme that comes up in many pieces, for example Lavelle and colleagues's CourageRISE model. Despite the social and ecological rifts we've been discussing, "resistance to injustice, unfettered joy, and the spirit of kinship are ever present. The hallmarks of humanity—creativity, cooperation, and compassion—abound." This work emphasizes that structural change without these cultural shifts and embodiment is not going to work very well. This piece was my first exposure to this model; it's exciting to think of people participating in this process!

Adam: I've had a chance to go through a training that CourageRISE offered, and Brooke Lavelle has become a friend. They have developed a true community of practice with a research dimension through the Mind and Life Institute and a spiritual practice in the sense of a personal journey of transformation that is relational. The sense of kinship, community, and relationality is the core of what Courage does. The RISE model is one of the most concrete examples of positive steps forward coming from these articles. How could we weave together communities, transformation, and experience? Well, here's one answer: use these steps of the RISE. They're very skillful.

The RISE model can be understood as something like Otto Sharmer's Theory U model in the sense of a journey that a group could go through to enact beautiful new worlds. It also is similar to the acronym RAIN in the mindful-

ness community, which is a personal process working with difficult emotions. RISE allows a collectivity, and maybe even a whole civilization, to go through a journey of transformation. “R” is to reveal truths, “I” is to invest in healing, “S” is to sense alternatives, and “E” is to enact beloved community. It’s a very succinct map that comes from significant experience, research and reflection, and trial and error; it’s very promising! I hope that the readers really spend time with this piece.

LaDawn: They have a website for their work—courageofcare.org—where people can learn more, get involved, or even participate in a training.

I want to thank you, Adam, for taking the time to talk with me! It has been a delight. I hope that we can have more conversations in the future on these topics, bringing in broader perspectives beyond ours.

Adam: Thank you. I look forward to further dialogue. And, again, much appreciation for all the authors and their contributions, and for your efforts in bringing it all together. May this time of speaking, writing, and reflecting be of benefit to the more-than-human world and to the sacredness of this Earth.

LADAWN HAGLUND is a sociologist, professor, and researcher of human rights, social and environmental justice, and socially transformative processes. Her research analyzing the social and political dimensions of sustainability and environmental governance has received support from the U.S. National Science Foundation, the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board and the Brazilian Fulbright Commission. Her teaching focuses on guiding students to bring their intelligence, compassion, and bravery to confront the structural and cultural violence that perpetuates injustice in our world. She also serves as a meditation instructor and has practiced Buddhism for more than 30 years.

ADAM LOBEL (Ph.D) served as a teacher (*acharya*) in the Shambhala tradition from 2005-2018. He leads ecodharma workshops called “Silent Transformations,” teaches in the Ecosattva Training, is a GreenFaith fellow, and is active in ecological and social justice movements. Adam teaches a critical style of contemplative training that seeks to avoid enclosure in neoliberal mindfulness while still disclosing effortless awareness. (See his full bio on page 56, following his article in this issue.)

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