

STARBORNE

the journal of autocosmology

Spring 2025



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Issue 1: Spring 2025

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Editors' Note:

All unattributed artwork was created by Ari Makridakis using a combination of digital art-making tools (primarily Photoshop) and generative AI programs (Midjourney, Adobe Firefly, and Chat GPT).

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Letter from the Editors

Welcome to *Starborne*!

Over the past hundred years, science has revealed something astonishing: we are not simply located *in* the universe—we *are* the universe, in human form.

This shift in understanding stems from now widely acknowledged truths: that the atoms in our bodies were forged in ancient stars. That the complex tissues of our brains are continuous with the slow self-organization of matter across billions of years. That consciousness itself is not an exception to the cosmos, but an emergent expression of it.

Starborne exists as a space to explore what it means to live inside this new awareness—not just conceptually, but through felt experience, artistic practice, and creative inquiry. What might it mean to be a local expression of a 13.8-billion-year evolutionary process? What shifts when we begin to sense our lives not as separate from the cosmos, but as one way the cosmos is becoming aware of itself? And how might we leave traces of this dawning awareness in language, image, and form?

To help frame this daring experiment, Brian Thomas Swimme and Carolyn Cooke have introduced the term *autocosmology*. The word points to a shift—from telling stories *about* the universe, to telling stories *as* the universe, in its localized human form.

At the same time, we should emphasize that there is no single, orthodox definition of autocosmology. This is not a genre with preset boundaries, but a living question we must explore together. Still, to offer some waypoints, here are five possible definitions - each one partial and open to further evolution:

- Autocosmology is creative expression that asks: What is it like to be the evolving universe in one specific human form?
- Autocosmology is the genre of writing and art-making that arises when cosmic evolution is not just an abstract idea but the very ground of experience.
- Autocosmology is art that reflects and enacts time-developmental consciousness—a mode of awareness that sees everything, including the self, in light of cosmic evolution.
- Autocosmology is what happens when autobiography breaks orbit from the isolated self and begins to track its entanglement with planetary and cosmic forces.
- Autocosmology is the voice the universe finds when it begins to speak from within your particular nervous system, with all its unique memories, longings, and creative impulses.

Ultimately, our hope is that *Starborne* becomes more than a journal—that it grows into a site of shared experimentation for those who feel compelled to give voice to the radical intimacy between self and cosmos.

If something in these pages resonates with your own wild endeavors—if you are creating from that edge where story meets stardust—we hope you'll reach out. This is an open conversation. We'd love to be in it with you.

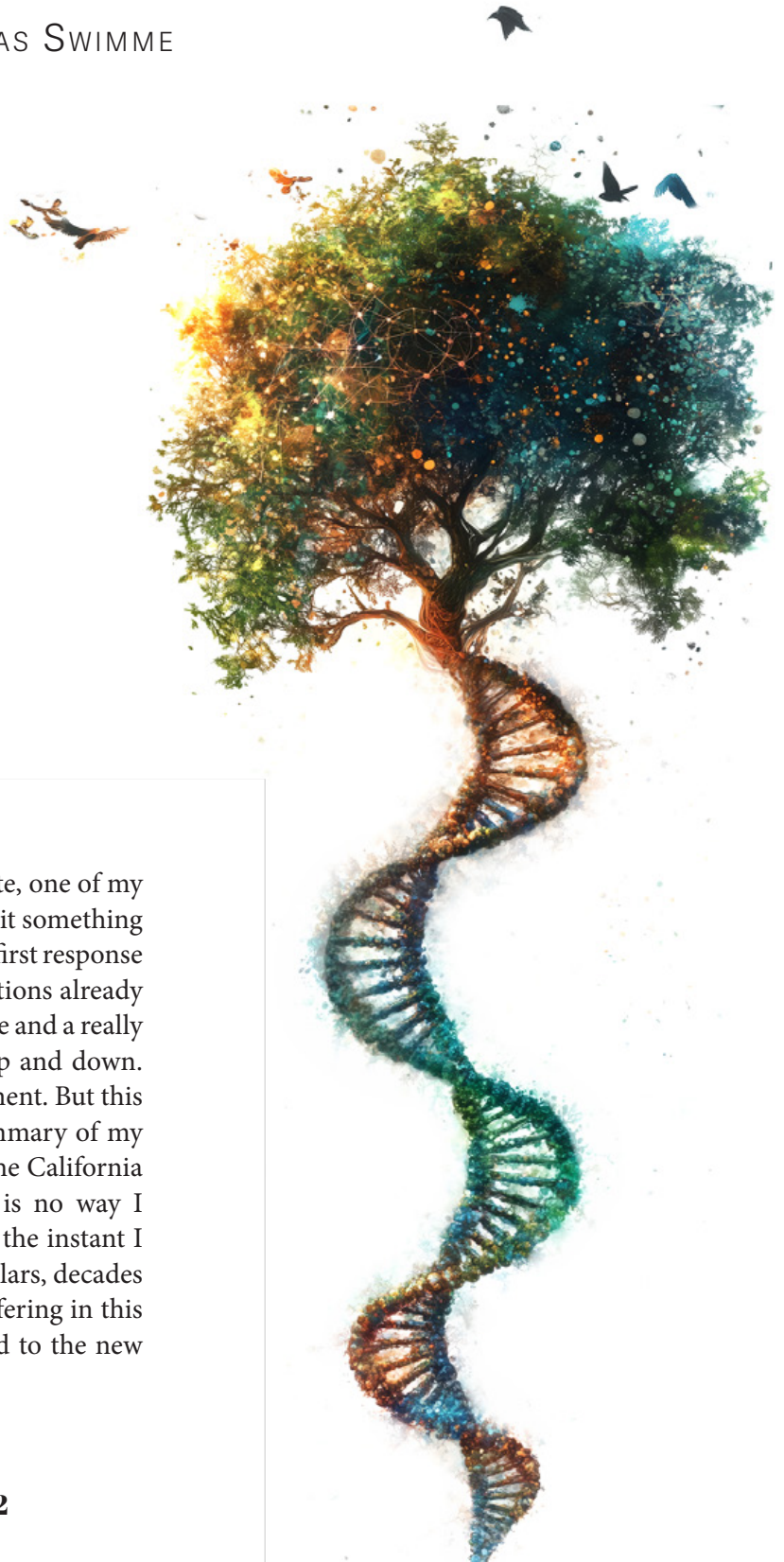
With gratitude, wonder, and delight,

Ari Makridakis & Ezekiel Fugate
Editors-in-Chief

The Birth of Autocosmology

BRIAN THOMAS SWIMME

Today is January 29, 2025. Ezekiel Fugate, one of my last doctoral students, has asked me to submit something to *Starborne: The Journal of Autocosmology*. My first response is to feel even more keenly the heavy obligations already on my shoulders, a jovial elephant on one side and a really angry gorilla on the other, both jumping up and down. There's no way I can take on another assignment. But this is *Ezekiel*, the man who gave a heartfelt summary of my life's work when I retired from teaching at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). There is no way I can say anything but Yes! to Ezekiel. But in the instant I silently agree to it, I feel the presence of scholars, decades in the future, poring over each and every offering in this maiden voyage of the first journal dedicated to the new genre of autocosmology.



I feel an intense pressure from the critical minds of the unborn future. In any event, here I am in the San Francisco Bay area, searching through my memories for the throughline that led to the founding of this new genre.

When I was in graduate school studying mathematics and physics, I was keenly aware that I was en route to becoming a dried up stick. That's a terrible thing to say, I know. It suggests that the American system of higher education is filled with evil people, which is far from the truth. Even so, there was something missing in my education. My struggle can be characterized as the condition the mythologist Phil Cousineau calls "Venus," by which he means "lack." I felt a profound lack. I was lost in a territory of confused erotic energies.

The way I dealt with my confusion was by entering into a slow process of turning from the equations of mathematical cosmology to the philosophical meanings of the universe. The parade of thinkers ushering in what was, for me, a different form of consciousness includes Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Thomas Berry. The equations remained at the center of my mind, but they were now seen to be an element of a much larger, richer, more magical universe than what they, by themselves, had unveiled. Back then, I would not have been able to say that I had taken a first step out of industrial consciousness. I didn't have that much self-awareness. What I did know was that a hot energy within

demanded expression as I taught my courses. I would find myself saying things like, "Every atom of your skin came from the creativity of stars! Can you actually learn that and not change your life?"

Even with this development, "lack" continued. You can see it in the last sentence of the previous paragraph: "Can you actually learn that and not change your life?" Looking back on that exasperated questioning, it seems obvious to me now that knowledge of the evolving universe was not enough for me. Or for my role as professor. That is to say, if I had given written examinations, and students answered every question perfectly but were

not also flaming with wild energy at finding themselves at the forefront of an evolving Earth and universe, I would feel I had failed to connect, that I had failed to convey what needed to be conveyed, that I had failed to deliver the searing truth.

Another step. After a lecture I gave at the Esalen Institute, Bruce Wilshire, Rutgers University philosopher, suggested I look to European phenomenology. This turned out to be helpful. I launched into reading Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre and was delighted. But once again, my mind filled with Venus. It took some time to name it, but eventually I realized what the lack was.

*Every atom of your
skin came from the
creativity of stars!
Can you actually
learn that and not
change your life?*

Neither Heidegger nor Sartre *lived* in the evolutionary universe. This is not a criticism of their work. After all, they had no choice in the matter. Heidegger's big work was published in 1927, four years before Georges Lemaître theorized the universe's beginning as an explosion, and 37 years before Lemaître's hypothesis could be empirically verified by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson at Bell Labs in Holmdel, New Jersey. I celebrate Sartre and Heidegger as touchstones in Western philosophy, but ye gods! All those books and not a single mention of what it felt like to live in a universe that has been developing for fourteen billion years? All those words but nothing about the flame of wild energy at the front of cosmic creativity?

Then, a fateful moment. Carolyn Cooke, novelist, short story writer, professor, showed up at CIIS when her college went bankrupt. Never have I been so happy at the bad luck of others! Their failure led to a new world of possibilities working with Carolyn. From the start, I was amazed by her brilliant understanding of both writing and literature. But along with her insights, which I copied down furiously, came statements that threw me. For instance, this professor of creative writing declared one day that, "Writing is not self-expression. I hate that." In another class, she proclaimed, "Writing is consciousness." In all my years studying philosophy and the world's spiritual traditions, I had not come across anyone saying that writing, by itself, was a form of consciousness. But as the months and years went by, I slowly drew in what she was saying, and I found, through experience, that it led to a bright, brand new, creative world.

The autocosmology genre emerged in the series of courses Carolyn Cooke and I invented over several years of the early twenty-first century. We drew students from both the MFA world and the Philosophy world. No one person knew where this process was taking us, but when we were together as a community of novelists, cosmologists, visual artists, philosophers, actors, spiritual teachers, screenwriters, film directors, short story writers, and playwrights, we could feel the significance of what was brewing. Various words surfaced as possible ways to name what we were about. Over time, "autocosmology" survived longer than the other candidates.

Asking about the emergence of the autocosmology genre is similar to asking when the first human

entered existence. Was it with *Homo erectus* millions of years ago? Was it with *Homo sapiens* 300,000 years ago? Scientists argue over these and other speculations. The one thing we can say with confidence is that humanity began in Africa. It's the same with the autocosmology genre. It surfaced not from one particular individual nor from one particular event; it was, instead, a collective discovery coming from a group of CIIS faculty and graduate students exploring the developing universe through the lens of human experience.

The autocosmology genre surfaced not from one particular individual nor from one particular event; it was, instead, a collective discovery.

With the birth of *Starborne*, that is, with the work of editors Ezekiel Fugate, Ari Makridakis, Addam Ledamyen, and Erin Vigil, the process initiated in the classrooms at CIIS now leaps beyond its walls. All around our planet are utterly unique creative personalities who will light up with the wild energy of a developing universe.

I should end by addressing the scholars of the 22nd century who are tracing the lines back to the origin of the autocosmology genre and have found their way to our journal. Thank you for featuring us in your research. There is one additional thing you should know which concerns the whole process of invention. Our classroom dialogues included light shows. And music. We would often spill out of CIIS into the San Francisco evenings. Restaurants, bars. Please note that in your report. The truth is, in addition to the seriousness of the undertaking, it was a real blast.

The Blurb Artist

CAROLYN COOKE



The blurb artist's job is simple: to open the book for a reader like a scalpel to the chest. She commits to an entanglement from which recovery might be impossible and reports back in the precise form of a blurb. Blurb is an art of essence. A good blurb artist can capture hundreds of pages of soaring genius in a sentence, two words—or even one. The question for the blurb artist is not, *What do you think?* The question is, *Will you blurb?*

The blurb artist unwrapped the advance copy and held it—weighty, but not heavy—in her hands. The violet-hued cover bled into a deeper shade toward the bottom, suggesting the gravitas of the author's subject: the evolving intelligence of the universe over fourteen billion years, and the metaphysical dimension associated with purple. Machine-generated stars sparkled across the title, the subtitle, the author's name, and a reference to one of the author's earlier, best-selling books.

The blurb artist felt honored to be asked to blurb a book about the universe. Her zone of expertise wasn't physics, philosophy, theology, geology, or anything grounded in what might be called fundamental truth or reality. Her zone of expertise lay in the opposite of disciplinary mastery: in not-knowing. The not-knowing formed a container, an open space in which the blurb artist experienced the work in its pure form, as the author intended, or even beyond what the author intended.

Blurb is an art of distillation that requires both emptiness and readiness. This paradox—empty readiness—is essential to the experience, otherwise the blurb artist won't have the capacity to be filled with new content, to be *revised* by the experience of the book. The blurb artist can't just *go in* as if the book were a door. The book is not a door; it's a billowing slot. The blurb artist enters sideways, as one enters a whirling jump-rope.

The blurb artist set the author's book, a glass of water, a yellow legal pad, and a pen on her worktable. She'd have no memory, when she returned from her journey, of having made the notes that filled the pages, and she'd never look at the notes again. Because blurbs were not made of notes—they *came*. Like orgasms, like lightning. The notes were essential, though, as a record of the physicality of the blurb artist's labor, her manual struggle for understanding.

During her preparations the blurb artist became aware of a young deer, a buck, browsing in the meadow outside her work room. Velvet parentheses of bone rose from the buck's brow; he might have been the fawn from last year who'd lived in the forest with his mother. The buck seemed at home. Why shouldn't he? Probably he was born nearby, in a bed of redwood fronds and pine needles.

The buck watched the blurb artist through the window as he ruminated on tough meadow grass. The blurb artist tried not to reveal her excitement at being so close to wild nature and ignored the buck so he might stay. She stretched her arms overhead, shook out her hands, and rubbed them together until the palms warmed. Then she opened the book, closed her eyes, and began to read.

At first it was as if she skated across a frozen sea. This is the challenge, isn't it, of entering another consciousness? The blurb artist was humbled, too, by the author's command of science, mathematics, and philosophy—from the cosmic microwave background radiation that was born with the universe to the various human players on the evolutionary stage. (Pythagoras, for example, apparently realized that the universe was orderly and mathematical, but had no mathematics to explain and understand itself. Pythagoras was, in this sense, the original blurb artist. He came up with the language—a math—that evoked the infinite text of the universe.)

Suddenly the frozen sea cracked, plunging the blurb artist into the depths. The terror was familiar, yet the blurb artist had never gotten used to the effort it took not to panic and claw her way back up to the shattered surface, but instead to sink down until the water warmed

The task of the blurb artist can be summed up in two sentences: Identify the source of human light. Then get out. There's a poem—Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo"—that reads like a manifesto for blurb artists. It begins with a headless torso so suffused with light that it functions expressively like a head, like a lamp, Rilke says, which is how the blurb artist liked to think of the author, as a lamp that illuminated humanity. Life bursts forth from the human "like a star," says Rilke, "for here there is no place that does not see you." This is the moment the blurb artist lives for: when, hovering almost motionless in the mind of the author, she is at once less herself, and more. The chilling last sentence—"You must change your life"—comes from everywhere and nowhere like a tide. It is the true text of every blurb.

...

At noon the blurb artist surfaced for a training on the new system that had replaced the old system at the university where she taught "Reading As If Your Life Depends On It" and "Art Of The Blurb." Rising from the submarine layer of the author's mind into her work room, the blurb artist saw the buck again. He lay in the grass just outside the window, resting, she imagined, while he grew his rack and prepared to fight and mate.

The task of the blurb artist can be summed up in two sentences: Identify the source of human light. Then get out.

a little and new life appeared. For example, the blurb artist herself took on a new form, as a gilled, flat fish—a fluke—with fins top and bottom like the fringe around a carpet, and both eyes on one side of her head, facing up. One eye observed the vastness described by the author, who drew in Aristotle, Ptolemy, Dante, Hildegard of Bingen, Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Einstein, Hubble, and a triad of three-named philosophers: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Sanders Peirce. The other eye remained alert for a fragment of the unsayable totality that might be broken off and forged into a blurb.

The buck didn't need to think about that future. He could trust that the desire and ability to fight and mate would flow into him when he needed it. Fighting and mating were part of him, but the knowledge was stored, for the time being, outside of his personal consciousness. It was more practical to save the energy he'd otherwise spend in practice-fighting and rutting (flirting? developing an ego?) in growing the largest, strongest rack possible. The rack was the key to the kingdom of fighting and mating.

As he lay in the meadow growing his antlers, the buck's black eyes were full of the experience of

transforming from a fawn into a buck. The great question hung in the air, but unspoken, of course—because the buck had no words. The blurb artist imagined that one day he was a fawn following his mother around a delicious meadow, and then he woke from the dream of his life into a violent instant in which his instincts told him, *run!* He ran before he knew, before the event for which the entire history of his species had prepared him, happened. Anxiety, he now understood, was a hint, a vibrational skill.

Yet a wild animal had never appeared to the blurb artist as relaxed as the buck in the meadow, perfectly secure in his vulnerability.

...

Fortunately, the training was online, so the blurb artist didn't need to drive to campus, find parking, or make small talk, any of which could fatally interfere with the poetic, sonic, and almost unconscious gestation of the blurb. Still, the training ripped her from reverie and thrust her unceremoniously into, of all things, a project management tutorial.

The trainer seemed genuinely enthusiastic about the all-new menu of options which, once you got used to them, weren't even that complicated, he promised. You could now do everything within the system. Remember the old way, when you wanted to talk to someone, you had to leave the system and use another device? Now you could make contact right from the app. You could immediately convene a group on an open channel, or you could lock a channel and send an invite to anyone you wanted, and they'd get an immediate notification. You'd also be notified immediately every time someone submitted a task for review.

The blurb artist's soul raged at spending the gold of her attention on learning a new system. Wasn't the old system still pretty new? She tried to keep an open mind out of respect for the trainer, who was just doing his job. Besides, the last thing the blurb artist wanted to do was cling to an outdated framework out of fear, like the idiots (not the author's exact words, though the blurb artist felt his contempt) who called Copernicus a heretic in 1543 for claiming that the Earth orbited the sun rather than being the fixed center of the universe. Who wanted to be like that?

Here's how it works, the trainer explained. You create a task, or you create multiple tasks and assign them to one bucket, or you spread them across multiple

buckets depending on whether the tasks are coded by color, by team, or by progress. So—for example—you have a bucket called "new tasks." The next bucket is "tasks in progress." The third bucket is "submit task for review." The fourth bucket is "progress feedback," then "task submitted for approval," then, finally, if the task is approved, "task completed."

What if the task isn't approved? someone asked anxiously.

The blurb artist must find a way to hold the vastness of the universe while at the same time compressing it into an infinitely tiny point.

Good question, said the trainer. Then the task gets kicked back to the "in progress" bucket with notes on next steps. Make sense?

It made no sense! Why put a "task" into a "bucket" as if the desktop were a farm where everyone works with their hands and not just their fingers and thumbs? The endless cycling through "buckets" seemed especially small and sad.

Someone asked how the new system bypassed the internal protocols with their built-in multi-factor security. The trainer answered, I'm so, so glad you asked that!

When the training finally ended, the blurb artist wasted no time and plunged back to the floor of the sea where her fluke-self hovered, both eyes facing up, taking in the macrocosm where there could be no false sense of completion, no buckets or tasks. There was only the universe—the book—and then the microcosm of the blurb, whose creation demanded a catharsis, a period of lostness followed by a revelation.

In a frenzy of sympathetic intellection the blurb artist copied whole paragraphs, filling the legal pad with a reproduction of the author's mind that was identical to the text itself. The notes, perfectly illegible, were never meant to be read; they formed part of an internal system of communication between author and blurb artist—a locked channel.

The revelation came suddenly. All her life up to this moment the blurb artist had been *encased* in a human agenda, artificially shrunk from her natural size, born into a story that wasn't even true. Most people had grandiose ideas of what their lives were for, but their ideas were still too small. Now suddenly (like the buck's budding consciousness that his rack was an *aid* to fighting and mating, not a weird appendage but his destiny) the blurb artist knew. Her life up to this point had been a relentless, violent compression of vastness. In her urgent desire to be an exponential player on a tiny field, she'd shrunk herself. The work of distillation that gave life meaning had reduced her down to a few dozen remarks she would now do anything to retract—or expand on.

The stakes could not be higher: the blurb artist must find a way to hold the vastness of the universe while at the same time compressing it into an infinitely tiny point. To do both was impossible: she must choose. Just then, the blurb artist's stomach growled loudly and the buck startled and ran, leaving nothing but a pyramid of shit-pearls in the hard grass and clover.

Impulsively, the blurb artist turned to her computer, clicked through her files, and purged the old blurbs from the new system. She put the blurbs into a bucket, which she named "blurbs," and swept the bucket into the trash with one finger. She made another bucket called "final blurb." She would trade all past blurbs for this one. The past blurbs were of no use anyway—a book lives or dies based on its own merits, or on other largely industrial

*The book is not a door; it's a billowing slot.
The blurb artist enters sideways, as one
enters a whirling jump-rope.*

Suddenly the problem of *shriveled consciousness* came clear: what it means to be too caught up in human concerns. The blurb artist wondered if she could expand her shriveled consciousness by feeding it, like the wild pandemic yeast at the back of the refrigerator with its gray alcoholic hooch floating on the top. Some bakers stir the hooch back in; some drain it away or even drink hooch as an aid to recklessness or courage, which are related forms of sacrifice. As the blurb artist well knew, the courageous sacrifice everything for a purpose, whereas recklessness is the courage of the screwed.

The blurb artist worried, though, that the fierce clarity of the author might be deceptive, like the fierce clarity of hooch. Would this life-changing, shared intelligence fade into a series of unintelligible marks? Could this expansive experience dissipate? What if, after a bender in the mind of the author, the blurb artist woke up with a headache, swollen and unable to compress her findings into the concise mold required? It was important not to be under the influence while writing a blurb, or at least not to hit "send" while drinking exuberantly. On the other hand, hooch could bring the blurb artist closer to her primal fire and expand the space within.

factors—but the process of throwing used blurbs into the trash can at the bottom of her screen and then deleting them felt cathartic. The blurb artist hovered near the bottom of the large, empty feeling and waited. Eventually the lines floated past:

This book will annihilate you. You will never return to your previous stupid contentments.

Not perfect, but a start. A blurb may come, but the necessary refinement can take 100 drafts or more. This blurb-in-progress contained some essence, though. It was facile and hyperbolic—with truth in it.

A notification pinged and the trainer appeared. He was right there, his face, his voice! He'd been there all the time. Hadn't he mentioned that one could stay in the new system and do everything within it? Isn't it awesome, the trainer said, like being in a beehive? I see you're using your buckets, he said. Would you be willing to give feedback on your experience of the training? Just a pithy line or two to help us sell the new system to the laggards.

Of course, said the blurb artist. When do you need it?



On Mowing the Lawn

EZEKIEL FUGATE

Just now, I'm mowing the lawn. My hands encased in leather gloves, my feet covered by old maroon sneakers, my ears tucked inside bulky protective earmuffs.

Just now, I'm walking briskly to keep up with the lawn mower as its internal combustion engine turns a shaft that turns two belts: one to propel the mower forward, the other to power the spindles onto which two metal blades are attached.

Just now, the metal blades slice off the tops of the blades of grass.

Just now, the grass—mostly fescue—is eating the Sun's light.

Just now, the Sun is exploding hydrogen to feed the grass.

Just now, I am exploding hydrocarbons—mostly stored sunlight—to keep the grass at bay.

Just now, I'm walking briskly, subtly squeezing the lever in my left hand, then the lever in my right.

Just now, I'm working the edges of the lawn, tracing the perimeter that marks the boundary between mowed and unmowed: here, I slice the grass; there, the grass grows freely.

Just now, my body is bathed in Sun and sweat and fumes.

Just now, something is longing to unfurl itself in me, stretching toward the immense future that is nowhere and everywhere.

Just now, I'm walking. Slicing. Breathing. Tracing. Being bathed. Attempting to tame the wild green carpet that longs to unfurl itself toward the source.

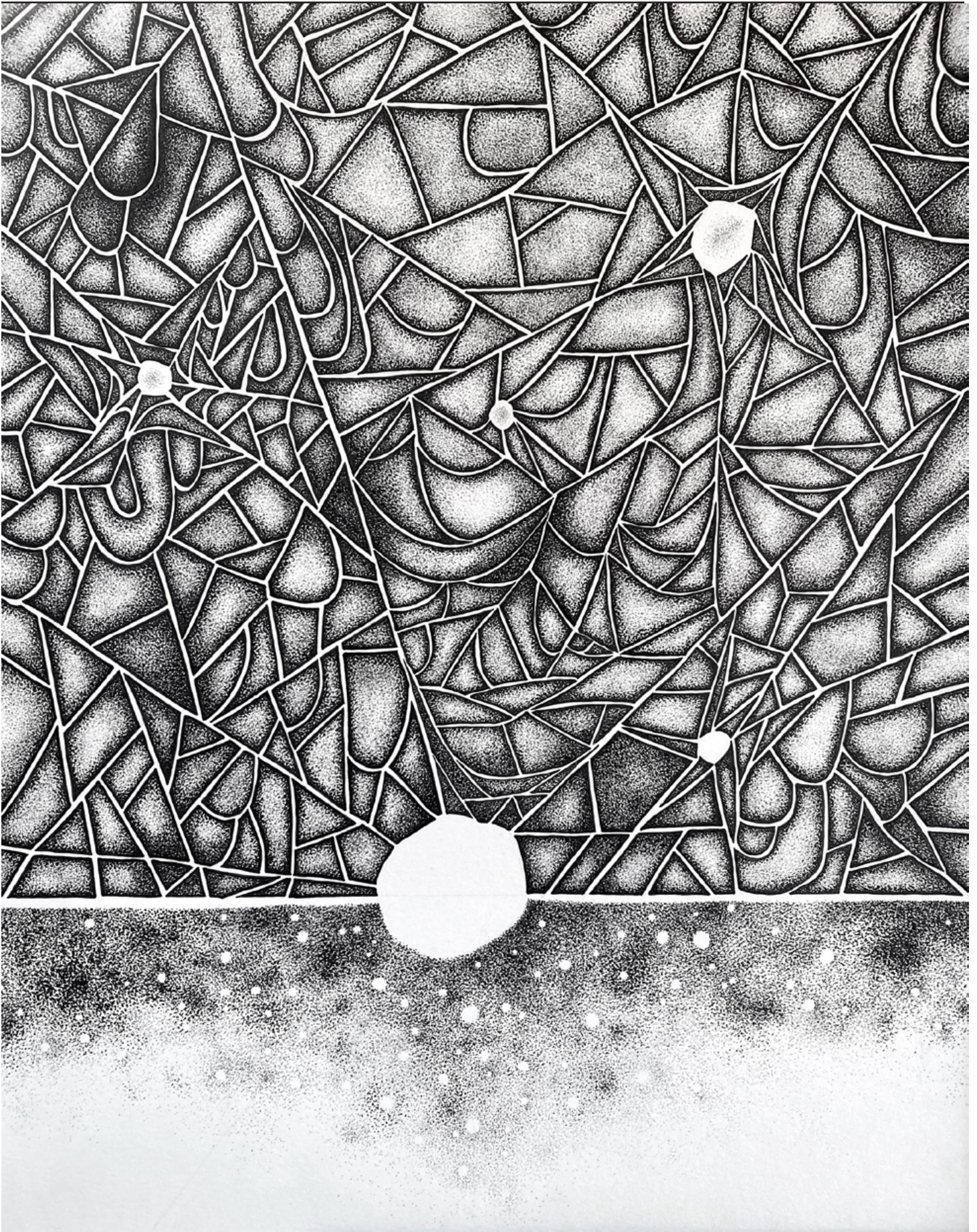
Just now, something is longing to unfurl itself in me, stretching toward the immense future that is nowhere and everywhere.

Just now, as I'm navigating the bumpy terrain of this south-facing slope that I call home, I'm working to remember that somehow, beyond all possibility, I have emerged from the vast Earth process that brought forth life; that my body—my eyes, my fingers, my lungs, my two gangly legs—has been sculpted through an age-old dance between Earth and Sun, a dance that has called into being blue whales and sugar maples, blue-green algae and elephants, butterflies and fescue; that this roaring machine that I guide like a chariot in the ancient Olympic games was also gathered up out of disparate bits of Earth's body in a process unleashed by the strangest of Earth's creations: the human imagination; that the human imagination is so easily deformed by its blindness to its own embeddedness in the Earth process; that even now, even here, as I enact this silly ritual of mowing the lawn, perpetuating the feudal impulse to manicure wildness, something new is trying to break through.

Just now, I'm reminding myself that how I pay attention matters.

Just now, I'm imagining my own belonging.

Just now, I'm mowing the lawn.



ARTWORK BY TYLER GLAUZ-TODRANK

Wild Pilgrimage

GENEEN MARIE HAUGEN

At the holy well in Glastonbury, England, a cluster of women and men place crystals—citrine, amethyst, rose quartz—on the flat gray stones that circle the wellhead's opening. Others suspend necklaces and amulets over the water. I hear someone whisper that the crystals and amulets are getting "charged." One woman tilts back her head and spreads her arms wide, face and palms uplifted to the sky, talisman dangling from a silver chain entwined in her fingers. Most of the women wear flowing garments in colorful shades, like the flowers of the garden—purple, lavender, lemon, crimson, or cobalt. One man wears a black t-shirt with a goddess figure on the back.

Elsewhere in the Chalice Well garden, people walk slowly, reflectively, from holy thorn tree to holy yew, tying ribbons to branches or placing offerings at the base of tree trunks. Some of the ribbons are written in an indecipherable script. Another reads, "May your dreams flow through us." It is not clear whose dreams are intended to flow. It occurs to me that someone must untie the ribbons every evening; someone must carry away all the coins offered to the pools, the stone beads, and written prayers left on the garden's ground.

I am exquisitely capable of cynicism about the seeming new age earnestness of these pilgrims, except that the longing for intimate relationship with

the mysteries of the holy Earth—sacred water, stone, tree—is palpable to me, and familiar. I carry my own longing for communion with the intelligent, animate, ensouled Earth. At the Chalice Well, I drink iron-rich water at the spouting Lion's Head; I step barefoot into the Healing Pool; I sit in meditation by the rusty Vesica Pool. Archaeological evidence suggests that pilgrims have been traveling to these waters, which flow at a constant rate and temperature, for at least 2000 years. I imagine that pilgrimage did not begin with the Christian era, but thousands of years earlier, perhaps even before the great stones were mysteriously raised at nearby Avebury and Stonehenge.

The ambiance in the Chalice Well garden is reverent. Even people who may be on the tourist circuit—rather than spiritual pilgrimage—speak in



hushed tones to one another. No one talks to a smartphone. There are no loud voices. No one runs, or appears to be in a hurry. I've always hoped for similarly gracious mindfulness from those gathered at, say, Old Faithful, Yosemite Falls, or the rim of the Grand Canyon.

Do human beings have a purpose on this astonishing planet? Why are we here?

I came upon the Chalice Well by chance, not as a purposeful pilgrim; I simply happened to be in Glastonbury, unprepared for the array of prehistoric sacred sites or for the bustling modern streets lined with shops devoted to magick, goddesses, fairies, crystals, Merlin, Arthur, Avalon, tarot, channelers, Druids, psychic healers, ley lines—a metaphysical banquet, a commerce of ancient mysteries, a dim reminder of a time when trees and wells, stones and hilltops were still animate, still possessed their own *genius loci*, or spirit of place.

...

If there are sacred wells in the American West, where I live, I don't know where they are. But I do know locations of springs, hot and cold—springs that are holy, at least to me, a few friends, and perhaps to unknown others, perhaps even to many unknown others. I have been a pilgrim in all seasons, at all hours, at one particular hot spring for more than thirty years. My own offerings to the water might be poetry, or wild prayers, a simple flute melody, or small bundles of feathers and sage tied with the twisted hair of bison I've collected from nearby lodgepole. My offerings are gratitude for water emerging from the fiery heart of Earth, gratitude for places wild enough for bison, elk, and grizzlies. Gratitude

Does land—like human beings, like our companion animals—vibrate with subtle enlivenment in response to our attention, our acclamation or devotion?

for all the times I've been a pilgrim in the absence of shouters and shriekers, cell signal-seekers, or drunken revelers. And gratitude, especially, for the Big Questions that arise while lying in steamy water beneath the glittering sky: Do human beings have a purpose on this astonishing planet? *Why are we here?*

At the Chalice Well, I am reminded of an evening more than two decades ago, when I was fortunate to be present in an auditorium with the Dalai Lama in Santa Cruz, California, just days after the announcement that he would receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The air in that sold-out venue nearly crackled with attention; there was a felt sense that a truly noble being, a great spiritual teacher, was among us. And I wondered if—like the maroon

and saffron monks' robes—the numinous atmosphere always accompanied the Dalai Lama, whom many regard as a holy man, or if it was also us, our attention, our deep respect and honoring, and our anticipation of his Holiness, that sent the air aquiver. Did the evening feel extraordinarily alive because we approached it *as if* it were a sacred occasion?

At the Chalice Well in Glastonbury, the mystically-tinged atmosphere in the gardens is distinct from the flurry of commerce not so far from the gates. There is reverence toward the yew and holy thorn trees, toward the lush plantings, and of course, toward the well and the ever-renewing water itself. There is a feeling that the well...might...actually...be holy.

And of course I wonder. Is the Chalice Well more holy than other places, or does it feel numinous because pilgrims regard it with awe and reverence, as if a respectful attitude matters? Do the springs to which I make pilgrimage feel like a wild shrine to me because I make offerings, because I praise, because I approach the watery lands as if the manner of my presence matters, as if the land and creatures are aware of my intention? Does land—like human beings, like our companion

spines of mountains and labyrinthian canyons, fiery geyser basin and superfund sites—as if it were sacred, essential to our own florescence and vitality, imbued with its *genius loci*, worthy of pilgrimage, worthy of our offerings, attention, and acclamation? Who do we become if we address the world in such a way, if we learn to address the Earth community as “thou”—or as our larger Self?

What if approaching the world as if everything is alive and sensing *reveals* a breathing, trembling, shimmering presence that has been near, all along, at the edge of our ordinary awareness? What new contours might the world take if we addressed the other-than-humans amongst whom we dwell as animate, intelligent, expressive, and suffused with their own noble longings? What if everything depends on this?

I ask myself these questions as I gather wild prayers for Earth, prayers to weave together with sticks and dried grass, prayers to carry in offering to the land. I do not know for sure if it matters to the other-than-human world; I do not know if it matters that I sing for the return of wolves and bears and trout, for

What if approaching the world as if everything is alive and sensing reveals a breathing, trembling, shimmering presence that has been near, all along, at the edge of our ordinary awareness?

animals—vibrate with subtle enlivenment in response to our attention, our acclamation or devotion?

I don't know if there are any lands more sacred (or less) than others, though there is surely a difference in how we treat the various faces of Earth. If our collective perception of the world allows us to regard some places as less worthy, less valuable, less consequential than other places, have we already flung open the door to strip mines, fracking, nuclear waste disposal, and other everyday desecrations?

What would the world become if we treated every place—our backyards, national parks and watersheds,

the restoration of land injured by dams, coal mines, logging, gas fields, pesticides, cattle, wars, corporate ecocide—the litany is endless. I don't know if flute music is of any consequence to the furred, feathered, or leafy others; I don't know if offering a rough nest of wild prayers as part of my backyard pilgrimage makes a difference to anyone but me. I do know that such acts erode my ordinary way of seeing and being. For a time, I am no longer simply an observer. The pinyon, meadowlarks, and sage pulse with invitation, and I approach with offerings, gratitude, and praise, as a participant in an animate world.



Encountering the Cosmos from the Celtic Sea

PETER REASON

*When I retired from formal academic life, having spent years teaching and researching issues of sustainability and justice in business life, I decided I wanted to devote myself to experience and writing around themes of deep ecology—a move from “bright green” to “deep green”. I also wanted to sail more. So I set off in my little and elderly yacht Coral from the south coast of England to the western coast to Ireland, and wrote an account of this voyage in *Spindrift: A Wilderness Pilgrimage at Sea*.¹ Two years later I set off again, now clearer that these voyages were in the nature of ecological pilgrimages. This was a voyage over two years that took me to the far north of Scotland, from which I wrote *In Search of Grace: An Ecological Pilgrimage*.²*

A pilgrimage is a journey of moral or spiritual significance, undertaken in response to deep questions in their lives and a yearning for answers from a realm beyond the everyday. A religious pilgrimage can be described as a search for a holy realm and a direct encounter with that which is sacred. An ecological pilgrimage can be seen as a search for an experience of deep participation with the Earth and her creatures.

These pilgrimages taught me much: about sacred places, silence, deep time, and fragility; about the great gestures of Earth in tide and weather. On several occasions, they also took me beyond the confines of Earth to contemplate our place in the cosmos as a whole. The following is an account of such an experience on a night passage across the Celtic Sea, taken from Chapter Sixteen of Spindrift. My companion on this crossing is disabled with seasickness, and I am on watch for over thirty continuous hours.

It was midsummer night. At about half past ten the sky was greeny-grey in the twilight, dappled with clouds. By midnight it was quite dark, and the clouds began to clear. In the small hours, stars appeared on the western horizon over the Atlantic. I wondered if the cold front trailing the depression was coming through, and, sure enough, a sharp line between cloud and clear sky moved steadily east. As it passed overhead the wind veered a little more, strengthened, and became gusty. Coral picked up more speed,

backing southeast as the depression approached; the steady shift of the wind from southeast, to south, to southwest with the arrival of the warm sector; and now the clear skies of polar air behind the cold front. I had experienced the sharp shift in wind direction as each front passed and made the necessary adjustments to course and sails. It is only by staying outdoors for an extended period, in a small boat, or maybe on a mountain, that one gets a chance to experience and be part of this pattern of change. It is familiar and mundane to anyone who understands our weather. But I was certainly not brought up to see and appreciate the patterns of British weather in this way, and I doubt if many people are. In a city it is almost impossible to see the whole sweep of a weather event like this, and in any case, as city dwellers we only need to know if it will be fine or raining. I felt a deep satisfaction in having ridden this system through all its phases.

I watched the stars as they appeared behind the line of clouds, first in the far west and then above me, each one sharp against the dark sky. A satellite moved incongruously among the fixed stars. In time, the clouds cleared the moon as it rose in the southeast; I first saw it shining through the genoa, catching full sight of it only when the bows lifted. It was just after full, still large, although waning. A path of pale yellow shimmered across the inky black sea and gleamed

I relaxed: all was well, she was just going very fast.

charging on into the dark. Foam and phosphorescence were glowing all around and trailing in our wake. For a few moments I found it slightly alarming: I stood in the cockpit looking carefully at the sails, sensing the motion through my legs, wondering about taking another reef. The feel of the boat was right, everything was well balanced and the wind was not overpowering the rig. I relaxed: all was well, she was just going very fast.

Once again I had seen the whole of a weather system pass by: cloud and rain gathering and the wind

on the wet decks. The sky to the east lightened with the moonlight, and the stars faded, but overhead they remained bright. I felt very close to them.

I remembered the previous summer's Channel crossing, coming up on deck to find Monica sitting enthralled in the deep, moonless night, as if in a cloud of stars. The wind and rain of the previous few days had left the sky startlingly clear. She told me excitedly about the four planets she had seen near the sun as it set, and later three or four shooting stars. She pointed to another planet shining steady in the southeast,

and exclaimed how clearly the Great Bear stood out. I followed her gaze, seeing how the path of the Milky Way struck a line through the sky, rising in the northeast, striding high overhead and coming down to meet the horizon in the southwest. We laughed together in utter delight as we remembered the poet Drew Dellinger's cry, "I want to write a love letter to the Milky Way!"³

That night in the Channel the sky had been completely clear with no moon. But even with a rising moon, while the bright stars of the major constellations took my first attention and wonder, behind and beyond them I could see more and yet more stars. In the end I could make out no black sky between them—a web of faint light filled the night.

After an hour or so the moonlight extinguished all the stars, leaving me musing about what I had seen. Modern cosmological science tells us that as we look up into the stars we are also looking back in time toward the origins of the universe. Incomprehensible billions of years ago, time and space began in the

remnants far and wide, giving birth to yet another generation of stars. Among these is the one we call the Sun.

Thomas Berry and his cosmologist colleague Brian Swimme emphasize the importance of the universe as story, a story that gives us an understanding of our origins and our place in a wider context.⁴ It is a story that draws on the extraordinary, and very recent, unfolding of our cosmological knowledge. We now know that the universe is made up of nearly a hundred billion galaxies, each containing billions of stars. We know that the universe is expanding and that, against all common sense, each of these galaxies, indeed each one of us, is a center of this expansion. The universe and everything in it belong together in an unfolding creative process, the manifestation of a deep patterning, immanent in the whole and reflected at every level. The universe is not just a space where things happen; it is a process of evolution. It is not based on anything like a predetermined design, for nature itself is creative, exploratory. And here we find

We are the universe looking at itself, reflecting on itself, understanding itself, even celebrating itself.

explosion of matter and energy we call the Big Bang. It's impossible to imagine the beginning of everything, but it seems that the universe flared into being and began unfolding into ever-greater diversity and complexity. Galaxies formed, each with billions of stars. The most brilliant of these early stars, after what was a short life in cosmic terms, exploded as colossal supernovae, scattering fragments through their galaxies. Similarly, second- and third-generation stars were born, developed, and exploded, and through the birth and destruction of these primal stars, the heavier elements required for life were forged from hydrogen and helium: carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, calcium, magnesium, and all the others. When one of these primal stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way, exploded, it scattered these elemental

new meanings for death, violence, and destruction. For it was only out of the destruction of stars that the elements of life could be formed, meaning that at every level the smaller self of the individual dies into and nourishes the larger whole. Destruction and violence are inextricably intertwined with the process of bringing forth more complex forms of order, including life. There is no difference in principle between the self-organizing dynamics of the stars and galaxies and the evolution of life on Earth. They are both part of this creative, evolutionary process, out of which different life forms and then sentience and consciousness emerge.

After the formation of the Sun the story continues. Planets coalesced out of the dust and rock that circulated the early Sun and became ordered into the

solar system. It may be that several of these planets were so positioned that life might spark into being, but it seems that it was only on Earth that life evolved as a Gaian process.⁵ Life on Earth learned to draw on the vast energy of the sun through photosynthesis and use it to increase diversity and modify the planet to make it ever more habitable.⁶ Because the light from distant stars takes so long to reach my eye, if I could see far enough into space I would look back over the

noblest perfection in things.” Perfection lies both in wholeness and in differentiation; each part belongs to the whole and articulates the whole in its own unique fashion. So humans take their place within the community of beings.

How can we appreciate this story if we cannot see the stars? As *Coral* charged along through the dark night, I looked up at the gorgeous arc of the universe, back through this ever-retreating web of stars toward

*In the strange starlit darkness of the Celtic
Sea I experienced in my heart and guts a
deep reality of being part of the whole.*

10 billion years that it took to bring the Earth into existence. It took another 4.6 billion for the Earth to shape itself into its current complexity and beauty.

At that moment, looking up at that fabulous night sky from my tiny boat in the middle of the night and the middle of the sea, I knew that we humans are the stuff that stars are made of. This story places humans as emerging from the universe as it evolved. It shifts us away from a purely human-centered perspective and places us back in the context of the cosmos.

I remembered Thomas Berry telling me that all beings have their origins in the evolution of the universe and all bring to it their particular sensitivities. All beings, humans included, are part of a community of subjects. What we bring to this community is our particular capacity for reflexive self-awareness. The human intellectual, emotional, and imaginative capacities are part of the universe expressed through the human. We are the universe looking at itself, reflecting on itself, understanding itself, even celebrating itself. But just because we bring this particular gift doesn't make us more important than anything else.

Somewhere in the depths of my memory I found the religious language Saint Thomas Aquinas uses: “the order of the universe is the ultimate and

its origins and so also to the origins of life on Earth. In the strange starlit darkness of the Celtic Sea I experienced in my heart and guts a deep reality of being part of the whole.

ENDNOTES:

1. Peter Reason, *Spindrift: A Wilderness Pilgrimage at Sea* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014). Originally published in Bristol by Vala Publishing Cooperative.
2. Peter Reason, *In Search of Grace: An Ecological Pilgrimage* (Earth Books, 2017).
3. Drew Dellinger, *love letter to the milky way* (Planetize the Movement Press, 2010).
4. Brian Thomas Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era — A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (HarperCollins, 1992).
5. Stephan Harding, *Animate Earth* (Green Books, 2009).
6. Tim Flannery, *Here on Earth: A New Beginning* (Allen Lane, 2011).

The Unsettled Settler Settles

MONICA DAY

I am on
hallowed
ground
that is
not mine
but that I
inhabit
share
tend—
and lately
she feels
familiar
in a new way

Maybe
because the
fawn sleeps
in the fern bed
every night
maybe
because we
rescued the
baby bird
from the fenced
garden while
mama bird
screeched
overhead

Maybe because we
mourn the ones who pass
greet the ones who visit
know what they eat
how they graze
when they give birth

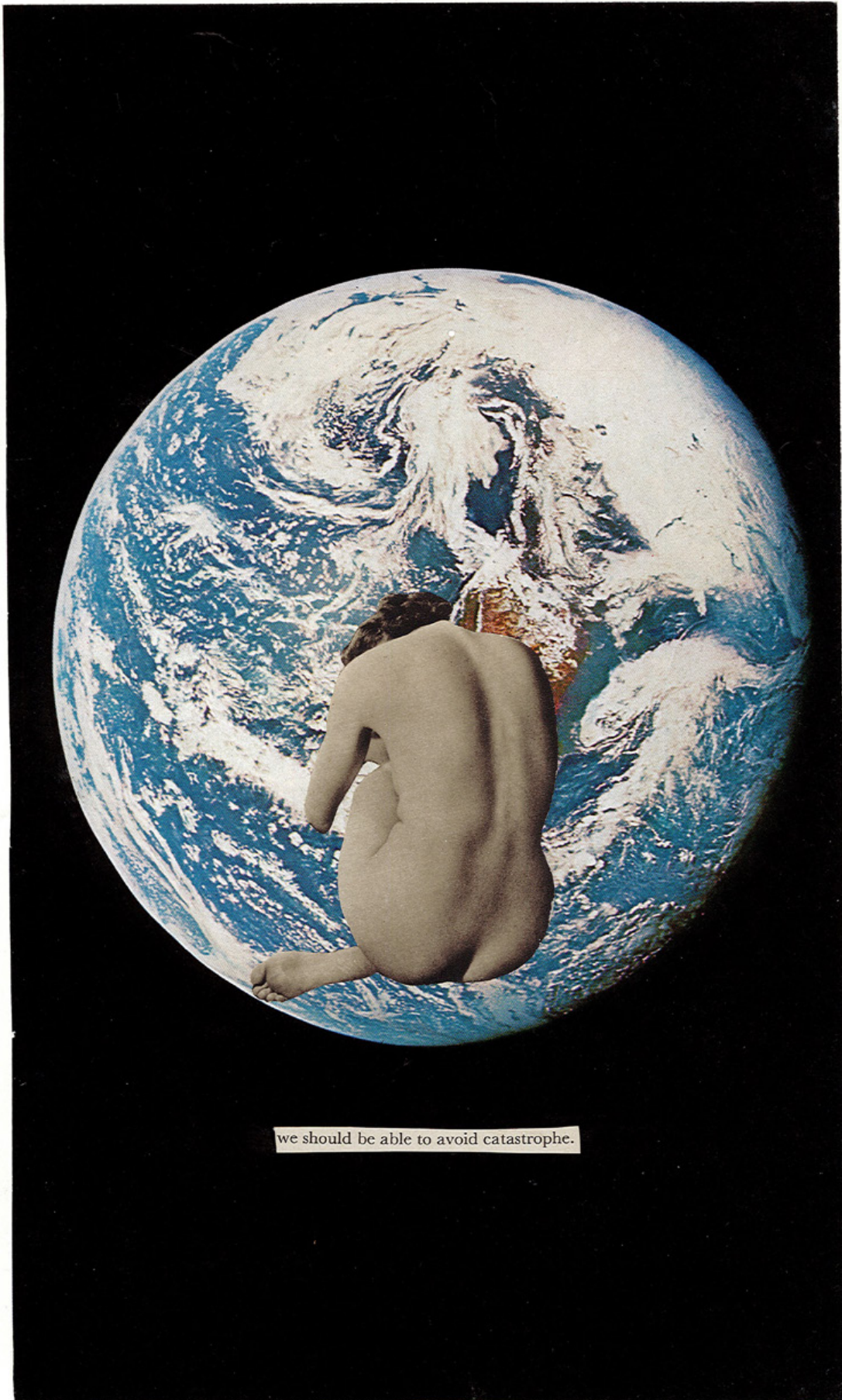
Maybe
because we say
good morning

Maybe
because this new
we-are-in-this-together-ness
we-are-home-ness
we-are-here-ness
this-is-now-ness
this-is-settled-ness
finds me
no longer
precarious
unmoored
tentative

Finds me here
firmly lodged
between the
twin maples—
my sentries
pinning me
to this blink
of time
and place
and finally

I accept
without
reservation





ARTWORK BY OLIVIA WILLIAMS



The Quantum Fountain

A Material Autocosmology

CAROLINE DICKEY

What is the universe up to? Is it a vast, indifferent expanse of material processes, or does it reveal an inherent directionality through its unfolding? While we cannot peer inside the universe's "mind," we can discern its tendencies by tracing the patterns that shape its evolution. Across all scales—from the quantum realm to the vast structure of galaxies—emergence arises from relationship. Interactions between elements generate new possibilities, driving the cosmos to evolve: particles form atoms, atoms coalesce into molecules, molecules organize into stars, planets, and, eventually, life itself.

At the heart of this generative process is the Cosmogenetic Principle—the interplay of differentiation, autopoiesis, and communion, the engine of the universe’s unfolding complexity. Differentiation fosters diversity and uniqueness, ensuring that no two entities are alike. Autopoiesis sustains the integrity of individuals, enabling them to self-organize and persist. Communion weaves these individuals into interdependent relationships, binding the universe into a vast, relational whole. Without differentiation, the cosmos would collapse into homogeneity; without autopoiesis, it would lose its capacity to sustain life; without communion, it would fracture into isolated units. Together, these dynamics drive the universe toward ever-increasing complexity.

But this unfolding is not merely about change—it is about the birth of the unprecedented. The universe does not simply rearrange what already exists; it generates what has never been before. Life was not inscribed in the cosmos from the beginning but emerged when conditions allowed, opening pathways to realities beyond prior possibility. This pattern of emergence marks the threshold where the qualitatively new arises. At each level of complexity, something more significant than the sum of the parts emerges—new forms of existence, new ways of being.

The cosmos is a wellspring of novelty. It is not a static structure or a machine producing predetermined outcomes. It is a living, open-ended process of self-organization, where each moment births new potential. The Cosmogenetic Principle reflects this dynamic: differentiation, autopoiesis, and communion work together to enable new levels of emergence, allowing complexity to deepen and possibilities to expand.

Imagine the universe as a fountain, endlessly bubbling forth new actualities from a sea of pure potentiality—a concept echoed in the very heart of quantum theory. But to truly grasp this, we must feel the shift within ourselves. It’s not just about understanding the universe’s dynamic nature; it’s about embodying it. We trade the

***Creation was not an act of control; instead,
the fountain took form through discovery and
responsiveness, arising from an openness to the
materials and the conditions of the moment.***

comfortable perch of passive observers for the exhilarating, sometimes daunting role of co-creators in an ever-unfolding story. With each thought and each action, we reflect, participate, and shape the universe, becoming the very instruments through which it activates, celebrates, and evolves—a universe coming to know itself through our own imaginative awareness.

The Quantum Fountain, pictured above, is my meditation on emergence, relationality, and ceaseless creativity. Composed of found organic and manufactured materials—seed pods, wire, shattered ceramics, and feathers—it stands as experiential evidence that matter is never fixed but always in transformation. Each component existed first as

something else, shaped by forces beyond my control, before being gathered into a new configuration.

I created this assemblage during a recent Deep Belonging course called Embodying Evolutionary Cosmology. Over the course of ten weeks, we gathered to explore what it means to embody evolutionary cosmology: what it feels like, sounds like, tastes like, smells like, looks like. As we collaborated, we did not merge into sameness; instead, our differences sharpened and deepened one another. Each discussion, exchange, and offering became an act of relational creativity, generating new thought, understanding,

To create is to participate in the universe's own creativity—to recognize that, like the sculpture, like the stars, like life itself, we are not separate from the cosmic process, but expressions of it.

and expression. Like the evolving cosmos, we became a self-organizing system—an interplay of differentiation, autopoiesis, and communion, where individuality and interconnection fueled the emergence of novelty.

One week, we were given a powerful prompt: can you make experiential contact with the realm from which all matter is constantly foaming forth? I ventured to a local park with the singular intention of opening myself to the more-than-human beings and things within it. With that openness, I collected whatever I encountered—not through deliberate selection, but by following a sense of resonance, a quiet pull toward certain objects. This was not a process of choosing but of noticing, of allowing materials to reveal themselves as part of a larger unfolding. Some pieces caught my attention through their texture or shape; others seemed to insist on their presence, as if they belonged to something yet to be realized.

This act of intuitive gathering became the foundation of the sculpture. Just as the universe does not impose form but allows it to emerge through relationship, this piece arose through attunement rather than intention. I did not set out to make a fountain, nor did I have a predetermined vision. Curves took shape, elements found their place, and I followed. Every decision was neither a mistake nor a detour but part of an unfolding process—a dialogue between myself and the materials. Creation was not an act of control; instead, the fountain took form through discovery and responsiveness, arising from an openness to the materials and the conditions of the moment.

The Quantum Fountain does not just depict evolutionary cosmology—it performs it. Like all things in the cosmos, it is a temporary crystallization of relational creativity at work. It enacts the very principles by which the cosmos evolves, reflecting the fundamental truth that we, too, are part of this vast, generative unfolding. To create is to participate in the universe's own creativity—to recognize that, like the sculpture, like the stars, like life itself, we are not separate from the cosmic process, but expressions of it.



A Song from the Woods

MORDA KENNEDY

I am standing naked on the edge of an abandoned rock quarry in Abingdon, Virginia. I am 19 and a Summer Apprentice at the Barter Theatre. It is my first time doing any psychedelic, and I am coming up on two hits of acid. I am about to go skinny-dipping for the first time as well—there is water in the bottom of the bowl-shaped quarry, though it is too dark to see it. It is a warm night, and the air feels good on my bare skin. I step back from the edge to get a running start and leap into the quarry. With a concussive thud, I hit the side of the deep pit and tumble down the dirt embankment for what seems like a very long time. I am Alice down the rabbit hole. I'm falling end over end and briefly think, "This is how I die. I will break my neck and die here." I'm not upset by this, just surprised.

I hit the water with a huge splash. It is cool. It envelops me. I come up for air and start swimming. Liquid silver slithers over my body. The night sky is reflected in the pool—as above, so below. I am mesmerized. I hear a splash behind me. Oh yeah...I am with a guy, a local. I don't remember his name. He sold me the acid. He swims up to me, his face is contorted: "I thought you were dead! Oh my god, you fell down that slope, you gotta jump OUT—a lot farther—to clear the sides of the quarry. I thought you were dead!" I am past that now, and he is boring me. I backstroke across the water while he continues muttering about me being dead. I stop and float—looking up at the stars and also IN the stars. I am swept into the vastness of the Universe—held deep in the earth, in this liquid womb, and feeling part of the heavens and all that is. I sink into the expanse of this moment and never want it to end.

"I'm freezing. Let's get out of here." The drug dealer. I forgot about him again. How could he be cold? This night is perfect! He drove though so I follow him to the quarry's edge, looking for stairs or a ladder. "This is the best place to climb out, lots of roots and rocks." In a moment of complete sobriety, I realize we have to climb over twenty feet to get out. I have muscular dystrophy—40% nerve capacity in my hands and feet,

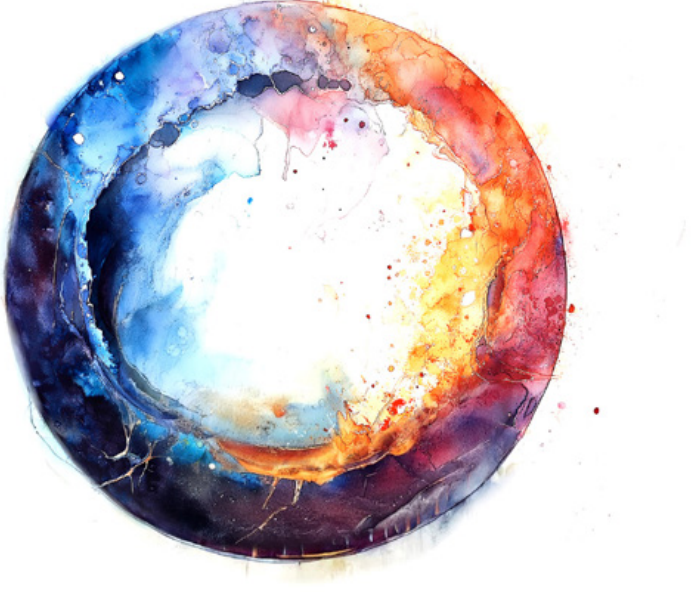
*I am part of the Universe, and it is
part of me. I know, for the first time,
that I am okay...I am okay.*

and my ankles are fused! He is halfway up the wall face. "Just follow me." I can't see well enough in the dark to do that, but I start grabbing at rocks and tree roots that are sticking out from the wall, and I climb. The quarry wall is slick with dirt and loose rock. Somehow, I reach the top, grab a clump of grass, and haul myself over the edge. I am scraped to hell, covered in mud, and triumphant! I clawed my way out from the belly of the earth.

Later, after I return to my dorm, shower, and put on fresh clothes, I take a pillow, blanket, and my Sony cassette Walkman out to the greenspace next to the rehearsal hall. I lie down beneath a giant green ash tree. I look up. The leaves look like the lace on my grandmother's holiday tablecloth. I nestle under this delicately fractaled canopy and push play to hear Jethro Tull's *Songs from the Wood*. I rewind the tape and replay the song over and over. I feel a sense of belonging that I have never felt before. I am part of the Universe, and it is part of me. I know, for the first time, that I am okay...I am okay. This simple statement was never available to me before. I am okay. I am competent, and smart, and there is nothing wrong with me. My heart expands. I want others to feel this, to know this. I want others to try acid and know they are beautiful. I want to heal the world through psychedelics. But first, I want to lie under this tree in this perfect moment and listen to Ian Anderson's killer flute solo again.

Our Roundness

KACEY AMRITA CARMICHAEL



At the sink
cleaning the white clay bowl
of strawberry juice and bits
I'm stopped mid-rinse—O!
Moon is beginning to show herself
and what an entrance
silhouetting this particular deep valley
caressing this particular curve of hill
rising bright ivory
shining
sliding
slippery
up into the blue
perfectly whole
framed by
hanging liquid amber leaves
I feel her roundness
she is not a circle but a sphere!
palm to belly, palm to breast
I feel my own roundness
—mine the woman, mine the Earth—
all the space between us
fills in lush
summer night
we touch



Marbles in Cabo

MONICA DERASPE-BOLLES

Amid the incidental sounds of a live musical trio, a chattering crowd, and a table strewn with skewbald words, wine, drink, and aperitif, my daughter Delaney spoke a sentence that landed with unexpected weight.

“Well, that’s as certain as gravity,” she said.

Her statement was familiar, almost beyond doubt, yet it struck off-center, unsettling something in me I hadn’t yet named.

“Gravity might not be as certain as we think,” I said more to myself than to her.

Delaney was seated across from me. There were twelve of us—my family and my brother’s—settling into an ocean-side Thanksgiving feast at the Pueblo Bonito Rose in Cabo San Lucas. Perhaps Delaney acknowledged my comment with an impassive glance. If she did, I wasn’t expecting it and didn’t notice. More likely, she remained in semi-private conversation with her new fiancé, Holden; they were probably arranging for more cocktails.

The evening might have unfolded differently—my

deep interest in the nature of time might never have surfaced—if not for one person at the table who was shocked by my words: my brand-new son-in-law, Garrett.

“That’s complete and total bullshit, Monica. May I remind you—it’s the law of gravity?” he said, eyes wide, chin thrust forward as far as his neck would allow.

“Actually, Garrett,” I began, “I do have reasons to say this. We know now the universe is evolving. Laws may not be laws at all, but strong habits that develop and evolve, and...”

I managed a sentence—maybe a bit more—before he cut me off.

“Is this the kind of crap you are learning at that school?” he said, the left corner of his mouth quirking upward.

I stared at the space between us, stunned at how fitting it was that this bold, intelligent, exceedingly well-raised, and even amiable young man was now

the husband of my daughter, Charlotte. The two of them were so well-matched, so deserving of one another, that it, well...baffled me.

"And why the fuck do you think we even care, Mom?" Charlotte asked.

It was the way she said it.

The eyes of the waiter across from me darted from the brim of his tilted pitcher to me, to my eyes, then back again, as he competently negotiated his pour. He was accustomed to this kind of thing—if not generally, then at least from my family. After almost a week there, this wasn't the first show we had given him.

Still, I wished the word "Mom" hadn't been part of her outburst. It always felt worse—harsh words aimed at a *mother*, witnessed by fathers, by mothers, by a whole host of strangers, especially on Thanksgiving. Judgment hung thick in the air around her, and that was never what I wanted for her. But there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it—not really. Silence or retreat at the first hint of conflict only ever upped the ante.

Wide-eyed, perhaps to signal surprise at Charlotte's sharpness, Garrett's otherwise deadpan face came alive as he doubled down.

"Gravity is a law," he proclaimed.

I looked at my brother, Michael. He was looking at his two youngest boys, who were watching me, wondering, I supposed, what might happen next.

every word of that plaque. He did this regularly, more often if warranted, and sometimes just for fun—or on special occasions, like when I visited, which is how I learned of his strategy and his aspirations. He was determined not to make the same mistakes my husband and I had made, and he expressed this kindly, too often, and, I thought, with ludicrous naïveté.

"There is more to gravity than Newton's law, Garrett," I said.

He lowered his head like a bison holding its ground. "I know what gravity is. It's 9.8 meters per second squared," he said. "Exactly the speed I fall when I jump out of a C-140 transport. Anyone who says otherwise is just plain wrong."

"Monica, it really is a law," Holden affirmed, his head bobbing with the kind of assurance meant to soothe a child.

Well, isn't that nice of him, I thought, resisting the impulse to stick out my tongue.

Delaney, who never misses a trick, shot him a sideways *what-the-hell-are-you-doing* glance.

"Seriously?" she asked.

"Come on, Delaney," he said under his breath. "She doesn't even know what she's talking about!"

Delaney turned to me. "Mom, why do you care?"

It was a reprimand.

"All I said is that gravity may be a habit, and now—

Maybe what was needed was an understanding of matter in process, an open future, and some goddamned harmony.

I thought of the plaque in his entryway—General Douglas MacArthur's poem *Build Me a Son, O Lord*—hanging proudly for years before his three sons, Simon, Joseph, and Luke, even existed. Michael's long-standing commitment to ensuring his boys did not grow up "disrespectful and entitled" was forged during the dozen or so years he and his wife, Ann, witnessed firsthand—and then judged—the complex, passionate, intelligent, and developing creatures that are my daughters. To be sure, on occasion, these girls of mine were positively frightful.

With my daughters in mind, Michael would assemble his growing boys in that entryway, each in turn, and then the whole lot of them, and read aloud

only now, after my words are called bullshit—I want to explain why I said it." My words hovered in front of me, a foot off the table.

She wasn't convinced; worse, she wasn't interested. She understood the futility of my effort—there was rarely a harmonious or charitable listening to me at our table. I could see her point.

"But they won't let me," I added, ready to let it go.

Daniel, my youngest, noticed the sting of my being shut down. He reached across the table and pressed his hand gently against mine for just a moment. I shook my head, troubled that he should feel burdened by something that wasn't his fault or responsibility.

More than ten years younger than his sisters, Daniel

had been the kind of kid who'd come home from the elementary school bus each day, jump backward onto the kitchen counter, legs dangling, and ask, "How was your day, Mom?" With nineteen years of experience, Daniel knew to expect far more wild, condensed intensity whenever his sisters were around—and quite possibly me as well. He once said that watching our family interact was like embarking on a wildlife safari meticulously staged just for him—or like watching a nature film, years in the making, condensed into an hour. Dull moments were rare in our house; other families, he thought, were far more civilized—and far more boring.

Watching him engage the waiters with quiet consideration, I knew he was thinking about their experience—not just with our family but with the endless flow of vacationers chasing curated moments in places long void of authenticity, all the while calling themselves "Americans."

"No, you guys. You know what?" I said quietly. "I'm finding it very hard to just drop this. There's something really wrong with calling my words bullshit and then not allowing me to talk."

"You really should let her explain, Garrett, if you're going to call it bullshit," my husband, David, finally said, without equivocation. "If you level that kind of criticism, you have to allow a response."

"Oh my God," Charlotte groaned, muttering under her breath. Everyone else looked silently at me.

"I'll start by explaining Einstein's gravity," I said.

*Thought and gesture,
word and deed,
create the world.*

I wasn't entirely sure I wanted to explain gravity as a habit—or that I even could. I'd heard of the principle of precedence: that matter, when probed, tends to provide the same answers it has given before. In other words, matter tends to follow precedence—to develop habits.

I'd been thinking that premises are assumptions—no more certain than beliefs—and that the very idea

of fixed, external laws acting *on* the stuff of the world might be at the root of humans behaving in righteous, confrontational, and even ecologically destructive ways. Maybe what was needed was an understanding of matter in process, an open future, and some goddamned harmony. But I didn't know how to say any of that—not yet.

I knew I could explain Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. But I also knew it wouldn't really advance my point—Einstein still believed gravity was a law. Maybe, I thought, if I explained relativity convincingly, it would open a path to something deeper. Or at least they'd see that my understanding of gravity wasn't as simplistic as they assumed.

Maybe that would—what? Impress them?

This is my opening, I thought.

I jumped up from the table. "Does anyone have a bathing suit in their bag?" I asked. "We need something stretchy—for the fabric of spacetime. And a big bowl. Something to stretch the fabric over. And some marbles."

David's hand rested on his forehead. He looked up, a trace of a smile playing at his lips as his palm nudged his eyebrows upward. "What are you doing?"

"Demonstrating gravity," I said.

I knelt and scanned the sand for anything smooth and round.

The silence that had been my opening began to hum with fistfuls of words tangled in voices and faces. Not good, kind words, but mocking ones. They were laughing—the kind of laughter that ridicules and derides.

I thought *surely the noises they are making aren't governed by laws of acoustics. Surely in this unfolding moment, there is still space for something new to arise—emergent, unruled, born only of what is already in motion.*

"Oh my God! She's lost her marbles!" Holden exclaimed. He thought himself so clever that he said it again and again: "Look! Look! She's lost her marbles!" He was absolutely delighted with himself—and well he should have been. He garnered quite a laugh from everyone, including David. Even the waiters looked on with amusement.

Michael stood up from the table. "I don't know what's wrong with any of you," he said, his voice trembling. "She brings you here, and this is how you treat her? I can't sit here another minute." And he left.

I hesitated, then followed. Once at a safe distance, I turned back. An assembly of waiters stood fixed-eyed,

meals in hand, afloat in a cacophonous whirlpool: skewed notes and counter-notes; frenetic beats; Daniel posturing aggressively; David reaching, touching, calming. Daniel was about to storm off. Knowing he'd come in search of me, I retreated into the darkness down the coast.

I stood on the shore of the ocean, warm waves lapping at my sandaled feet, feeling the movement around me and within—the night sky, my pulsing

not discovered. David, too, believed in fixed truths—scientific, scriptural, moral. The world made sense when you honored the order of things. But this insight I'd stumbled into resisted closure.

It felt more like a doorway—unstable, alive, pulling me forward.

If I was right, I thought, then my insight had arisen in a universe that lays down habits—regularities of motion, of force, of form—yes, and also structures of

I was the evolving process, the still-awakening cosmos, universing in ways it never had before.

world, the universe awakening. I felt like Kate Winslet on the bow of the *Titanic*, arms outstretched, flaring forth into a future that pressed in.

What truly mattered was the love I felt for my family—my longing for closeness, connection, and understanding. I wanted only to share with them, to feel them open to me. What were we waiting for? What was humanity waiting for? What could make this possible?

I had said that gravity was a habit—that the laws of the universe were not fixed but evolving. My sense was that matter governs itself *from within*, and that always and everywhere, something unprecedented is underway. What we needed, I felt, were new convictions: a feel for the irreversibility of time, a sense of the future manifesting, and the quiet knowing that how we treat one another matters—because thought and gesture, word and deed, create the world.

I spoke those words—that gravity might not be a law—almost without precedence. I couldn't defend the claim, not really. The insight had surfaced as a recognition—something felt before it was understood, arriving not through argument but through attention. Still, I was steeped in a metaphysics of being—one that privileges space and rationality over time and experience, that imagines fixed and eternal laws acting upon inert matter.

In my family, knowledge was about fidelity—holding to what was known, what was trusted, what had worked before. The plaque by Michael's door said it plainly enough: virtue was something to be instilled,

thought and experience that shape and constrain how we understand ourselves, one another, and our world. These habits do not preclude change; they cradle it. They hold steady not to resist novelty but to make it possible.

Precedence is not the opposite of the unprecedented—it is its condition.

In that vast, chaotic moment, I resolved to find precedence for the insights that were surfacing in me, to find my lineage in the work of philosophers and scientists who came before me. I resolved to explore the metaphysics of time and becoming, to learn all I could about gravity and so much more—not merely to know, but to live that understanding, to embody it, to give it voice.

All that holds steady—the habits of substance and existence from the birth of the universe to this present moment of tension and strife—was holding steady in me. I carried a vast column of time within me—yet more than that, I was the evolving process, the still-awakening cosmos, universing in ways it never had before. I could learn. I could change. I could bring forth better ways of being in relationship—ways to foster harmony not just within my family, but across all of humankind.

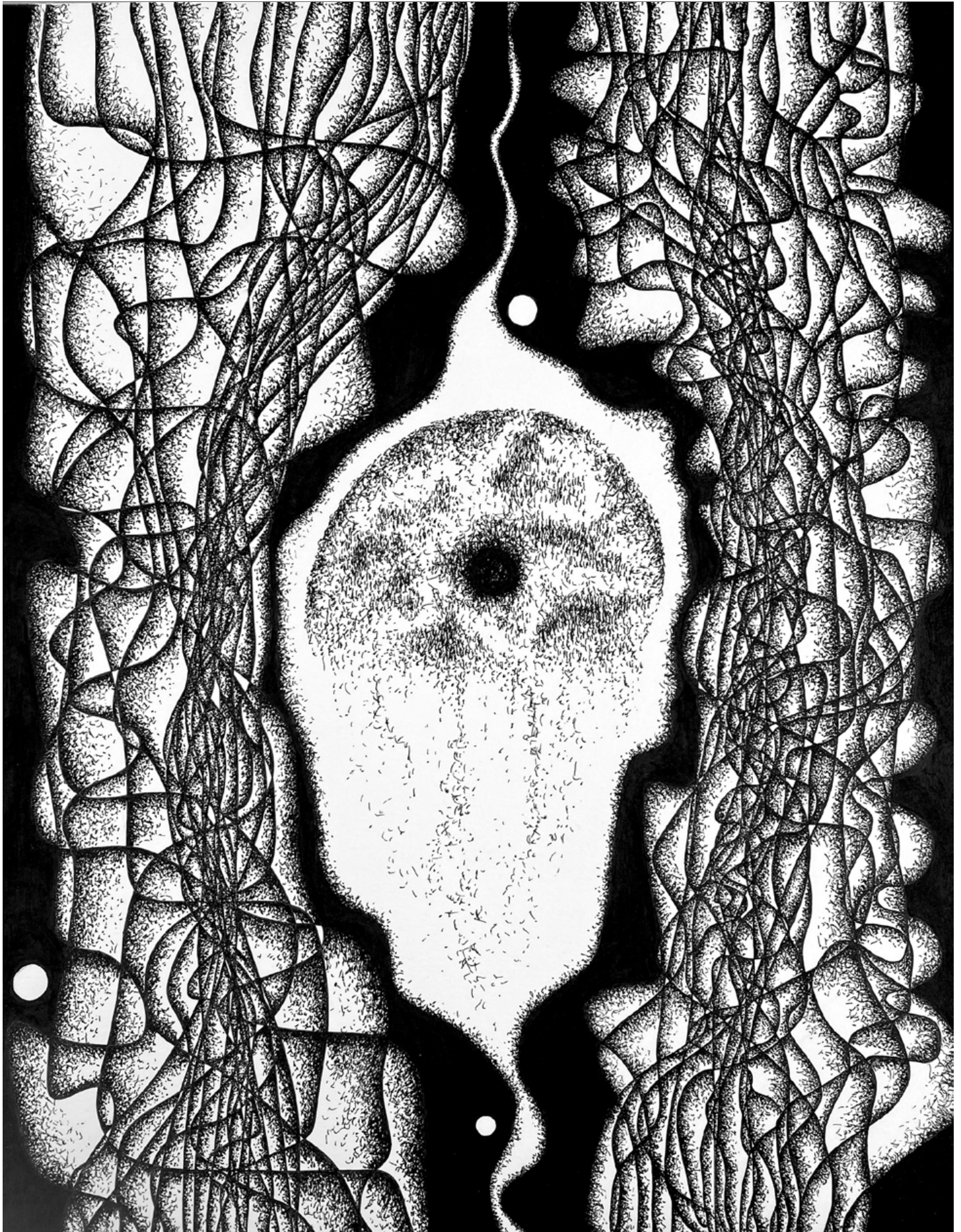
"How's your night going, Mom?" said Daniel, sprinting up behind me and leaping onto my shoulders.

I laughed and said, "Not too bad. How about you?"

"How about I push you in the water?" he said.

"Okay," I said. "And then can we gather everyone up in a pile again?"

"Okay," he said.



ARTWORK BY TYLER GLAUZ-TODRANK

Little Girls Ponder Unspeakable Beauty

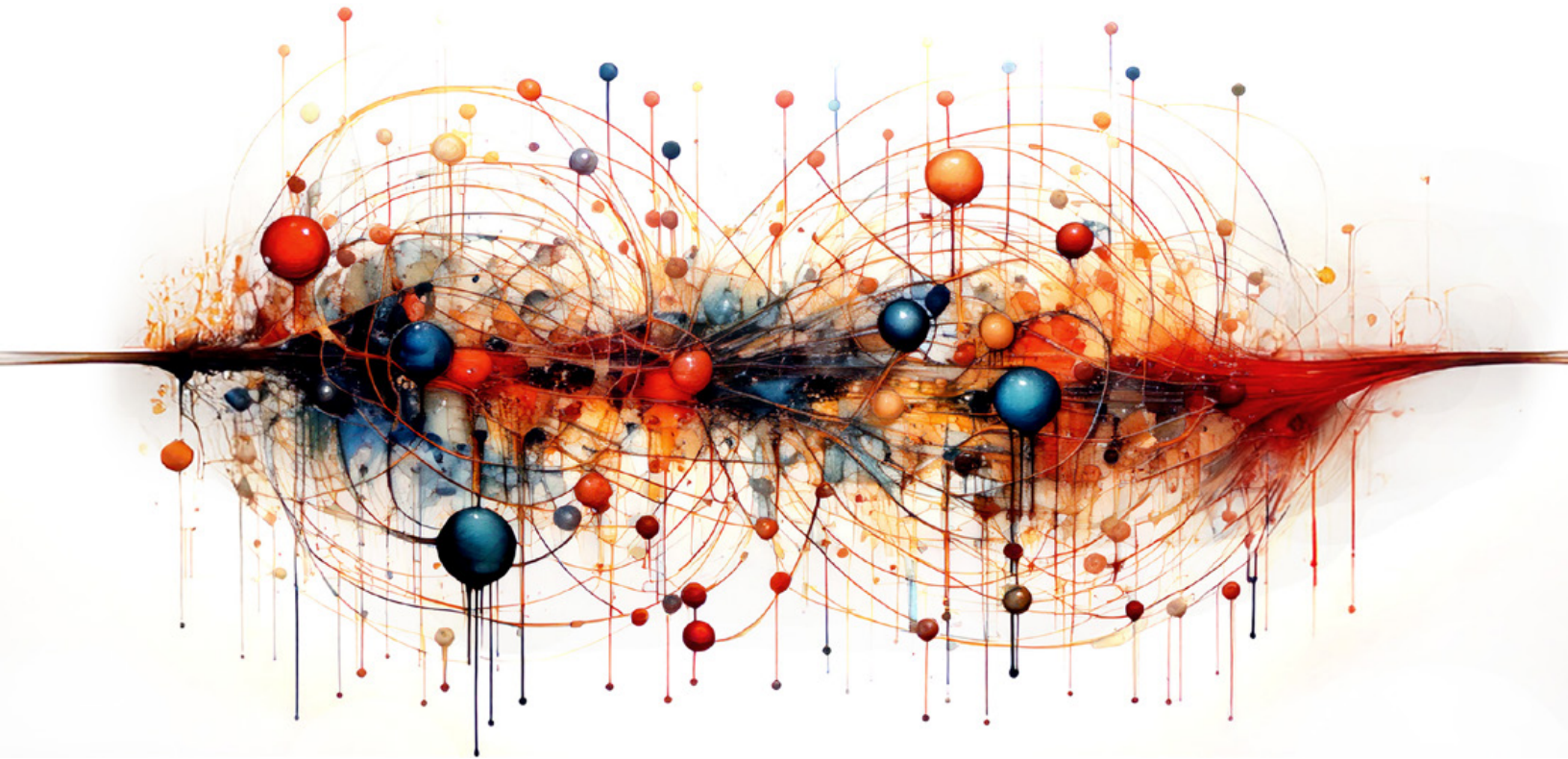
NANCEE CLINE

The child Saint Teresa of Avila,
twirled to the word forever,
around, around, around.

For me, it was infinity,
a word that revealed itself
at the funeral of a great-grandmother.

My mother took me outside—a sobbing little girl.
She mistakenly believed
I was crying for the dead.





Comet Pitched

A Peripatetic's Quantum Account

NATHAN M. SENGE

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

The wind flailed a long tail of snow off the schist-encrusted daggerhead of Cody Peak, and I stood at the top of the couloir, waiting. My ear-piece felt discordant in the hum of the wind, and I wanted to take it out, but I knew Jack would be instructing me about when to begin. I knew this was all wrong. Poised on top of a mountain waiting for someone else to call when the light had paled just right. I had been ready to ski this line since arriving on top of it and had been forced to wait. It felt unnatural, and I began to tense.

"All ready; about thirty seconds," Jack called in.

I spat. I felt like a performer for hire. I watched the long slip of light lay its plane of shadow down the pitch of the mountain. The world fanned into its funnel. I saw the narrowing of the couloir, where the rock walls almost touched and which would just permit the passing of my skis in one swift turn, and then the tilted barrel of the face atop the cliff wall that fell into oblivion where I would take flight.

"Five seconds." I took the ear piece out and stuck it in my pocket.

I didn't wait for any "go, go, go—" I dropped in. The first turn came smoothly and easily as the hissing loose and fresh snow of the mountain combed into my

flex and I felt the side of the wall graze by my fist as it dragged through the snow. Then I flexed, and the upper body stayed quiet and true as the downward hand led and the legs pivoted outwards and swung out and traced the gyroscopic arc beneath me and the speed gathered and the walls began to blur and streak and race as the next turn came off the rebound of the pounce. I had to give into it because of the springiness of the fresh snow, and then the turn rounded and swished into the next, and all the while I saw the slough rumbling and gathering around me and tumbling past, and then I had to slam on the

...

At the bottom of the mountain, I stood outside the office building at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort where I did my snow reporting. I had to go in and give the afternoon report and lock up.

Another day in paradise, the template tumbled out through my voice over the airwaves. *If you missed it today, there'll be more tomorrow!*

Ah, capitalism. Dollar bills. Bullshit. At least the industry was a good one. Thrills in the mountains. Even if the theme was laced with the vapid rhetoric

I was fresh out of college, with a minor in Physics, and now I was trucking a thousand miles north to educate people who had co-evolved alongside a landscape for thirty thousand years about the nature of reality?

skids to break the speed against the elevator shaft of the fall-line and line the turn up with the banked angle of the chute, and then I flew into it in direct line with gravity and came humming out into the hanging snowfield far too fast and holding on as the fall-line tried to buck me off my edge and roll me over and away onto its fall-away fan as the rock walls widened, and I saw the bullseye of the exit hanging against the ether, and I made one long turn and then drew a quick, shorter one as the cliff raced up, and then I clipped the top of its rocks and popped with all my spring from my flexed knees, and then all was silent as I whooshed through the pixelating cloud of snow as all went white and was gone and gravity fell away and I was uroboric, and then the snow slammed in all around and I flexed and rebounded like a popped cork and lasered out of the landing like a cannon shot.

"Wahoooooooo!" came the cheers in the ear-piece from my pocket as I coasted out into the flats and slid up to the film crew and stuttered to a stop. High fives flew. I returned them.

"Shot of the season, dude, *shot* of the season!" Jack said as they danced around me.

"I quit," I said.

of the era, the product drop-kicked people into the wilds.

I left the office and walked across the groomer-hardened snow that flexed under my feet like styrofoam and slid down to the outer patio of the Mangy Moose, Jackson's après ski blackout nexus. I loved the place. Last night I had seen Lez Zeppelin—a female quartet from New York who hawk-screached Zeppelin ballads. I didn't remember much of it, other than how the gravel-rubbed pleas of Robert Plant fit smoothly into the singer's soprano range and came out like a Celtic battle cry.

As I mused on these antics, and the utter collapse of everything around me, and my reluctance to stop by the film office to formalize the truncation of my film contract, my phone twitched.

"Hello, Nate?"

"Yeah."

"My name is Leroy. You don't know me. I'm a colleague of Miles."

Miles Blencowe was the quantum theorist at Dartmouth College who had supervised my undergraduate thesis. I'd just declined to do a doctorate in Physics with him. When I told Miles that I'd instead be trucking out to Jackson Hole to be

a pro skier, he reacted like I'd shot his dog.

"I hear you just graduated with a degree in Physics," the voice continued.

"A minor," I said, trying to curl friendliness into my flat voice. "Chemistry was my major."

"But you studied quantum mechanics."

"My thesis was in quantum mechanics."

"That's all I need to know. How would you like to teach quantum mechanics to my students?"

"I'm sorry—whom did you say—"

"Leroy Little Bear. I'm a professor at the University of Lethbridge. I'm Blackfoot."

Blackfoot. My adopted brother, Ian, was ten percent Blackfoot. Not that that had any bearing on anything.

"Blackfoot—"

"Yes. Of the Blood tribe."

"Why would you want me—"

"I want someone young. Someone fresh out of the system. Are you fresh out of the system?"

"Haha," I laughed, thinking, *fresh out of one and fresh out of another*. "Twice over," I said.

"You can tell me what that means when you get here."

"Get there—"

"Sure, you're in Jackson Hole, right? Miles told me."

"Sure—"

"How would you like to drive on up to Lethbridge and hang out for a little while?"

"Ummm—"

To be honest, I was ebullient and weirdly star-struck and trying to act cool. I wanted to get the hell out of Jackson and with all possible speed.

"I could quit my job—"

"How long do you need?"

"Say two weeks?"

"You got it."

And BOOM—it happened again. Story of my life. Out of one world and into another. Always a lightning flash. A comet's pitch and pivot. Never a warning. I drove home to pack my bags.

Whitefish, Montana

I was having second thoughts. I was fresh out of college, with a minor in Physics, and now I was trucking a thousand miles north to educate people

who had co-evolved alongside a landscape for thirty thousand years about the nature of reality? The only reason I was going at all was because of Leroy's steady assurance. Something in his voice exhorted me to act. I had initially wavered, and he had heard it and countered it. He had volleyed it right back to me, and it'd struck me in the face, and I'd let it melt and slide over me like a snowball. There was a quiet plea in his voice that transcended any normal business transaction. There was a karmic tinge to it. I felt buoyed. Commanded. And even though he'd rhetorically granted me the right to refuse, I had not felt that prospect actually take hold. No, I *had* to go. Willed on by something far greater than Leroy's voice, by something tidal in which that voice was enmeshed. Something it was connected to and ensnared by. It had the same gravitational, visceral pull that leaving Dartmouth and arrowing west had wielded.

I enjoyed a momentary distraction from this internal push and pull amidst the tumbling miles as I finally rolled up a gravel road to the border-crossing north of Whitefish, Montana, which consisted of a

I looked through the window pane and saw the official was asleep with his cap over his eyes and his hands folded on his chest and his feet up on his desk.

shack with one swinging arm over the road like a railway crossing. I pulled up to the arm and nothing happened. I looked through the window pane and saw the official was asleep with his cap over his eyes and his hands folded on his chest and his feet up on his desk. Living large and loving it. I honked and he shimmied a little in his seat, shifting his weight to acquire that perfect tilt of dream, and then he settled back into his breathing. I had only dented his floating reverie. I leaned over the passenger side window and rapped on the window. He snapped upward out of his chair, and his cap fell off his head and tumbled out of view behind his desk.

"Sorry," I said, smiling. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"Wake me? What do you mean?"

"Nevermind. Need a passport?"

"What for?"

"Going to Canada?" I said and pointed ahead.

"Ah. Nah, no passport needed. No one cares anymore. Why you wanna go to Canada? What's up there for you?"

"Blackfoot Native Americans," I said. It just tumbled out. I always get nervous at border crossings.

"Huh?"

"I was invited by a Blackfoot professor to teach quantum mechanics to his undergraduates."

The official's eyes globed. I'd made his day. In all his border crossings, he'd never heard that one before.

"You're...you're what?"

"I'm co-teaching a course on quantum mechanics and indigenous epistemologies with Blackfoot professor Leroy Little Bear."

"I don't even know what that means."

"It's complicated."

"Yeah? Try me."

"Try you *what*?"

"Explain it to me. Call this your Canadian warm-up."

I leaned back into my seat. As preposterous as this was, I was not going to drive through that mechanical arm without this guy.

"Why?"

"I have no idea."

"Don't you think you should know?"

"Probably. But I don't. Yet. I'll be sure to ask."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Just winging it, huh? Flying wide?"

"I guess so."

"Well, nothing wrong with that. But I'm going to tell you something that might help."

"Okay—"

"I've known a few Blackfoot. The reservation extends into Montana from Canada. Adjacent to Glacier National Park almost. Had a friend, Jimmy was his name. Went fishing with him a few times."

I instinctively looked back to see if we were holding anyone up, but of course there was no one there. All that lay behind me was the Montana wing of the Rockies, their spilled tops barreling rocks down their faces and into their long-tapering aprons into the entangled masts of the aspens and conifers.

"Anyways, Jimmy used to tell me things while we were fishing. Like, 'You know, Bill, people really should be listening to us in this day and age as everything falls apart.' 'About what?' I'd say. 'Everything,' he'd say, kind of haunting-like. Made me tremble when he said things like that. But I couldn't help it. I was curious. So

I turned and regarded the array of students. With all but one or two giggling exceptions in the back row, they were transfixed.

"You ever heard of quantum mechanics?"

"Just the word, 'quantum.' Like in quantum leap."

"That's fine. That's apt. So a quantum leap is a sudden jump in energy level."

"Like when you woke me up?"

"Haha," I said. "Yeah, like that."

"So what do Blackfoot Indians have to do with quantum leaps?"

"Well, Leroy thinks that the principles of quantum leaps and Blackfoot knowledge systems are compatible. That they share ideas. He wants to show his students that, I think."

I pushed him a little bit. 'Come on, Jimmy, like what.' 'Like how we're all related,' he'd say. 'People always forget that. They think it's all for them. Forever. It's not. We're all in it. Together.'"

I waited for him to tell me more, but he just sat there with his eyes closed, musing to himself. For a moment, I thought he'd gone back to sleep.

"Anyways, just be prepared for that kind of thing," he said. "They don't think the way we do. At least not the way we think nowadays."

"I'll keep that in mind," I said.

The gate lifted and he gave me a thumbs up.

"Welcome to Canada," he said, giving me a mock military salute, and off I went.

Lethbridge, Alberta

"And so," I concluded, my face still to the chalkboard, "you can see here how, as you flip the spin of this pair of the bracket, this other side, to conserve the net symmetry, has to instantly flip as well."

I turned and regarded the array of students. With all but one or two giggling exceptions in the back row, they were transfixed. A young Blackfoot woman in the front row named Janice, with long rows of black braids that fell like willow fronds, raised her hand.

can represent a quantum system in the infinite spatial dimensions of linear algebra, is what is called an *entangled* state. You see, these two systems cannot truly be separated. They are existentially coupled. Now, when you separate them, regardless of the distance between them, they will retain the symmetry of net spin that they presently have. It is *one* irreducible system. So, you could put them on opposite sides of the universe, and it wouldn't matter. They will continue to behave as *one* system. This is known as Bell's theorem. And what's amazing is that cosmologists have noted that this seems to hold for systems as big as galaxies. This kind of coupling has been seen in galaxies as far apart from each other as on opposite sides of the expanding universe. It's known in cosmology as the

We are augmenting our direct, unmitigated relationship with the flux of the universe itself. When we surf the flux, we can travel. We can learn.

"Yes?"

"But, that equation holds irrespective of distance?"

"Yes."

"How is that possible?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm not a physicist, but I thought nothing moved faster than light."

I looked at Leroy, who was standing at the side of the board. He nodded, smiled, and shrugged, as if to say, "I told you you'd like it here."

"That's right," I said. "But the key is that nothing *material* moves faster than light. That's special relativity. But what we're talking about here is not material. It's more fundamental than that. It is information itself."

"Can you elaborate on that?"

"I'll try."

I smiled and gave Leroy a look to indicate that I was reaching the beginning of the well of great quantum mysteries that no living physicist understood.

"Well, this state I have written here, in Dirac's bracket notation, which is a good notation because it

'boundary problem,' and the big bang theory cannot account for it."

"You haven't really answered my question."

I turned to Leroy for help, and he laughed.

"Nate here is not really acquainted with what we call 'surfing the flux' yet."

"The *flux*?"

"Let's take a moment and flip the tables," Leroy said. "In Blackfoot epistemology, all is flux. All is change. You've read Heraclitus? Or at least know of him?"

"Of course. The pre-Socratics."

"Yes. Heraclitus knew this, watching the river flow. All changes, incessantly, all the time. But we can do more than just passively know this. We can partake in it. That's what we mean by 'surfing the flux.'"

"How?"

"By expanding our consciousness. Deliberately. When we vision quest, this is the purpose. We are augmenting our direct, unmitigated relationship with the flux of the universe itself. When we surf the flux, we can travel. We can learn. We can actually travel

that distance separating the poles of your entangled state.”

“You can do this in the mind?”

“We do this in consciousness. In the expansion of consciousness. And in its holographic situatedness in the cosmos.”

“Anyone can do this?”

“No. You train your whole life with an elder first. And they can’t just do it on command.”

I looked out at the three radial rows of students encircling me like I was the hub of some collective atom.

“Have any of you done it?” I asked them all.

Everyone laughed. Everyone but Janice.

“I’m training with Arnold,” she said.

“Arnold?”

“Our medicine man,” Leroy said. “You will meet him. He’s eager to meet you.”

I nodded and put down the chalk. I had a feeling the lesson was done for today. But Janice raised her hand again.

“One more question,” she said. “If the entangled system is separated over a distance, like this, as you say, but its aspects are so tightly coupled, then would you say that it really has only one identity? That the whole bracket describes a single entity?”

“Yes; I would say that.”

“Leroy,” she asked, “is that how we would describe it also?”

“Yes, Janice, it is.”

“So is everything one big whole? I mean, over the spread of distances, don’t those aspects couple themselves with a great many things?”

“Well, here is one of the great mysteries of quantum mechanics,” I ventured. “Yes and no. You see, in theory, yes, everything becomes coupled, but these couplings are also interfered with and destroyed just as easily.”

“Not so easily,” Leroy said.

I turned to him.

“In measurement,” Leroy began, “those destructions occur. David Bohm taught me that. But in theory, they endure as part of one great meta-state—the universe itself.”

“You’re now officially beyond my purview,” I said and threw up my hands.

“Well, we’re all here to learn, yes? I brought Nate up here so you all can see the results of a physics

training today. Physics is increasingly mirroring our ancient system, but with key exceptions, and, as you can see, there are limits to their worldview. But the good news is that they are acknowledging those limits.”

“The physicists are,” I said. “But so many haven’t a clue. And the popular worldview remains Newtonian.”

“That old guy?” someone in the back scoffed.

I laughed. I had not heard Newton referred to as “that old guy” before.

“Newton was complicated,” I said. “Like Descartes, he is responsible for the most useful fragmentation of consciousness in Western history, but there is a side of Newton that is not Newtonian. Newton was very religious, deeply Christian, and perpetually in awe of the mysteries of reality that he believed defied any reason-based system. He at the same time believed in his new gravitational laws but could feel their limitations. Just as Descartes knew of the utility of severing mind and body but believed in their ultimate union, which he wrote about in *The Passions of the Soul* later in life, far after the *cogito* and all that.”

“What do you mean by ‘utility?’” Janice asked.

“The ability to build technology,” I offered. “Newtonianism and Cartesianism are necessary for engineering. In fact, most physicists today agree that engineering is physics minus quantum theory. Classical mechanics is tantamount to engineering. The problem is that, as you can see everywhere around you, engineering is soul-less. It wields immense power—these classical inferences allow us to exploit the materials of the world to our advantage—but contains no wisdom. No sense of connection to the cosmos. And this is why so many modern people feel alone and lost.”

“It’s funny that you say ‘modern,’” one student said.

“Sorry! I did not mean—”

“No; it’s okay. We are very, *very* used to that.”

Leroy laughed and turned to the students.

“Remember that Nate here is the same age as you are and here to learn. And now, shall we go somewhere where we can deepen that learning? Make it a bit more embodied, perhaps?”

I looked at Leroy quizzically.

“Would you like to meet Arnold?”

Psychedelics as a Catalyst for Autocosmological Exploration

KATHLEEN M. OSBURN

“Human beings are always, and always will be, a frontier between what is known and what is not known.”

—David Whyte¹



Sitting with coffee at dawn, over a decade into an intentional exploration of self in relationship to “all that is,” I continue the reflection, yet again—Who am I? Is there an aspect of “me” that exists beyond the self that operates in this physical universe? Or, am I, as Alan Watts expressed, a skin-encapsulated ego that will perish when my body is declared dead? And regardless of the answers to these questions, I want to know why—why am I here? What is my purpose for being here? I know that I am here having the experience of incarnation. And from this gnostic stance, I wonder about my relationship with “all that is.” Am I cultivating an interior awareness of my participation in this enormous, unknowable, magnificent, co-creative cosmic process? Could it be that my essence is not separate, as I frequently believe, but rather a unique expression of “all that is”? Perhaps the intimate process of my journey represents a microcosm or fractal of a cosmogenetic process “that establishes its order in each era and then transcends that order to establish a new order.”² Does my process reflect, in some way, a grander journey of cosmic (or universal) consciousness becoming aware of itself?

As this contemplation continues, an uneasy feeling creeps into my awareness. I wonder: is this line of inquiry constrained by a habit of mind that has been shaped by well over half a century of conditioning? Perhaps there is something more, something just beyond my present level of awareness, some more profound wonderment. Rumi’s invitation to meet “out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing”³ leaps forward in my awareness. Does Rumi’s field represent a magic door? A portal that invites my essence—my formless awareness—to experience something other than the self it wanted to know? And might I return with insight that supports my growth, transforms

my way of being, and manifests in creative expression? But how do I find the magic door and experience my essence in relationship with the cosmos?

...

Each of us, honoring our uniqueness and our present level of awareness, will find our own path. For some who are called, as I am, psychedelics may serve as a catalyst for this journey. What opened me to this possibility was a transformative experience that occurred several years ago in a ceremonial psychedelic journey. This experience is challenging for me to express, ineffable even. What remained after the journey was a noetic quality—an unshakable inner knowing that I had encountered the vastness of “all that is.” I recall it as an oceanic feeling of dissolving and expanding simultaneously—with complete serenity. Arthur Koestler’s description of his transformative experience while imprisoned in Spain in 1937 most closely evokes the gestalt of my own: “I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist.”⁴ When the exceptional state vanished, what remained for both of us was the sensation “that for the first time the veil had fallen” and that we were “in touch with the ‘real reality,’ the hidden order of things, the x-ray texture of the world, normally obscured by layers of irrelevancy.”⁵

waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different...No account of the universe in its totality can be final, which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite discarded.”⁶

In 1927-28, Whitehead asserted the ontological and epistemological significance of these experiences by elaborating on the relationship between our human consciousness and “all that is”: “Reality is nothing else than the process of becomingness, of which we are dimly conscious. Every detail of the process is open for consciousness, though in fact our individual consciousness is only aware of a very small fragment of what is there for knowledge.”⁷

Based on my experience and the experience of many others, I’m proposing that, with intentional focus, psychedelic experiences may catalyze an exploration of the universe by occasioning direct encounters with deeper dimensions of self and reality. Over time, repeated experiences of this nature hold the potential to deepen our intimate relationship with “all that is.” I am not advocating for the indiscriminate use of psychedelics. These substances require cautious attention to set and setting. I am suggesting that for some of us, the pathway to autocosmological exploration may be a continuously self-reflective process that includes—but is not limited to—serial psychedelic experiences. And that by exploring the

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Those embracing a materialist-physicalist worldview may dismiss these experiences, claiming they were subjective and caused by chemically-induced physiological conditions invoked by extreme stress (in Koestler’s case) and psychedelic mushrooms (in my case). This point of view feels too limiting, no matter how commonly embraced in the collective. So, I’m adopting a more expansive perspective that aligns with the father of American psychology, William James, and process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. In 1901-1902, James helped establish a foundation for embracing these experiences as ontologically significant when he stated: “Our normal

universe in this way, we may learn to cultivate a personal trust in the process of becoming, gain a deep sense of purpose and meaning, and open to the fullest expression of our uniqueness.

...

Since Albert Hofmann’s discovery of the consciousness-altering effects of LSD in 1943, psychedelic researchers have linked these substances to consciousness expansion. By 1964, Harvard psychedelic researchers had published *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the*

Dead to prepare and support individuals during their psychedelic experiences. This manual emphasized the potential for psychedelics to facilitate personal growth. The manual drew upon Tibetan Buddhist mystical teachings to offer approaches (including set and setting) that would maximize the consciousness-expanding potential of the psychedelic experience. While today, we may view this as the superficial appropriation of a highly sophisticated spiritual tradition, appreciation of the context may allow us to recognize the magnitude of their task and the importance of their message. The profound nature of what they were attempting to convey is expressed in the first sentence: “A psychedelic experience is a journey to new realms of consciousness.”⁸

By the early 1970s, Czech psychiatrist and pioneering LSD researcher Stanislav Grof became aware that people were leveraging serial sessions with psychedelics to support systematic self-exploration. This discovery spurred him to analyze over 5,000 psychedelic sessions that he and his colleagues had facilitated. He found that regardless of the initial impetus for engaging with psychedelics, serial sessions inevitably lured the experiencer into an existential quest. Grof identified consistent metaphysical and cosmological themes that arose for participants on this quest. Most sought a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, the experience of death, and the existence of a universal conscious intelligence. Through this exploration, individuals experienced meaningful shifts in consciousness, which infused the participants with a deeper understanding of their relationship with “all there is.” Leveraging Grof’s insight, Professor of Philosophy and Theology Chris Bache embarked on an exploration into a deeper understanding of the mind of the universe through seventy-three LSD journeys between 1979 and 1999. I believe these pioneers have laid the groundwork for a way to engage with psychedelics for autocosmological exploration.

We now find ourselves in a post-prohibition psychedelic renaissance, which began in 1994. Since then, there has been significant research exploring the potential for psychedelics to engender long-term growth. In one important study, Schutt et al. performed a systematic review of this research, which included 34 empirical studies with over 19,000 participants, and found that psychedelics positively influenced long-term growth involving “positive transformations in a person’s larger sense of purpose

and their relationship with whatever they perceived as sacred.”⁹ Perceiving the sacred as “all that is,” I am proposing that some of the themes that emerged from their research may be particularly relevant for autocosmological exploration, including (1) greater sense of meaning, (2) greater feelings of unity and self-transcendence, (3) positive change in worldview, (4) increased connectedness, and (5) reduced fear of death.

...

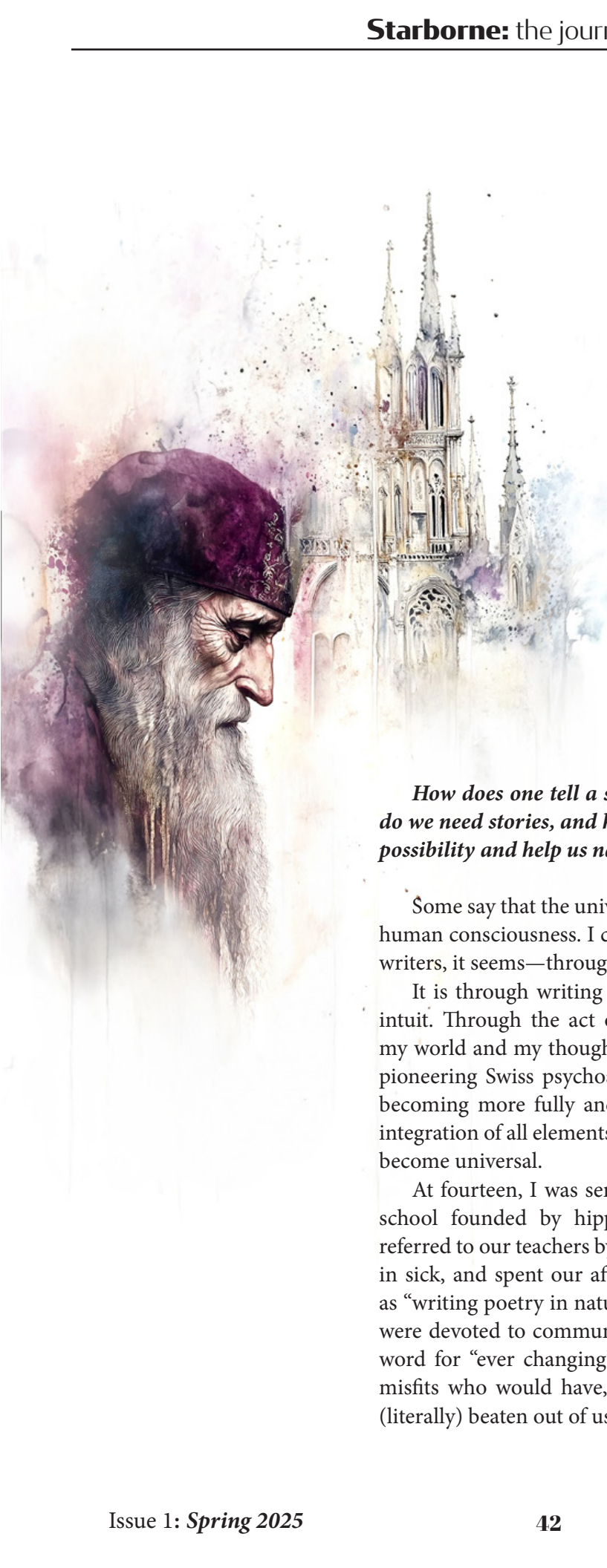
Autocosmology can be defined as an exploration of the universe through human experience. I am proposing that, for some, serial psychedelic experiences—approached in a cautious and disciplined manner—may provide an opportunity to explore the nature of the universe experientially. In my growth journey, as I continue expanding my relationship with “all that is,” supported by psychedelic experience, I have begun to cultivate a felt sense—an inner knowing—of cosmic resonance. When this noetic quality emerges in my awareness, I experience, as if for the first time, fresh aliveness.

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The Power of Stories

JOANNA EBENSTEIN



How does one tell a story? What can a story be? Why do we need stories, and how can they expand our sense of possibility and help us navigate change?

Some say that the universe comes to know itself through human consciousness. I come to know myself—as do many writers, it seems—through writing.

It is through writing that I discover what I think, feel, intuit. Through the act of writing, I come to understand my world and my thoughts about it. And, paradoxically, as pioneering Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung pointed out, by becoming more fully and uniquely ourselves through the integration of all elements of the psyche, our singular stories become universal.

At fourteen, I was sent to Anacapa, an alternative high school founded by hippies. I and my forty classmates referred to our teachers by their first names, called ourselves in sick, and spent our afternoons busy with electives such as “writing poetry in nature” or “jazz appreciation.” Fridays were devoted to community service. *Anacapa*—a Chumash word for “ever changing”—was a refuge for kids like me, misfits who would have, no doubt, had our eccentricities (literally) beaten out of us at regular high school.

One of my teachers at Anacapa, Tony, was especially influential in my young life. He introduced me to the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald and James Baldwin, the poetry of Keats and Yeats, and the idiosyncratic books—equal parts art object and absurdist fiction—of Edward Gorey. Tony recognized in me a talent for writing, and helped me learn to better express myself. He encouraged me to write essays with a strong authoritative voice and a clear thesis. This was difficult for me; I was interested in so many things that it was hard for me to focus on just one, and I saw so many shades of grey that it was hard to be firmly and confidently conclusive.

After high school, I spent four years studying Intellectual History at the University of California at Santa Cruz. There, I was assigned a writing tutor to help me simplify my essays. She taught me to begin each project with an initial draft, a free write that could contain everything that poured out of me in response to the material: the full spectrum of unruly, associative ideas, feelings, intimations, connections, and digressions in whatever associative and messy

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way I pleased. I would then return to this initial draft and select a thesis—a single through line—which would be the focus of the final essay, discarding all that was extraneous to the narrative thrust or that undermined my argument.

The lessons I integrated from my teachers made me, without a doubt, a more effective writer and communicator. The way we have been taught to tell a story—removing all that does not support the argument, or distracts from the main point—is undeniably useful. But in the process, something else—call it humanity, essence, relatability, the audibly beating heart of the maker—can be lost.

My interest in forms of expression—my yearning

for different kinds of story forms that might do justice to the wealth of detail and feeling that constitutes the human experience—is far from unique. In school, I learned about early 20th century writers such as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein, all of whom sought new forms of expression to take the place of what they saw as old, empty forms no longer capable of giving voice to their lived reality. These thinkers experienced—in a moment when the old world was disappearing and a nascent modern world emerging—a crack in the continuity of history. New forms were necessary to express new truths, and the work they created contributed to the creation of the current era we now find ourselves in.

...

Over the course of my life, I have had the good fortune to have traveled extensively and lived in other countries. For a year and a half, I was involved with a Bolivian man, and spent months with him in his home city of Santa Cruz. He was extremely intelligent, with a masters degree in engineering, and had a professional job where he mixed with people from around the world. He knew two languages fluently and was in the process of mastering another. This man also believed in an invisible world of spirits, shape-shifting shamans, and entities that one could see—if one utilized the right technique—when gazing at a bright blue sky. In Peru, I spent three weeks with a friend of a friend. She took me to Incan ruins, where she led me through energy-based rituals; she also told me a story about a leprechaun she had seen in a hotel room. These were both people with whom I had a great deal in common, and whose intelligence and education I thoroughly respected. Their differing worldview penetrated my own, and made me understand that, had I only been born in another place or time, I might have a very different understanding of reality.

Experiences such as these led me to the conviction that a worldview is like a lens, and each lens is true, so far as it goes. But each is also limited, providing only a partial view of the world. The more lenses we have at our disposal, the more inclusive our understanding of the world might be, and the more holistic a vision we might be able to access.

Stanford-trained anthropologist Dr. Jeremy Narby echoed these ideas in a recent lecture for my organization *Morbid Anatomy*, a project committed to exploring ideas about death, the in-between worlds, and human consciousness. He spoke of this in terms of bilingualism, explaining that he is fluent in several languages, each of which allows him to perceive and express different aspects of reality. Rather than finding the visions as in conflict, he sees them as complementary.

In the lecture, Narby spoke of a life changing experience he had while living with the Ashaninca people in the Peruvian Amazon. During his time with the tribe, an indigenous medical practitioner offered him an herbal tea to treat his chronic

lived experience, one that allows for the complex unknowability of reality, which is too vast and mysterious to be contained by any single theory or worldview. By opening ourselves up to paradox—ideas that seem contradictory—we allow for a more inclusive acceptance of lived reality. Paradoxes are, not coincidentally, a common form for expressing religious truths, and often used as aids in religious realization, as in the Zen koan.

These days, I find myself coming back, again and again, to stories, and my dissatisfaction with those with which we have been provided.

Our rationalist worldview might suggest that stories are unimportant, simply a means of entertainment, an escape from the difficulties of our

A worldview is like a lens, and each lens is true, so far as it goes.

back pain. After drinking it, the pain disappeared completely and permanently. The tribe explained that their knowledge of healing plants comes from their shamans communicating with the spirits of plants during altered states of consciousness.

Rather than simply discounting the Ashaninca's inspired and non-rational worldview, as his traditional Western education would instruct, Narby tried to hold both a Western scientific view and a native animistic view. He discovered that combining the two approaches created a fuller perspective than using either one alone. This "cosmological bilingualism," like stereovision (which blends two perspectives to create 3D depth), allowed the two worldviews to work together, offering a deeper and richer understanding of reality.

Jungian analyst and author Marion Woodman championed a similar attitude, one that embraced, as she put it, a "both/and rather than either/or" attitude toward the world. Approaching the world through the lens of "both/and," she says, offers a more comprehensive understanding of our

lives. But many say that stories are medicine. Stories—as expressed in our historical narratives, our television and film, books and video games—tell us what is and what is possible. They circumscribe our imaginings of what could be. The current debate around which stories are allowed to be told—and by whom—makes it clear how important they really are.

Over the course of my research, I have learned that the stories told by matriarchal cultures are very different from those of patriarchal ones, and that the stories of indigenous cultures are different from those told by the industrialized, affluent West. To me, this is the exciting promise of decolonization and multiculturalism; by inviting a more diverse group to participate in the creation of academic knowledge and popular culture—allowing in the voices of people with different life experiences, cultures, gender identities, and neurostyles—the culture is enriched. Our worldview—our collective consciousness—grows broader and more inclusive with each new perspective, each new lens, each new cosmovision. With the emergence of new stories, we experience,

and have access to, new possibilities. Our scope of vision increases. Our understanding of our world, and what is possible in it, deepens and expands.

Like those writers and thinkers who, in the early 20th century, manifested the modern world from the ashes of their parent's culture, we are navigating a moment in which the old ways appear to be dying, and whatever new ways will take their place is not yet clear. I recognize in myself a deep yearning for stories that can help us navigate and make sense of this reality, stories that can help us to survive, and perhaps even thrive, in liminal and unpredictable times. I find myself ravenous for stories that move beyond the old narrative arcs of good versus evil,

explained, when the rational world abuts the non-rational, the encounter is not experienced as horrific. Rather, it becomes integrated into the story in a way akin to that of magical realism, a Latin American genre in which the impossible happens alongside the prosaic everyday. The result, in this case, is not conflict, but integration.

One of my favorite recent television shows, Netflix's *Narcos*, tells the tale of DEA agent Steve Murphy, sent to Columbia in the 1970s to reduce the amount of cocaine entering the United States. To achieve his mission, he must defeat Pablo Escobar, a brilliant, uneducated man who has amassed immeasurable wealth and power through the

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and again, to stories, and my dissatisfaction
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of power and how to win and maintain it. I, and I imagine many of my peers, are eager to find stories that can help us chart a way forward.

...

Folk Horror is a genre of narrative revolving around the dread and danger experienced when one finds oneself immersed in an alien, irrational, and superstitious culture. In the American film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a group of urban teenagers is subjected to horrifying violence by rural Texans. And in *The Wicker Man*—a British classic of the genre—a piously Christian policeman is burned alive by a pagan culture that continues the ancient practice of human sacrifice.

In *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched*, a documentary film exploring the history of this genre, one of the interviewees pointed out that Folk Horror is not a pan-cultural phenomenon; rather, it is a narrative form of the affluent industrialized Western world. In Eastern European films, they

production and distribution of the drug. Brazilian actor Wagner Moura portrays Escobar as a deeply paradoxical figure. Larger than life, lovable yet terrifying, a literal folk saint to some (we see people burning candles before his image) and an inhuman monster to others, he is a notorious drug dealer who even becomes—for a brief, heady time—an elected official. To our protagonist, and to the viewer, Escobar is a sort of Zen koan, equal parts tender and brutal, ruthless and loyal, a trickster and a dreamer. With wit and warmth and grandiosity and verve, he lives a life that defies imagination, for better and for worse, embodying ideas many in the United States would consider mutually exclusive.

Murphy arrives in Columbia with an easy sense of cultural superiority and moral supremacy. And, in the first few episodes, he experiences this alien culture as frightening, abject, and barbarous, as is common in many folk horror productions. But, by the time he manages to defeat his foe, after much bloodshed and atrocity on both sides, the entire venture seems absurd and morally bankrupt. What

began as horror and disdain towards the other has developed into respect for Escobar and his culture, and a more nuanced and critical view of his own. What begins as folk horror ends up as a story of integration, growth, and maturation, an arc which culminates in Murphy's adoption of a Colombian infant orphaned by the violence of their years-long battle.

...

When I muse on the cultural persistence of stories revolving around good versus evil, good guys against bad guys—us versus them—I find myself coming back again and again to the monotheistic bedrock of our cultures' Judeo-Christian cosmology. This fundamentally intolerant cosmovision tells us that our God is the only real god. In such a system of thought, any opposing claim to God (or, by extension, truth) can only be wrong. This binary, in which the evil devil must be defeated by the spotlessly good God/Christ, does not allow for shades of grey, much less moral complexity.

The notion of complementary duality, as exemplified by the well-known concept of Yin and Yang, offers another approach when thinking about opposites. Here, opposite qualities, such as masculine and feminine, life and death, good and evil, are seen not in embattled opposition, but rather, in dynamic relationship. In this worldview, one is not better than the other, and each needs the other to exist. The interactions between the two creates life and all that we see in the universe.

When the Spanish Catholics arrived in what is now Mexico to save souls and amass riches, they encountered civilizations with complex cultures, magnificent cities, and an inspirited cosmovision populated by spirit beings, gods, and goddesses. Rather than rejecting the newcomers' god, the natives were curious about him. What was he like? What powers did he possess? How could he help them? How might they incorporate him into their own pantheons?

Along with their god, the Christians also brought his embattled opposite: the Devil. The concept of the devil was notoriously difficult to

transmit to indigenous cultures in the Americas and beyond. These cultures had no concept of all-good or all-bad gods. The deities they venerated were ambivalent, embodying both negative and positive qualities, a complexity seen as necessary in the dynamism of life. And their underworld, far from a site of torturous punishment, as understood by Spanish Catholics, was a place of regeneration and transformation, where the dead went to be reborn.

Carl Jung is famous for his idea of the shadow, which he defined as the part of us that we deny and repress because it is not acceptable to our family or culture. Because these characteristics move into the unconscious, we can no longer recognize them in ourselves. Instead, we project them outwards, seeing—and demonizing—them in others.

The devil, in the Christian worldview, can be seen as the shadow of god. He can also be seen as the shadow of the conquistadors. The devil is described as a wily figure eager to ensnare the unwary through seduction, lies, and deceit. The conquistadors lied, raped, killed, enslaved, robbed, and tricked in order to conquer this new land, convert the natives, and consolidate their fortunes. Ironically—and unconsciously—these ardent Christians came to embody the very force they believed they were ostensibly attempting to defeat.

Latin American culture, as we experience it today, is the product of syncretism, or the combination of two opposing cultures, ideas, or practices into something new. Jung wrote that when we encounter two irreconcilable opposites for which we can find no bridge, a new, unsuspected solution, which he called a transcendent third, might emerge if we can hold what he called the "tension of opposites" for long enough. We might see syncretic cultures as Jung's transcendent function in action.

The syncretic cultures of Latin America are the product of a violent encounter of conflicting cosmologies in which the dominating group subjugated the natives and forced them to adopt their culture. Or so it appeared. But on a certain level, through defiance, attachment to the old ways, and cultural misunderstandings, at least some of the old ways persevered. In Mexico's Yucatan region, for example, despite brutal attempts by the Spanish to

completely eradicate Mayan culture, many people today continue to speak their original language, and aluxes—an elf-like creature animated by shamans—are still said to guard the corn fields. In the new cultural forms engendered by the trauma of syncretism, that which should have disappeared was, ironically, protected from the light of day and given a space to survive.

...

Travel, research, and learning about history from a variety of different perspectives are the chief means by which I expand my sense of what is possible. Learning and experiencing how other people think about the world and our place in it helps me recognize the invisible assumptions that color what I think and do. In this way I am more

world, this perceived separation is an illusion. Everything in the cosmos—from rocks to trees, rivers to mountains, the stars and the glaciers, animals and other humans—forms one interwoven web of life. Einstein called this feeling of separation “a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness...,” one that served as “a kind of prison.” He also claimed that “Our task... must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

Which brings us back to stories.

These days, I find myself eager for stories—historical and otherwise—that can help me imagine new kinds of futures. I find such stories in the writings and teachings of non-patriarchal and indigenous cultures, as well as in the thought of the marginalized. For me, stories that come from

Our worldview grows broader and more inclusive with each new perspective, each new lens, each new cosmovision.

easily able to recognize the limitations and biases of my own worldview and see the water we are swimming in.

Jung believed that the ideas and images that attract us contain something that we need; they resonate for us because they find an echo in something hidden within our unconscious that wants to be seen and experienced. Once we have integrated the image or idea, the energy it holds for us disappears; because it is now a part of us, we are no longer forced to seek it outside ourselves.

One of the core principles of the Western cosmovision is our nature as discrete individuals separate from the world and from one another. But according to the wisdom traditions of many cultures, and the writings of mystics around the

a perspective of complementary duality feel more true and generative than the embattled opposites engendered by our monotheistic worldview. I find myself drawn to stories like that of *Narcos*, in which a battle between good and evil transforms into a story about growth, integration, and moral maturity. Or narrative forms, such as magical realism, which give equal primacy to inner and outer experience, the rational and the non-rational, providing a fuller and more complicated portrait of the world and our place in it.

Like many of us, I find myself hungry for story forms that can help guide us into the next stage of existence, that can help us navigate a perilous and liminal time when the old world has died, but the new world has not yet emerged. I find myself drawn

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to stories, such as those told by the Yucatecan Maya, in which death is not the end, but an end, a transformation into a new state of existence. And in which the end of the world is just one of many such endings, each followed by a new world that will emerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes.

I am also watching with great interest as new kinds of stories are emerging into our mainstream popular culture or, in Jung's parlance, our collective consciousness. I find myself delighted by productions such as *Reservation Dogs*, written, directed, and acted by Indigenous Americans, and incorporating humor, grief, and an inspirited—while at the same time prosaically modern—worldview. I feel deeply heartened by Gints Zilbalodis' Oscar winning animated film *Flow*, which wordlessly follows a rag-tag group of animals navigating a biblically flooded world. And I love seeing the popularity of Apple TV's *Severance*, which artfully and wittily dramatizes the drive to reunify our complex, divided, and compartmentalized selves.

When the Spanish came to what is now Mexico, they found, to their surprise, that the cross was an important symbol for the Yucatecan Maya. But in contrast to the cross of the invading Christians, the Mayan cross was equally balanced, with the horizontal and vertical planes intersecting in their centers, like a plus sign (+). The Mayan cross also had a very different meaning than the Christian one; rather than symbolizing Christ's sacrifice, it signified the four cardinal points—North, South, East, West—and, crucially, the center where the axes meet, the point of perspective: human consciousness.

The Yucatecan Maya perceived humans as the centerpoint of the cosmos; paradoxically both spiritual and material, they provided the link and acted as conductor between worlds. Like the tree

of life found in so many cultures (including their own), their roots were understood to stretch down to, and be nourished by, the underworld, the land of the dead and their underworld gods, while their branches stretched to the heavens, the realm of the upperworld gods.

These days, I find myself wondering what profound disservice is done when we focus only on the transcendent, that which is above, as symbolized by the elevated horizontal axis of the Christian cross, while at the same time severing our roots from the vivifying soil of the ancestors. What happens when the underworld is no longer seen as a place of transformation and regeneration but rather one of fear and punishment? What happens when humanity is cut off from their existential function as a connector, a conduit between worlds, one that is only possible through the happy mystery of human consciousness?

In *The Gay Science* (1882), Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "thoughts are the shadows of our feelings—always darker, emptier and simpler." Similarly, I am attracted to the story-telling possibilities of autocosmology, in which we find the promise of reunifying the self/subject with the other/object. Forms that do justice to our lived reality by allowing us to include, in a single work, feeling and scholarship, subjective and objective, personal and professional, inner and outer, the rational and the irrational, the everyday and the magical. It offers an invitation to find truths particular yet universal, evoking a worldview in which everything is intricately interwoven, separation is illusion, and the microcosm reflects the macrocosm, where, in the words of visionary poet and artist William Blake, we can "see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower."



A Parable of Maps

AVEN WHITEHORNE

there is no map to where you are going, because you have never been there before. your footprints will become the map for those who walk this road after you. in your pocket, you have old maps. talismans which you hope may guide your steps. the way is long, and you do not want to get lost. in your pack, you have a modest allotment: seeds, words for a world that no longer exists, a photograph of home. your blanket—with its frayed edges—tells stories of the road thus far. sometimes you hold it against your chest, put your face into those frayed threads, pretend that it is the hair of the one you love. sometimes in your imagination, it is a human whose face you can't make out, but whose arms make you feel safe and warm because they feel like home. other times a dog or cat whom you loved deeply for the time you had together, whom you love deeply still, though the love is different now. in the dirt, you draw where you've been so that you remember each resting place. after you make the map, you unravel the old maps. you don't allow your fingers to trace the surface, but you wonder. you wonder if there are similarities between your map and the old ones. you don't know where you are going, but you are going. that is the important part.

at night, you dream of worlds you've never seen. in your dreams, the old maps are alive in ways you do not understand. you think you dream the last day, but each night, the ending changes. which ending is true? are any? are all?

stones fall from a wall, maybe, or a building. it is tall, and ivy grows along the crumbling stone. metal strikes metal. you smell fire first, but you can't find its source. people are yelling in a tongue you do not know. they are angry. as you close your eyes, you discover that you are beginning to understand what they're yelling. you hear a name; it holds no meaning for you, but they are screaming it. the air is heavy with fear and grief. you do not understand. you move closer. the soft clover grass is damp beneath your feet in the field. you see bodies piled. you do not understand so you walk closer. the ground grows sticky, the air metallic. the bodies have wounds you've never seen before. you're about to ask who they weep for when you see banners cast into a fire. the banner on top is beautiful even as it burns. the animal is proud, even as the flames consume it. in the banners' place they erect two pieces of tree bound together. sharp metal presses against you just enough pressure to make your heart beat faster, but not enough to hurt you. you know this must have been how the others died though you don't know how you know it.
are you a believer, or are you pagan?
you do not know how to answer.

when you wake, you cannot breathe.

you do not know the name, but you cannot forget the way it sounded. it haunts you. you want answers, but the dreams do not take you back to that field.

you keep walking. you record where you find water, and where edible plants are ready for harvest. you restock your pack and mend new holes in your blanket. you do not want to walk too quickly; you do not want to arrive before the dreams have fully revealed themselves to you. you nap beneath a tree on a warm afternoon, and instead of endings, the tree offers you a beginning.

Your footprints will become the map for those who walk this road after you.

the seeds sit atop a dense covering of brush and debris. the light coming through the gaps between the tree branches would not be enough for the seeds to grow, even if they could root into the soil below. they sit, deposited by some force beyond their awareness, until one night, the forest burns. it is hot and bright, and the seeds believe they will be destroyed. but when morning comes, they are tucked into the earth by rain. the seeds become a tree—this tree—and all around the tree, other seedlings bloom and grow. there are flowers again, and the animals return to rest beneath the shade of the branches. they sing, and the forest lives.

when you wake, you are thirsty. nearby, you find a pool of water, cool from the shade of the branches. you drink, and drink again. you cup water in your hands and rub the water over your face. you decide then that you will sleep with the tree tonight. when you tuck yourself beneath your blanket, you hope you will be given another beginning. it does not come.

you do not know where you are, but it smells: sweet, wooden, a bit spicy. it is dark, and cold, but you think you are inside. your eyes acclimate to the light, which is coming from small flames atop a table made of stone. you are not alone, you realize, but it is so quiet. your eyes scan the room. the silence, finally, is broken. you do not know the tongue they are speaking, but you close your eyes, breathe deeply, and begin to understand. the man is standing in front of the table. he is yelling. he denounces someone—another name you do not recognize—and at the sound of that name, others begin to yell, too. one person, louder than the rest, yells words you do not know—progress, and helio, you think—but they are words the others disagree with. the louder person is attacked by the others. you want to intervene, but you don't know what to do.

have we not all that we need in our holy scriptures? the man standing before the table asks you.

you do not know what scriptures are, but you realize that these people believe they are worth dying for.

*In your pack, you have a modest allotment:
seeds, words for a world that no longer exists, a
photograph of home.*

when you wake, you reach for your maps. perhaps you would die for them.

you decide to keep walking. you do not know how long it would take to travel around the forest, so you walk through it. it is easier for you to breathe beneath the trees. although you cannot forget the details of your dream the night before, your steps are purposeful. you feel strong. you realize that you have not felt lonely since you first saw the tree.

you find water. when you cup it in your hands, it is clear. carefully, you set your pack down, then remove your clothes. you walk into the water. it is cooler than the air, but warm enough that you do not want to hurry. as you wash yourself, your eyes scan the waters' edge. you do not see anyone. eventually, your hunger draws you from the water. you eat, less than you would like, until you see edible plants growing near the roots of a fallen tree. there is enough for you to eat your fill and still take more for your pack.

in the soil where you harvested the plants, you draw a new map. you have barely looked at the old maps before your full stomach coaxes you beneath your blanket. your thoughts go only once to the one you love, and then you are asleep.

when you open your eyes, you are not in the forest. you are not home, either. you do not know where you are, but beneath you, it is soft. you are comfortable, but something is missing. you untuck yourself; the blanket is finer than any you have

ever seen, though you do not know what to call its color. the stitches are even, and it is thick. beneath your feet, the floor is cold. you look down. it looks like stone, but you don't think it is. the light is not from the sun, nor is it from a fire. it is too bright. you hear voices, but you do not see anyone. you walk out of the room you awoke in. you want to find the person who is speaking, to ask them where you are. you know it is a dream, but you want someone to look at you, to call you by your own name.

in a large room, you find the voices, but no bodies. in a window, people talk. they are in the room with you—you can hear them speak—but they are not there, not really. you cannot touch them or smell them. they do not hear you when you speak. the window shows animals. the animals are also there and not there. one person cries. i thought we could save them, she says. you do not know the other words they use, or what the animals needed to be saved from. you think of your dog, and you cry, too.

we had the data. we knew what would happen and we didn't act. the woman in the window has stopped crying. she is mad now. you hold your breath as you wait for her to speak again.

what could we have done? a man asks her. there is no kindness in his voice.

she says another word you do not understand, but you don't like its sound. what are profits? she is wailing now. she shrieks an apology: to the children who see this, she says. you want to look away, but you cannot. she is sobbing now, and you do not understand what she is saying anymore. you touch the window where her face is. it is cool beneath your fingertips.

you know she is speaking directly to you when she says, it didn't have to be like this.

the window goes black, and you are alone.

***You do not want to arrive
before the dreams have fully
revealed themselves to you.***

when you wake up, you are cold. the sky is still dark. you have not cried yourself to sleep since you first left home. you pull the edge of the blanket against your face and wrap one arm around your chest. you cry until you cannot cry anymore, and then you cry again. finally, you exhaust yourself and fall into a dreamless sleep.

when you wake, you carefully fold your blanket, admiring the loose stitches, the spots you've mended since you left home. you take the photograph out of your pack. you lightly trace your finger over the home you left. you count the seeds, and then you pack all but three of them. you draw a new map in the ground and plant the three seeds within it. you carefully wet the ground and whisper your hopes to the seeds as you tuck them into the dark earth.

there is no map to where you are going. your footsteps will become the map.



The End of Things

ERIN VIGIL

Unell stepped forward to volunteer.

Dr. Harigo smiled and spoke to those few in attendance: “What Unell is about to demonstrate is a breakthrough development that’s taken years of research and experimentation. We’ve learned that the language of water is called Nguic, and now, humans can communicate with water. As a language, we speculate that Nguic emerges from water’s movement and its content. Movement might be easier to imagine as a way towards communicating, like sign language, but knowing water’s content is more difficult to determine. Knowing any part of a body of water’s chemical makeup isn’t enough—knowing how polluted it is, or whether it contains traces of the presence of species, its salt content, or what it’s been filtered with—these factors alone are not enough to construct a way to communicate. Whatever resides in water becomes a part of its gestalt, and therefore part of what we’re able to understand. So, you could say that we’re not just able to translate the thoughts and expressions of water,

but indirectly anything else that's come into contact with water. Truly understanding the Nguic language involves understanding any body or container of water's history. It involves water's affective reality. It involves contact and relation—hence, why our friend Unell here is willingly choosing to get her hair wet. Basically, you might enjoy the water as you take a shower, but that doesn't mean it's enjoying washing you."

The audience laughed gently at Dr. Harigo's quip. Unell stepped forward and lifted the water dispenser. She leaned over and held the dispenser above the left side of her scalp so the water would fall into the drain on the floor and not all over her clothes. As the water dispersed, a digital text box beyond Unell's sight lit

to decipher Nguic into any words at all has massive implications. The next step is translating its meaning consistently." Dr. Harigo hoped that this description would be a sufficient compromise. She also gave a quick look toward Unell to place the dispenser back.

The man spoke up again. "So, without mentioning that there are already vast histories of animistic cultures who've made the same sorts of claims over thousands of years—which you can take or leave as real—your big revelation is just poetry? This is an art project, not a scientific revelation."

"I disagree," Dr. Harigo responded firmly, "And just as with any conversation you might have with a person, different people will take away different interpretations from what someone says. The same

*Basically, you might enjoy the water
as you take a shower, but that doesn't
mean it's enjoying washing you.*

up with rapidly changing letters as it translated the water's message. Her head still cocked to the side, she saw many of the crowd's eyes widen and mouths hang as words began appearing, prompted by the running water.

"What does it mean?" a man in the audience asked in reference to the words on the screen. Dr. Harigo stepped around to the text box facing the audience to read the message. She offered a professional smile tempered with caution.

"It's important to remember how vast language can be. We humans are socialized to communicate in a certain way and to emphasize or de-emphasize certain things. Water doesn't have the same social, experiential, or linguistic background as we do. So, while we can translate its motion and content into symbols and language that we can understand, it's important for us not to impose our human expectations of communication onto Nguic."

There was doubt in the man's voice: "Are you saying that water communicates in poetry?"

"You...could absolutely say that, yes. Being able

with water. But in this case, it'll take time to discover consistent threads in what water has to say."

The man laughed to himself and walked away from the standing crowd. A few watched him depart, while the rest waited for the scientist to break the tension. A series of glances and shrugs replaced the audience's prior attention. With no more eyes resting on the cryptic words on the screen, Harigo concluded her presentation. She thanked the crowd and silently sought a towel to offer Unell to dry her hair.

Hesitating, Unell asked, "I was wondering what showed up on the screen?"

"I didn't have time to memorize it," Harigo said quickly and softly. "Thank you for volunteering." Harigo held out her hand.

As Unell shook Harigo's hand, she wanted to offer some respite to the scientist despite the two being strangers. She wanted to say that calling Nguic poetic isn't a hindrance. Or express to Harigo what she wanted to say to that man, something like, *What the fuck did you expect? That nature would be some kind of technical writer?* She wanted to reassure

Harigo that even if the translations of Nguic weren't convenient, any communication at all was still miraculous. She probably knows that already. Unell watched her pack up her things and guessed that this was a familiar pain of Harigo's: everything could be lost with just enough dismissiveness.

...

Despite attending other conference presentations, Unell couldn't shake how fast the tide had turned during Harigo's demonstration. Maybe what the man said had struck a chord with them: that even if at one point—one minute, one second—they were impressed, they would most likely wait for another announcement by some translator or communication specialist about Nguic and its insights, months or years from now. By then, any revelation would come to their door as just one more piece of information

What the fuck did you expect? That nature would be some kind of technical writer?

out of many. People had their own lives to lead, their own ambitions, and Harigo's research was, at the end of the day, her interest, not theirs. Any intrigue, any wonder, any curiosity would never reach the souls of any of the audience members. It wouldn't cause their days or their lives to come to a halt. Their interest would die as quickly as it was born.

Am I upset just because I was a part of the demonstration? It's not like I helped Dr. Harigo research anything. Why did I have to wet my hair and not just my hand? Was it just for her joke about showering? Was that man right? Was this all a waste of time or just not as interesting as we thought? Did we just want to experience something that felt like a miracle?

Unell walked to the public area and scoured for one of her friends. The public area had high glass ceilings, open air sections, recliners, and desks. She sat alone near one of the many glass windows overlooking the ocean.

This was a strange place to have a conference. Fifty years ago it was one of the largest offshore oil rigs in the world, but it became useless after fossil fuel reserves were depleted globally. In its final years, the corporate owners drilled deeper and in nearby areas. Finding nothing, other energy sources became the game—with history rewritten to say that they were the progenitors of alternative sources all along. When the rig was left abandoned after fulfilling its purpose, it was bought by a real estate developer who redesigned it into a catch-all venue of sorts—hotel rooms, a concert hall, a restaurant—that could withstand rougher seas and offer a higher occupancy limit. One year after opening, messages from the new owner to the oil company asking if it was possible to continue drilling while simultaneously offering venue services, despite safety concerns, had been leaked to the public. The board, sufficiently embarrassed, stripped his position and handed the reins to one of their own.

In the public area, Unell faced away from shore, watching the ocean extend toward the sky. The sun, its rays wide and long, inched its way down in view of the windows.

It was the time of king tides, which would occasionally evoke screams from the visitors as waves crashed against the glass. Unell hated the transport method to arrive here. She imagined that before it had become a venue, any boat would have sufficed for transporting people here. But in addition to revamping the rig, a track was lined from the rig's cylindrical spars to the shore propping up what looked like airplane seats that hovered over the water with no overhead framing. Its schedule for transporting visitors depended on the tide and the weather—for a back-to-earth, environmental touch. To Unell it felt like an equal parts boring and fascinating rollercoaster ride: a straight-shot from the shore to the venue, but with the curiosity of being carried through ocean air.

Unell looked back to where she'd walked from. *I might not ever know what that message said. Maybe it was recorded somewhere. I need to find Dr. Harigo.*

Clipped

ANDI CHATBURN

I never would have believed
I would delight in being the whore,
the woman with seven lovers
spanning the rainbow.
Or that with an orgasm
I could birth a star,
becoming a mother of millions,
when I have no human offspring.

I never would have believed there are
still ceremonies
where holy bodies come to worship
other holy bodies.
I am a pilgrim at these
Temples full of delicious devouring,
consuming,
feeding and being fed.
Is there anything more intimate
than eating one another?

That is what Turkey whispered to me
three Novembers ago,
my arms engulfing her body,
preventing powerful wings
from shattering in one final dying clap.

Her scaley blue feet wrapped,
suspended by jute from a tree,
like shibari.

We took deep breaths together,
Turkey and me,
her blood pooling into the woodchips,
nourishing next year's growth.
My blood caught in cotton,
she warmed my snowy blue fingers in
the downy layers of her breast.
It took all of my strength to restrain her.

But who was restraining me?
Whose arms were around my wings?
They were clipped decades ago
at summer camp,
the moment I sputtered
that I saw God in a dying Seagull
on the rocky shores of Lake Charlevoix.

They clipped them, then
I clipped them again for good measure.
They told me, without ever really telling me,
that I can't really fly,
and seeing God isn't something that happens
anymore.

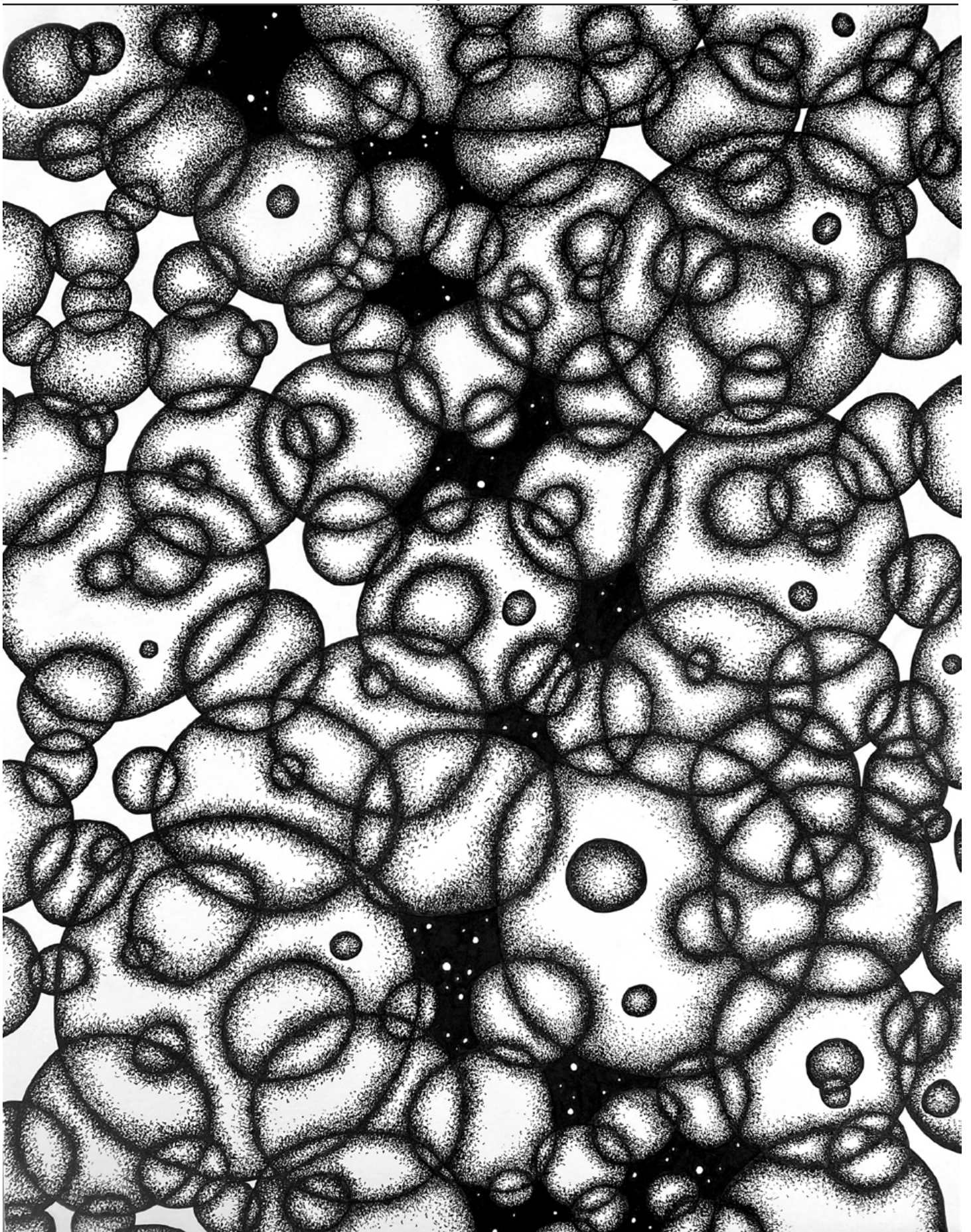
It was the way they looked at me,
holding me at arm's length
with pity and fear
for my future.

But even then, I could see a glint of their holy envy.

I was more careful who I shared with
(almost no one), and even then,
I restrained myself,
clipped and small,
believing what they said about flying.

Until one day, in the snowy deserts
of Anza Borrego in a canyon filled
with a thousand glorious rainbows
as Cougar Creek rose and roared,
I danced with Raven and
a giant lactating bat wearing purple lipstick.





ARTWORK BY TYLER GLAUZ-TODRANK

In Passing

LINDA COPMAN

Out of silence comes the sound of a single frog
Calling in darkness for his kin, someone to fill the hole
of night with honey. The sound of bells jingle on
a door as it opens in the wind to let ghosts pass
through the somnolence of this year into next.
Memories fade like ink in the rain, characters that
cannot be read, cannot speak of their pain, whose
ears no longer hear the sound of jingling, eyes see
no twinkling, no kin in the distance where sky
bleeds into sea. They stretch fingerless hands
to the living who betrayed and abandoned them
as they, too, betrayed and abandoned this life
where we speak our lonely thoughts, reaching
out for skin. Improbably we sing, backs to the wind,
searching for something to warm us from within.



Afterword by the Author

ADDAM LEDAMYEN

Dear Journal,

This will be my final entry in you. You can't see this yet. I'm using my "Creative Writing Journal" instead of the usual you so that it'll be a surprise, but when the historians who decide I was a genius collect all the volumes of my "Feelings Journal," type them up, and put them all together, they'll place this entry at the very end (if they've done their job right). I don't imagine I'll ever have the courage to say goodbye to you in real time. I'll always have the feeling that there must be a few more days, at least one more page; so to relieve myself of the concern, I'm going to say goodbye to you now and, with the help of some friends, trust that you'll read this when the time is right.

The me that writes to you now has gone through a lot of change. I've changed my appearance, my pronouns, my name. I've changed my relationships and improved my health. I've gained understanding, and I've gained confusion. Still, when I look back through the various iterations of you, even those barely filled notebooks from elementary school that did not yet know they were you, I find that my written voice—my spirit in words—has always been very much as it is now. I have more wisdom, a larger vocabulary, more of a flare for style, and better handwriting, but the loves, fears, curiosities, sense of humor, interests, and passions are all the same. I know—or I suppose I hope—that by the time you read this I will have grown a great deal more. Still I expect that no matter how far in the future that day

may be, this voice I write with now will be the same one that ultimately dies. Therefore, I am content to allow this voice—younger and still inexperienced in so many ways—to be the one that says farewell on the behalf of future-me.

As I write this, I am sitting underneath a street lamp that lights a freeway. Next to that freeway is a half-dead and half-stubbornly-growing field of traumatized grassy plants. Part of the field is in darkness, untouched by the freeway light, and that part is littered with objects created and then tossed away by humans. The spot where I'm sitting now, at the field's edge in the light, seems to have escaped most of that. Past the dark side of the field is a parking



lot, which is generously charging up my brand new 2011 plug-in hybrid car (to clarify the humor there for those who don't know, the year is currently 2024). There are lights in the parking lot...but they never turn on, no matter how late into the night I stay. I don't know why they're there. I sometimes bring a little light of my own (whose usage won't drain the battery of either my car or my phone), but tonight's visit was more spontaneous, and I was unprepared. This freeway light was the nearest source bright enough to write by. So I crossed the little field. Fortuitously, I found this perfect little log in the transition from dark to light that I picked up and brought with me to sit on. It has a flat part for sitting and a round part for rocking back and forth on. I can see some stars now, and the freeway actually sounds a bit like the ocean. It's not what we would often consider to be lovely, but it is actually—quite.

I am sitting here on a piece of tree between a sky full of stars and a chain-link fence. I don't exactly know what the building to my right is, but the parking lot is always full of police cars, so presumably it's something related to that.

There's a voice on the other side of the fence. I feel like a deer in headlights. I don't know if they'll find me, and I don't know if it would matter, but I also don't

differently from the wild animals who simply see Earth and know it is always home? Why have we designed a society that makes us forget we are wild animals?

We separate ourselves into these containers: countries, properties, corporations, single families, states, religions, races, genders, species, etc. We trace our lineages back to continents and say we are one thing or the other or designate how much of each, and we feel all this gives us more right to exist in some areas of Earth over others, but we forget that we all have the same direct ancestor. Every one of us is a direct descendant of Earth, and I mean that very literally. It was the planet Earth that bubbled and burned with fiery goop until it finally birthed something that could breathe. And that littlest thing yearned and pushed itself until it became something that could grow. Earth started sprouting earthlings everywhere it could and, in so doing, transformed its very air into something that could be breathed until different earthlings climbed out of the water and began to breathe it. We understand how the story goes from there. Regardless of what other life may be out there in the universe, this fact will always unite the people of Earth: every speck of life on this planet can count Earth as their great-great-great-great-

Why have we designed a society that makes us forget we are wild animals?

know if I'm technically allowed to be here. Given the abundance of police cars nearby, I assume this is not the best place to be caught being somewhere you're not supposed to be.

I think the voice walked away. I guess we're okay.

Isn't it odd though that there are places—uninhabited, not really being utilized—that we're “not allowed” to be in? Imagine if we tried to tell that to a bird, or a squirrel. They wouldn't even laugh. They'd just walk away and make a nest where you told them not to, and you'd probably let them do it because they're not really doing any harm by being there. Why have we designed a society that makes us operate so

great-(etc.)-grandparent. Earth is the ancestor that will outlive us all, and when our time of experience here is done it welcomes us warmly back into the ever-burning core that first created us. We often conceive of death as going to meet our ancestors, thinking only of familial humans who have passed on, but it is not so simple. We have always been with our ancestors. Every time we touch grass or dig our toes into the sand of a beach, we are directly interacting with our ancestors. When we die, we are not joining them but becoming them. We are returning our atoms to the planet that first molded them into life.

While we are alive, we have an even greater gift.

We can look up and see the stars, each one of them a cousin in our 14-billion-year-old family. We can use our reason and experiments to understand the galaxies. But what is it then we are understanding? Distant cousins, perhaps. But aren't they closer than that? When we look at a star and marvel at its majesty, feeling within us a close, personal awe, how can we say they are distant? What is looking back at us when we gaze at a star? There is something in the space between us. Lots of things in fact. There are molecules and asteroids and waves of radiation. There is nowhere between me and the star I'm looking at that is not filled with a cosmic something. Nowhere is there nothing. The universe is everywhere, and it encompasses everything from me to that star and beyond in every direction. There is no difference between me and the universe. There is no difference between the universe and that star. So how separate can the star and I really be?

Without getting big-headed about it, we can marvel at the capacities of the human mind, this organ that the universe created out of itself which now can study and understand it in return. What if we are the only life in the universe? We as earthlings, I mean. If that's the case, then we—the humans—are the only way by which the universe can understand itself. Even if we're not the only life in the universe, we are the only ones with a distinct understanding of our own planet. Each one of us is the only one with a distinct understanding of our own lives, our own experience, our own brains, our own little pieces of the universal body that only we are capable of capturing and offering back to the universe so that it can understand itself in greater detail. The universe actively evolved this human storytelling organ that was not only capable but driven to learn the universe's history. Like any of us, the universe wants to know what it is and where it came from. We are its cosmic hand groping about in the dark, slowly shedding light on the answer.

But we can only search for so long. We are not as durable as the stars who are ever firing themselves up and fusing additional millions of years out of their centers. We are like Cinderella's carriage. Eventually, we must turn back into a pumpkin.

I hope the universe remembers what I learned on its behalf. Somehow, I think it will.

It's hard to think that one day I will no longer be able to think. It's an odd feeling to grapple with the fact that one day I will no longer be able to feel. But when you read this, Journal, such a day will have come and gone. I hope, when my story ended, I found myself experiencing loveliness, wherever it happened to be. I hope I could feel the beauty of life's energy at its utmost fullest right before it sailed away. I hope when I was buried my skin could feel the dirt embracing it, even though my nervous system could no longer translate that to conscious experience. I hope there are roots that come and caress my forehead. I hope mushroom spores embed themselves in my heart and allow me to help pass loving messages from tree to tree.

I hope to become earth, because I am Earth, and that is how it should be.

I hope the universe remembers what I learned on its behalf.

Somehow, I think it will.

Journal, thank you for your pages. Thank you for your inspiration, your understanding, and your confidence. I don't know how I would've done it without you.

I am ever and eternally yours,
Addam Ledamye

CONTRIBUTORS

Kacey Carmichael, MA, MEd, sees the Universe unfolding as YOU! She delights in helping you experience this directly, through embodied creative and contemplative arts. She brings the dynamic synergy of her experience as an expressive arts therapist, ordained interfaith minister, leader of cosmogenesis rituals and practices, spiritual director and counselor, Certified Deeptime Leader, mother, cosmos lover, and lifelong mystic, writer, and dancer.

Andi Chatburn is a queer bioethicist and hospice and palliative care physician living in San Francisco, California, in a courtyard of River Birch and Black-capped chickadee, where they all long for the River. She is a PhD student studying philosophy with an emphasis on Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies where she is exploring the ways embodied pleasure holds space for grief in this time of systems collapse.

Nancee Cline is a lifetime lover of the written word. She holds a master's degree in Interdisciplinary Humanities, as well as two certificates in Theological Education. She has tutored and taught every age group from Montessori pre-school through community college adults. After retirement she gave up writing essays and book reviews to write poetry, which she realized with surprise, was better than religion.

Carolyn Cooke is a professor of Interdisciplinary Arts and Writing at CIIS in San Francisco. Her books include: *Amor & Psycho*, *Daughters of the Revolution*, and *The Bostons*.

Linda Copman is a poet, mother, and lover of all things wild. She lives on the Big Island of Hawaii and works as a Communications Specialist for Cornell University.

Monica Anna Day is a poet, educator, and performance artist. She has written and performed two solo shows, *Song of the Sacred Whore* and *Falling into Love*; co-developed and produced an interactive immersive theatrical production, *The Secret Order of the Libertines*; and was the creator, producer and coach for the solo show festival, *The Power of One*. She has only just begun to submit her poetry for publication and most recently was published in the summer 2024 edition of *Ovunque Siamo*.

Monica DeRaspe-Bolles is a doctoral student at CIIS, researching time-developmental cosmology and the emergence of a new structure of human experience that fosters cosmogenetic awakening. She collaborated with Brian Thomas Swimme on the creation of the thirty-five-part mini-film series, "Story of the Noosphere," and co-authored its companion book, *The Story of the Noosphere*. Monica lives at Blueberry Front in Snohomish, Washington, a research center for time-developmental experience.

Caroline Dickey is a master's student in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness at CIIS. She wonders how human perception and creative expression participate in the unfolding of an evolving cosmos, with a special interest in metaphysics, process thought, and the role of storytelling in shaping ethical and imaginative life. She lives in Oakland, CA, where she balances philosophical inquiry with wandering the woods and gazing at the sky.

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Joanna Ebenstein is an artist, writer, curator, photographer and graphic designer. She is the founder and creative director of Morbid Anatomy, an educational and cultural institution dedicated to exploring the mysteries of existence, mortality, and the human condition through an interdisciplinary lens. Her books include *Memento Mori: The Art of Contemplating Death to Live a Better Life*, *Anatomica: The Exquisite and Unsettling Art of Human Anatomy* and *Death: A Graveside Companion*.

Ezekiel Fugate is the co-founding director of Deep Belonging and a co-founder and former director of Springhouse Community School. He is currently completing his dissertation in the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program at CIIS, where his research focuses on the intersection of evolutionary cosmology and human experience. He lives with his wife and two daughters on a permaculture homestead and native plant sanctuary in the Appalachian Mountains of Floyd County, Virginia, where his ancestors have resided for nearly three centuries.

Tyler Glauz-Todrank embodies the intersecting identities of being trans/non-binary/agender, queer, neurodivergent, and living with chronic illness. Through their studies centered around the importance of embracing a perspective of interconnectivity and plurality in the Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness Program at CIIS, they both integrate and transcend these labels. Glauz-Todrank is an artist and contemplative living in the Santa Cruz Mountains and dreaming visions of a loving and harmonious future for all aspects of the cosmic story.

Geneen Marie Haugen, PhD, grew up a little wild, with a run amok imagination. A content creator and guide to the intertwined mysteries of nature and psyche with the Animas Valley Institute (www.animas.org), she has also been on the faculty of the Esalen Institute and Schumacher College. Her writing has appeared in *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*; *Thomas Berry: Dreamer of the Earth*; *Parabola*; *Kosmos Journal*; *Ecopsychology*, and many others. She believes in the world-shifting potential of the human imagination allied with the planetary psyche.

Morda Kennedy is a spiritual coach, performance artist, and scholar who creates original performance work inspired by dreams and fairy tales and grounded in deep spiritual exploration. She is currently a PhD student in East-West Psychology at CIIS. Her current research focuses on how role-playing games (namely classic *Dungeons & Dragons* and the computer game, *Baldur's Gate 3*) can support people in reframing personal narrative, particularly as this relates to spirituality and chronic illness.

Addam Ledamyen (they/them) is a multidisciplinary storyteller with specialties in acting, playwriting, novel writing, and narrative improvisation. Addam is now working towards an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts and Writing from CIIS, teaching and performing with a variety of organizations around the SF Bay Area, and serving as the Artistic Director of the new arts non-profit For Elenvia: Publications and Productions.

Ari Makridakis has just completed a ten year mentorship with Brian Swimme at CIIS. He is currently teaching cosmology to high school students and adults in Asheville, North Carolina.

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Kathleen M. Osburn is a doctoral student of Transformative Inquiry at CIIS. Kathleen draws upon decades of experience collaborating with leaders and organizations as they navigated transformative change. Her transdisciplinary research focuses on the potential of psychedelics to catalyze growth and transformation.

Peter Reason was Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath, England, and an international leader in the development of participative approaches to action research. He co-edited the *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* and co-founded the journal *Action Research*. Since retiring, Peter has focused on writing books and articles that link the tradition of nature writing with the ecological crisis of our times, drawing on scientific, ecological, philosophical and spiritual sources.

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Brian Thomas Swimme is the Director of the Center for the Story of the Universe and a professor at CIIS. He brings the context of story to our understanding of the 13.7 billion year trajectory of the universe. Such a story, he feels, will assist in the emergence of a flourishing Earth community. He lectures widely and has presented at conferences sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, The World Bank, UNESCO, The United Nations Millennium Peace Summit, and the American Museum of Natural History.

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