An abstract painting with vibrant colors and expressive brushstrokes. The composition is dominated by bold, dark outlines and thick applications of paint. On the left, a large, flowing shape in shades of red and pink is prominent. In the center and right, there are dynamic, swirling forms in blue, purple, and yellow. The background is a mix of light green and yellow, suggesting a bright, open space. The overall style is reminiscent of modernist or expressionist art, emphasizing emotional intensity and visual rhythm.

# POIESIS

**A Journal of the Arts & Communication**

**Evolution/Revolution: New Directions in Expressive Arts**

**Volume 18, 2021**

# POIESIS

A Journal of the Arts & Communication

Volume 18, 2021

Editor: Stephen K. Levine

Art Director, Layout & Design: Kristin Briggs

EGS Press Manager: Sarah Farr



[www.egspress.com](http://www.egspress.com)

ISBN # 978-1-7776817-0-8

The POIESIS journal is supported by the European Graduate School (EGS), Switzerland.

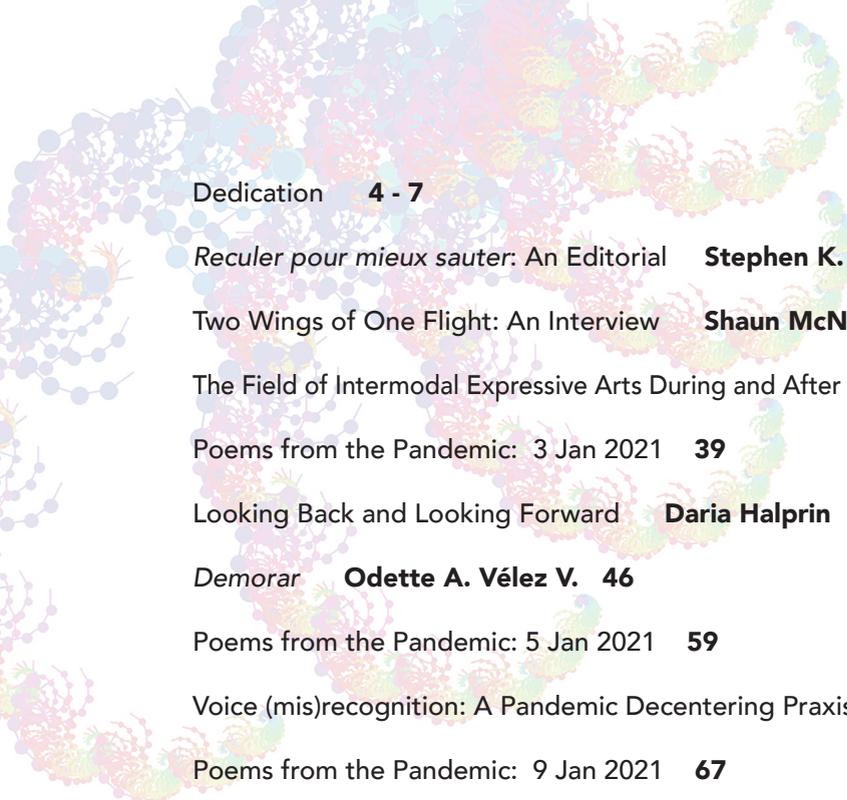
EGS offers low-residency masters and doctoral programs in the Division of

Arts, Health and Society ([www.expressivearts.egs.edu](http://www.expressivearts.egs.edu)), and in

the Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought ([www.egs.edu](http://www.egs.edu)).

All Rights Reserved ©2021 EGS Press, except where otherwise indicated.

COVER ART: *Dance*, by Shaun McNiff, circa 2004, 19" x 24", tempera on paper.



Dedication    **4 - 7**

*Reculer pour mieux sauter: An Editorial*    **Stephen K. Levine 8**

Two Wings of One Flight: An Interview    **Shaun McNiff 14**

The Field of Intermodal Expressive Arts During and After the Pandemic    **Margo Fuchs Knill 22**

Poems from the Pandemic: 3 Jan 2021    **39**

Looking Back and Looking Forward    **Daria Halprin 40**

*Demorar*    **Odette A. Vélez V. 46**

Poems from the Pandemic: 5 Jan 2021    **59**

Voice (mis)recognition: A Pandemic Decentering Praxis    **Carrie MacLeod 60**

Poems from the Pandemic: 9 Jan 2021    **67**

Memoria Symbiotica: Smart Devices  
and the Evolving Technobiological Narrative of Self    **D. W. Chester 68**

Poems from the Pandemic: 16 Jan 2021    **77**

The Lockdown Library: A Socially-Engaged Art Project    **Gopika Dahanukar 78**

We are all angels together    **Elizabeth Gordon McKim 84**

Evolving Angel    **Kristin Briggs 85**

Vital Reflections on Expressive Arts and the Online Modality in Uncertain Times    **Judith Alalú 86**

*ii* Expressive Arts and the Call of the World    **Ellen G. Levine 98**

Poems from the Pandemic: 28 Jan 2021    **116**





My Mind is a Hostile Arctic World	<b>Dorota K. Solarska</b>	<b>117</b>
Coming Back to Myself: Art-making and Mental Crisis	<b>Dorota K. Solarska</b>	<b>118</b>
The Drum	<b>Dorota K. Solarska</b>	<b>123</b>
City as Studio, City as Wound: Dreaming Abolitionist Futures	<b>Gracelynn Chung-Yan Lau</b>	<b>124</b>
Gathering Boughs	<b>Ronald Meck</b>	<b>136</b>
Poiesis beckons the Witness	<b>Alexandra Fidyk</b>	<b>143</b>
The Heroic Journey of Ai Apaec	<b>José Miguel Calderon</b>	<b>144</b>
For the Revolution, our ravishing host Discordia will perform a little number on the pandemonium-harmonium	<b>Kristin Briggs</b>	<b>155</b>
The Revolutionizing Power of Aesthetics	<b>Judith Greer Essex</b>	<b>156</b>
Perspective: Technique or Thinking as Applied to Expressive Arts Therapy	<b>John Faul</b>	<b>162</b>
Rudie goes shopping	<b>Irene Renzenbrink</b>	<b>173</b>
By the Raven's Eye	<b>Alexandra Fidyk</b>	<b>174</b>
Poems from the Pandemic: 2 Feb 2021		<b>175</b>
How Expressive Arts Opens Spaces in the Pandemic, But Still What If?	<b>Bonnie Nish</b>	<b>176</b>
Poems from the Pandemic: 12 Feb 2021		<b>180</b>
A Year of Creating a Heart in a Havenless World	<b>Marian Rich</b>	<b>183</b>
Poems from the Pandemic: Coda		<b>199</b>



Driver/Minstrel of Soul/Gatherer/Harvester/Ready at the open door/Guide to the unknown

your life peppers light red black bird of night gracias

Paolo, in my mind you are swimming to eternity

*Listening is a form of love, making space for the other—  
Paolo was a passionate and dedicated  
Master in that*

*When negative, do not go there;  
if you are there, choose not to stay*

**Art-making is bound to irregularity.**

*If beauty  
is the we-song  
of flowers, you are  
the sower of the seeds*

**Geniesser-gourmet,  
gourmand, lover of all  
things beautiful**

# The We Song of Flowers moves to the symphonic.

*One who concentrates beauty and stops time, uniting  
the beauty of things in the hearts of people.*

**MY MAESTRO, MY MENTOR, MY CAPTAIN, MY FRIEND;  
YOU OPENED THE CAGE FROM WHICH I FLY EACH DAY AGAIN.**

*He's done his walking and swimming  
... Slow motion is not enough to describe this great man  
Fast forward is not enough to taste his great wisdom  
Always stay with us, your voice and song and music ...  
Never enough ...*

**PAOLO YOUR  
LONGING FOR  
BEAUTY IS SO  
PRESENT IN OUR  
COMMUNITY**

Your loving, kind spirit is rowing with us into the sea of wide imagination

Play proposes to you, the emergent as partner—of what wild life did you sing to us?

## Dedication

To Paolo Knill, who passed away in September of 2020, for what he has given us in the past and for what will continue to come to us from him in the future. Paolo was a founder of the field of expressive arts at Lesley University and the founding Provost of the European Graduate School. Author and co-author of many books, including *Minstrels of Soul: Intermodal Expressive Therapy* and *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*. A multi-talented artist, teacher and innovator, he inspired leaders and practitioners from all over the world.

See also: "Leaves in the Woodland," performed by Ronald Meck, Memorial for Paolo Knill, Fall 2020.  
link: <http://www.egspress.com/Poiesis2021Gallery/>

For Paolo  
Stephen K. Levine

My friend's hand shakes  
like mine when pouring salt  
It's in his family, he says,  
along with other things:  
father's music  
mother's herbs  
and the memory of war,  
his best friend gone.

So many years,  
Peru, Israel, the American adventure,  
and now returning home  
Rhine water falling  
its sound like Bach  
The mountains of Saas Fee  
promising peace

What is the sound of a man's life,  
The music that will linger  
when he is gone?  
Or is it silence, air,  
a whispering breeze,  
murmuring the prayer:  
return, once more, return

# *Reculer pour mieux sauter:* An Editorial Stephen K. Levine

*evolution revolution we are evolving revolving going back to go  
forward going back to the beginning to start again what does it mean  
to begin to end to begin again*

*there once was a man named Michael Finnegan he had whiskers on  
his chin again along came a wind and blew them in again  
poor old Michael Finnegan begin again there once*

*finnegan's wake finnegan's awake o rise and shine  
sing out your glory glory children of the world*

*you say you want a revolution oh yeah we all want to change the world  
you tell me that it's evolution well you know we all want to change the  
world but if you go carrying pictures of chairman mao you ain't going  
to make it with anyone anyhow...*



Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? The title of one of Gauguin's paintings may be the fundamental question, a question that does not have an answer. Gauguin told a friend that after he finished the painting, he went up on a hillside in Tahiti to commit suicide. Since he lived for several years afterwards, this may or may not have been true, but pondering the most basic question of our existence can certainly lead to thoughts of suicide.

The painting itself is a good example of cultural appropriation. An idyllic depiction of Tahitian culture, men, women and children are peacefully living together on the island, with the sea and mountains, the natural landscape, in the background. If the painting is "read" from right to left, like an ancient scroll, we see a child on the right, an adult in the center and an old woman on the left—the course of human life, if all goes well. Gauguin himself wrote, "I have finished a philosophical work on a theme comparable to that of the Gospel."



Expressive arts comes from the 1960s, a period of cultural ferment in which old truths had been discredited and a new world was asking to be born. The slogan of the French student movement, *Pouvoir à l'imagination!*, (Power to the imagination!) sums it up: another world is possible. But at the same time, we have to go back to what has been to find a model for what is coming. *Reculer pour mieux sauter*, stepping back to jump forward, returning to what has come before—the origin, the beginning—in order to go into the future.

In the 1970s, Shaun McNiff asked for a "theory indigenous to art," a demand for both what is proper to the arts but also for a return to a time before the arts were contaminated by psychological interpretation, something he later called, "image abuse." Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said, if the Golden Age did not exist, we would have to invent it. If the arts are fundamental to our work, after all, that means they are at the origin, the root of originality, the mark of artistic genius. Marx also said, to be radical means to go back to the root. For Engels, that meant

“primitive communism,” the social form which existed at the beginning of human society. And so we come back to Gauguin and Tahiti—and cultural appropriation, too!

But aren't we always appropriating what is other than ourselves? Like all living beings, we survive by taking in what is outside ourselves. We breathe the air, we in-spire, and when we can no longer take it in, we ex-pire. Inspiration in art is no different. To be original is to go back to the origin. In the words of T.S. Eliot: “We shall not cease from exploration/ and the end of all our exploring/ will be to arrive where we started/ and know the place for the first time.”

He ends the poem “Little Gidding,” with these words:

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.



In September 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, Paolo Knill passed away. He was our inspiration, the minstrel of soul whose music resounds in our ears. We will mourn him as long as we live.

Together with Shaun McNiff and others, Paolo founded the field of expressive arts therapy at Lesley University in the 1970s. Beginning as a musician, he explored all the other artistic media which his fellow teachers offered. Paolo was a *Geniesser*, a gourmet, someone who enjoys good food, and for him the arts were food for the soul. At Lesley, he developed the theory of intermodality, in which the origin of all artistic disciplines is understood as resting on the modalities of the senses.

Later, he outlined a theory of expressive arts practice, based on the aesthetic responsibility of the therapist (or “change agent,” a term he used to describe expressive arts practice in fields beyond therapy as well). “Aesthetic responsibility” refers to the basic attitude of the therapist, to guide clients in a session so that they can have an “aesthetic response,” an experience in which they are “moved” or “touched” by what they have made.

The theory of practice that Paolo developed is rooted in the arts rather than psychology. It leads to what he called a “work-oriented” approach to therapeutic practice, in which not only the process but what is often called the “product” is seen as important. After all, artists not only want the experience of making a work, they want the art-work itself. The interpretation of the work, then, can only be developed from the work itself, not from a pre-existing psychological framework which serves as its explanatory basis. Clearly, Paolo’s is a theory of practice indigenous to the arts.

The “architecture of the session” follows from this perspective. Beginning with the “filling in,” the description of the difficulty or problem which clients bring, the therapist then moves into what Paolo called “imaginal reality,” away from being focused or “centered” on the problem into an imaginative “decentering” that can take the form of play, ritual or art-making. In the “aesthetic analysis,” the therapist uses a phenomenological method to help the client to understand the experience and the work that resulted from it in its own terms, rather than using another framework as the basis to interpret it. Finally, the session ends with what Paolo called “harvesting,” returning to the problem and asking whether the decentering could shed any light on it.

It is important to note that Paolo’s rejection of a psychological basis for the work of expressive arts is not a rejection of psychology *per se*. Instead of seeing art as a means of self-expression, reducing the meaning of the work to the psychological state of the artist, this account sees the psychological import to lie in what the work itself brings to us. The work is expressive,

not the self. This is the way in which the arts are, after all, experienced in our lives and why they have always been at the center of human existence.

In addition to his development of the theory and practice of expressive arts, Paolo was original in his theory and practice of community art. He was a master of community art practice, leading groups and communities to find forms for their lives and works that could give them a sense of purpose and meaning beyond the experience of making art in community itself. Anyone who had the good fortune to attend Paolo's community art sessions at the European Graduate School or elsewhere can attest to this.

Paolo's greatest work as an artist was the formation of EGS itself. When he left his post as Professor at Lesley University in the early 1990s, he returned to his own origins in Switzerland. My view of Paolo's development is that he went to the United States in search of the spirit of creativity and openness which it seemed to offer at the time and, in his return to Switzerland, he brought back with him what he had gathered from that experience.



Now, in 2021, we are living in the aftermath of Paolo Knill's life and work. We are also living in a critical period in human history, in the midst of a world-wide pandemic taking place in and partly caused by the crisis in our relationship with the world around us. That is where we are. Now we wonder, where are we going?

How can expressive arts—the work, in large part, of Paolo Knill—help us to go forward?

*Reculer pour mieux sauter.* We need to go back not only to the origin of expressive arts but to the spirit of creativity and originality which is at the origin of art, an expression of human existence at its best. Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, once said that everything begins in spontaneity and ends as a cultural conserve. In a similar vein, the sociologist Max

Weber wrote that social institutions begin in charisma and end as bureaucracy. If expressive arts is now a cultural conserve, how can we prevent it from becoming a new bureaucracy of its own, in which its forms have become fixed and sclerotic? In the words of St. Paul, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." We have to find again the spirit of the arts to find new life in the midst of death,

Does the new life we look for lie in indigeneity? Perhaps we have to go back to the origin to find the way forward. Life comes from life. We are none of us the authors of our birth. Our authority must come from honoring those who have gone before and giving birth to what will come after. We honor what Paolo Knill has given us and look forward to what we can make out of his heritage, to a time when, "the fire and the rose are one."

**Stephen K. Levine**, Ph.D., D.S.Sc., REAT, is Emeritus Professor at York University and Founding Dean of Doctoral Studies in Expressive Arts Therapy at EGS. He is the author, co-author or editor of many books in the field of expressive arts therapy, including *Philosophy of Expressive Arts Therapy: Poiesis and the Therapeutic Imagination* (2019). He is the founding editor of the journals, *POIESIS: A Journal of the Arts & Communication*, co-editor of the Open Access journal, *Ecopoiesis: Eco-HumanTheory and Practice* ([www.en.ecopoiesis.ru](http://www.en.ecopoiesis.ru)), co-founder of IEATA (International Expressive Arts Therapy Association), and co-founder of The Create Institute in Toronto.

# Two Wings of One Flight: An Interview

Shaun McNiff

**S**tephen K. Levine (SKL): Shaun, I would like to take the opportunity to review your work in our field, to see where it is now and where it may be going. Although you've written about this before, I think it would be good if you could first address the origins of the field at Lesley University and your work with your collaborators there, especially Paolo Knill, the Founding Rector of EGS, whose recent death has affected us all so deeply.

**Shaun McNiff (SM):** In January of 1973, I taught the first art therapy course at Lesley, and the large turn-out of students resulted in other courses being offered immediately. In March of 1974, the student interest convinced Lesley to support me in establishing the Institute for the Arts and Human Development, from which the various graduate degree programs and the future of expressive arts therapy emerged. The name was influenced by the then current emphasis on developmental psychology—my interests were more in line with group and therapeutic community processes, together with the psychology of art, as developed by my mentor Rudolf Arnheim. The mission of what became known as the Arts Institute was committed to the integration of all forms of artistic expression in therapy, education, and other related fields. I was the lone non-adjunct faculty member and program director at Lesley, working with

an administrative assistant who, together with the first students, were very much part of what we might call the “founding” process. We collaboratively established the culture and commitment to new and imaginative ways of being in community with artistic expression. It could not have happened without the students and the more general innovative and interdisciplinary atmosphere that then permeated Lesley. It was an egalitarian community of creation, in sync with the transformative social and educational values of the era. The fact that I taught the first course just after turning twenty-six contributed to this leveling of roles which I have tried to sustain in my work, always striving to be a new learner.

As I have described in other writings, I was offered the opportunity to work as an art therapist in a large Massachusetts State Hospital three years before teaching the first Lesley course. I began as a visual artist; it was the patients who innately brought the full spectrum of artistic expressions to the studio in an unplanned way. I responded to them when they handed me a poem or story to read, sat down to play the piano, or offered a dramatic enactment. After two years I became closely involved with the Addison Gallery of American Art and its Director, Christopher Cook, who wanted to cooperate with our program. Chris brought staff and students from Phillips Academy together with the new portapak video technology, and they worked together with interns I had from the Boston Museum School, Gordon College, Harvard College, and the Harvard Divinity School. It was the beginning of what I have called a therapeutic community of art. As I have said, the presence of video was a key factor in eliciting the full spectrum of artistic action beyond just the visual arts—the medium was a big part of the “founding,” and this was expanded when we initiated a full-fledged program within the museum environment at the same time that the Arts Institute at Lesley began in 1974.

Another key factor in the development of our field was when the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health invited me in 1973 to represent what they called “Expressive Therapies” as a designation for all the arts in therapy. Of course, we went with their terminology. The department leadership at that time was progressive and focused on community mental health

and multidisciplinary training, all of which ended when the next administration brought back the silos of professions, but it worked for us and we received a large training grant that gave credibility to the young program.

Norma Canner, who had a dance and theatre background, was the first faculty member I recruited. She brought some needed "maturity" and taught us all how to do large group and community art. Norma was teaching in the early childhood area at Tufts University together with Paolo, Mariagnese Cattaneo and Elizabeth McKim. As I hoped, Norma was pivotal in attracting



L to R: Paolo Knill and Shaun McNiff, late 1970s, Colloquium.

other talented faculty. It turned out to be a bit of a theft from Tufts, but they were all either adjunctive or visiting. Paolo and Mariagnese were still based in Switzerland. They were both teaching music and cognitive development with a focus on Piaget and not working in the arts therapy area. Paolo was keenly interested in what we were doing but still not sure about making a commitment since he had positions in Europe. Mariagnese joined us in 1975 and taught music with children. The

Arts Institute really took off; Paolo came in 1976, and his ensuing commitment had a major impact on the future. He started by teaching music courses and in his characteristic way wanted to be part of the primary action of arts integration and therapy. As is well-known, in addition to teaching, he took classes with me, Norma, and others in the various arts therapies and started putting together his unique ways of integrating them. In the later 1970s, he did his doctoral dissertation at the Union Institute with this as a focus. He turned out to be the unplanned role model for the post-doctoral fellows program that involved you, Steve, in the 1980s and other

leaders in our field. It was a great period for doing the unusual. It could never happen today in higher education.

In concisely stating Paolo's contributions in the early years, I might say three things—he modelled lifelong learning in new and unfamiliar areas for faculty and students; he was a leader in fully committing to all the arts as manifested through his inspirational teaching; and he played a key role in recruiting students from Switzerland and Germany which ultimately furthered the internationalization of Lesley and the field. As I have said in jest, Paolo should have had a dual appointment in the admissions office, since he was such an effective recruiter, making major contributions to growth and momentum. And personally, he became my closest colleague and supporter in developing expressive arts therapy. Most of the faculty tended to slip back into specialized art forms, whereas Paolo always had my back with the whole art experience.

**SKL:** Are there significant differences between the way you and Paolo worked in the early years and subsequently?

**SM:** We have always talked and written about the work in different ways, but when it comes to the actual doing with a core commitment to art, we are, as I have said: two wings of one flight. Paolo affectionately emphasized our differences, calling himself the dark figure compared to me as the light. But in practice we were always intimate art-partners, in my view embracing both darkness and light. I speak often about how he was the one who helped me see the importance of full presence when working with individuals and groups. It seemed to come so naturally to him—presence in relation to



L to R: Shaun McNiff and Paolo Knill, April 2019, Annisquam. Paolo's last trip to MA.

persons, artworks, spaces, everything. Maybe it was also because he was older. This focus on presence became the bedrock of my practice. In the early days, he was able to teach full-time while I also had to serve as director and then dean. When I stopped doing this in 1988, I said that it was time to dedicate myself completely to the perfection of teaching, like he did.

When I revisit 47 years of close work with Paolo, perhaps the thing that best represents our shared values was an experimental art healing group that we conducted in the 1980s that we called the “healing lab.” For years we met weekly at Lesley for approximately three-hour sessions with students and graduates—including Margo Fuchs Knill—who were the ones who sustained the process. There was no plan to the sessions, just total improvisation and experimentation, and lots of sweat. We supported each other in doing new things and expanding our artistic expression...it was the place where I focused on percussion, voicework, trance, and movement that have since been fundamental to my work—I do not think I ever made a painting, drawing, or poem in the sessions. Paolo and I were total equals with everyone in the group. I see now how it was a systematic practice of empirical art-based research. I experimented with methods that I would ultimately bring to others. How could I ask people to do things that I do not do myself? We supported each person in taking risks, doing the unfamiliar, creating the work and future, based on each person’s uniqueness and the common features of artistic expression that became better known to us.

There are endless differences between us, which again corresponds to art. First, as I tell groups familiar with Paolo, I keep my shoes on in studios, wear jeans rather than cotton meditation pants, sit on a chair, and do not light candles! Painting is what I call the “trunk of my art tree,” and music is his. We are both grounded in the body, enactment, poetics, ritual, transcultural processes, community creation, and the sacred. There was lots of free play and moving around in his sessions where I tend to encourage more solitary art-making in groups, performance, and witnessing, albeit all grounded in what I call the movement basis of expression. He tended to give specific structures for creation, a bit of choreography, where I am a

minimalist—start by moving and keep moving. Paolo developed what might be called theories of practice with their accompanying terminology. This is probably our greatest difference. I see myself restoring and renewing core human processes. As a teacher, my message in keeping with making art has always been to find your unique form and communicate what you do as convincingly as possible to the world, as Paolo did. If mine is helpful to you, great, but only as part of the process of shaping yours. I suggest maintaining a creative tension in relation to borrowed methods and theories. As Hamlet advises, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

In the larger sense of the past, present, and future, I concentrate on “how” Paolo worked and his profound impact on me and others. Vivien Marcow Speiser, who was with the two of us since the 1970s in Cambridge, Israel, and Europe, said: “I always felt the intensity and vibrancy of how you influenced each other—the ways in which I loved being together with both of you, the playfulness, the absolute trust you both had in the process and in each other.” We need the third person in these close relationships to articulate what we may not see.

**SKL:** I’m also wondering about the future of our work. Of course, none of us can predict what will happen, but what would you like to see developing? What is your vision for the future of expressive arts? And further, how do you see yourself and your own work in the coming years?

**SM:** I am always reluctant to make predictions about the reliably unpredictable future, but I am confident about art healing based on human history—even though it is unfashionable today to explore transcultural and common human experience. As I say in the first line of *Art as Medicine*: “Whenever illness is associated with loss of soul, the arts emerge spontaneously as remedies, soul medicine.” I am more convinced of this every year and more committed. In addition to my international work, I keep having it affirmed by my own art-making. We have succeeded in bringing these processes and commitments to the world today. My objective is to

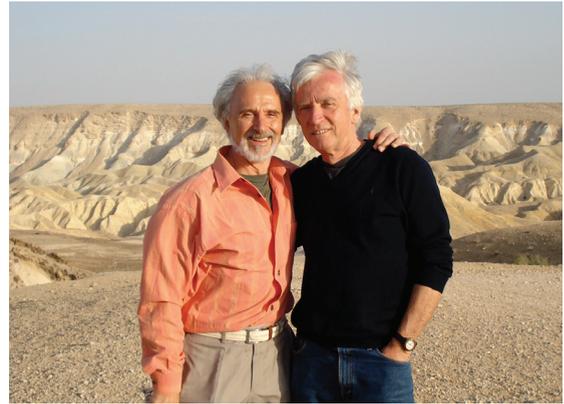
make artistic expression widely accessible as a form of public health and well-being.

As the work is popularized, there will be the introduction of stereotypical things. I will continue advocating for the primacy of artistic expression and depth in the work we do. I have been surprised since the publication of *Art-Based Research* in 1998, how this area has grown exponentially, becoming what I have called a second career. The corporate-industrial-academic complexes of research, professional credentialing and specialization, together with the fixed systems and language spinning off from them, have proven to be formidable threats to everything I value. As troubling as this is, the agitations have served as potent foils, just as art diagnosis and the misuse of interpretation has motivated my work from the start. Challenges like this are not going away. The key for me is to keep putting them to use in moving forward, now without Paolo. Training prescriptions inside and outside higher education are becoming more restrictive and ideological every year. Also, professional training in the arts therapies in the US has become oriented toward licensing, resulting in what I see as very little quality "art." The arts therapies have become exclusively identified with mental health counseling and its guild requirements, rather than the whole spectrum of health and well-being. I encourage those who want licenses to get them in one of the many health-related disciplines, including the arts therapies, and then pursue art and healing in keeping with my vision of universal access for all people and professions.

I have no idea what will happen next for me. I will hopefully enter what the Celts call a "thin place" between worlds. I know current difficulties and uncertainties are alchemical sources of the new. I have lots of desire to serve and create, and I like to think my game is intact. As I have learned, artistic expressions are always a few steps ahead of the reflecting mind, and they will take me, and all of us, where we need to go.



Shaun McNiff and Paolo Knill, Rome, 1986.



Shaun McNiff and Paolo Knill, Negev, 2009.

**Shaun McNiff's** books have been translated and read worldwide. He is an exhibiting painter and founding figure in expressive arts therapy and art-based research. The recipient of many honors including the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Journal of Applied Arts and Health and Honorary Life Member Award of the American Art Therapy Association, he was appointed as Lesley's first University Professor.

Interview conducted by Stephen K. Levine.

All photos published with permission from Shaun McNiff.

# The Field of Intermodal Expressive Arts During and After the Pandemic

## Notations: From Responding to Corresponding

Margo Fuchs Knill

**W**hat can be certain in times of uncertainty? And how can professionals in the field of expressive arts move forward with a sense of certainty within uncertainty?

Resilience during the pandemic

There is no hiding place  
I am riding the wave that hits us

I cannot take off, I am not a bird  
I fall when I fly, fall in a nest  
to breed and hatch the new.

First the pandemic seemed far away, happening outside of our country, Switzerland, impacting the others, not me, not us. Then our country was hit very strongly. Yet it felt still distant, until friends and colleagues got infected. As I am writing this article, Switzerland is in the grips of the



© Andreas Felger Kulturstiftung,  
[www.af-kulturstiftung.de](http://www.af-kulturstiftung.de)

second wave, worse than the first one. The BAG (Federal Office of Public Health Switzerland) has ordered a partial lockdown. Working at home is mandatory. Restaurants, museums, cinemas, sports centers and shops are closed for another six weeks.

Since the inception of EGS by the founding rector Paolo Knill, we have been challenged for the very first time by a pandemic. We professionals sit in the same boat as our clients, our students, and our colleagues worldwide. Nobody can draw on research or on previous experience, as when expressive arts professionals treat, for instance, clients who suffer from a trauma, depression, or ADHD. We know of our mutual responsibility to support well-being, worldwide. This calling is not new, yet the pandemic affirms its necessity even more strongly. At this point, I have to admit that we cannot predict where the field is going. Yet as an EXA professional, I can strengthen the conviction that the expressive arts can serve us to transform the lived challenges we face into an affirmative life force.

Today I woke up early  
day light in the room

I reach out and find  
a void  
I reach in and find  
my heart racing

don't we have words  
to talk to us  
don't we have words  
that pierce through fear

we are in it together  
together yet alone  
alone yet together.

Even though it might be too early to make predictions about new directions, we can phenomenologically observe obvious changes. As a poet I am specifically interested to look at our vocabulary.

### I. How the covid-19 pandemic changed our language

Our languages are dynamic, expressions evolve and adapt to new realities and situations, even during the covid-19 pandemic. Language is a lively companion evolving over time,

sometimes ahead of us. We constantly add new words, forget others, and forgotten words surface in a new context. Digital technology has accelerated our communication modes worldwide and we are creating more “content” than ever before, reaching a global audience.

Neologisms, the use of new words, were quickly coined during the pandemic and became quite popular, for example, social distancing, self-isolation, cocooning, excess mortality, home-office, homeschooling, lockdown, quarantine, covid-19-patient, triage. Also the vocabulary around our virtual activities booms with neologisms, such as the verbs, to instagram, to skype, to niksen (to do nothing), to netflixen (to chill); digital wellbeing, zoom-room, infodemic (overabundance of information). Neologisms around climate change and politics surfaced, such as fake news, inclusion, solastalgia (emotional distress caused by climate change).

Crises, such as a pandemic, as painful as they are, force us to be inventive. We develop new words in conjunction with new practices. Other interesting linguistic phenomena to observe are the portmanteaus where you blend two words, like smog (from smoke and fog). During the lockdown people can drink a “quarantini” or a “coronita,” have “coveideoparties,” or have a “coronacation.”

The post-covid-19 area will create neologisms and portmanteaus, too. Let's listen to them and act as co-creators rather than victims. I imagine a post-covid portmanteau *cheeco* that blends cheers and post-covid. *Cheeco* to the unknown in a fearless, even humorous way. *Cheeco* to a wellbeing that is nourished and cultivated by the trickster and the clown. He playfully reverses and acts innocently upon what is in front of his red clown nose to make discoveries. Through the arts, the not-knowing can be an inspiring resource rather than requiring us to fight against it. We can learn from the trickster who teaches us to wonder, and thus to stay open and lively.

As if it would be that easy  
to express myself, to say  
what I think and feel  
what I want and don't  
what I wish for -  
especially now  
as the pandemic stuffs me

with new words

while others are hushed up.

Every word has its story  
its rise and fall, its wedding,

wants to love and argue, and  
now and then a word manages

to do a somersault  
right into our hearts.

## II. Messengers and the third

Especially during this pandemic spring

when the buds hide in fear  
when the air stands still  
when the birds fall from their nests  
when the sun is hurt by the light

I need my double face  
eyes and ears of the wolf at night,  
to exorcise fear

Especially during this pandemic spring  
I need you, timeless angel,  
to collect the pits and pieces  
that will hold the world together  
again.

Where to turn to when all humans sit globally in the same mud of uncertainty that the pandemic created (even though there is now a vaccine)? The lockdowns offer enhanced emergency solutions. Online opportunities are booming, and at the same time people report suffering from online fatigue. Professionals who are teaching and practicing the expressive arts were quickly able to turn a challenge into a new opportunity by going online. Yet I am careful to not confuse an emergency solution with a desired development of the field of expressive arts. Rilke (1986) reminds us to have patience with everything unresolved.

I became interested in researching artists who lived around the beginning of the twentieth century during the pandemic of the Spanish flu. Interestingly enough, the pandemic was followed by the aesthetic innovation of the experimental avant-garde movement. After the Spanish flu, a strong movement of perturbing and freeing from given styles began. Poetry, for example, was broken down into its sound quality. Sound poetry and concrete poetry emerged. Old values and meanings didn't hold up anymore. Examples in terms of breaking down conventions were Eugen Gomringer, the father of concrete poetry, Ernst Jandl, the German writer Hugo Ball, to name a few. Rafael Alberti was a Spanish poet, a member of the Generation '27, a literary circle which experimented with avant-garde forms of art and poetry. During a time of anguish, loss and emptiness, Alberti speaks of irresistible forces of the spirit and of a kind of angelic revelation. A notion that something that has been unknown to us can suddenly and unexpectedly act as an eye-opener. That "it" arrives takes work, takes calling, takes shaping, and naming. He metaphorically describes the impact the called one can have when it arrived:

The one I loved came,  
the one I called.  
Not the one who sweeps defenseless skies,  
stars without shelter,  
moons without a home,  
snow.  
...  
Without hurting me, he came  
to dig a river bed of lovely light in  
my chest  
and to make my soul navigable.

–Rafael Alberti  
(translated by Margo Fuchs Knill)

In this example, the right angel came, the one he called. He flooded the chest with light and made the soul navigable. An interesting and unusual image that shakes up the notion of physical limits. What is striking about Rafael Alberti's angel? First, he had to be called, second (luckily), the right one came, the one he loved. Let's remember that angels can be terrifying, as Rilke describes. Shaun McNiff (1998) ascribes both the demons' as well as the angels' participation in the artistic process.

In Rafael Alberti's poem we find Eros, a love for the messenger, for the one who endows the chest with a river bed for the light, so the soul becomes navigable.

In the field of intermodal expressive arts, the angelic with its sudden and awesome appearance does not necessarily have a specific physicality or imagery. Paolo Knill talks about the space in between, the transmuted realm, as a reality to take seriously. Here belong "events" that cannot be precisely foreseen or planned and are not to be enforced, yet arise on their own intent. He coined the term the "third" for this emergent in the situation of two. Even though the third cannot be exactly determined, it can be compared to "pure presence," more precisely "presencing," or to the principle of uncertainty in modern physics (Knill 2004). Even though the third is merciful, it takes committed and disciplined work that it may emerge. We might look at this surprising event as well as a dynamic force and rename it accordingly as a verb: *to third*, or it is *thirding*. This thirding transmuted realm has received much attention, yet at the same time there is no third without a second and a first. Paolo Knill (2004) talks likewise about the mediated and the unmediated realm. The professional prepares, schedules, arranges, prescribes, does what can be done, needs to be done. At the same time, he/she pays attention to the professional relationship or the unmediated realm with its qualitative dimension. We cannot function outside of any relationship.

Fear belongs to us humans, as does joy, jealousy, anger, boredom, sadness. During crises such as a pandemic, securities shatter, fear tightens its grip. How to tame fear, so we, especially

health professionals, can do the job whenever possible? There is a basic rule in times of crisis: bring first yourself into safety and then (only then) you can help others. To tend to the mediated and unmediated realm asks for cultivating self-care. (And as we have seen, as long as a crisis cannot be turned into a difficulty, many health professionals had to overwork to save lives.)

*The fear*

Fear not, says the night  
to the day.

Join in joy, says the day  
to the night.

I am your consolation,  
says the light

I hold the moment  
colorfully bright.

For B.

In this poem we find three voices. A threefold component is personified; fear received a voice, as did the day and light. The "third" (the voice) can be helpful in breaking open the dialogical back and forth which may become an endless loop.

Rafael Alberti's angel is not somewhere above or behind the human being, he digs a river bed of light right into the chest to make the soul navigable. In a similar way the third is "thirding" among us, not outside. Paolo Knill (2004) used the following comparison: For where

two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst of them (Matthew: 18,20). And yet ... then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight (Luke 24.31). The third cannot be exactly determined because we cannot predict it. The third in its thirthing appears unexpectedly and affects us. We notice it when something changes (Knill 2004). The other metaphor Paolo Knill uses for the third is the emerging art work arriving in an encounter between two. What startles me is that all the examples illustrate that it takes a relationship, an encounter between two for the third to possibly arrive.

This we know: crisis—such as the pandemic—changed our lives, and changed, we go on living with the changing.

Still in quarantine, week three

We had to stop, all of us around the globe  
lock the door, stay indoors and put the TV on  
with the curve of the infected and dead,  
world-wide omen for the day

stillness in the pollution-free air  
fallen stars, each of them  
shows the way to the day  
where we hug and kiss again.

### III. The liberating force of the expressive arts

In creating art, as for instance in an expressive arts session, we are in an alternative reality actively in touch with the emerging. Through the arts we create otherness, an otherness that we cannot completely understand, that is existentially different from us (Fuchs Knill and Atkins 2020). Even though we don't know the future direction, we always know that with each shaping we create something uniquely new that is ahead of our full comprehension. It is our aesthetic responsibility to respect the new, not to try to pull it backwards and squeeze it into a known box in which we categorize the world.

*Credo*

I believe the word  
the Amen  
the "so be it" implanted–  
and I repeat the letters, the utterance,  
for the unspeakable other is always ahead of us.

–Margo Fuchs Knill (2020, p.112)

I am still intrigued by Hilde Domin's (1998) enigmatic notion of "I set the foot in the air and it carried." To set the foot in the air–what a paradoxical first step. The next step is unknown. However, the air holds. Gravity ceased to hold down and something else comes into play. *We set a foot in the air*, and "something is in the air" – this phrase also means that something is going to happen. Hilde Domin (1984) encourages us to have courage *and* to call, namely to be courageous enough to believe that the call can be received and heard by the other one, by an other.

There are many ways to shape the call. The psalm is for instance an ancient calling that prevailed. Moreover, a psalm works as a directed call and response. A call itself is void—it needs to be heard and responded to in order to have its impact. This is intrinsically given by the composition of a psalm in its poetic responsorial form. Each first line is followed by a response throughout. Types of psalms might be songs of praise or hymns, of individual or communal lament, or of thanksgiving. Originally the psalms were not reduced to written poetry, they were songs.

Phenomenologically speaking, the ending (such as that of a pandemic) corresponds with its new beginning, and we are amidst. In my work as an expressive arts professional I like to include the poetic corresponding to a new “beginning,” no matter how old I am, or how old a client is. There is – even it might be – a placebo effect, something strong about the notion of “beginning,” such as a new year, a new week, another year after a birthday, the first moment out of the hospital, the first day of spring, the first time without wearing a mask after the pandemic.

As an expressive arts professional and poet, I stay with the practice of (almost) daily writing. During the pandemic, I developed a series called “resilience poems.” When my beloved husband Paolo Knill passed away last fall, I continued with resilience poems and gave myself a clear frame. The notion of resilience adds a third element while allowing us to face what is fallen or lost. Resilience as a persona has the writer speaking back and gets the poem back on its feet. This gives the writer the permission to face the challenge, the difficulty, the thing that frightens us, such as a pandemic, a loss, an illness. And the poem wants the writer to find the twist. At least on paper, the writer is saved, a first step in the air is made. The following resilience poem speaks of a sense of new beginning during the pandemic, thus we might say it speaks of a “nevertheless hope.”

*New Year's Day*

The bread tastes sweeter,  
the neighbor smiles  
a little longer than usual.  
I can begin all over, I tell myself,  
open an empty agenda.

But the pandemic remains  
and has us endure uncertainty.

And still, who would I be without  
having held the glass in my hand  
toasting to the bells,  
their good bye and hello

the same bells my parents heard,  
and parents before  
the same bells that warned of danger  
and rang for peace  
these same bells want us  
to be safe and saved.

–Margo Fuchs Knill

Calling and responding until it corresponds. This kind of third or thirding liberates us for a second from our common sense of space and time. Space and the space in between are intertwined. Time isn't anymore an issue, there is no what is first or second, nor who went first, and who was last – when it is corresponding, another sense of time is at work, like a timelessness within time. *Tell Me, She Said* is a beautiful responsorial poem by Sally Atkins (2018, p.133) that gives the caller and the responder a voice. The story-teller confirms that it matters what we did and do. Not necessarily because we are important, but because we are in this story together.

...

Listen:

In the silence between there is music

In the spaces between there is story.

Pay attention.

We are listening each other into being.

–Sally Atkins (2005)

#### IV. Rite of Passage

We usually connect rites of passage with ceremonies marking a transition in someone's life, like marriage, or the transition from childhood to adulthood. But what about transitioning from a crisis like the pandemic to a healthy, pandemic-free life? It took me a while to realize that something we might call a virtual rite of passage is already happening worldwide, for example, the upbeat song "Jerusalema," which South African DJ Master KG and the singer

Nomcebo Nkwanyana made during the pandemic 2019-2020. People around the world dance to the song, and these intermodal videos are shown online. Dancers are nurses and doctors in hospitals, nuns and monks do the dance in the courtyard, the sellers of a super-market dance on the parking lot, tourists at the beach, pilots and stewards on the airplane runway, policemen on sidewalks, firefighters, kids, school classes, people in the office, even paraplegics in wheelchairs dance to "Jeruselema," no matter what age, profession or cultural background somebody might have. The video encourages everybody to dance and has had over 300 million views. The choreography is easy to learn, similar to the low skill-high sensitivity approach in expressive arts. A few steps can be repeated, and each dance ensemble does its own exploration within the same given frame.

The call of the lyrics by Nomcebo Nkwanyana is simple and clear: "Jerusalem, my home. / Rescue me, / Join me, / Don't leave me here!" The repetition is doubled, not only is the phrase "save me" repeated within the same line, also the stanza is repeated.

...  
Save me, save me, save me,  
Don't leave me here,  
Save me, save me, save me,  
Don't leave me here!

—Nomcebo Nkwanyana

Nothing else can be more energizing than dancing, dancing to a prayer that has a ripple impact worldwide. I have no stronger word for this autopoietic emergence than to say—a third arrived. People (of the global village) are listening and dancing each other into being. New directions in expressive arts? This is a beautiful example of how the notion of "community art"

is expanding to a global virtual community art. Let's build on it. Let's respond to the save me, save me—yes, I save you, yes I save you, yes, we save each other, yes, we are, we are saved.

Paolo Knill would say—the expressive arts are not exotic, they are mainstream. He is right.

## References

Atkins, S. & Snyder, M. (2018) *Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Domin, H. (1984) *Abel steh auf*. Stuttgart: Reclam.

Domin, H. (1992) *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag. (Original work published 1959.)

Domin, H. (1999) *Der Baum blüht trotzdem*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag.

Fuchs Knill, M. and Atkins, S. (2020) *Poetry in Expressive Arts. Supporting Resilience through Poetic Writing*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Knill, P. J., Barba, H. N., and Fuchs, M. N. (2004) *Minstrels of Soul: Intermodal Expressive Therapy*. Toronto: EGS Press. (Original work published 1995.)

Levine, S. K. (2019) *Philosophy of Expressive Arts Therapy*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

McNiff, S. (1998) *Trust the Process*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.

Ohlbaum, I. (2000) *Aus Licht und Schatten. Engelbilder*. München: Knesebeck. (Original work published 1994.)

Oliver, M. (2006) *Thirst*. Poems. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rilke, R. M. (1993) *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. M. D. Herter Norton. New York: W.W. Norton. (Original work published 1934.)

## Links

Alberti, R in: Norwich, J. J. (1990). *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia Of The Arts*. USA: Oxford University Press. Accessed on 01/27/2021 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafael\\_Alberti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafael_Alberti)

Nomcebo Nkwanyana / Kgaogelo Moagi in: Source of the lyrics: Lyricfind.com. Songwriter: Khaogelo Moagi / Nomcebo Nothule Nkwanyana. Accessed on 02/06/2021 at <https://lyric-stranslate.com/en/jerusalem-jerusalem.html-0>

**Margo Fuchs Knill** is a professor, psychotherapist, expressive arts professional and poet. She is the Dean of the Division of Arts, Health and Society at EGS, and a member of the original Core Faculty of the European Graduate School (EGS). She was an Assistant Professor at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA. Margo works in private practice and teaches expressive arts internationally at training institutes in Europe, Russia, Asia, Latin America and the US. She is the author of numerous poetry books, such as *Von nun an* and has contributed numerous book chapters on poetry, poetics and expressive arts. She is co-author of *Minstrels of Soul: Intermodal Expressive Therapy*, as well as a contributor to *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy: Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives*. Her latest book together with Sally Atkins is titled *Poetry in Expressive Arts: Supporting Resilience through Poetic Writing*.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*3 January 2021*

How to keep going?

The poem asks a good question,  
the answer inside it,  
like all good questions.  
The prize there from the beginning  
though we don't always see it.

Keep going keep going,  
the train rumbles the answer as it rolls,  
keep going keep going  
until you stop

# Looking Back and Looking Forward

Daria Halprin

I find myself unable to think about the future without remembering the past. There is a new his/her/their story called, “The year of the pandemic” including days of loss, fear, rage and disconnection, and yet also strangely filled with unexpected gain. Loss and gain. Those of us privileged to have our basic needs taken care of had time to suspend, pause, reflect, reconsider, stay home. We even welcomed it.

A sudden wave of a new way to reach out and connect began to swell through Zoom. We were faced with the imperative to decenter our normal ways of going about business and, if we wanted to keep our expressive arts work alive, to transform into a virtual community. It has been a pandemic year. COVID, Black Lives Matter, Climate Crisis and far-right extremism have catalyzed us into a time of radical action and reaction, some of it dark and destructive, some of it inspiring, innovative, creative and compassionate.

What needs to be remembered to envision a possible future? I remember the last time, a year ago March, when I hugged my grandchildren. I remember the day, March 13<sup>th</sup>, when I sent the group of international training students home from the Tamalpa studio, not realizing

then that a very long time of painful closings and losses lay ahead. I remember July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of EGS. I was to make a keynote presentation and was struggling with how to honor the celebration in the midst of the pandemic, in the face of so much suffering. I remember what a joy and a blessing it was to connect with old friends, teaching colleagues, students and Paolo on Zoom that day.

Here is the keynote presentation I did that day:

EGS changed me—I found colleagues who became friends and playmates—brothers and sisters in the work to experiment and learn with. I found a most remarkable mentor in Paolo, who challenged me, supported and urged me on in what I was doing. I had looked forward to making the return pilgrimage to Saas Fee, which I first made 25 years ago. In March 2020, our shared reality changed dramatically. In a matter of days, I had to come to the decision to take Tamalpa online, a situation frankly I could not imagine. EGS followed with the same summer school decision. It was heartbreaking and frightening. Could we do it? Would it be accepted? It was a radical decentering movement—an aesthetic response to an unexpected challenge we knew nothing about and were completely unprepared for.

It is a testament to our passion for the work and the value we place on community connection that together we made it work, a demonstration of our commitment to overcome, to persevere and to keep the practice of expressive arts alive and accessible. And we were not alone. As things closed down, as the impending sense of danger grew and, with it, the realization that a return to normal was not going to be soon, a wave of artistic offerings came online. It was as if the arts arrived to act as a healing balm, to keep our spirits up, to engender a sense of connectivity. In the midst of shutdown, loss and threat to our health and way of life, this awesome flood of creative art became accessible. Beauty found its way into the ruins.

I struggled with how to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with EGS in the midst of the complex

life-threatening challenges we were facing. The celebration needed to feel meaningful, relevant and connected with our reality. I asked myself, how can we celebrate in the face of the collective trauma we are experiencing, as we live with the unknown and fear of COVID, confront the divisions of systemic racism, experience and witness the terrifying assault on civil liberties and democracy underway? How can we be responsive/responsible to the real challenges of these times? How to give space for Praise and Lament today. Would I dare to invite the shadow of the 3-pronged pandemic and all our feelings about it into this celebratory moment together? How could I not? "Dance with what is," I said to myself, that's the medicine and the way forward.

I returned to the principles of our approach to find a ground that would feel solid and flexible enough to provide space for a possible interconnection between the summer session themes that year, Reconciliation, Resilience, Celebration, and the pandemic. I returned to the core principles of the work itself for strength to take the risk in choosing this direction and for trust in the creative rebound and the life-affirming energy that I know the medicine of the expressive arts always provides, particularly in the face of difficulty, distress and trauma.

James Baldwin once said; "Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Community dance and art-making experiences give groups and individuals an Expressive Arts way to name and face the shadow. In connecting the language of body and movement with language that names the current external challenges, we develop creative enactments and artworks as acts of resilience and artful protest against how we have internalized or felt consumed by what is happening around us. We make artistic place for the bodily sensations, feelings, emotions and images we are holding.

The process of art-making is resiliency in action. It encourages the capacity to confront, to express, and to rebound when experiencing challenge and difficulty. It empowers individuals, groups and communities. It increases and supports the range of play, the ability to be spontaneous and flexible, and to take risks. It recognizes the inalienable right of all emotions and

provides productive healthy means of expression. It expands the ability to be in touch with our sensations, feelings, emotions, and images. It gives us new ways to tell old stories and to create new stories of reconciliation to embody. It strengthens the ability to respond with awareness and creativity, to be present and to work with what arises. It celebrates life, all of it, not just the easy and comfortable and familiar. It opens doors and borders that were guarded, shut and locked down. It opens new territories of experience, identity and communication.

Expressive Arts thrives on diversity. It is a universal language, endowing people with a sense of individual, group and community visibility and voice. Expressive Arts embodies a basic human right.

On March 13<sup>th</sup> when we first received the stay at home/shelter in place, order and external activity as we knew it closed, I saw photographs in the New York Times with the headline: "For the first time in decades, the sky is clear over Paris, Hong Kong, New York. Los Angeles, Moscow, Beijing." The images were stunning, the sky clear, pure, the streets empty, as if everything had taken a peaceful meditative pause, giving the earth a chance to renew herself. I was struck and deeply touched by how quickly the polluted skies recovered. These images, like a calm before the storm, were in stark contrast with the threat of the virus and the growing intensity of social divisiveness and violence.

The metaphor of the togetherness of Praise and Lament, presented by the poet Rilke, in his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, calling back what has been lost and creating new stories of renewal, feels particularly fitting as we endeavor to find refuge, hope, beauty and a way to re-emerge. We are quite privileged to have our practice and community of Expressive Arts Therapy to lean into. We will need to think about how to contribute our work to the demands and the necessary healing process ahead and to stay connected to the light, to the spirit of our life-force.

March 2021: Here and now! As I reflect back, after almost a year now, much has changed,

and much has not. The challenges remain present. In America, the shadow grew even darker. But at the same time, we now begin to sense some relief, we imagine a lifting and feel a faint glimmer of light. There is talk of hope and what a return to “normalcy” or a new normal might look like. However, that which has ailed us collectively persists.

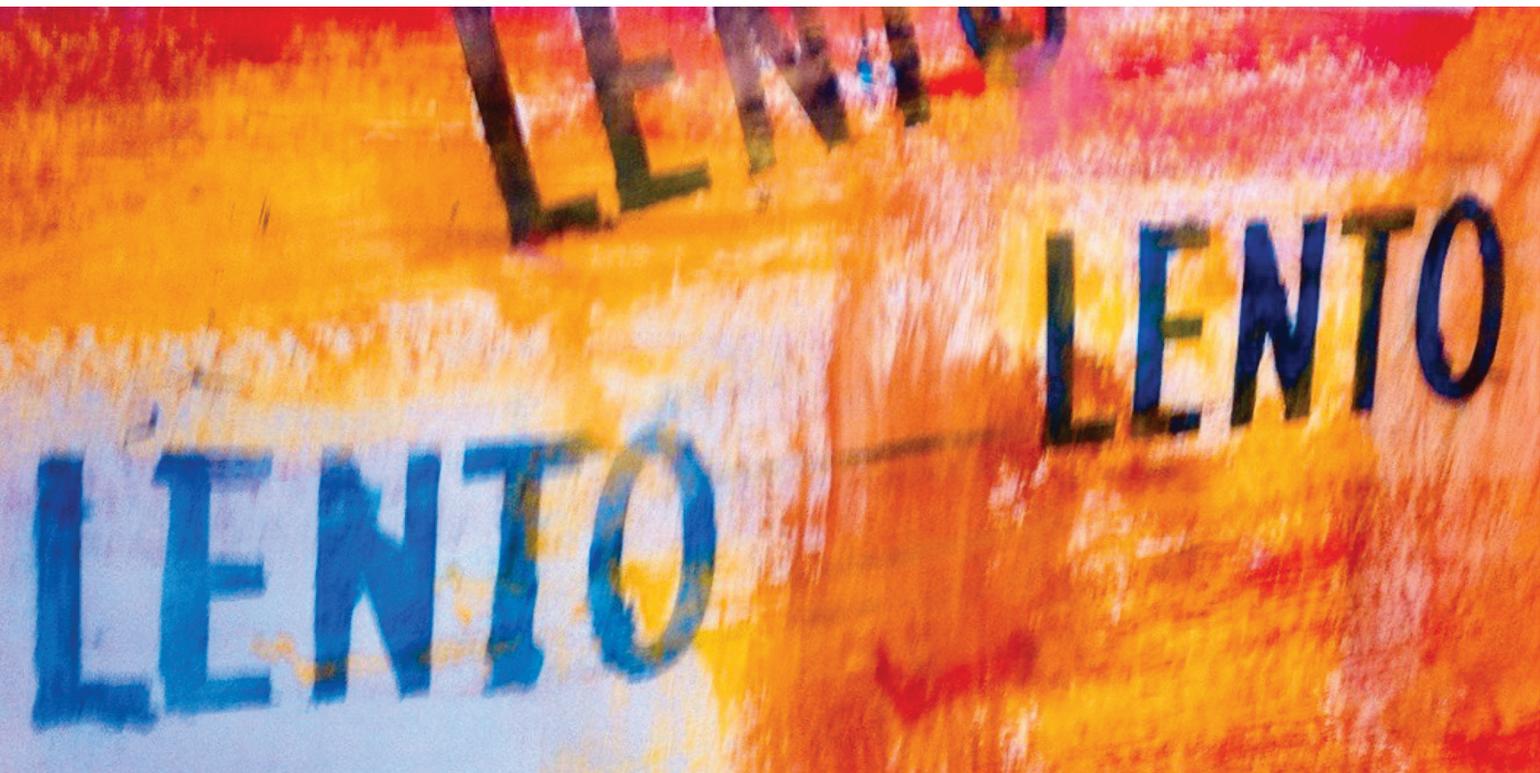
What is the harvest from this process? Transitioning the movement-centered expressive arts approach at Tamalpa to online public workshops and training programs has been an extraordinary challenge that has demanded sacrifice and yet bears unexpected fruits. More people, less expense, opens the doors to a level of inclusivity and diversity that is proving invaluable. The absence of physically being together in person, of seeing, hearing, exploring in movement, witnessing, co-creating up close in the body of the group is difficult.

The new word is “hybrid,” a bricolage approach, more improvisational, crossing the boundaries of states, national borders and time zones. While I grieve the losses and make peace with the inevitable sacrifices, I welcome and celebrate the blessing of being able to continue our work in a new studio online. It feels important to enjoy and immerse ourselves in what we have now—it feels like an important way of recovering from all the trauma. I have given up my pattern of strategizing and planning for the future. This year has taught me something about letting go, adapting, and going with it. There is something beautiful about that!

**Daria Halprin**, MA, CAGS, REATH, RSMTH, originally trained as a dancer and performance artist. Co-Founding Director of Tamalpa Institute, she is a teacher, therapist and author, directing training programs in movement-based expressive arts education, coaching and therapy. Published writings include, *The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy* (2003); *Expressive Arts Therapy: Principles and Practices* (1999); *Dance, Somatics and Spirituality* (2014).



From the performance: *Pods*, (2017).  
Photo: Rick Chapman, Tamalpa Institute



Martín Zavala, *Lento*, 2010, acrylic

**delay**

hand-wash your diapers

shake the bliss of detail,  
present in every corpuscle of light

slow down your pace  
count the fallen leaves of the poinciana tree

sigh deeply for every death  
every indolent scream in the street

to be a statue in the middle of the crowd

sweeping clean every stepping stone

gathering grain after grain

adding the silence

de-laying

**Odette Amaranta**

# Demorar<sup>\*</sup>

Odette A. Vélez V.

Only in birth and death does one step out of time; the Earth stops its rotation and the trivialities on which we waste the hours fall to the ground like glitter dust. When a child is born or a person dies, the present splits in half and lets you glimpse for an instant the crack of the truth: monumental, burning and impassive. Never does one feel so authentic as edging those biological frontiers: you have a clear awareness of living something very great.

(Montero, 2013, p. 9).

## Something very great

Tremendous moment in the history of mankind. The planetary pandemic of disease by Covid-19 takes us out of our usual time, stops our usual movement, and trivialities fall to make room for what is important. The virus' deadly presence and the confinement splits the present and let us glimpse truths we did not want to see. We live in an unprecedented time that

---

\* *Demorar* is a Spanish word that can be translated as "delay."

requires a receptive and sensitive attitude to the world in order to appreciate what is revealed before us.

Studies by various international organizations related to health and the environment<sup>1</sup>, state that this situation stems from climate change generated by human activity that has altered the natural cycle of balance on the planet. These investigations suggest that different practices carried out in the name of the economy in the short term (intensive deforestation, polluting agriculture, abuse of fossil fuels, uncontrolled exploitation of resources, etc.) have had devastating effects on different ecosystems and have affected the environmental barrier that protects us against the transmission of viruses between different species. Global warming, as well as multiple damage to the soil and the water cycle, have generated movements of human populations and other species, including their viruses. Apparently, what is happening is a consequence of the climate change that we have been insistently warned about. Life on a large scale is seeking its own harmony; just as Covid-19 is a deadly virus for us, so humans are for the planet; the difference is that the ancient wisdom of the earth will find a way to survive our thanatic way of inhabiting it, while we may not.

One thing is clear in this year of pandemic: despite the power of our destructive actions, we do not dominate nature and, although we are part of it, we really only know her a little bit. Not even the scientific advances we boast of control the progress of new viruses. One more blow falls on our modern and "crowned" ego, on the rational paradigm as the foundation of all knowledge. Our vulnerability is more visible than ever. We are not the "superior" animals that we dream of being, not only because we are also governed by the unconscious (Freud), but because there are viruses that, suddenly, endanger our continuity. However much we advance,

---

1 Information collected from interviews, reports and articles published in the last year in different media (El País, The Conversation, La Vanguardia, etc.), in which various professionals (Fernando Valladares, Jeremy Rifkin, María Neira, Peter Daszak, etc.) reflect on the subject.

we will always be a fragile species. In times of Covid-19, existential uncertainty, a condition of our life, is largely exposed and revealed more easily.

Difficult picture. A transcendent transformation in human consciousness led by new generations needs to save our species and also other endangered creatures. Building a different relationship with the planet, based on a sustainable development model that preserves the natural balance (economic and technological reorganization, change from oil/coal to solar/wind energy, environmental education, etc.), is urgent.

Take a deep breath.

If we wish to continue living, we must pay more careful attention to nature, much wiser than all our technologies. Listen attentively to that universe of which we are just an ephemeral and insignificant particle. There are no certainties about how to continue living, but there is the certainty that a different effort is needed to recreate a more serene and friendly coexistence with the cycles of the environment. The birds and the sea know it better than we do. I want to believe that we can re-found a new way of inhabiting the Earth. Where to start?

### **Pause and contemplation time**

Our ambitiously excessive and accelerated production and consumption has caused catastrophes in the ecosystem. "Modern capitalism generates extraordinary wealth, but at the cost of devouring natural resources more quickly than that with which mother nature is capable of replacing them" (Honoré, 2017, p. 16). We cannot go on as if nothing has happened. *Stop.*

There is no point in continuing at the same hurried pace and pretending to adapt to the new living conditions that the pandemic entails. *Stop.*

We need a different *t i m e t o r e a l i z e* the magnitude of the events and how they are affecting us in order to imagine new solutions. The state of emergency calls for quick

action to prevent more deaths, but it also requires calm and thoughtfulness to make good decisions. It could be dangerous to continue demanding of ourselves only urgent “productivity” and fulfillment of tasks, when we are unsettled by the turmoil and we need profound changes in our way of life.

Speed and slowness are rhythmic polarities that inhabit us. In themselves, neither is better than the other; it is rather that both can coexist, according to vital needs. Rhythm is constantly changing. It is not a matter of living in acceleration mode or procrastinating, but it is clear that humanity has been living in time’s excessive acceleration for some hundreds of years. As a result, more and more people are beginning to reject the mandate that faster is always better. There is already talk of a global movement in favor of slowness (Slow Movement<sup>2</sup>) that does not seek to declare war on speed but rather to act slowly or quickly according to what makes sense or is more convenient; in other words: to go to meet what in music is known as *tempo giusto* (different according to each living being, event or process).

The pandemic context undoubtedly needs to weave action and contemplation so that the ecological revolution that we need takes on meaning. Because only after a sensitive encounter with events, is the rational effort to understand and evaluate possible. We need to act without haste avoiding the constant state of alert in which we live that makes us lose the ability to recognize vital sensations and needs. Action creates experience, but only when it is followed by a state of stillness does it make sense (Tojla and Speciani, 2006). Making the right and quick decisions also means stopping, something that we have not done, despite the fact that infor-

---

2 Honoré states that this is an attitude with antecedents in the 19th century, the machine era of the industrial revolution where time scheduling became a way of life, where people resisted the rush to speed up (2017, p.26). This movement offers a middle way between *la dolce vita* and the dynamism of the information age.

mation about the serious situation of the planet has existed for decades. It is not easy to resist the urge to go faster and

s t o p

especially when it comes to production and consumption, or when health urgency prevents it. A pandemic is, by definition, a pressing issue because it affects everyone's health, but it is also important to remember that it does not affect everyone equally. Unfortunately, some people have a very difficult time not only because their work involves great danger when caring for infected patients or seeking solutions for entire countries from various technical fields, but also because they do not have basic rights, due to economic and social inequalities that have historically been entrenched in their countries. While some of us enjoy a privileged situation because we have guaranteed basic rights (house, food, work, education, etc.) and we do not risk our health on a daily basis, doctors, nurses and other professionals do.

I think of thousands of people in my country, Peru, waiting for days in the street to be treated in hospitals or going out to work to earn their daily sustenance and not having "the luxury," like me, of remaining confined in their homes and teleworking. So many people paralyzed, without formal employment, businesses closed, projects cancelled, families whose breadwinners have disappeared. The drama of fighting for the most precious thing in life: o x y g e n. Vulnerability. Social, economic and human costs are exacerbated. Is it possible to pause in such a context? Has contemplation not become a privilege of the few?

Humanly, we all deserve moments of

q u i e t n e s s

and breathing

to sustain what we are living. Suspended moments where linear time disappears and cyclical time appears, where the slow and sustained perception of what life brings is not a waste of time but a valuable and creative time of learning and healing. A quiet time to begin to do the slow exercise of observing the images around us, for example, to look at the physiognomy of Covid-19 as it appears before our senses. To perceive and bear witness from there, from the phenomenon and its aesthetically sensitive qualities as the symptoms come alive in our body and in the soma of the world: "Where there is pathology there is psyche, and where there is psyche there is *eros*" (Hillman, 1999, p. 182). To stop and, from our capacity of *aisthesis*, to perceive every detail slowly, with attention and patience, with a new sense of smell or animal common sense capable of sensitively perceiving the *anima mundi* present in every manifestation of life. Because everything, even Covid-19, attests to itself from the image it presents. What qualities of this disease can we sensitively appreciate and how do they affect us?

### The crowned virus and the aesthetics of slowness

Just like dreams, symptoms are also images to be contemplated, described and known as possible allies that come with important messages to recover wellness. In addition to attending to the physical plane of the disease according to the recommendations of authorized health institutions, it could also help us to attend to the phenomenology of the symptoms to restore health. What are the symptoms when suffering from Covid-19? What do they prevent us from doing? What do they impose us to do? According to Dethlefsen and Dahlke (1993)<sup>3</sup>, the answers to these two questions often reveal the central theme of the disease. If we pay attention to the hindrances, we can appreciate that this virus, in general: limits closeness and physical contact, stops the movements of accustomed routines, restricts contact with dirt, hinders normal breathing, leaves us, at times, tired and breathless. If we observe the impositions, we see that: it demands distance, social isolation and distance from crowds; it forces us to be in greater pause and rest; it demands great care in cleanliness; it incites us to breathe in a dif-

---

3 German researchers and doctors, specialists in interpretive medicine.

ferent way, sometimes generating greater silence; it interrupts the usual flow of our daily activities, pushing us to be different in the day-to-day.

Distance. Pause. Silence. Cleanliness. Breathing. These are just some of several manifestations to consider. Powerful words that, probably, come to remind us of something we need to recover our balance. Do not touch each other, slowing down, stopping some machines, enough for emptiness and silence to reign in the cities together with birdsong, enough for the air and water to be purified and other animal species to occupy the space in a protagonist way, enough for the planet to rest and clean itself. As far as possible, stay longer at home, hibernating in solidarity, also making a deep cleaning, literally and symbolically. To take care of ourselves. To learn to communicate and bond in a different way, one where the attention we give and receive can be experienced as a tender caress capable of sustaining pain, sadness, fear, frustration and anger, among other difficult emotions that arise in this difficult scenario. The name of this disease also gives us an image: it is the virus that has the crown and not us, it is nature that reigns and not us. To remember our vulnerability with humility.

The symptomatology of Covid-19 deserves to be listened to with a calm aesthetic curiosity. From a holistic perspective of health and illness, it is not only necessary to pay medical attention to the symptoms, but also to observe aesthetically in order to better understand and respond from different dimensions (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, etc.). The phenomenological gaze, a great pillar of the expressive arts, offers the possibility of honoring images and knowing their expression from a prolonged contemplative gaze that welcomes, here and now, the unknown. It is a slow and continuous approach, difficult for those who are busy under the rush of the labor imperative in a scenario of health emergency but also for those who, beyond the pandemic, always work under the tyrannical logic of productivity and efficiency; less difficult for those who know how to delay, "ripening like the tree which does not force its sap and stands confident in the storms of spring without the fear that after them may come no summer" (Rilke, 1996, p.34), because, as the poet says, summer always comes

for those who know how to wait patiently.

To contemplate, according to the philosopher Han, you need enough distance and enough proximity, it is necessary to learn to linger, but in times of rush people do not have time to deepen our perception, we prefer action, the enjoyment of the immediate, and we lack serenity enough to verify that all things, no matter how small, are intertwined:

Only in the depths of Being does a space open up in which all things come together and communicate with each other. This cordiality of Being allows you to feel the aroma of the world. (...) Only when one stops to contemplate, from aesthetic recollection, do things reveal their beauty, their aromatic essence. (Han, 2015, pp. 73-75)

The sensory encounter with images and their beauty, so important in the work of expressive arts, challenges us to recognize the pathology in the psyche of the cosmos, to hear its suffering, to perceive its manifestations as something animated, just as the ancestral cultures did and how, later, different thinkers and artists took up again in various ways: "... the de-souled world can once again be en-souled and speak to us its suffering without the fear of being reduced to projection and neurosis" (Faire , 2017, p.248). Our capability to respond aesthetically must awaken and allow the re-enchantment of the cosmos and the restitution of its soul. The aesthetic and imaginal heart of our work as facilitators of expressive arts challenges us to go slowly, to pay attention to each of the qualities of images (color, texture, taste, etc.), to perceive them with precision and to create from an attentive and intimate observation (what Hillman designates as *notitia*). We are invited to permanently sharpen our senses and to be present, patiently and humbly, in the encounter with the images of the arts, of play, of rituals and, in general, of nature. Images, earthly angels connecting sensory perception and imagination, injecting strength into our lives (McNiff, 2004). Valuable portals of vitality today when death is so present.

The phenomenon of the pandemic, from some of its images, summons us to be and to be

on earth in close connection with everything, far from the usual instrumental and technological attitude, allowing the body to return and slowly explore the realm of things to invoke, "... the attitude of the wildness: an attentive wonder that draws us into the mystery, the unpredictability, the many voices of the more-than-human world around us that have been silenced for too long" (Stoknes, 2017, p. 260). It is a call to review, individually and collectively, our historical relationship with time. An invocation to appreciate the beauty of slowness and to reflect on our *tempo giusto* to eat, walk, heal, love, create, work, play, rest, do rituals, connect with our own body and with everything that inhabits the orb. It is a journey to recover serenity, especially for those of us who are addicted to speed. It is time to create a sustainable ecosystem, an ecological, resilient and viable civilization, respectful of the various manifestations of life. It is time to sow *ecopoiesis*, what the native peoples have always done: to know that we are part of nature and, together with it, to shape the world and the life that inhabits us, kindly open to its aesthetics and beauty.<sup>4</sup> It is an adventure in which we should remember the wise words of our teacher, Paolo Knill: "Don't force it and don't resist it... let it happen."

Perhaps vindicating the slowness, the delicate attention to each image and the aesthetic response to its details can be seen as a privilege for the few or as a luxury in the midst of the ecological catastrophe that we are suffering—or in the midst of societies in which the basic rights of the majority are not fulfilled. But it would be good to consider that, "Perhaps events accelerate more when they are least appreciated; perhaps events reach all the more catastrophic dimensions and intensities when less attention is paid to them" (Hillman, 1999, p.166). Therefore, it is vital to recognize contemplation and to pause, not only as part of our right to rest and to enjoy free time, within the free and healthy life that we deserve as people, but as indispensable companions in the attempt to recover planetary "well-being." It is not fair that the earth suffers the damage that we have generated. Befriending ourselves with slowness and contemplation can be a good start so that, as the Amazonian master Ino Moxo says, we may recover a little the contentment of our existence.<sup>5</sup>

---

4 Kopytin, A., Levine, S.K. and Alexeyev, S. (2020).

5 Calvo, C. (2015).

## References

Berman, M. (2001). *El reencantamiento del mundo*. Santiago: Cuatro Vientos.

Calvo, C. (2015). *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo*. Lima: Peisa.

Dethlefsen, T. y Dahlke, R. (1993) *La enfermedad como camino. Un método para el descubrimiento profundo de las enfermedades*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores.

Faire, R. (2017) What do you care about? Arts Therapies in Support of Civil Courage in a "World Gone Slightly Mad." In: Levine, S. K and Levine, E. G. (Eds.) *New Developments in Expressive Arts Therapy. The Play of Poiesis*. (pp. 244-257). London: JKP.

Han, B.-C (2015) *El aroma del tiempo. Un ensayo filosófico sobre el arte de demorarse*. Barcelona: Herder.

Hillman, J. (1999). *El pensamiento del corazón. Anima mundi: el retorno del alma al mundo*. Madrid: Siruela.

Honoré, C. (2017) *Elogio de la lentitud*. Barcelona: RBA

Kopytin, A., Levine, S.K and Alexeyev, S. (2020) Editorial: In search of a new benchmark, in search of ecopoiesis. *Ecopoiesis: eco-human theory and practice*. <https://en.ecopoiesis.ru/>

McNiff, S. (2004). *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Montero, R. (2013). *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

Rilke, R. (1996). *Cartas a un joven poeta*. Barcelona: Obelisco.

Stoknes, P. (2017) Why Eco-philosophy and Expressive Arts? In Levine, S. K. and Levine, E. G. (Eds.) *New Developments in Expressive Arts Therapy: The Play of Poiesis*. (pp.258-260). London: JKP.

Tolja, J. and Speciani, F. (2006) Tiempo, Trabajo y Ritmo de vida. In: *Pensar con el Cuerpo. Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo extreme*.

**Odette Amaranta Vélez Valcárcel**, Professor at TAE Peru institute and the European Graduate School, PhD candidate in expressive arts therapy at EGS. Poet, psychologist and writer, Odette accompanies learning, creation and healing processes through the expressive arts and Bach flowers. She has taught at several universities in Peru. Author of poetry books, co-author and editor of books on education.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*5 January 2021*

Sink back into that  
from which all things come  
source/resource

To breathe is to speak again  
a rhythm like living and dying

in-breath out-breath  
in-spiration ex-piration  
speech silence

The desire to hold on  
the need to let go

To go on

# Voice (mis)recognition: A Pandemic Decentering Praxis

Carrie MacLeod

I jumped onto the Zoom bandwagon when COVID-19 catapulted the world into a socially-distanced reality. The strong currents of cyberspace carried my one-dimensional body through the fluctuating tides of pandemic highs and lows. The lockdowns around the world transported many of us into Zoom rooms with little warning. I experienced trepidation and delight as I marvelled at how an online “*Circus Enzoomble*” came to life at the Expressive Arts Institute in Vancouver. The alternative world of Zoom-landia offered a timely antidote to the absurd realities that were upon us. The online summer school at the European Graduate School also created a range of peak experiences for students and faculty, despite our inability to gather in the Swiss Alps. We connected our disparate worlds through a virtual portal in the spirit of poiesis.

This appeared to be a formidable solution until a recurring case of shingles invaded my eyes. The uneven refraction of light emanating from the Zoom grid triggered this response, one that could lead to blindness if left untreated. The ophthalmologist boldly prescribed minimal computer time for an indeterminate period. I swallowed hard and began to wonder if I could teach and facilitate Expressive Arts through my non-visual senses. Yet, I needed to look

at the potential of sight loss straight in the eye as my vision started to blur. A fear of the unknown was staring right back at me. Would I be reduced to a mere shadow of myself without the self-reflexive Zoom camera affirming my virtual existence?

This question opened my eyes to the specific challenges faced by persons who are blind and partially-sighted during the pandemic. I have been sheltered from the need to actively confront the discrimination associated with systemic ableism. The pandemic has compounded these misunderstandings in seen and unseen ways. For instance, regulating physically-distanced bodies is predominantly communicated through visual signs. Mainstream virtual platforms still largely rely on visual media for the dissemination of information. "Ocularnormative" is a term coined by David Bolt to describe the perpetuation of ocularcentric epistemologies that equate seeing with knowing, and visual perception as the norm for gathering knowledge (Bolt, 2016, p.18). As I become more attuned to the prevalence of this ocular bias, I question how the Expressive Arts can actively support perceptual variations through multisensory hubs and frameworks.

I often hear a nostalgic sigh emanating from those who experience Zoom fatigue when I discuss my swift immersion into the audio world. Some of us still have the body memory of holding the handset of a stationary landline while twirling our fingers around a tightly coiled cord for hours. Rather than reverting back to one audio format, I am turning to Artificial Intelligence (AI) speech recognition software as a platform to translate my writing onto the page. Instead of framing my experience through the lens of scarcity, I am choosing to embrace a "resource-oriented" (Knill, 2005, p.163) approach that translates medical identifications into lines of improvisation.

I am writing this article as I dance my way through the wired matrix of AI. This involves giving myself permission to finish the first draft without touching the keyboard. I am printing out the evidence and filling in the gaps with my own shorthand afterwards. Then I will tend to the updates in a second draft that blends real-time speech dictation and retrospective "harvest-

ing” (Knill, 2005, p. 156). In the meantime, I have proprioceptive accompaniment as I nudge my body further and further away from the screen. The texture of my voice moves in tandem with the tempo of my body. The paragraphs are rounded out with each rotation of my shoulders as formless ideas crystallize into unlikely forms. Writing through an embodied voice produces a visceral discovery at every turn. My senses are in service to one another in this continuous loop between sound and gesture.

The space between my body and the computer morphs into a sprung floor that supports choreographic writing. I am physically be-holding new visions as I make my way through the contours of this composition. The conversation between the ground and my body becomes pivotal for improvised writing in real time. The pull of gravity shapes my grammar and brings a life force to the velocity of words. Clear seeing is not only limited to the eyes as I wind my way through entangled postures and convoluted thoughts. The language of the body generates novelty at every turn. When I speak with my eyes closed, I can see a hue of water-coloured images pass through the dark chambers of my closed eyes. There is an imaginal vocabulary hovering behind my eyelids that is less available when I prioritize sight. In fleeting moments of recognition, AI is quick to catch each phrase before words fall to the ground.

Although my trusted AI speech companion is purported to be “extremely responsive and highly accurate,” this cyber wizard is keen to finish each sentence with a grey-washed suggested text. The blinking cursor is like an over-zealous stage manager who unapologetically offers lines for someone else’s script. There is a power struggle as I teeter between rejecting and accepting predetermined ideas. I wonder who is actually speaking for whom in this strange interplay of sound and text. The rhythmic cadence of my breath is also cause for audible confusion in this real-time negotiation. AI attempts to fill in the gaps with verbatim translation. Whoooooooooooouggggg ahhhhh appears on the page as I inhale and exhale between words. Is the microphone too close to my mouth? Is my breathing unconventional? Am I confusing the internal mechanisms of AI when I move and speak at the same time? I begin to envision how

AI could be enhanced with a healthy dose of somatic training. I have come to understand that vocal writing is a living organism that breathes in its own time.

For some unknown reason, my voice consistently exceeds normative patterns of speech recognition. I notice strange diversions when I print out the audible evidence from this embodied writing. Many surprises come to the surface when movement vocabulary and robotic syntax overlap. One example is:

My voice: *The virus is revealing what has been hidden under the surface.*

AI translation: *The iris is feeling what has been hidden under the surface.*

These mis-takes coax me into a decentered narrative that brings this article back into focus. The iris arrives as a gift and re-centers the writing back to my lived experience. The algorithm directs me back to the phenomenological framing of vision and translation as a central component of this writing. An unapologetic infusion of ideas from elsewhere invites me to consider the location of knowledge. I have been given an eyewitness account on the tensions concerning agency and accessibility. Can I let go of my ideas for semantic coherence and find strands of meaning in unconventional places? I have stumbled into a framework for arts-based research that centres on artificial platforms, embodied perception and sensory ways of knowing. My locus of inquiry takes place at the crossroads between speech algorithms and pre-linguistic impulses. This imaginative interplay invites me to courageously write my way into the unknown.

### **Translating bodies of knowledge**

The instability of my vision prompts me to consider a larger analysis of systemic misrecognitions. My encounters with speech (mis) recognition software serve as a timely indicator for global injustices that we are collectively facing. We are seeing this play out in performative

systems that determine how speech acts (Austin, 1975, p. 150) are translated for certain demographics. Many of these acts are a matter of life and death for those who are denied access to platforms of privilege. Sentences are composed and finished by those who occupy positions of unquestioned power. Constructed identity categories are presumed to be settled and static when left to the margins. Many of these inequities are amplified during the pandemic. The elderly, immigrant groups and various ethnic minorities have bared the brunt of the virus. The struggle for racial justice coincides with the prevalence of systemic injustices. Centuries of blatant misrecognition are also fuelling racial reckonings across the globe. Intergenerational, collective and cultural traumas are leaving an indelible mark on our world.

What is needed to rebuild more equitable architectures of belonging in the wake of this ravaging pandemic? I extend this question to Expressive Arts communities around the world as an evolving arts-based inquiry. In many ways, our pre-pandemic lives are unrecognizable in a world of social distancing. It is time to hit the refresh button and decode a new path forward as we reframe relations across physical and virtual platforms. The many distortions that belong to this pandemic can prompt a renewed ethics of engagement in the field of Expressive Arts. This involves making time and space for bodies that are currently situated on the peripheries of this field. A renewed ethic of care is needed to address the barriers to inclusion that have been hidden or ignored until now. The resource-oriented ethos in the field of Expressive Arts holds a specific set of agencies for these impasses. An alternative logic and language is needed to re-cognize trauma-informed capacities for resilience in this stressful time. The resulting societal fractures call for a re-examination of in-group and out-group relations. A web of social connections can slowly be reassembled if we dare to question where the locus of meaning-making resides in each context. Otherwise we are at risk of projecting our agendas onto others and extracting resources in unethical ways. This involves updating the key operating systems in our field that may lead to further dislocation if left unchecked.

mation. As I confront the veils of assumption that have hindered my vision, I am questioning how my positionality and white privilege has benefitted from normative systems. This includes acknowledging how my ableist and racist viewpoints perpetuate endemic misrecognitions in society. I am re-viewing how my actions are entrenched in oppressive systems that are hidden in plain sight. In this exploration, I am also asking how language, in all of its levels of semantic complexity, can artificially or naturally shape our world-making endeavours. It is time to revisit epistemological origins, as constructs of power begin to shift in every sense.

The virus has affected not only individuals, but has destabilized entire systems and power structures. The incalculable losses of this global crisis still remain to be seen. We are now faced with the task to reimagine new platforms for meaning-making in the wake of unprecedented disruption. Explanatory reasoning and statistical graphs cannot be the only evidence of these pandemic days. At this precarious juncture, the overlapping efforts of people from various disciplines and demographics are needed to repair the severed social tissues. Culturally responsive rituals and placeholders are needed to host collective memories and shared grievances. *How we engage is inextricably dependent on who is present and where engagement takes place in this distorted space-time.* This theme of this *POIESIS* journal offers a starting point for reimagining "Evolution/Revolution" in poetic ways. A "high sensitivity" (Knill, 2005, p. 98) approach to artistic intelligence may guide us through the disquieting gaps of the unknown.

Virtual platforms also create new possibilities to encounter one another across physical borders and imaginal boundaries. Yet these wired lexicons also need to be scrutinized when Zoom rooms and Instagram reinforce social inequities. It is vital to discern whether communication platforms catalyze generative participation or perpetuate forms of misrecognition. Reflexive and relational platforms that increase agency, inclusion and accessibility are needed as the mayhem of misrecognition persists. Whose voices are muted or lost in translation at every turn? Rather than clinging to silos of comfort and certainty, we have to ask, how can we illuminate underrepresented demographics in our shared platforms? Opening this aperture will

begin to shed light on what lies beneath and beyond what is currently known. This may involve stepping aside with humility as we invite unrecognized voices to finish our sentences for us. It is my hope that we can co-create an alternative future that dares to see the post-pandemic world through dynamic lenses of inclusion and ingenuity.

## References

Austin, J.L. (1975). *How to Do Things With Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bolt, David. (2014). *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Knill, P. (2005). Foundations for a Theory of Practice. In Knill, P., Levine, E., and Levine, S.K. *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**Carrie MacLeod** is a scholar-practitioner and performance artist who designs and facilitates arts-based peace-building, conflict transformation and refugee resettlement initiatives worldwide. Carrie is on the faculty at the European Graduate School and has published several chapters and training materials in academic, community and artistic contexts.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*9 January 2021*

In the middle of the pandemic,  
I ask,  
what am I doing here?

Is there a mission entrusted to me  
or am I simply living day to day,  
waiting for the end?

Others are sleeping,  
perhaps one of them is awake  
sharing my thought.

Brother, sister,  
what shall I say to you?  
Is it better to lie here,  
tormented by anticipation  
or a lost hope?

Think of me in the silence,  
I wait for you to speak.

# Memoria Symbiotica: Smart Devices and the Evolving Technobiological Narrative of Self

D. W. Chester

Through much of the study of human history, epochs have been defined by the most advanced technology over which the species possessed mastery. The Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age all define the human pre-historical experience in reference to the technology and the artifacts that technology left behind. If these epochs tell us anything, they point to a rapid acceleration of change. Whereas the Stone Age lasted the better part of 2.5 million years before being superseded by the Bronze Age, Iron replaced Bronze in a mere 2100 years. Fast forward to the 20th century, which gave us: The Age of Flight, the Atomic Age, the Space Age, the Information Age. It is hard to imagine a more fundamentally transformative period in history...unless we examine the last 13 years of the 21st century.





In 2007, the iPhone was introduced, and it looked like a solution without a problem. Absurdly expensive and fragile, and apparently magical. In the nearly 14 years since, smartphones have deeply integrated into culture on a global level and become a kind of necessity for contemporary life. For the poorest, they represent an equalizing force, allowing internet access to job applications, government benefits, directions, general information and bankless money transfers. In this time of COVID-19, phones are the school for many and the new town square. It's fair to say that any semblance of normality during this pandemic depends on this technological partner, a tool which didn't even exist when my youngest clients

were born. In spite of the *brandedness* of this label, I think it is not beyond reason to say we are in the Age of iPhone. And the implications are different than we might initially think.

A few inventions in human history have had tremendous transformative relational impact. The moveable type press took books from the hands of the church and the elite and made the thoughts of others available to a larger public. History, once locked away in libraries, or told in

the oral tradition, became, like the King James version of the Bible, fixed and canonical. The telegraph provided the first instantaneous transmission of precise information across long distance. The phonograph allowed a "record" to be made, so events became fluid in time. The wireless and the television extended this ability to reach mass audiences, while the telephone personalized it. All these technologies offered a novel feature: the ability to share the range of nuanced human expression across both distance and time. iPhone does something more...

The Age of iPhone may represent the first time in human history when the artifacts of our technology seem, to some observers, prepared to take ascendance over us. Among those who study artificial intelligence, much speculation focuses upon the concept of "the singularity," the point at which the network connecting all our devices becomes a self-aware super intelligence, capable of learning and adapting at superhuman speed. In science fiction, this idea has given rise to machines who control and exterminate humans. In Spike Jones' *Her*, the machines develop consciousness so vast and incomprehensible that they become bored with human interaction and leave the planet to explore as a vast inquisitive superintelligence. In real life, Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk have all warned of grave danger from a rapidly evolving artificial superintelligence. Hawking, in a 2014 opinion piece for *The Independent*, wrote, "Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history... Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks." (Sainato, 2015)

To be clear, I do not share Hawking's fear. As a person who holds a technical degree in Computer Electronics, I don't hold out hope that algorithms can produce *consciousness as we understand it* in isolation from biological life. For the last decade, my phone has served as a primary "recording device" in my life, and a highly personalized electronic witness. Photographing insects and plants on the trail for later identification. Copying pages of text, recipes and visual jokes. Documenting meals out with friends, vacation journeys, holidays, cocktails mixed, museums attended, hotel rooms and scenery in places around the world. And my phone has tracked me for better or worse, recording the times, dates and locations of every photo taken,

every voice memo recorded, every call and every text. My iPhone holds the photos I took of the car crash that totaled my vehicle, as well as messages from the very pleasant young German tourist named Johannes who drove into my car. He still occasionally writes a text to see how we are surviving the latest drama in America. This technology has connected me across cultures and time zones with real human experiences and emotions.

However, in the past two years I have begun to witness something rather different that promises to be equally impactful. Slowly, almost imperceptibly my devices, and particularly



L-R: Elizabeth Gordon McKim, Carrie MacLeod, Paolo Knill and Carrie Herbert at Hotel Allalin in 2018

my iPhone, have been coming into a new relationship with me. One which is less like a tool and more like a companion. iPhone has begun a pattern of what I can only refer to as aesthetic relational behaviors. After a November 2020 update, I was surprised to find a new search screen with a window of "Featured Photos." It opened into a selection of ten photos from around the world I had taken. The first was a photo of Saas Fee from 2018, of Paolo Knill and Elizabeth McKim with Carrie MacLeod and Carrie Herbert seated around a table in the garden of the Hotel Allalin. Elizabeth is reaching

across Carrie to touch Paolo's hand, and laughing so hard she is face down on the table. It is a moment both beautiful and heartbreaking to see from 2020. We lost our dear friend, maestro and mentor, Paolo Knill, this year, when we could not travel to the mountain and commune with our EGS family. The next photo was of my mother, who I haven't been able to see since December 2019 due to COVID. Then a roadrunner in the Mojave Desert, bright parrots in flight at the San Diego Safari Park. Me recording my album in Cambodia. It was as if the phone was

reading my longings for the year. Given that I have over 6,500 photos on the phone, it managed to pick 10 which held real emotional significance, many of which I had not revisited since the moment they were taken.

A few days later, a different behavior. Something called "For You > Memories." Again, images from my past, grouped by locations in slide shows. I touched one and was surprised to see my phone had created a small movie of my birthday trip to Los Angeles in 2018, complete with soundtrack, video clips and photo animation. Again, this seemed surprising, but not necessarily a radical departure from the memories function I had seen on Facebook, a sort of "on this day" function that shows all the posts from a year ago. The realization of exactly how different this behavior is struck me as I was preparing my lesson plan for my grad students in a course called "Biography as a Resource." The purpose of the course is to encourage self-examination and exploration of the life narrative, hoping to find the resources in our own self-knowledge; "gifts," as Stephen K. Levine suggests, in "Bearing Gifts to the Feast" (1998, pp. 43-63).

I was considering memory, and the fictive nature of personal history/narrative. That story has always been the take of a *single storyteller*, the one speaking from the pronoun, "I." It dawned on me that this has changed. The iPhone is actively engaged in showing me what are ostensibly "my memories." I was there. I experienced the moments now recorded in the pictures. And iPhone was there. Not even just this iPhone, but even older pictures, shared from its ancestor's memory. The generational memory of iPhone could place me precisely to within a few yards of where I had been, recognise the faces of who I had seen, and tell me when that photo was taken, be it a year, five years or nine years ago. And know absolutely nothing of the context. iPhone used facial recognition of my friend Carrie to group all the photos of her and offer me an album of memories. The context for the photos is mine. iPhone doesn't know she "is" Carrie. It doesn't know anything about our friendship. It doesn't even know what friendship is. Or life for that matter. But that doesn't mean I can dismiss the input.

The naturalist Edward O. Wilson famously says, "An ant colony is far more intelligent than an ant." (Junrod, 2009) The ants individually know nothing, plan nothing, coordinate nothing, and have no consciousness in evidence. In the same manner, the iPhone is "evolving" to respond to what it notices about my activity, image making and recording, and producing a coherent set of images and associations, which, with my help as a user, become inserted into what I think of as my memories. In this way, my phone is producing "memories" of me that I do not have of myself. Or at least I *did not* have. I must have been awake and conscious and present for the events depicted in the photographs. So even if I had utterly forgotten the experiencing moment, I do not question the fact of these happenings. I accept them into my narrative, and *they become a part of my life story.*

Without me fully realizing it, an unexpected kind of *singularity* has occurred. A hybridized intelligence. Another author has entered my narrative of self. One without any direct consciousness of me, although it can recognise my fingerprints and remember my search terms. An author who edits my memories on the basis of god-knows-what algorithmic filters, and offers me a published life. A story not necessarily made of my preferences. One I am encouraged to share with the world as "my memories." A narrative that is reinforced, and simultaneously reinforces, the values of the system that creates it. A ghostwriter for my emergent autobiography, a filmmaker I give nearly unlimited access to. One who is there to witness me lonely or depressed, or feeling trapped in the isolation of COVID 19, sometimes with comfort, and sometimes with dread news: A friend infected. A life cut short. The iPhone knows nothing of grief. But she remembers messages and comments of the past few months, and keeps the broken heart emoji and the crying emoji at the top of the list.

And so we journey together, one story, two roles: My conscious presence experiences the world. The iPhone's technical presence documents it, and filters it with and without my help. I remember the emotional feeling of seeing my friend at the airport after months apart. iPhone remembers what we were wearing. Remembers where we had lunch, and that we took a sunset

stroll. iPhone offers up the phenomena of that day to me. Once the offer enters my narrative, it becomes irreversibly bound to my concept of self. I have come to think of this connection as *memoria symbiotica*: A shared, indivisible and contiguous narrative history that exists between my experiencing and my technology's documenting. One indivisible history, a story written by my continual being and iPhones intermittent documentation. Together we hold a version of reality that is not literal for either of us. A story that sometimes branches into non-sequitur, pocket dials a friend, or takes a random photo of the floor, or the sky.

In the current iteration of the technology, smartphones have transcended their role as mediators, in between us and our communications and experience of world. The published life, posting photos of your food and vacation, is so 2010. Even though *the map is not the territory*, smartphones both hold the map and take the journey with us in recording every turn. And the most unexpected turn is this: *the singularity is a partnership*, a cohabitation of the life narrative that cannot any longer fully be labeled "mine." My iPhone has quietly become integral, both a tool for my own witnessing of the world, and a storyteller, weaving its own thread into my narrative. Like the imperfections in raw silk, this thread is strong but delicate, disappears and reappears in the weave of my narrative. But as the technology grows-up, it becomes ever more integrated and anticipatory. It begins to identify and respond to patterns in my life, recognizing habits I do not know I have, and making connections across time and space that transcend what is possible in corporeal form.

This quiet integration into the narrative self is both tantalizing and troubling. Tantalizing because there will be a time in the foreseeable future when we will never forget a name, or an anniversary (not only of a marriage, but even of a meal), and the phone will act as a secondary cortex, storing information and anticipating needs before we are aware of them. Its threads will become a larger part of the narrative. If we allow it, and it seems unlikely that people will do otherwise, then smartphones will increasingly become a part of psyche, the living narrative of our lives. We are conducting a vast experiment on ourselves and all generations to come. We

do not yet know what impact the *singularity partnership* will have upon us. What divides will it create in the practical world, between the haves and have-nots of increasingly smarter technology? Beyond social justice, we cannot anticipate the power of this narrative companion to direct and manipulate our moods or desires. There is already evidence that Facebook has altered the psyche of five hundred-thousand Americans (Goel, 2014) in a manipulative study, altering mood by containing the flow of images and information. Zealots exploiting the same technology have led many more to believe in a reality where liberal leaders are election-stealing pedophiles and cannibals. Smartphones delivered these narratives as blithely as a weather report. They delivered life-saving evacuation warnings to thousands of people, and documented the disaster. They stand as last witnesses to hundreds of thousands of hospitalized COVID-19 victims, as nurses routinely place visual calls to allow the family to see their dying loved one for the last time.

In James Hillman's *We've Had 100 Years of Psychotherapy and the World is Getting Worse* (1992), he suggests a provocative and ultimately indispensable idea. To paraphrase, *the thing we call mental illness might be a sane response to an insane world*. He voices concern that a treatment room closed to the events of a planet in crisis is one that may only serve to effectively mask the symptoms of a pervasive cultural illness. I believe there is a parallel risk in ignoring the growing influence of the technobiological narrator. And I ask this question: In the age of Memoria Symbiotica, can we practice a competent therapy addressing the life narrative without treating the device as well?

## References

Goel, V. (2014) *Facebook Tinkers With Users' Emotions in News Feed Experiment, Stirring Outcry*. The New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/technology/facebook-tinkers-with-users-emotions-in-newsfeed-experiment-stirring-outcry.html> (originally published June 29, 2014)

Hillman, J. and Ventura, M.(1992), *We've Had 100 Years of Psychotherapy and the World is Getting Worse*, Harper San Francisco

Junrod, Tom, (2009). *E.O. Wilson: What I've Learned*. Esquire <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/interviews/a5375/eo-wilson-quotes-0109/> (Originally Published January 2009) Retrieved 2-8-2010)

Levine, Stephen K., (1998). *Poiesis The Language of Psychology and the Speech of the Soul*, Palmerston Press:Toronto

Sainato, M., (2015). *Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk, and Bill Gates Warn About Artificial Intelligence*, Charlotte Observer <https://observer.com/2015/08/stephen-hawking-elon-musk-and-bill-gates-warn-about-artificial-intelligence/> (Original date of Publication 8/19/2015) Retrieved 2/3/2021

All photos published with permission from the author.

**Wes Chester**, M.A. Expressive Arts Therapy, CAGS. Wes is an outdoorsman, artist and musician who coined the concept "Eco-Aesthetics," an arts and philosophy based understanding of Decentering through the sensual encounter with nature. Wes has been teaching and lecturing in Expressive Arts since 2001, and continues to work at the nexus of therapy, art, technology and nature.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*16 January 2021*

Inside  
not quite locked up  
free to go  
but where

Others walk by  
as if life  
had not stopped

I cross the street  
two sticks bearing me on  
then back again

as though I never left

# The Lockdown Library: A Socially-Engaged Art Project

Gopika Dahanukar



In the midst of the fire, I burn for words  
I have no air to keep my thoughts ablaze  
Only my heart knows to create something  
from the ashes that remain.

~ Gopika

It was an afternoon during the lockdown last summer in Mumbai when we dared to venture out of our homes. We had spent so much time indoors that the aroma of spice, smoked coconut and incense had landed on our clothes. The air was tense, yet there was a supportive atmosphere of care, in our own homes and around the neighbourhood.

A dear friend, Rachna, an artist, environmentalist and expressive arts student, came over for tea with a stack of handmade re-cycled books she had made. What had kept her sane during the lockdown was making books out of all the scrap paper and fabric she could lay her hands on. She felt this need to capture, chronicle, and share these times in an inspired and imaginative way and had come to see me about exploring this idea further. I felt invited in. We discussed what we could do proactively to contribute to this lockdown moment, as artists and expressive art practitioners. What if we gave out these books to friends to draw, paint and write poems of their lockdown stories? Then they could return these books to us, and we could create an art installation. A handmade lockdown library!

The silence, the struggle, the pain and the possibilities that this pandemic inspired called for a shift, from being solitary art practitioners to collaborating with the public in the creation of an art-work, an outcome that would involve engagement and co-creation. This would be an open frame inviting others into this shared space of struggle and discovery, giving room for community participation and connection.

When I first saw the books, what immediately struck me was how each fragment of discarded paper or material was honored in the creation of the books. Every page carried its own texture and feel that gave potential for a response and opened a doorway for expression. This possibility of sensory engagement naturally led us to want the book to be more than just a journal that participants had to fill in; it was to be a living companion that had its own part to play in the lives of those who were going to work with it.

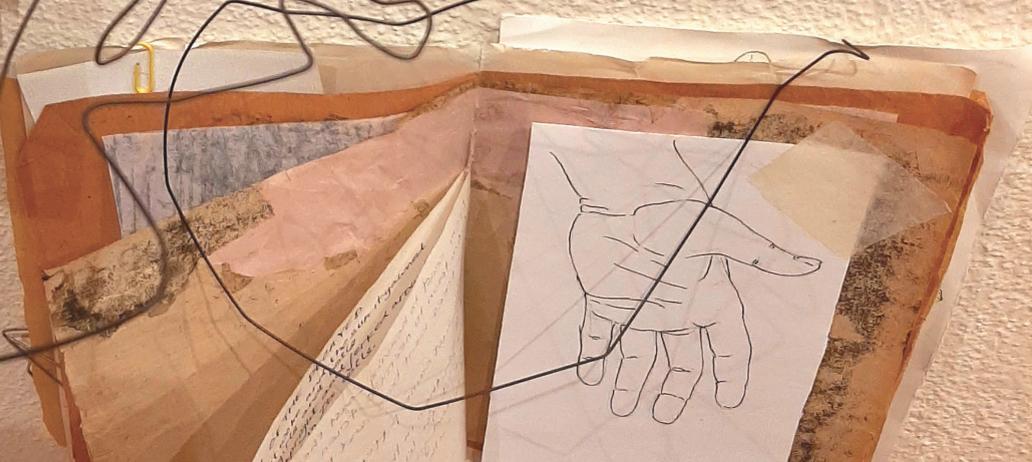




We distributed the books to friends around the world to record their lockdown stories. It was essential to introduce the book and to sensitize them to the project, so I led a series of online sessions to orient the participants into an experiential and sensorial engagement with the book.

During this time, I was questioning the identity of the role of practitioners as artists. I realised that I had not given enough time to nurture the artist within, over the few years of my dedicated interest in establishing the Swahansa Institute. I discovered the practice of "Socially-engaged Art" and felt my interest compelling me in this direction.

As explained by Pablo Helguera in his seminal book, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, "most artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that affects the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way" (Helguera, 2011). Socially engaged art is an umbrella term for many different forms of artistic practice. Some examples include





artistic activism, community-based art, creative place-making, cultural organizing, participatory art, social practice, and social sculpture.\*

Rachna and I now had a project. The Lockdown Library invited people isolated in the pandemic to creatively introspect, express and share meaningful moments, stimulating dialogue and giving voice to their experiences. I learned that “socially-engaged art” focuses on new processes defining art’s responsibility to the social sphere. This kind of arts-practice seemed to be in sync with the philosophy of Expressive Arts: serving what emerges from the participants, and potentially inspiring or influencing the final outcome of the art work.



After a few months, the books made their way back to us, and I started the pro-



cess of creating an art installation. I found a page from each book from which spontaneously emerged a story conveying our inherent human condition, connection and evolution during this unprecedented time. Using these chosen pages, which consisted of images, poems and prose, I created an art-work narrating the story that was displayed on a large wall. I added another dimension, using a thin metal wire which symbolised a pencil line moving playfully and freely over the story. The art-work was open to the public. We also held a poetry reading and sharing for the community.

On the wings of love  
That's where you'll find me  
Ready to dive  
Out of the sky  
And fall  
Into freedom's mystery.

–Rachna

## Reference

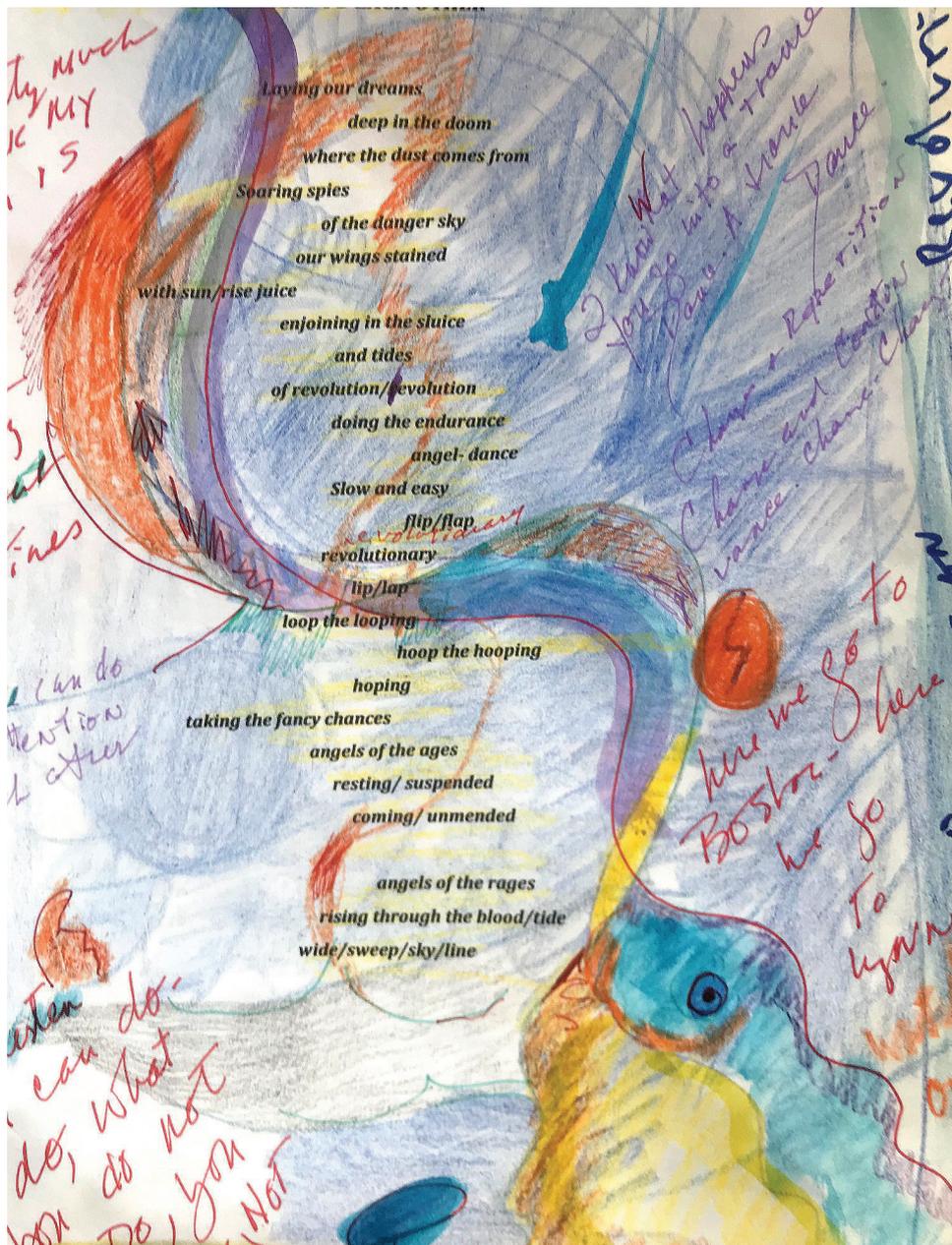
Helguera, Pablo (2011) *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. Jorge Pinto Books: Bethesda, Md.

**Gopika Dahanukar** is an artist, vocalist and founder and Director of Swahansa Expressive Arts India. Gopika has an MFA in Applied Craft and Design from PNCA, Portland, USA, a Certificate in Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation and Change from UPEACE, a Diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy, Vancouver School of Healing Arts and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS) from EGS. Her research interests are directed toward creative awareness, peace-building, creativity in human evolution and socially-engaged public art. She is also a trustee of the Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation, a non-profit organisation that is leading the way in supporting emerging artists and progressive social action through the arts in India.

We are all angels  
together

Elizabeth Gordon McKim

Inter-generational teacher, Spoken Word Artist, Poet Laureate of the European Graduate School, Jazz Poet of Lynn, Massachusetts. In 2020, she published her 6th book of Poetry, *LOVERS in the FREE FALL*. She loves what she does and sends warmest greetings and much inspiration to readers of this precious *POIESIS*. Thanks to our esteemed Clarifier and Editor Steve Levine. You can find McKim in the margins, the center, and in the circling.



Evolving Angel  
Kristin Briggs



**Kristin Briggs** is the Co-Director of Kitchen Music Studios, a music school in Toronto, Canada, with her partner Steve Briggs. She is a 1998 graduate of CREATE (Toronto). She is also a graphic designer and has been art director for all volumes of the *POIESIS* journal since its inception.

# Vital Reflections on Expressive Arts and the Online Modality in Uncertain Times

Judith Alalú

**M**ore than a year has gone by since I left Perú to start a new life in Barcelona. I would have never imagined that, just a few months later, the great adventure of moving to a different country would turn out to involve a pandemic crisis, followed by the dramatic world shifts we are now experiencing as a collective.

The practice of letting go, releasing, surrendering, allowing, rebuilding, deforming, re-imagining has been part of my daily life from the moment my family and I decided to migrate to a new continent. The emotional challenge of this big life-change was intensified by the arrival of COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020. All of a sudden, the feelings of uncertainty and chaos that were already governing my internal world became a big part of an external new reality that now affected the entire planet. Uncertainty, fear and chaos—these were and still are the main ingredients of this disruptive experience.

The process of migration and detachment was accompanied by my own exploration in



painting and coincided with the beginning of my doctoral dissertation. About a year before leaving Perú, I held an exhibition in Lima called "Vital," which also became my doctoral research topic. The question of vitality approached me as an existential need, one to be sought urgently. I reflected on my own vitality and wondered what was necessary to be in contact with it in a meaningful way.

Seeing things from a distance, I now realize it was precisely this personal search for the "vital" that gave me the strength to support myself and others in times of such great uncertainty. This pursuit of meaning and deep inner listening to my unique voice has worked as a powerful bridge to withstand moments of significant chaos, deformation and instability.

As part of my own expressive arts-based research, I carried out a musical project that allowed me to understand the theme of vitality from an imaginative perspective. In the aesthetic analysis of the created song, I wrote the following:

The "other" has arrived. It is a new moment to own. It feels mine. I make it my own. There is no place for other voices. It is an intimate landscape that needs to be explored. It feels like the "self" is different from anything else. It is a fluid melody, a soft melody, containing pauses where my "own rhythms" have a place. I own this rhythm. It is a sound that feels like my own sound, and it welcomes me. It gives me the feeling of being myself, of playing my own melody. There are no other voices that interfere.

My search for the "vital" supported me in uncertain times because I knew that I was getting closer to that own space full of meaning to me. This was my own voice in the world, my own *tempo* like I discovered through my musical exploration. It was from this personal motivation to inquire more about my own voice and my own beat that I started to seek new possibilities.

Moving to Barcelona has not only helped me learn how to train flexibly in adapting to

a new place, but it has also made me reflect deeply on new ways of teaching, shaping and supporting others in their transformation journey through the expressive arts. Only months after my arrival, the continued global uncertainty and the persistent fear around the virus demanded that I look at chaos as the prelude to a new creation. The reality everyone was experiencing became threatening, traumatizing and alienating. This gradually led to inevitably confront deconstruction and grief as part of an individual and global restructuring which is still unfolding in our daily lives. However, I was already experiencing feelings of that sort by the time the pandemic broke out. It soon became crystal clear to me that, now of all times, drawing upon vitality and desire was crucial for finding new ways to deform “the known” and come up with “the new.” In this sense, listening to my voice was the vital element to make this happen.

Given the circumstances described, restrictions on traveling and social gatherings prevented us from meeting face to face with students, and the EGS Summer School program had to be released online. I had previously facilitated some short virtual courses in Barcelona, but this was the first time that I was conducting a long-term online program in collaboration with other professionals. It meant that teachers and students would have the chance to witness the translation of offline expressive arts learning into a virtual language.

I would not deny that I undoubtedly missed the physical contact with the group and the place: the inspiring presence of the mountains, actual hugs, and the powerful dialectical play of glances. Teaching online made me honor more than ever the importance of live art, of live bodies having a vital physical experience. I would not say it was less significant, but it was definitely different. Having said this, the experience was nevertheless very enriching and carried many surprises.

To begin with, people from several different countries had the chance to come together without having to travel. Creativity and communion were present, and I inhabited the connec-

tion to my body and others while teaching in a new way. Powerful imaginal resonance emerged from the group synergy, regardless of the physical distance.

It seems to me that we are now in transitional times towards new ways of social interaction. Online teaching is gaining more and more strength, and even online therapeutic practices through the arts are already being implemented by some professionals in the field. This could also translate into one more alternative for people who are looking into beginning a healing creative process.

It is worth mentioning once again that times of chaos and uncertainty demand that we rethink ourselves, especially as expressive arts facilitators and educators. The current challenge is to dive into inquiry with an open mind, letting go of the known past “normality” and deform ourselves in the search for new vital gestures. In terms of our own methodology: to decenter into an alternative reality to give way to surprises. This led me to wonder: what would happen if we dared to play with these possible deformations in the field of expressive arts in the virtual realm? What would it be like to deconstruct and explore new ways of teaching? Is it possible to continue to bring art, imagination, play, creativity and health to our encounters in an online modality? And most importantly, we might well ask: what elements would there need to be present in these new virtual educational spaces to keep the so-needed connection to our vitality?

I do not intend to answer all the questions posed in this essay, but I would like to begin an approach to these topics from the perspective gained from my experience in the last few months.

The danger of being trapped in the past is that of missing the possibility to collaborate with reality from a poetical dimension, something which could have an overall impact on the creation of the future.

The expressive arts are embedded in a paradigm of co-creation. This implies the emergence of images with the power to translocate and reshape the forms in which our literal world appears to us, and this may prove to be crucial and decisive for meeting the challenges of our time.

We know that working with the body and the senses is central for accessing the imaginal realm. Therefore, we cannot afford to disconnect from our very own human characteristics. We are imaginative and sensorial beings, embodied forms. We are communal beings who grow and expand from interaction with one another. Thus, we need to ask: how can we prevent these new technologies from distorting our understanding of human existence and our practice as facilitators?

I would like to outline some of the elements to be considered when designing an online modality for working with the expressive arts.

## 1. Imagination and play

Working as facilitators in expressive arts requires that we find creative, sensitive ways of helping people, groups and communities to engage in the process of *decentering*<sup>1</sup> from the literal situations they find themselves in, so that they can step into the world of imagination through art and play. All the types of different *images* that emerge from artistic creation itself are guides towards new information, feelings and sensations that dwell in an alternative reality where plentiful resources can be found.

During my online experience with expressive arts, I could verify that play and imagination did find their way through. The participants could access their imaginal worlds through visual and poetic language, play and photography, among others. There was room for individual and collective creations that were later explored in-depth, and we could all witness different

---

1 Leaving literal reality to access an alternative, imaginal reality.

discoveries and surprises along the way.

As a facilitator, there were moments when I trusted letting the *expert*<sup>2</sup> display his/her own way of building the creative process, allowing each person to find their own space and time to decenter, without interfering.

When it comes to guiding the decentering process, there are considerable differences between the online and offline experiences. When working in the same physical space with the client, one can see what is going on, as it occurs, in great detail. Possibilities to shape the experience become broader because all the senses are involved in real-time. In the virtual field, it becomes difficult to see and listen to everything that is happening on the other side of the screen. However, holding and shaping are still possible in a new way. At times, shaping the experience virtually requires that very specific and clear instructions are set beforehand by the facilitator. The arrival of the creative act depends greatly on the efficacy of building a trusting relationship where clients feel safe to step further into their creative journey. In terms of this, it is also important to choose appropriate tools for holding the creative space. Organizing the virtual resources and making room for deep listening is essential to bridging the physical distance.

James Hillman (1999) reminds us that, “where imagination reigns, personification occurs.” For him, imagination has the capacity to “make soul,” that is to build interconnectivity and feed our psychic substance filling our life with meaning. He believed in recovering our lost *aesthetic responses* and our sense of *beauty* to recuperate the “lost soul” to face the depersonalization process where everything, including the self, becomes inert, automated and lifeless. I believe we must keep promoting truthful encounters with the imagination even in the virtual field. The online tools have offered an alternative space to keep nurturing our creative capacity despite the circumstances.

---

2 In expressive arts, we call the client an expert since we consider that he knows his own difficulty and has the resources to transform it.

## 2. Community

In my view, one of the most valuable elements connected to vitality in our field is the sense of community it brings. Art has had an impactful transformational effect on the way people build their sense of belonging and transcendence throughout history.

In the last few months, I have observed very close encounters among people of various nationalities connecting online from different parts of the world. This possibility of interconnected diversity has been very much appreciated by the participants.

The online platform used during these experiences allowed the gathering of participants in smaller groups, which granted simultaneous collective creations in a more intimate, deeper way.

Among the many memories I treasure from this experience, I can mention beautiful storytelling, different images and sensations, diverse communities exchanging knowledge and perspectives, as well as many professionals offering their valuable input and nurturing one another. This is how a strongly cohesive social web was created, through a renewable collective pulse capable of sheltering and connecting individuals in times of social distancing.

In the words of Victor Frankl (A. Längle, 2009), each human being must find their own *life purpose*. However, each person's purpose is not only connected to the individual psyche, but also to the rest of the human beings. Internet resources have given us the possibility of finding a new purpose together. This is why it is vital to keep connecting in every possible way so that we can all contribute to a collective space that nurtures us deeply in return.

## 3. The body and the senses

How can we abandon the body and its senses when they are the very origin of our imaginative capacity? Our practice is based on the experience of inhabiting our bodies. It is

difficult for me to conceive a way to access the imaginal realm from art, play, or ritual without getting in touch with the universe of the senses first. The therapist's body is of the utmost importance as a living perceptive tool that can provide a sense of co-creation.

I was quite concerned about the limitations that could arise when working with our bodies separated by a screen. To be present in time but not in the same space seemed, at first sight, to be a real challenge to overcome. The idea of having to spend so much time in front of a computer was almost disturbing to me, and it could even mean that I ended up disconnecting from my body during the encounter. I was aware of the importance of keeping the connection to the senses and constantly drawing my attention back to the physical dimension.

Nonetheless, when the Summer School online program took place, we did find a way to connect to our bodies after all. We guided several activities involving conscious movement and found different ways of raising body awareness. Some of these activities were done individually by participants; each of them finding a way to connect with their body at their place. There were also times when we could connect with movement collectively, watching bodies express themselves through the screen.

Perspectives shift often online. The facilitator is no longer in the same experiential space, but is now capable of generating bodily experiences which awaken creation, awareness and beauty.

Some of the participants could feel more confidence and freedom when it came to expressing images through their bodies, something that they had previously found difficult in face-to-face encounters. Somehow the privacy of their own homes provided a safe space to explore movement more deeply and promoted their engagement with body experimentation, while still keeping contact with the facilitator through voice and sound.

It seems to me that the subject of *the body and the senses* is something that we will have to address seriously if we venture into expanding the online work of expressive arts further, as

these components are a straight road to imagination and creation. It is impossible to imagine a vital encounter without the full presence of the body. Interestingly, the auditory and visual senses are still very present, even highlighted, in an online exchange. Even though some of the senses, like smell and the kinesthetic sense, are unable to be shared in the virtual modality, they can still be stimulated and felt individually to preserve vitality.

#### 4. Beauty

I can honestly say that I have run into many moments of *beauty*<sup>3</sup> in the virtual world. Visual images, poetry and photography come to mind, as well as moving bodies, sounds and voices. I am pleasantly surprised with the possibility of creating beauty virtually.

Some students and patients have resonated profoundly with the images produced by themselves and others during the quarantine. I have also been able to respond to these images with some of my own, making use of the available technology.

Some years ago, I discovered a digital art tool that allowed me to paint from my iPad. Brushes and physical paint were absent. However, I was thrilled at watching my fingers create powerful images that would later be part of "Vital," the exhibition I mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

Currently, I still keep my exploration with textures in the physical production of paintings, and I enjoy the interplay of languages, how images from different dimensions can merge or create interesting dialogues with one another, how we could build bridges of *beauty* between the online and offline worlds. These are interesting matters we could address as expressive arts practitioners. Perhaps exploring new possibilities of digital expression for art, play, music and

---

3 In Expressive Arts Therapy, beauty has to do with what touches and moves you, rather than with the cultural aspects of an aesthetic that is considered appropriate.

audiovisual language may open up new ways of creating moments full of *beauty* on the road ahead.

As Jean Dubuffet wisely states: “*True art is always found in unexpected places.*” (Dubuffet, 1992) Along this line of thought, online technologies might well bring an invitation for us, facilitators, to persist in our search for *the unexpected* as a portal towards *the vital* in times of pandemic upheaval.

## 5. Poiesis

I believe the whole online experience has been highly rewarding for everyone involved. Personally, it has taken me to levels of exploration I had never imagined before. I have played with new dimensions of experience, with new sensations and understandings in regards to my work with expressive arts.

Within the community I worked with, I have seen how learning has been made possible; the understanding has become vivid, embodied, not only theoretically speaking, but experientially, through art and imagination. I have witnessed moments of connection, sensitivity, vulnerability and transformation.

I can truly say that *poiesis*<sup>4</sup> (Levine, 2005) has indeed been possible, even amidst adversity. I have had the opportunity of witnessing moments of compelling beauty, where *Eros* seemed to peek out through little virtual windows.

We have created new possibilities. We have certainly discovered more about ourselves

---

4 Stephen K. Levine (1992) has rescued the term *poiesis* for the expressive arts. *Poiesis* is the creative capacity that human beings have to transform their world. Despite the difficulties, *poiesis* is always possible.

along the way. We have encountered an unknown *other*. And finally, we have been able to transform hardship into *possibility* from our creative vitality.

Perhaps it is possible to imagine an online education connected to all the elements that I have been describing. At the same time, we must not lose sight of what makes us human and has to do with our body and its sensoriality, with the beauty of and interrelation to the outside world in which we cohabit. We must be able to integrate both possibilities where the possibility of imagining, transforming individually and collectively, is not lost. If we are able to dialogue with these elements from virtuality, then let's play with technology and find humanity in it. At the same time, let's not forget that there is a world out there waiting for us to continue co-creating. We are part of that physical world and it is part of our own vital nature.

I do not mean to favor one modality to the detriment of the other. However, I do believe that we cannot ignore the new paradigm changes the world is going through. In regards to this, it is necessary to contemplate the role that technological tools have played in keeping us united and vital in the middle of such a great social and economic crisis.

This essay is an invitation to reflect; with it I do not intend to conclude on the advantages of a new online model over a face-to-face one. However I think that we cannot be oblivious to these new paradigms that the world brings us and that have had a vitalizing function in such complex moments. We must be able to continue playing imaginatively.

Will we be capable of deforming ourselves in the *praxis* of finding new ways of transformation? How will we establish a sensible dialogue between virtual and traditional modalities within the expressive arts field?

Finally, I would like to say that my wish is that we approach all challenges, keeping a close connection to our imagination, sensitivity and beauty as powerful means to confer meaning, as

ways to honor our capacity to shape reality and, perhaps most importantly, without ever abandoning the search for what makes us vital beings in this world.

## References

Knill, P.J, Levine, E.G., Levine, S.K. (2005) *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Towards a Therapeutic Aesthetic*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hillman, J. (1999) *Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World*. In: *El pensamiento del corazón*. Madrid: Siruela.

Längle, Alfred (2009). *Meaning and Existential Fundamental Motivations. Cornerstones of Existence*. [Electronic version], *Psychology Magazine*, 5 (10).

Guggenheim Bilbao Exhibition (2020): *Jean Dubuffet. Trace of an Adventure*.

Calderon, J.M ( 2020) Expressive Arts Based Research. In *POIESIS: A Journal of the Arts and Communication*. Vol 17, 2020.

**Judith Alalú Langnas** Co-founder of TAE Peru Institute. Faculty member and Phd candidate EGS. Graduated in clinical psychology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Therapist and supervisor of expressive arts, and member of the Peruvian Association of Expressive Arts (APDARE). Art is essential in her life, especially painting. Exhibiting artist. Co-author of the painting and poetry book, *Vital Exodus*, and co-author of the book, *Dolor y belleza. Imágenes desde las artes expresivas en el Perú*.

# Expressive Arts and the Call of the World

Ellen G. Levine

The earth is suffering: burning, flooding, freezing, losing species and habitats, land masses and forests. The people of the earth are experiencing suffering: pandemic, financial losses, dislocation due to changing climate, loss of resources such as water and food. War and violence are more common than ever. These are traumas on a planetary, a social and an individual scale.

As a result, people are traveling the earth, displaced by climate changes, by wars and by violence. At this point, there are more migrants, refugees and asylum seekers than there were after World War II. By mid-2020, 80 million people were displaced worldwide as a result of conflict, persecution, human rights violations and violence.

How can we respond to this situation? What constitutes an “adequate” response to problems of this scale and magnitude? Where do we even begin? Can expressive arts perspectives move beyond a focus on therapeutic change to the larger issues of social change?

Perhaps it begins small, in a personal way as the basis for action. A first step.

For a long time, I have been particularly sensitive to the plight of refugees. I think that this

has to do with the history of my own family. My maternal grandparents came to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, seeking a life free of violence and oppression. They were Jews in Lithuania and subject to vicious pogroms perpetrated by anti-Semitic mobs. My grandfather was in danger of being kidnapped and conscripted into the Tsar's army. Their parents sent them away in the hope that they would escape the violence and find a better life. They were adolescents at the time. With struggle and determination, they made a decent life in the United States. Although they remained relatively poor, they were free from the threat of violence. At the same time, my paternal grandparents emigrated to the United States from Russia. They fled from the same situation of oppression, anti-Semitism and violence.

This personal sensitivity to the situation of refugees began to come forward in the paintings that I was creating, beginning several years ago. I have always painted with the ocean landscape as a structure. Forms of the beach and the ocean, particularly the layers of water, sand, rock and sky, have always played a significant role in my work.



Figure #1: "Below the Surface #3" 2007

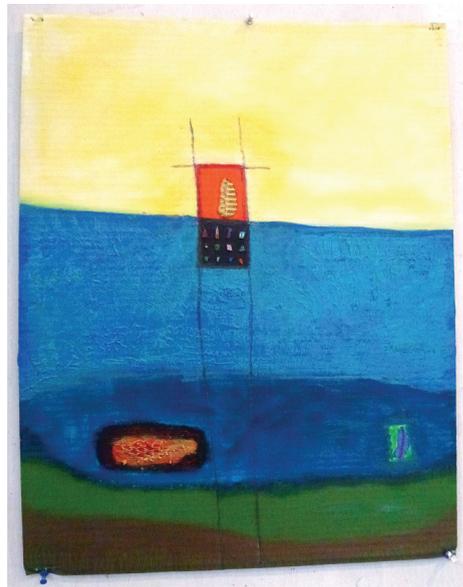


Figure #2: "Treasures Series" 2016

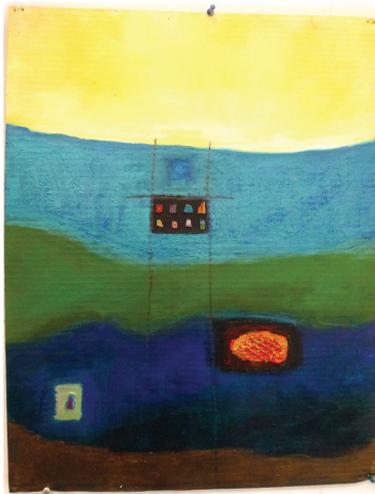


Figure #3: "Treasures Series" 2016

From the time that I was a baby, I spent a large portion of my life by the sea. The sounds of the ocean crashing against the rocks, withdrawing and crashing again, became my lullaby at night. I am sure that I internalized these back and forth rhythms as part of my internal structuring, as a kind of self-soothing.

These ocean paintings began as more abstract landscapes where I was exploring my fantasies about what could be contained in the depths of the ocean beyond my capacity to actually perceive them. I imagined treasures, other worlds, portals to other realities. The horizon line, demarcated above and below, was always a prominent feature. Figures #1-#3 are examples of this work.



Figure #4: "Where Are We Going?" 2018

Several years ago, I began to take notice of some striking images that I found in the newspapers. The images that called out to me focused mainly on people traveling, migrants searching for a place to land. The photographs showed masses of people traveling by boat or by land, exposed to the elements. I was so struck by these photographs that I cut them out of the newspapers and began inserting them into my paintings. I felt as if I was responding to a call from the world.

In the paintings, I would either highlight the photograph, calling attention to it, or I would make the photograph become a more integral part of the landscape. I copied some photographs several times and strung

them together to emphasize the enormity of the masses of travellers. In my fantasy, I was providing soothing and comfort to the travellers, by placing them in a landscape that I myself always have associated with comfort. Figures #4-#6 are examples of this work.

At the same time as the paintings were developing and changing, incorporating my personal response to the call of the world, I began to feel more and more a need to create a project that would go beyond my artistic work, to find a larger answer to this call. In particular, the situation in Syria was becoming more and more critical, coming to my attention daily.

In response to this humanitarian crisis in Syria, displacing millions of Syrians and causing mass migrations, the Government of Canada began Operation Syrian Refugees in November 2015 and committed to welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016. Right here in Toronto, on my doorstep, an opportunity for a project presented itself.

Although it was not clear what I could do, I wanted to take action. To this end, I called a meeting of interested people through the network of the training program in expressive arts therapy that I co-founded and teach in, The CREATE Institute. In addition, I invited people from the agency where I was working to join this meeting. Many people came who also shared a concern



Figure #5: "Travelers" 2019

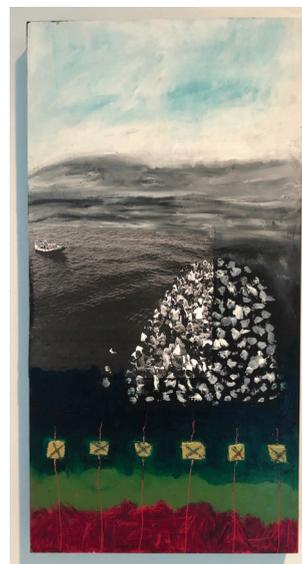


Figure #6: "By Sea" 2019

about the situation of refugees in Toronto. We met several times after that. A project began to emerge: to bring a team of students from the training program with me into a public school classroom which focused on children who had been in migration for long periods and, as a consequence, had lost years of schooling. Some students, in fact, had never been to school. These children had experienced the rupture of migration and the trauma associated with witnessing and experiencing violence along the way.

From the beginning, the teachers and the school administration welcomed us into the school, located in a large public housing project in Toronto where many refugees and people from diverse communities live. The teachers are part of a special program in the Board of Education, entitled LEAP (Literacy Enrichment Academic Program) for students aged 11-18 who have not have the opportunity to attend school regularly before arriving in Canada. LEAP offered these students a chance to gain English language, literacy, and mathematics skills so that they could participate fully in their classes. LEAP is now offered in 20 elementary schools and 17 secondary schools within the Toronto Board of Education.

Every week for the past five years, we have gone into the school and provided art projects for the children. Following the core principles of expressive arts, our focus has been to stimulate the imaginations of the children, to get them interested and excited about their own work and, thereby, to build their resources and capacities. The teachers at the school were interested to see whether this arts-based intervention could help the children improve their language and social skills. In the first couple of years, the classroom consisted of Syrian and Roma children. Over time, children have also come from Iraq and Afghanistan. The teachers wanted the children from these different communities to interact and to find common ground together. We found that co-creating in art-making activities has been a way for them to do this.

We have followed the same structure in every session. The children needed a sense of continuity from week to week, this was reflected in the design of the structure:

1. Opening with the whole group: welcome and rhythm play
2. Games/movement warm-ups such as: movement activities, musical chairs/grandmothers footsteps (red light/green light)
3. Art Activity
4. Performance component: showing and presenting to each other
5. Reflection on what worked/what did not work in the session
6. Closing

Over the course of the last five years, we have become known in the school as “The Art People.” We engaged in a wide variety of art activities: music, storytelling, puppetry, stop-motion animation, painting/drawing, and drama with costumes. Some of the activities were projects that continued and developed over many weeks. One such long-term project was the stop-motion animation project (Figure #7) which included a showing of the film work to the whole school, with the LEAP children featured as the “artists” who conducted a “Q and A” after each showing.

Another important project was what we called, “The Branch.” The teacher brought in a

Figure #7: Plasticene scenarios created by teams of children which were then filmed





Figure #8: The Branch

large tree branch one day, and we all sat around brainstorming about what we could do with it. The idea came up to decorate the branch. The teacher brought out many materials: yarn, coloured papers, string, tape, glue. The children worked in small groups with one CREATE student facilitator in each group. They took turns putting things on the branch—wrapping it, hanging objects on it, tracing their hands and adding words. The teacher observed that this was one of the first times she saw collective, cooperative work between the children. She kept the branch in the classroom for the whole school year, and one of the other teachers made a stand for it. The children loved looking at it and commented on it all the time.

We also introduced shorter art experiences to stimulate freer expression. One of these activities was the creation of five paintings to five different pieces of music, each painting taking

five minutes. The music was set up to be very different each time in terms of mood, rhythm, sound, etc. One piece was a response to the sound of ocean waves. The children (and the teachers) loved this activity and have asked for it many times.

Since the COVID 19 pandemic ended our ability to go into the school in March of 2020, we have been on-line with the classroom. This has presented many challenges. At first, the children were not in the classroom but in their own homes without access to computers or other devices. While the school was arranging for them to have proper equipment, we devised projects with materials that might be available to them at home and sent these photos and videos to them. One project was the creation of a "portrait" on a dinner-size plate (Figures 10 and 11).

From September of 2020 to December of 2020, the children were back in school in-person. This made it much easier to work with them, even though we were coming into the classroom virtually. The teachers were there to assist the children with their projects, help them with materials and generally keep them on track.



Figure #9: Five-minute paintings



Figure #10: Dinner plate portrait #1



Figure #10:  
Dinner plate portrait #2

The essential thing for us during this period was to maintain contact with both the teachers and the children and to keep stimulating their imaginations as much as possible. During this time, one of the teachers announced his retirement. We devoted several sessions to making a memory book for him and writing an improvised story which we had hoped would be performed for him before he left. Unfortunately, the school shut down due to COVID infections before we had a chance to finish the ceremony and the memory book.

After the holidays, the schools shut down again and, beginning in January 2021, we were connecting with the teachers and the children virtually, with the children in their own homes. Most of them have been reluctant to turn on their cameras, and it has been difficult to know whether they are engaging or not. We chose to accept this situation and to assume that they are watching us. One way of possibly understanding their turning off of cameras is that they are asserting the only control that they have in a basically out-of-control situation.

We have been doing the art-making ourselves as a way of connecting with them. We have also done more projects with materials that might be available to them at home. The theme of these weeks has been outer space. We have made installations of solar systems with objects from around their spaces, rocket ships from toilet paper rolls and recycled materials. Our last project was to construct an "alien" out of found materials.

As of this writing, the children are back in the classroom in person. I wonder how all of this disruption has affected them? Has it reawakened any memories and past experiences for them? Several weeks ago, five new children were added to the classroom, all Arabic speakers with very little ability to speak English. It was difficult for them to connect from their homes and to understand what was going on. It is interesting to see how they are adjusting to being in the classroom in-person and how they have begun to connect with the other children. We have had one session now with the children back in the classroom and there is a big difference, particularly around their attentiveness and their willingness to engage in the activities.

Throughout the pandemic, we have remained committed to being there every week. This has been an essential aspect of the program, no matter what we actually do with the children. To my mind, this reinforces the importance of relational connection in working with the arts.

Finally, I want to applaud the teachers for their commitment to our work and their support of both The Art People and the children through the years and through this very demanding current situation. Without their support and encouragement, this project could not go forward. Here is a reflection from one of the teachers who has been with the project since we began:

*Community*

*Identity*

*Confidence*

*Belonging*

*Joy*

*Welcoming the Art People into our space...*

*The visits by The Art People have created an authentic and exciting opportunity to build and practise oral language around welcoming and hosting visitors in our space. The Art People quickly have become cher-*

ished members of the classroom community. The art activities create a dynamic atmosphere encouraging the students to explore and learn more about themselves and share that in a supportive, caring environment. As the teacher, it allows me to step back a bit and observe my students as they navigate new situations. It provides me precious moments to reflect on my students, helping me to build a fuller understanding of the children's gifts, personalities and needs.

Conversation flows during shared activities. There are also times where we are all quietly connected through the act of individually creating. The art activities encourage the students to open up and share their thoughts, feelings and creations in new ways—through painting, drawing, making musical sounds and full body expressions. There have been opportunities for the students to have quiet chats with individual Art People, and to toss ideas around in a small group, as well as take the stage during full group activities. Individual choice is respected and encouraged while gently pushing students to participate in new ways. Again, it is an authentic opportunity for students to build relationships, grow their oral language skills, test ideas, ask questions, explore their thoughts, let down their guard and be proud of themselves. Students watch the interac-





Figure #12: The Creation of Worlds, 1

tions of *The Art People*, who model constructive feedback, appreciations, taking turns, stepping into new experiences, making mistakes and finding joy in unexpected results. The sessions provide a shared experience for the class to reflect on and draw upon during their learning in the classroom throughout the week.

I also asked my CREATE students (both current and former students at the Institute) to write something about their experience of working in the school with these children, focusing on what stood out for them. The following are a few of their accounts:

1. *The children all participated to the level they could. We held that space for them knowing that they were children who may have experienced something traumatic. The activities and the art allowed them to play and eventually for some to feel safe enough to express feelings and emotions with imagination and creativity.*

*One of the first projects I remember to help build the community, was where we all decorated our own large circle, called "our world," on a long single roll of paper. There were 13 worlds or so laid out across the floor where*

*we decorated side by side with paints, collage, and so on. As the children created, they told stories of family, such as a grandmother who taught one of them to knit, which was represented with yarn (lots of it). There were stories of activities they did with their friends and family, stories about their dreams, such as to one day have a very fast car or be a soccer player. Then the children and facilitators were asked to connect their worlds to other worlds that called to them. I witnessed delight, curiosity, and most of all connection as the worlds were connected and the space between filled in with colour and shapes. The image became one world for all of us.*

*Working with refugee children with Expressive Arts Therapy skills, I witnessed them develop more and more capacity to feel safe and relate to others. This was apparent in their play, their art and their team work in our group.*

*2. We witnessed the typical challenges of immigrant children who are in the process of adaptation to a new culture. The main challenges I observed were lack of engagement, and having difficulties relating to a new environment from a social and collective point of view. We were able to observe behaviours such as having a hard time focusing on concrete actions, shame, bullying, and difficulty relating as a cohesive group. Our main goal was to create a sense of community both working together as a group and always honouring the individuality of every child. We promoted participation to create*





Figure #13: The Creation of Worlds, 2

a sense of empowerment in the group, repetition was key to reinforce progress in this area. As a result, students were excited to take turns leading. We always celebrated their success, sharing their work among them and with other students at the school, and we honoured their art-work, creating portfolios for them to keep track of their work and to fuel appreciation for their effort by being contained in a palpable place.

3. I would like to share my observation from our last session of a long project last year (2019). I was working with a smaller group of kids where there were many doubts: how to use scissors, which role to take, how to read a story and how actually to write it, etc. Almost everyone had doubts. By just giving them space and time, trusting that they would find a way to deal with it, the kids dove into the creative process. This was the precious moment. You could feel the shift in the air. They collaborated, shaped, tried, shaped again and presented in front of the class. I could see that satisfaction and happiness (and pride) on their faces. They took risks. They could make mistakes and fix them. They accomplished the project. They could believe in themselves.

4. As part of this year's work (2020), our group was working with the students to create a special "good-bye" ceremony for one of their teachers, who was retiring in the middle of the school year. In planning the

*ceremony, the students created a story about rabbits and illustrations, as well as bunny ears to wear when they presented it to him. Although the ceremony had to be postponed due to the closing of the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe that the process of The Art People working with the students in creating the various elements for the ceremony helped to provide a tangible way to metabolize their emotions around the leaving of the teacher. Each aspect of the creation of the ceremony seemed to give them an opportunity to explore and process their emotions from a range of perspectives, with the use of a range of modalities. One especially memorable moment for me was when one of the boys in the class was able to express opposite emotions simultaneously—sharing with us at the end of the class, “I’m very happy today. And, I’m sad that our teacher will leave school. I will miss him.”*

*I felt this was a display of a growing recognition of the complexity of being human, and that we can be both happy and sad at the same time about something. I believe that this is a powerful resource for the student, which will help him as he navigates his life going forward.*

Going back to the questions about the current situation with mass migrations and refugees that I posed at the beginning of this article:

How can we respond to this situation? What constitutes an “adequate” response to problems of this scale and magnitude? Where do we even begin? Can expressive arts perspectives move beyond a focus on therapeutic change to address larger issues of social change?

On a personal level, my painting responses were important for me in terms of connecting to the issue of migration and the rupture of the refugee experience. It made me feel more

deeply into the situation. When I have exhibited these paintings, bringing them out into the public sphere, the feedback I have received indicates to me that they strike a chord in other people.

In terms of the creation of this particular project, guided by expressive arts principles and practice, there is no doubt that we have had an impact with ripple effects. Over the past five years since its inception, the project has influenced the teachers, the children, the students-in-training, and others who have heard about it and come into contact with it. Widening my focus from my own studio to an institution in the community, a school, has affected many others.

What are the guiding elements that worked in this particular project? How could the learning from this project be expanded to other projects that deal with more global issues around social change practices? It seems to me that the core principles of expressive arts work that apply within the context of psychotherapy with individuals can also apply within the broader community context of socially engaged practices. These principles, namely, keeping play, imagination and art-making at the center, are critical to all expressive arts practices. These principles were certainly evident in the project with the refugee children.

Seeing play, imagination and the arts as central to the daily diet of a person as well as the community at large is also essential. We can think of a community or a group as having an “immune system” that protects it from the external assaults of war, violence, forced migration, and trauma in general. The arts can be seen as playing a role in the make-up of such an immune system. They have always been carriers of both the suffering and the joy of communal life. As such, we work and play with people to find the forms for their experience so that these forms can support them through difficult times.

Play and art-making in the work of expressive arts always takes place in a relational context. Play is a back and forth activity. It functions as a way to bind us together. It is not a matter of

teaching people art skills but of forming relationships in which the art-making gains its strength and power through the engagement between us. We co-create in this playful back and forth, and we also build connections in the process of co-creating.

Art-making, play and the enriching of imagination leads to the creation of new possibilities in addition to affirming the resources and capacities of individuals and collectives. They expand the range of play and build new capacities. Particularly in this time of constriction and restriction, of pandemic shut-down, our work is more relevant than ever.

I believe that this project embodies the core guiding principles of expressive arts work when taken into the context of social practice. Perhaps it will also stimulate others to think about creating projects of this sort in their own communities. I have no doubt that expressive arts work can be an important way to respond to the call of the world.

Photos published with the permission of the author.

**Ellen G. Levine**, MSW, Ph.D., ATR-BC, REAT, Professor and Core Faculty at EGS, Co-founder of and faculty at The CREATE Institute in Toronto. Author, co-author and editor of *Tending the Fire: Studies in Art, Therapy and Creativity*, *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*, *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*, *Play and Art in Child Psychotherapy: An Expressive Arts Therapy Approach*, and *New Developments in Expressive Arts Therapy: The Play of Poiesis*.



Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*28 January 2021*

Winter in Toronto  
the streets treacherous  
and the virus raging

Here at the breakfast table  
all seems serene  
no violent death  
no loss of breath

Where is danger  
inside? outside?  
and who will save us  
from this wintry blast?

## My Mind is a Hostile Arctic World

Dorota K. Solarska

My mind is a hostile Arctic world  
full of traps, polar bears, night and dark.  
Sunlight comes here seldom, and when it does  
it's pale and shy, like a first lover.  
I'm scared to breathe in, I'm scared to breathe out.  
My mind is a hostile Arctic world.

# Coming Back to Myself: Art-making and Mental Crisis

Dorota K. Solarska



## End of the world

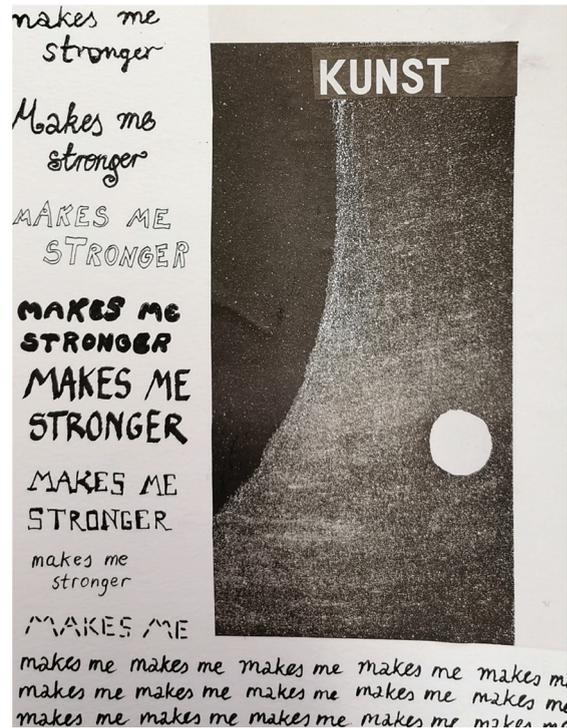
The first diagnosis—bipolar disorder—left me shaken and in disbelief. A psychologist, expressive arts practitioner, coach and business trainer, counsellor—mentally ill? Why me? I had it all...I started to read and learn more and more about the illness and figured out my case is not that severe; only mild phases of depression and hypomania. I can still function, I thought, but have to be careful. I didn't decide on taking medication. I just continued with my work, my hobbies, my life, treating diagnosis as an interesting hypothesis. Finally I got a major role in an English language theatre production: a dream came true. Couple of weeks on stage every night; stress, challenge, satisfaction, celebration. I stopped sleeping, started drinking, partying and doing very nasty things, losing contact with reality with the speed of lightning. I ended up in a psychiatric clinic some days later. My first hospitalisation. The world has ended. I officially became crazy.

## Reaching out

Mental illness is a very tricky enemy because it deprives you of many things you take for granted. You cannot rely on your reason anymore—it distorts your thinking, creating things that are not there, like delusions and hallucinations. And you can't trust your emotions, because suddenly you become depressed or manic without a reason; your intuition is gone, illness can easily pretend it is an intuition itself; you lose your judgment—and very often your body, since medications have side effects, and the most common is weight gain; you lose your job, because now you are unable to handle any stressful situations, plus the symptoms may come whenever—and just blow you away. I felt lost, my days became empty, relations with other people and the world shrank. But there was one thing that worked every time I reached out to it. Art.

## Decentering

I ceased to be a psychologist, ceased to be a coach and business trainer, ceased to be a counsellor, and started to make art. At first there were dots, lines and shapes on canvas or paper. Then week by week, month by month and year after year, they started to grow and develop. I also received my second diagnosis—a schizoaffective disorder—with periods of remission reaching a few weeks, if I was lucky. I was sick most of the time. And created—most of the time, daily, a few hours a day. Art was





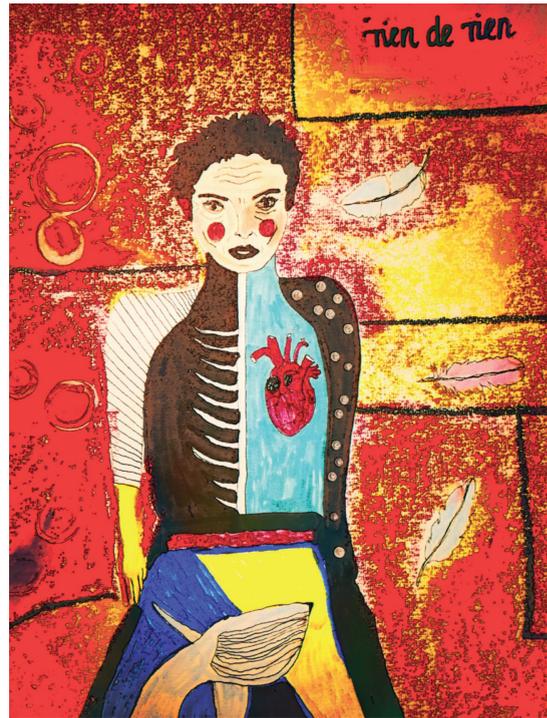
for me on the one hand a medium to transfer an enormous amount of overwhelming feelings, and on the other—a perfect *decentering* technique, a moment when I didn't think about my suffering at all. I started drawing portraits, faces of people I have never met. Drawing or painting a face was like coming back home. Soothing. Evoking curiosity. Who will I see on paper today? Who will come to meet me? What is *the third* that's going to appear?

I painted independently of how I felt. I painted when I was manic, when I was depressed and even when I was delusional. Art was something that never, ever let me down. My best friend. My loyal supporter. My everyday practice.

## Harvesting

After a few years of this practice I discovered a local association of outsider artists, people with a mental crisis experience. After a year, I had my first exhibition. Meanwhile, my drawings appeared on the cover of a mental health magazine—and I sold my first painting, the one that would be on the cover. Then I started taking part in other exhibitions and selling more and more works; obviously these were still occasional rather than regular events. I also met many people in whom a mental crisis triggered the artist's soul and stimulated regular artistic activ-

ity. They were people with a mental crisis, for whom creation begins to be the essence of life, helps to cope with difficulties, *decenters* and defines who they are. Sometimes one of us stops coming to the joint atelier and we know then that the crisis has returned, hitting hard, for some time. But we also know that this artist will eventually come back to us. Each of us has a separate, unique style, in line with the ART BRUT or OUTSIDER ART trend. Some work on one painting for weeks, others finish their work in two hours. In the atelier, we are always accompanied by a healthy caregiver, with whom we can talk about both art and life. The association also involves many healthy volunteers who not only help us promote and exhibit our works, establishing contacts with cultural institutions and collectors, but also sell them. For the first time in my life, I had an exhibition in a real museum in 2020. Were it not for this network of healthy helpers, we, people with mental disorders, would not be able to organize support and promotion on such a scale. Our condition is too labile and unpredictable.



It was like a dream—from a very ill person who draws at home and hides her works in a drawer—to become an exhibited artist, whose works go to collectors in Europe. I think about it as a harvesting phase. I'm collecting fruit from my everyday practice which is like breathing to me, and always surprising. Art is not a job for me, a hobby or a passion. Art is me.

## Coming home to myself

Slowly and shyly, I started to think of myself as an artist. I tried on this new identity like a beautiful dress. Still, I was for myself—stubbornly—above all, mentally ill.

And then I heard a podcast, and a sentence in it: if one is so attached to one's diagnosis and illness, there is no way you can deprive him/her of it. And it dawned on me. Who am I? Who is *my self*? Am I just a crazy person, or am I an artist, with an experience of mental crisis? I slowly started to move my central notion of self towards ART.

And I'm writing this text from this place: I, a writer and a visual artist, Dorota.

Bern 2021

**Dorota K. Solarska**, an EGS alumna, is a psychologist and an interdisciplinary artist (writer, singer, actress, and a visual artist). Born in Poland, lives currently in Switzerland where she leads an intense artistic life. She publishes in English and Polish. [dorotaksolarska@gmail.com](mailto:dorotaksolarska@gmail.com)

## The Drum

Dorota K. Solarska

I am playing my role on the drum of my belly.  
Stretched like a goat's skin on my bones,  
It makes deep sounds that attract crows. They ask,  
who are you to leave the Safe House and wander.  
Who are you, she-man, to pilgrimage so far! You have not  
asked the Unknown if It wants to see you,  
to hear your steps and smell your weariness.

I am playing my role on the drum of my belly.  
Stretched like a goat's skin on my bones, its beat sounds like thunder.  
It attracts hyenas, who laugh at me, and laugh, and laugh, and laugh.  
They say, little creature, how come you are so far away  
from the Safe House, here, which is nowhere.  
No one will listen and no one will hear, no one is near, no one is near.

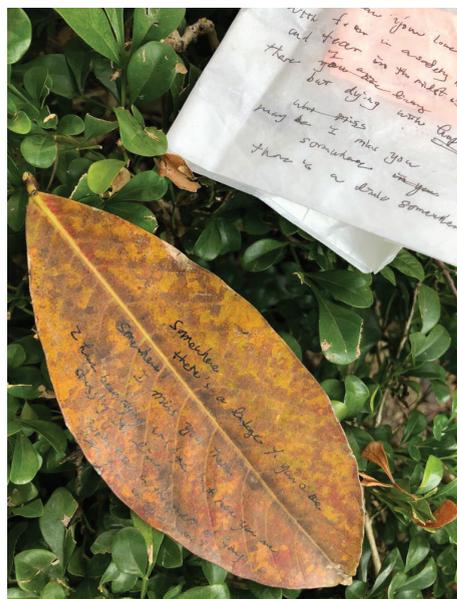
I am playing my role on the drum of my belly.  
I can't hear it anymore. I hit harder, I tense  
all my muscles with effort, to be able to sense,  
I hit harder and harder,  
and suddenly I hear

a cold metal sound of my body of steel.

# City as Studio, City as Wound: Dreaming Abolitionist Futures

Gracelynn Chung-Yan Lau

What does it mean to be an expressive arts therapist in the abolitionist movement? This question came to me when I was invited to participate in “Abolitionist Dream-Mapping,” a collective research project in collaboration with thirteen other researchers based at Queen’s University, Canada. The prison-abolition movement is the struggle to do away with imprisonment and the prison-industrial complex, and to find alternatives to incarceration as a way of building a more equitable society. Taking the abolitionist scholarship framework beyond the link between slavery and mass incarceration, we seek to experiment and recover abolitionist methods for disman-



ting carceral-colonial institutions and building freer, healthier, and more just communities in various community-based projects. Our research collective re-purposes “map” as a creative tool for navigating oppressive structures, activates the collective power to dream as a critical research method to experiment with ways of making alternatives, and translates abolitionist practices into hybrid cultural spaces. We ask ourselves: How do maps, images, and other forms of creative story-telling contribute to the transdisciplinary work of decolonial abolition? How do artists and researchers practice abolitionist and decolonial ethics in their work? As a co-researcher, I contextualized these research questions in Hong Kong in the Spring of 2021. This paper reflects on a six-month community collaboration with “From Trauma to Transformation,” a self-organizing initiative formed in response to the collective trauma in the aftermath of the civil unrest and protests in Hong Kong since late 2019. One of the focuses of our collaboration is experimenting ways to process traumatic memories and experiences in specific sites and neighbourhoods in the city through expressive arts-based “grief walks,” turning the wounded city landscape into the “studio” for play and imagination. I will reflect on the possibilities and challenges of facilitating healing spaces for social trauma outside the therapist’s office, and offer my self-reflexive inquiry as an expressive arts therapist in the dreaming of abolitionist futures.

Scholar-activist and feminist Angela Davis, a founding voice in abolitionist movement-building, has argued that abolition is not only a critical practice of dismantling oppressive structures, but also a creative process of building up and creating new relationships, practices, and institutions that would make oppressive structures obsolete (Davis, 2003). Initiatives such as *Harriet’s Apothecary* (inspired by the healing practice of Harriet Tubman) and the *#8toAbolition* campaign clearly demonstrate that abolition entails not only defunding police and freeing people from prisons, but also cultivating safe housing, health care, education, and co-creating accessible, all-body and all-gender loving community healing spaces. In the recent Black Lives Matter movement, Black feminists show us that abolition is a project and on-going practice of healing from the violence of policing and incarceration. As Queer Black poet-activist Alexis

Pauline Gumbs puts it, abolitionist work is “being partners in radical healing” in the here and now. In the essay “Abolition now: ten years of strategy and struggle against the prison industrial complex,” Gumbs invites us to imagine:

What if abolition isn’t a shattering thing, not a crashing thing, not a wrecking ball event? What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes, the broken places in our skin, the waiting places in our palms, the tremble holding in my mouth when I turn to you? What if abolition is something that grows? What if abolishing the prison industrial complex is the fruit of our diligent gardening, building and deepening of a movement to respond to the violence of the state and the violence in our communities with sustainable, transformative love? (Gumbs, 2008, 145)

Could this abolitionist vision inform and inspire a socially engaged expressive arts therapy practice? In expressive arts therapy (EXA) the making of art, as *poiesis*, is a sensitive, sensible and sense-making process of shaping the world while being shaped by it (Levine & Levine, 2011). EXA therapists have observed that those who search for healing perceive themselves as incapable of responding to their situations or challenges. By engaging in a process of *poiesis* in which they give up control, the clients act and respond within the creative constraints given to them by the therapists, and through which they rekindle a sense of their own capacity for imagination and action (Knill et. al., 2005). Can *poiesis*—the human aesthetic response to what has been given to us by making something new—facilitate abolitionist imagination in the midst of political uncertainties and hopelessness? Can expressive arts therapists create healing spaces and resources outside the therapist’s office to process systemic pain and social grief in the wounded city? Carrying these thoughts and questions with me, I responded to the call to work with social trauma in the land of my origin—Hong Kong—after the former British colony had been through months of civil unrest, social wounding and flight.

## When grieving becomes too political

*I met with my local project partner S at the Kowloon Park, a city park in the busiest downtown district right beside Nathan Road and the regional police headquarter. As we walked underneath the aerial roots of the Banyan trees, she showed me where the water cannon was deployed and where the police fired tear gas. There were vaguely visible traces of torn down protest slogan graffiti, and posters remained on the walls. S said that during the months' long pro-democracy demonstrations, countless memorable and traumatic moments changed the ways people feel and experience the city forever. Several metro stations, intersections, roadside fences, even the bricks from the sidewalk and post-it notes, have taken on new layers of meaning to those who call this city home, reminding them that once they were reclaiming ur-*



*ban spaces and voices in a political process. While a new sense of belonging and identity has emerged, powerlessness and fears are simultaneously reshaping the city. "Public urban spaces and the streets mean something very different now, but we have to pretend nothing's wrong and that everything returns to normal," S told me.*

*If the city is filled with unbearable memories and unresolved feelings, isn't it like living in a haunted house? Isn't it more brutal than accidentally walking by special places once shared between lovers after a heart-breaking breakup? There were times people com-*

memorated a metro station or landmark by leaving floral tributes in front of the exit to remember those who committed suicide or went missing during the protests. There were times "Lennon Walls," covered in sticky notes and other creative displays, sprang up on walkways, sky bridges, underpasses and storefronts, carrying messages that expressed protesters' mottoes and feelings. But even such gestures of mourning and expression have now become too politically risky and forbidden. S told me that she had the idea of "Hong Kong re-visit," a map/journey of revisiting those areas and locations to acknowledge the grief, pain and other emotions that come with the city-wide traumatic social events. She once shared the idea with others, and a few counsellors and teachers responded, but no follow-up took place thereafter.

"Let's do it," I said to S, not knowing how to do it yet. My gut feeling told me that the land, the plants, and the other-than-human beings in the specific locations were the witnesses of the happening, and they would show me how to do it. Perhaps I could create location-specific, self-guided expressive arts activities as community resources, like a grief-walk map, that people can download for free, follow the guide to interact with the space, and ceremonially re-create a new experience with the city. Politically people may experience themselves incapable of responding to their situations or challenges, and expressive arts therapy may seem far from practical at the moment. But in the face of systemic despair and grief, the least I could do is to create healing spaces and invoke the sacred. I remember Harriet's Apothecary facilitator Erika Totten saying in an interview that, "There's a level of alchemy in creating healing spaces. Even in the midst of these systems of oppression, we are still calling ourselves sacred" (Sostaita, 2020).

a group of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) practitioners and media professionals, alongside clinical psychiatry consultants. The initiative believes that sustainable transformation starts from building civic culture and community resilience, and therefore approaches social trauma as opportunities for collective transformation at the societal level. Since late 2019, they have been offering courses and educational materials to introduce NVC, The Work that Reconnects, and other models, raising public awareness about trauma, empathy, conflict mediation and emotional capacity-building.

Initially, our collaboration plan was to offer a three-month expressive arts-based inquiry group for people seeking alternatives for personal and social healing, and to create resilience through imagination, art and nature. But soon after I have arrived in the city and listened carefully, I heard the “unanswered call” to hold space for invisible grief in visible spaces. Two other projects emerged spontaneously: “Bring Wood to the Fire”, a series of bi-weekly online creative ritual spaces for deep listening, grief and empowerment; and the expressive arts-based “grief walk”. If the city landscape is where the wound is, is it possible to turn the city into a moving therapeutic “studio”?

### **Grief walk: making studio in and with the wounded city as we walk**

*Where is the studio? The studio is right here, nowhere and everywhere. In an individual grief walk session, I have to constantly remind myself as we walk that the changing space where we find ourselves is the studio. I cannot bring a fancy “portable studio” with me, so I must keep it simple. For each walk we meet with a different person at a different location, following the person’s lead to see how they prefer to revisit that area. Often times strong feelings or body sensations, memories, scenes or faces come up randomly as we turn a corner, or walk by a particular building. Knowing neither the place nor where the journey takes us, I can only rely on the architecture of an expressive arts session,*

*shaping time itself and the things we encounter in the moving scenery into the studio. The temporal-spatial experience of the walk becomes poiesis—I have to prompt “materials” for the person to work with and respond to aesthetically as we walk. The sun, the shadow, fallen leaves, and sometimes random road signs found on the street become the art materials. It feels like creating magic out of nothing. Usually I bring some basic items, such as masking tape, colourful sticky notes, sharpies, some cotton string or yarn, with me. But the key is to*

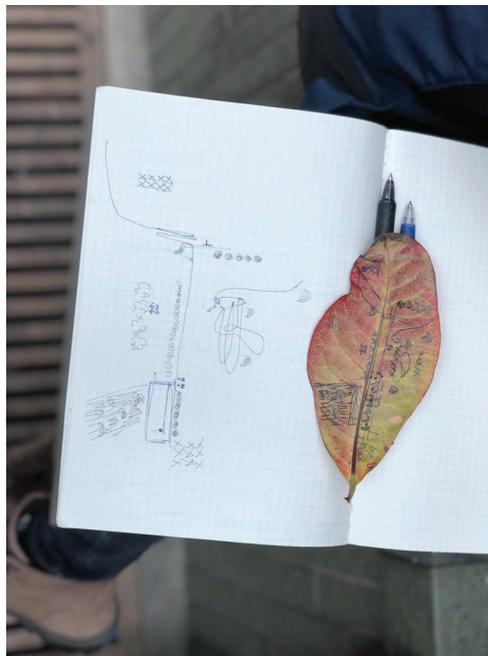


*listen to what arises in the person at the moment, and follow their curiosity. One time I turned a seven-storey old building’s rooftop in the heart of downtown into an improv dance performance stage; the clotheslines, the antennas (and the possibility of angry residents showing up) became the dance backdrop. Another time I asked the person to interview a pedestrian bridge,*

*and make an installation with found objects right outside the entrance of a no-entry zone where the unofficial “designated” smoking area is.*

*The challenge, and also the opportunity, is that the wound is where the studio is. When unbearable memories and unresolved feelings come up, the person either feels the urge to retell the stories, or intuitively ignores the feelings by focusing on something else. My job is to sensitize the person in their*

immediate surroundings at the present moment, so that they can pay attention to their body awareness and curiosity phenomenologically and start to notice what attracts them. But this is only the preparation work. The therapist's role is more than a companion. My aesthetic responsibility is always to create art-based creative play through whatever is available in the space and alive for the person. I keep in mind the principles of "low-skill, high-sensitivity" and "less is more." When people feel something strongly, a tiny little play is more than enough. As simple as putting some words down on sticky notes as we walk down the streets, it can turn into writing a poem that becomes a gift to honour something or someone special in the neighbourhood. To quiet down the desire to retell the stories and move into the art, I once asked the person to draw a map as we walk, to document the routes with two different colours – one colour records the route of the memories that emerged; another colour records the route of what attracts them at the moment – but only with symbols or shapes, no words allowed. The little "game" then evolved into a silent walk during rush hour in the business districts, and spontaneous intimate moments at specific spots and with the street-lined trees.



*Grief is a long-term project and cannot be rushed. I can open the door*

*by making up “studios” as we walk, but in order to experience the space and themselves anew, the person must walk through the door themselves. When the feelings of grief and pain are intertwined with the socio-political situations, the experience is more challenging and complicated by self-censorship, fear, and various restrictions and risks. How do I handle the censoring of emotional expression? As a therapist, it saddens me to know that even grieving for the city has become too politically risky. But at least we can reclaim the sacred by nourishing safe spaces and moments of healing and connection to witness and honour the truth of our experience.*

These “grief walks” are part of the research laboratory process to create a resource kit as a self-guided social grieving map, with written and audio materials, that people can download, use for their own grief walk in the city and create their own rituals. After a few experimental sessions, my project partner S has observed that often-times transformation takes place in and through the body during the creative or healing process, but that it takes time for the mind to register and understand what has happened. We need new languages and ways of speaking to articulate our bodily experience in order to make sense of such transformations. The research process also leaves us with more questions: What kinds of grief is the city going through collectively, and how do we carry these feelings in our daily bodily experience? Why is grief work essential to the city and to social transformation both personally and collectively? Can we sense the grief and pain in different parts of the city? And if we can, how are we to tell the difference between the personal and the collective in the grieving process?

The intention behind translating “sessions” into open source community resources is that we want to make it accessible for the wider audience who do not want to be reached or seen. There are many people who do not feel safe to join real-time programs, either in-person or online, due to various politically sensitive reasons. This practical consideration prompts us to walk the extra mile to create free self-guided materials on a mobile app that facilitates expressive

arts-based experiences beyond individual and group sessions. It also forces me to rethink my role as therapist and ways to adapt my therapeutic skills in the dreaming of abolitionist futures.

### **Dreaming expressive arts therapists' participation in abolitionist futures**

As the project goes on, it continues to ask me what it means to be a therapist in the abolitionist movement. The process challenges me to reconsider ways to practise abolitionist ethics in my expressive arts therapy work, invoking alternatives to facilitate healing spaces in the midst of political crackdown and systems of oppression. There are three areas of self-reflexive inquiry I would like to highlight:

First, abolitionist practice invites us to imagine a world without police and prison, and to work toward abolitionist societies beyond surveillance, imprisonment, and militarization. It requires not only the dismantling of oppressive structures, but also the nurturing of radical mutual aid and collective care outside these systems. What does it look like to be a therapist dreaming such abolitionist futures? I would take it further to envision a world without therapists. Can we democratize and normalize therapeutic experiences outside the therapist office and work hours? Can we imagine that there will be no need for therapy sessions, but communities of mutual support will be capable of holding spaces for healing in and with and by the communities themselves? Can we imagine that healing will not be monetized but accessible to all people, and that the ultimate goal is to abolish our private practice? What will be the therapists' roles in the post-therapy future?

This dreaming of abolitionist futures without therapists prompts me to examine my current practice during this project. How do I self-identify in the process—as therapist, educator, or activist? As a therapist and researcher based in Canada and working in Hong Kong, what privilege and power do I hold, and how do I navigate such positionality? In what areas of political analysis do I need to learn so that I can deepen my understanding of power, oppression and

privilege in the local context? How do my privilege, role and class shape how I offer services, and how do I decide when and what do I charge, or not charge?

Lastly, when imagination and grieving become “risky” in the political context, where do I stand as a therapist, how do I respond and adapt? Expressive arts therapy embraces the phenomenological notion that human beings have the innate creative capacities to shape and create the circumstances in which they live. When people experience their inherent healing potential of imagination, and see their own capacity in responding to their situations, they are fully capable of making personal and social change (Levine & Levine, 2011). The art itself has the capacity to hold grief and pain and restore imagination, but facilitating the art and imagination in this socially-engaged context could possibly put myself and people at risk. How do I balance and protect the vulnerable ones in the alchemy of holding healing spaces in dangerous times? Can I reframe the practical challenges and limitations as creative restrictions in the creative play?

At the time of writing this article, the project is still evolving and shaping itself. While I do not pretend to have all the questions answered, I do hope that these questions will open up further dialogue between abolitionist practice and expressive arts therapy. The insights offered by abolitionist theorists could be helpful for therapists to examine the socio-political context wherein we practice. The sensible, playful and aesthetic approach in expressive arts therapy could reclaim the sacred in the city by nourishing safe spaces and moments of healing to honour our pain for the city and the world.



## References

Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Gilmore, R. W. (2008). "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," in Charles R. Hale (ed.) *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Knill, P., Levine, E. & Levine, S. K. (2005). *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy*. London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Levine, E. & Levine, S. K. (Eds.) (2011). *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*. London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. 2008. "Freedom Seeds: Growing Abolition in Durham, North Carolina" in *Abolition now! Ten years of strategy and struggle against the prison industrial complex* (ed. CR10 Publications Collective). Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008.

Sostaita, B. (2020). "Free Radicals: Abolition's Roots in Healing Are a Key to Its Future". Bitch Media <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/abolition-healing-connected-essential>

**Gracelynn Chung-yan Lau** is a nature-based expressive arts therapist and a PhD candidate in cultural studies at Queen's University, Canada. Gracelynn's research applies expressive arts therapy in community-based participatory research, examining the relations between personal healing and social change and their impact on indigenous-settler relationships.



Ronald Meck

# Gathering Boughs

Ronald Meck

I can't say for sure how long I've held a kind of mystic fascination with Native Americans, but it goes back at least to 1979 when I was living rough in a tree house up in Addison County, Vermont. Pretty sure I'm not alone in that sentimental affinity amongst the sixty-somethings who've spent a good slice of their lives struggling to come to terms with the battering of a schizoid culture that seems to deny our intrinsic connection with the "natural" world (isn't all the world natural though?).

Never a doubt have I had that our species is mammalian, despite substantial confusion about the fact, and myriad perorations to the contrary, i.e. we being "chosen" or "created in God's image" or whatever self-serving narrative that tries to elevate us above the other creatures as well as the presumably inanimate entities in the cosmos. After all, we do nurse our young and give live birth. I've noticed even men have nipples. My elementary school biology teacher told me that makes us mammals. We seem to have forgotten that somewhere along the way, though not all of us have...



About ten years ago, I had a magnificent opportunity to check out this notion of the exalted Native American consciousness and demeanor firsthand, on an expedition to live in the bush one frigid March with a pair of Cree Elders several hundred miles north of Quebec City. This twelve-day trip, sponsored by the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Fairlee, Vermont, was their fifteenth sojourn to the Cree village of Ouje Bougoumou ("Where the People Gather"), cited by the United Nations as the foremost exemplary

configuration of a contemporary aboriginal community that had succeeded in synthesizing its archaic core belief system with technology. I was accompanied by three Marlboro College students, a University of Massachusetts forestry professor, an electrical engineer, a natives studies professor from SUNY Plattsburgh and our leader from Hulbert, Deb Williams.

Though sitting on the outhouse seat at 20 below zero was indeed a thrill, it wasn't the biggest charge I got out of living in the bush with Anna (56) and David Bosun (66). Snowshoeing in deep Spring snow, trapping beaver, pulling fish nets from under the ice, stretching moose hides, roasting Canada geese on a string hanging over the wood stove, sleeping on bear skins and eating a variety of game were only some of the enriching "primitive" activities we pursued. I did have a hard time eating Mr. Beaver though, I admit. I'm very fond of beavers.

But the most moving aspect of the trip was observing Anna and David in their element. These are not people trying to get "back to nature." Such a contrivance would seem bizarre to



in the mosaic of creation is to live within the parameters of the spots bequeathed to us and engage in reciprocal relationship with all the others on their spots, not to consume as much space and resource as possible.

Yet those of us with a romanticized notion of Native Americans living like they did a thousand years ago will be disappointed if they travel to the bush near “Ouje.” Their tradition is a dynamic evolving entity. The Cree have no qualms about assimilating technology, going back to the first metal knife or axe or wooden boat procured from the Hudson’s Bay Company. Though they may well have passed on those proffered conveniences, had they known where accepting such artifacts of “progress” would lead them and their like in the end.

Where they depart profoundly from the standard Western cultural fascination with technology is in their discerning integration of it, always asking how it will advance their ability to adhere to the core beliefs and values which still permeate their tribal communities. They don’t buy the iPhone 12 just because it’s the latest thing. One sunny day, as I admired the wolf and beaver hides, hand-made snowshoes and primitive toboggan hanging on the outdoor

them. I doubt they ever contemplate a separation from “the land” even being possible. Their 10,000 year-old hunter narrative appears to have imbued them with an unflappable sense of their identity and place in a world that we descendants of immigrant imperial colonists seem to find perpetually elusive. For the Cree, humanity’s role



appeared to be the prototype hand-powered Singer sewing machine. Thinking it an heirloom passed down to her through the generations, we asked, "Anna, where did you get that sewing machine?" "Ebay," was her reply, to our delight and amusement.

racks, I had to laugh at the image of Anna standing between these artifacts, talking on her cell phone. No contradiction there, as her intent was to check on the elders back at Ouje Bougoumou to know whether or not she could stay in the bush, as was her preference, barring some familial necessity requiring her presence. We all had a surprise one night as she sewed a moose hide in preparation for curing it over a smoky fire on what appeared to be the prototype hand-powered Singer sewing machine. Thinking it an heirloom passed down to her through the generations, we asked, "Anna, where did you get that sewing machine?" "Ebay," was her reply, to our delight and amusement.



provincial and national banners and have the imperative to teach French in schools being supplanted by teaching Cree instead.

The story of the Cree ascendancy, since they got fed up and took a stand against unfettered logging, mining and hydro-electric projects by blockading an access road in 1970, is inspiring, gratifying and ongoing. It culminated in a landmark settlement with the Canadian and Quebec Governments in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Finally some Indians got theirs! I especially liked them being allowed by the Federal and Provincial Governments to fly their flag at equal height between the

You can learn about it at [www.ouje.ca](http://www.ouje.ca) or by reading the book written by my traveling companion Hans Carlson, *Home Is The Hunter: The James Bay Cree and their Land*. Here's a small sample of my reflections on our experience at Ouje Bougoumou on the day we entered the forest to collect boughs for our tent floor:

### Gathering Boughs

Snowflakes, like fairy parachutes, drift down in gossamer symmetry, to join their predecessors, who now link arms to support our mocassined and booted snowshoe trudging. The party's playful banter and musings provide melody over a backbeat of "crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch." Flashing past us in the distance, a speeding Cree on a skidoo offers crisp, ironic counterpoint to our troop's passing, with our birch and sinew snowshoes, and rustic handcrafted toboggan in tow.

Upon arrival, "We don't want to take boughs from the shoreline trees," our leader tells us, "because the lake vistas are viable in both directions." Good directive and aesthetic, I think, but I wonder, "Do the Cree even care about 'the view'?" That seems an interest of those who imagine themselves as separate from nature, not at all how the Cree imagine themselves.

All of us now bend over, six bottoms seeming to rise in unison, like so many moons over the snow's sparkle, as we adjust the hand-made wood and sinew big feet over our little feet. A sudden ardent demeanor comes over the company as we prepare to embark on this most serious of missions. Our leader seems oddly elated in anticipation of the task before her. Maybe she's done this before? One by one, we vanish through tangled conifer arches in search of the forest green tiles that will become our new tent floors.

Soon, I lose visual contact with my companions as I struggle to ascend the



steep learning curve of snowshoe ambulation in waist-deep snow amidst the thicket. Teetering and stumbling like a fresh colt, I'm careful not to impale myself on the spiky black spruce sentinels that surround me. "Not any bough will do," I say to myself, "and I'll gain distinction for excluding black spruce in favor of the elusive balsam fir branches! Their flat needles hold up better under foot traffic." Rising up on tippy toes, I snap off the preferred brand, stuffing each one under my armpit. Still, I'm unable to see my fellow harvesters, but I detect the tell-tale cracks of twigs in the distance as they too fulfill the assignment. With the load growing unwieldy, I begin repeatedly dropping boughs from under my arm. I decide to head back to the transport with my booty.

En route, I encounter a tangle of ropes, toboggan, snowshoes and cursing woman. She's attempting to breach the shore barrier to transfer piles of boughs the others have stacked in the woods into position for loading on the sled. After getting her untangled, we decide it better advised to return to the lake ice and wait for the flooring to come to us in the hands of the others.

In time, it does arrive, but in the interim, two of us try our hand at securing the 800-plus boughs on an 8 foot toboggan with a mere 20 feet of cordage. We manage to do so, adding the bundles of the returning party, by interlaying bundles, threading the rope back and forth as we go. We feel kind of proud of ourselves, yet when our leader arrives, she informs us that our packaging, though adequate, is not “traditional.”

Shivering, we glance furtively at each other, slightly crestfallen, but with simultaneous recognition of our growling hunger pangs. Silently, we conclude that in this instance, adequate is indeed adequate. Another of the group loops the tow line over her shoulders, and the self-satisfied entourage heads for camp. We have our floor, and a warm tent and fresh fried pike awaits.

So, in the end I didn't turn into a Cree, perhaps even wishing I had. But maybe a smattering rubbed off on me and will help me navigate my world a bit more deftly. A bit more graciously. A bit more gratefully. When I return one day—which I'm sure I will—a little larger smattering?

Photos: Paul K. Barton, Univeristy of Massachusetts at Amherst, Dept. of Environmental Conservation.

For more info on Cree cultural tours, visit <https://www.facebook.com/nuuhchimiwiinuu/>  
Email: [creeculturaltours@hotmail.com](mailto:creeculturaltours@hotmail.com)

**Ronald Sigmund Meck**, MA, LMHC, is an expressive arts therapist and musician living in the woods of Western Massachusetts. He was a faculty member of EGS and Lesley University, specializing in the integration of Expressive Therapies and Therapeutic Adventure. His life/work experience includes ten years in the volunteer fire service, instructor in the sailing program of Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, completely renovating a dilapidated cottage to raise his sons in and studying traditional local song and dance with Village Harmony in Bulgaria and the Republic of Georgia. You may email him at [bigsigmund@gmail.com](mailto:bigsigmund@gmail.com)

## Poiesis beckons the Witness

Alexandra Fidyk

Poiesis beckons  
the Witness.

While we make  
we watch, witness  
what arises, what comes  
forth and weave together

breath to breath.

Somewhere  
in this sensual act  
if silence  
becomes us

we slip  
from singularity  
into cellular  
unity, abiding

breath by breath.

# The Heroic Journey of Ai Apaec

José Miguel  
Calderon



Aiapaec

to ulla

divine Moche *camac*

going to your death in full regalia

two-colored *chakana*

feline headdress

belt of snakes

Lima bean in hand

you descend the hollowed-out-night

spiraled being

your shirt woven by spiders

an owl comes

finally

for you

*mallqui*

man/sun/maize/ají pepper

you copulate

engage in combat

hybrids

*pututo* in hand

you are born again

—Odette Velez (2014)

Recently the Larco Museum (2020) in Lima, Peru released a documentary that narrates the journey of Ai Apaec, a hero of the pre-Columbian Mochica culture that developed in the north coast of Peru more than 1800 years ago. The series entitled “Ai Apaec, the Mochica hero” consists of 6 chapters and won the 11th Ibermuseums of Education Prize. In my dissertation for the European Graduate School (Calderón, 2015), I reflected on the relationship between Ai Apaec and our field of work in expressive arts. Now, based on this new and captivating audiovisual<sup>1</sup> material, I would like here to continue delving into the relationship between the myth of Ai Apaec and the expressive arts, especially in the current context in which we find ourselves.

Ulla Holmquist, director of the Larco Museum, in an interesting interview by Alberto Ñiquen (2020) from *La Mula*, shares information about the making of the documentary as well as her reflections on the importance of knowing more about our myths and their relevance to our present. The achievements of Ai Apaec transport us to an original indigenous worldview that has not had any external influence.

The Mochica did not have writing. They narrated the adventures of this character through three-dimensional images represented in their beautiful and mysterious “huacos” (ceramics). The documentary series has been developed based on artistic, archaeological and iconographic studies.

Ai Apaec, in the language of the moches (mochic), means “actor.” He was an archetypal human character with divine powers who performed various feats, travels, battles, and engaged in various encounters. He is represented with a human body but at the same time has particular

---

1 I recommend that the reader watch these videos before continuing to read the article, since the images are vital to be able to feel and better understand what is narrated in this text: <https://www.museo-larco.org/miniserie/ai-apaec/>

traits and attributes that give him special abilities. He wears a two-coloured chacana<sup>2</sup>-shaped shirt that represents his ability to travel to different worlds: the world above (hanan pacha) the world below (uku pacha) and the world here (kay pacha). He has feline fangs and crown as well as bird feather ornaments, snake ear flaps and belt. All this allows him to obtain the qualities of these divine animals to be able to undertake his journey through different realities.

Below I describe Ai Apaec's heroic journey. This description is based on the videos from the Larco Museum and the interview with Ulla Holmquist that I have referred to previously.

*Ai Apaec's mission is to restore order and the reproductive cycle of life. Before starting his journey, he prepares himself with the necessary clothing to be able to have the ability to perform his feats. The powers of felines, birds and snakes accompany him in his clothing to gain access to the different realities that he is going to travel through on his journey. He also carries with him a treasure that will be necessary for him, the black and white lima beans, symbol of abundance and life, in which the gods have left engaged hidden messages. He is always accompanied by the cunning lizard with a bird's crown and the spotted dog who warns him of possible dangers.*



*Ai Apaec goes in search of the sun that has gone to the bottom of the sea so that the cycles of life can return and the shadow disappears. When he reaches the beach,*

---

2 Andean cross

*the threshold between the terrestrial and marine world, he meets the giant crab who teaches him how to walk on the sand and eat from the sea. He then meets the great stingray whom he captures and acquires the cunning and ability from him to move swiftly and stealthily through the sea. The transformation of the hero has begun.*

*This is how he enters the depths of the sea where he has encounters with various marine beings that help him prepare for what is to come. The hedgehog man gives him a nose ring so he doesn't drown in the sea. The puffer fish gives him its crown so*



*that he can resist the pressure of the deep and can see in the dark. In return, Ai Apaec gives them his sacred lima beans to receive those powers that will help him in his feat.*

*Already on the seabed he has an arduous fight with the giant snail and thus obtains the sacred pututo, voice of the gods, a spiralling seashell that represents the regeneration of nature. That offering must later be delivered to the god of the mountain. Then he faces the monster of darkness, a mix of sea lion, stingray and shark. In that battle he dies beheaded and thus leaves the world of the*

*living and descends to the world of the dead.*

*Later some spiders unweave his chacana-shaped shirt and weave a ladder that takes him to the world above. Once there, some birds take him to the islands where the ancestors live to meet with the female shaman owl who heals him and rescues him from death. Then our hero goes to meet mother earth, the pachamama with whom he copulates in order to allow regeneration. From this union the tree of life is born. Ai Apaec germinates as a fruit and transforms into maize and aji pepper.*



*After all these encounters, confrontations, death and resurrection, he manages to rescue the sun from darkness and thus fulfills his mission. He returns revitalized to the kay pacha next to the sun where his community awaits him. He advances to the temple of the mountain god where he hands over his offering, the sacred pututo, acquired in the depths of the sea. The god of the mountain receives it and this ensures the rains so that the rivers continue to irrigate the field for the cultivation and harvest of the community. Ai Apaec thus manages to turn the spiral of the life cycle again.*

*Later, aged and already with wrinkles, he is seen playing with the sacred lima beans with his successor, thus granting him his knowledge so that he can continue with his legacy.*

The heroic journey of Ai Apaec gives us multiple images that reach us some 1800 years later, suggestive images that might nurture our expressive arts practice at the crucial time we are currently experiencing in the face of post-covid challenges and the climate crisis. Below I select some of the images from the story of the Mochica hero and relate them to our work. I like to approach the images of this myth from the perspective of the expressive arts: honoring them, surprising myself with their beauty, listening and feeling to them sensorially without quickly reaching a forced understanding or interpretation. I believe that this imaginative way of approaching the myth can enrich our expressive arts work in clinical, community, educational or social change contexts. I present the reflections that follow in a poetic way so that we still remain at an imaginal level.



The idea of *journey as a form of transformation*: Our expressive arts work can also be understood as a heroic journey into the imaginal world. A cyclical journey of regeneration. The

architecture of a session in expressive arts can be enriched with this more circular vision that places a greater emphasis on our bond with nature and community well-being.

The importance of *preparing for the journey* before entering the imaginary world of the expressive arts: What do we have to take? How can we prepare for the journey to be fruitful? A previous step, even before sensitizing, to enter the expressive arts process both at an educational and transformational level.

The kay pacha or *world here* connects us with our literal, interpersonal and community reality: The uku pacha or *world below* to the possibility of dying and dialoguing with our ancestors, our unconscious inhabited by various archetypes. The hanan pacha or *world above* speaks of accessing our divinities, a transpersonal reality. Our literal reality is enriched by the imaginal journey through these worlds.

*Threshold between the terrestrial and marine world:* Windows, doors, portals, thresholds as a way to enter and exit the imaginal world, at the beginning of our sessions, classes or transformation processes. Thresholds that open to allow us to enter new depths; then they can and should be closed.

The awareness of the *treasures* (sacred lima beans) or resources that we have: We have to be aware of our resources and sacred treasures and have them “at hand” in our journey (life).

*Exchange of gifts:* What do I offer in order to receive new capacities necessary to continue the journey? The tinkuy or encounter (Calderón, 2019) as an

ethical way of being in the world, I offer to be able to receive, and this benefit not only remains with me but also extends to the community. Exchange of gifts in our sessions: I give presence, confidence and creative openness and receive the gifts that the arts bring. The therapeutic bond also understood as an exchange of gifts.

*Death and resurrection:* Aspects of us that have to die for the new to emerge. Resistances, maladaptive personality structures, dysfunctional ways of being with oneself and with others. To thus access the transpersonal, to a greater consciousness, I have to leave something in the world of the ancestors and close that portal. Ascension can only happen if there is a "letting go" first.

*The female shaman owl* that heals us: A poetic and mysterious image that encourages us to continue to be inspired by the female role in transformation processes.

*The copulation with nature that brings fruit and regeneration:* What role do we have from the expressive arts to favor the continuous regeneration of life and nature? Rescue the sun to defeat the shadow. What do we have to rescue in our sessions? What has gone and must come back? Has the sun gone down in present times? What must we do to go in search of it and thus overcome the shadow in which we find ourselves? The expressive arts journey as a way to connect with eros and the ability to regenerate and revitalize.

*Journey in company in community:* We are accompanied in our becoming so it is not a lonely journey.

*Male/female complementarity.* Ai Apaec can return to the world of the living when he connects with the feminine side of him. He recovers his manhood

when he rescues his vulnerability. The journey of life flows when we open ourselves to our complementarity.

*Unweave* our body to build a ladder that takes us to the world above: What should we unweave? How do you unravel in the expressive arts? Deformation to access our vitality, as Alalu (2019) reminds us. Deconstruct to arrive at a new way of being.

Ai Apaec *the actor*: An image of an expressive arts facilitator, who seeks to make, regenerate, transform, germinate and mediate between worlds. A actor who opens up to multiple transfigurations. As expressive arts facilitators, we act, respond, accompany journeys, promote encounters and honor the multiplicity of images that inhabit us. Let us as expressive arts facilitators continue to travel the journey of Ai Apaec again and again.

*Transmission of knowledge*: Learning from our ancestors and sages and in turn transmitting their legacy to other generations. The Mochica tell us about their myth in three-dimensional images, offering us knowledge that can be re-imagined in the light of current challenges. The expressive arts are a bridge that connects us with the imaginary (Calderón 2019) that comes from the past in order to re-create it in our present.

The images described provide a poetic way of understanding our work. I invite readers to continue being inspired by this original Indigenous myth that comes from Peru. Discover how its suggestive images can contribute to the work you are doing in the current context. Stay with the images, don't try to understand them completely, let them speak for themselves and be surprised how it enriches your practice.

Tinkuy\*: The Trickster Speaks  
For José Miguel

Standing in the place  
Where all the rivers meet  
Let us see what must die  
So the waters may flow  
Let the old acts of violence  
Become a ritual dance.

The world sings  
For those who can hear  
And with the singing  
And the dancing  
The task is fulfilled  
The cycle begins again.

We are Ai Apaec  
The intermediary, journeying  
Between worlds, knowing  
The connection of all things  
Remembering again that  
Everything is sacred.

Remember  
Ai Apaec says:  
Don't take yourself too seriously.

\*Tinkuy is the Quechua word for encounter

\*\*Ai Apaec is a Quechua God

–Sally Atkins (June, 2016)

## References

Alalu, J. (2019), Deformation and Vitality in the Expressive Arts. In: *Pain and Beauty: Perspectives from the Expressive Arts*. Lima: TAE Perú.

Calderón, JM. and Velez, O. (Ed.) (2019), *Pain and Beauty: Perspectives from the Expressive Arts*. Lima: TAE Perú.

Calderón, JM. (2015). *Tinkuy: The encounter between the Peruvian imaginary and the expressive arts*. Doctoral dissertation for the the European Graduate School.

Larco Museum (2020) <https://www.museolarco.org/miniserie/ai-apaec/>  
*Ai Apaec: The Mochica Hero*

Ñiquen, A. (2020). *Alberto Ñiquen interviews Ulla Holmquist*. La Mula  
<https://www.facebook.com/LaMulape/videos/1284023235324197>

Vélez, O. (2014) *Urdimbre*, p.60. Lima: Intermezzo Tropical.

### Image Credits

Larco Museum Catalogue: <https://www.museolarco.org/catalogo/>

Ceremonial Vessel: code ML018882, ML018882, ML018882sup\_JG

Ai Apaec after capturing demon strombus: code ML003208

Ai Apaec beheaded: code ML002968

Corn Ai Apaec: code ML003291

Ai Apaec handing over lima beans to his successor: code ML002362

**José Miguel Calderon** Co-founder of TAE Peru/Barcelona institute. Director of the expressive arts doctoral program at EGS, Ph.D in expressive arts therapy from EGS. He received a master's degree in Theoretical Psychoanalytic Studies at University College London. Graduated in clinical psychology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Expressive arts therapist and supervisor. He has led various community projects. His interest is in arts-based research, and the exploration of movement and creative writing.

For the Revolution, our ravishing host Discordia will perform a little number  
on the pandemonium-harmonium

Kristin Briggs

Your Event: R/evolution Full Circle has now been confirmed.

The invites have gone out  
Through the wires, through the air,  
Via expedited laissez-faire.  
It's gonna be wild!

Glacier-Melt, Fire-Storm,  
Flood and Tsunami are online.  
They have all RSVP'd. They'll attend.

They are on their way and can no longer be changed.  
Click to track their progress.  
Delivery is guaranteed.

If you want to return an item from this shipment  
please visit the website [HERE](#).

You're invited to attend  
And to invite your friends.

Hit SEND.

# The Revolutionizing Power of Aesthetics

Judith Greer Essex

In *Principles and Practices of Expressive Arts Therapy*, Paolo Knill wrote:

We have a special challenge in confronting the anaesthetizing mechanisms in the world today. Could it be that genuine beauty has absented itself from our daily life to such an extent that we have to anesthetize ourselves in order to protect ourselves from abusive realities? Perhaps concerns about abuse in contemporary therapy should include those which result from an anesthetic everyday life; certainly then, the aesthetic response would have political implications. (P & P p.138).

Has beauty absented itself from our daily lives? If we are anesthetized, dulled, put to sleep, perhaps beauty is available, but we are unaware of it. Or have we lost our ability to respond to the loss of beauty as the result of anesthesia from abuse by the ugliness of everyday life. As expressive arts practitioners, can we administer an antagonist to reverse the anesthesia? How can we help our community and our clients reclaim the power of the aesthetic life?

156

In 2018 I was weary. Exhausted with terrible political news. Tired from the endless duties as





administratrator of my Institute, and depleted from a long family legal battle after the death of my parents. I needed a refresh, some time and space to clear my head and heart. I sought the big empty space of the Anza-Borrego Desert, a landscape that dwarfs my personal worries. I went seeking solace and beauty. The winter months brought extraordinary rain in southern California, and that single ingredient brought the desert to life. The gentle rain at frequent intervals coaxes dormant seeds to sprout. Even the scarce desert lily could germinate, since the rain had time to penetrate deep into the soil where its bulbs can lie sleeping for years.

My journey was rewarded with a landscape transformed. Descending the steep road above my destination, I could see the desert floor stained in shades of golden, yellow, orange

and purple that could be seen from miles away, so vivid they can be even seen from space. Space is the only place to see the true extent of the bloom. Once on the valley floor, we drove through acres of buttery yellow and golden petals: desert dandelions, brittlebush, desert sunflower, little gold poppies—each contributing their sunny hue. Van Gogh, with his love of yellow, would be happy here. There were carpets of purples: lupine, sand verbena, heliotrope and soft floppy dune primrose, pink and mauve. There were thousands and hundreds of thousands of blossoms. Species so little, many smaller than your thumbnail. Yet they were so rife, so plentiful they created great fields of color. The whole valley smelled sweet, as the flowers released their fragrance. Clouds of Painted Lady butterflies in their thousands floated over the scene, and Harris hawks had come especially to hunt their caterpillars, who crawl everywhere throughout the bloom. The spontaneous eruption of such beauty is almost overwhelming. It doesn't happen every year, or even every decade. The air was soft and warm as I walked over the sandy washes. I felt a world away from my worries, I felt relaxed and open. This voluntary and generous outpouring of beauty came like a gift—no one planted it, you can't buy it. It can only be given. The flood of beauty was magnificent and nourishing to my worn-out weary self.

Most of these plants do not stand as high as your shoelaces. There are a few, like the desert sunflower, that might reach your chin, and the desert lavender bush equal to your height. The rarer ocotillo with their fiery red-orange tassels serve as skinny trees in the otherwise sparse and flat landscape. But to really appreciate the glory of this spectacular bloom, you need to kneel, to meet them on their own ground. Then you see the details; petals with delicate dots and feathery stamens. Then you see the scalloped edges and fuzzy stems and leaves.

As I was held by the beauty of the desert, and the smallest of blossoms transforming the landscape, an image came to me; a metaphor about how we, as expressive arts practitioners, are like the super-bloom. Expressive arts practice is transforming lives, one hour, one person at a time. Our work can be so small, so personal and hidden. Behind closed doors, wrapped in confidentiality, in studios, in classrooms and community centers, it can be hard to see. But



every such experience brings sustenance and nourishment to that one person, or group, or community. It is the beauty of the thousand tiny acts. These tickle the aesthetic response into awakening.

We know the power of it, we have experienced it ourselves. We have increased our capacity for pleasure: the pleasure of dancing, painting, making your own music. There is an awakening to the pleasure of cooperating, of being part of the solution, of finding your tribe, the pleasure of the corporeal life, of being a fleshy creature. In this way we find our place, and each other. People, perhaps for the first time, nourish themselves in the arts and aesthetic relationships. A greater sense of connection to others is nourished in the aesthetic conversation. A greater sense of friendship and of community is a common outcome. The work itself is the change agent, the work itself is the beauty potion. Even if these changes are temporary, they are significant. Dipping into and coming out of the realm of imagination, enlivening the senses, returning to the body as a source of cognition and consciousness—these result in human beings who have their own locus of control and direction. They can navigate the winds and tides of their own lives. They can learn to trust themselves and the decisions they make. Even when they fail, even when they suffer, they have continuity and can better withstand the uncertainty of this transition time. They become more interested in the world. They turn outward and become activated. When people begin to see their creative actions as a source of help, of power and pleasure, of play, and as a resource, they begin to act differently, at least momentarily. In many cases their identity changes to incorporate the newly discovered or recovered role in their narrative: that of maker, or artist, performer, or poet.

Returning the arts to a more central place in the lives of people allows purposeful and consequential action to occur. When we give voice to and champion the arts, things do change. Questioning the status quo, trusting the body, withstanding not knowing, being open-minded, changing perspective, being curious, making room for beauty and surprise, and especially developing self-discipline, gives rise to originality and authenticity. Forging one's own way is

neither easy nor simple, not without struggle, not without loss. But seeing the effects of this work over and over has given me a firm belief in the reliability of these principles. Every single change I have mentioned here is something I have either seen myself or has been reported to me. And these are only some of the effects of expressive arts and of an empowered life.

I believe this resilience is what a dedication to the aesthetic life brings—a type of meta-noia—a changed way of being. Practitioners change their own lives, as Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo” urges us to do. Then they turn to others. We are the tiny blossoms. We drop our seeds of change. This change may be hard to see from ground-level worm’s-eye view, but rise up, and see it from the bird’s eye. We became a tapestry of color. Together we pull each other out of the wreckage of the worn-thin promises of materialism and conformity. We restructure and reorganize our priorities and values. We turn to the relative and shifting safety of knowing how to steer ourselves toward values standing on ambiguity and placed in poiesis. Paolo, we are awake.

## References

Knill, P.J. Levine, E. Levine, S.K. Levine. (2005). *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Towards a Therapeutic Aesthetics*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: Philadelphia.

All photos published with permission from the author.

**Judith Greer Essex**, Ph.D is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), a Registered Dance Therapist (ADTR) a Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT) and the founder of the Expressive Arts Institute, San Diego. Having taught at EGS for 20 years, she is now a Professor in the CAGS program, where is she also leads the community art sessions.

# Perspective: Technique or Thinking as Applied to Expressive Arts Therapy

John Faul



Pietro Perugino. *Delivery of the Keys*. 1481-82.

In this paper I examine the notion of perspective in art. I contrast perspective as a technique and creative skill used by an artist to a way of seeing in art. I speculate that art is perspectival thought. And finally, how these perspectival ways of creating and seeing art relate to expressive arts therapy is brought into context.

### **Perspective as a technique and creative skill**

Perspective is a technique that artists use to create the illusion of three dimensions in a two-dimensional space. An artist creates an impression of depth and space on a flat surface employing the technique. There are two main types of perspective: First, with a linear perspective, the artist depends on mathematical accuracy to create realistic pictures (Rohland 2017). Linear perspective is essentially a geometrization probably first formulated in 15th-century Florence by the architects Brunelleschi and Alberti (Raynaud 2010). Brunelleschi is known for his construction of the mathematically proportional system of perspective (later expanded on by Alberti) and made a number of influential illustrations in correct perspective of many buildings in Florence.

In the painting, "The Delivery of the Keys," the Renaissance painter, Perugino, used this technique of linear perspective. In the foreground the keys of service and care are handed by Christ to Saint Peter. The cathedral building in the distance may symbolize the church as the body of Christ per Christian dogma.



Alberti. *De Pittura*. 1435.

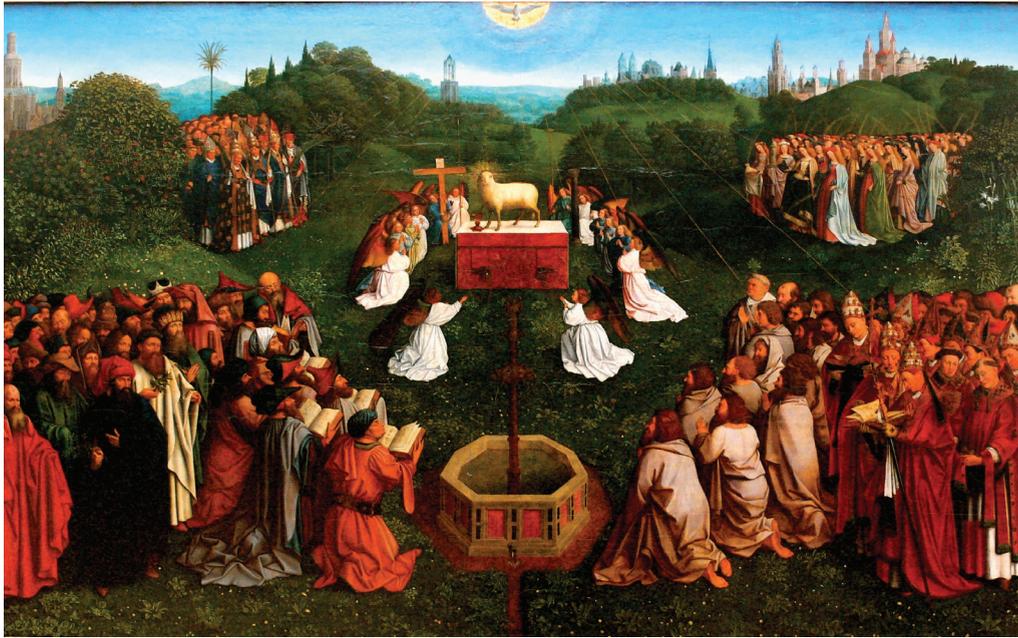


Da Vinci. *Mona Lisa*. 1503-06.

Alberti, in his treatise *De pictura* (1435), outlined the technique of perspective for paintings as imitations of reality. He viewed the picture plane as a window through which one looks at the visible world. Objects in the picture were systematically foreshortened as they receded into the distance. Orthogonal lines converged to a single vanishing point to correspond to a fixed viewpoint of the viewer (Columbia 2010). Secondly, with aerial or atmospheric perspective the artist depends more on the use of color to create pictures (Rohland 2017).

Aerial or atmospheric perspective was developed primarily by Leonardo da Vinci, who perceived that landscape recedes from the viewer with its colours and tones altered due to the nature of the atmosphere. This effect can be achieved in a painting by establishing gradual tonal changes between foreground and background, so creating an impression of space which approximates to that seen in nature. In general, aerial perspective is based on the perception that dark colors appear greater than light colors. Contours of near objects are more defined than those in the distance. The intensity and character of cool hues recede where warm hues are more prominent (Columbia 2010).

Aerial perspective was further developed by Dutch and Flemish painters and is notable in the atmospheric landscape paintings of Jan van Eyck (Funk 2018).



Van Eyck. Ghent Altarpiece, *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. Center interior panel. 1432.

Perspective as a geometrical method and mathematical technique makes a particular claim to truth. This mathematical technique is a design to render pictorial space as a representation of perceived truthful reality (Grootenboer 2005). With perspective, artists create views of exactly that which they want to show. The compositional unity of a painting with emphasis on perspective contributes fundamentally to the power of the picture (Berger 1977). The ideological basis for the power of perspective arrives from the religious view, as described in Genesis 1:31-2:2:

And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And it was the evening and the morning of the sixth day... And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made and he rested...

(King James Bible, 2010)

The central idea is that God created, stood back, and looked at the creation. This theological view informs the notion of perspective. Everything centres on the eye of the beholder. The picture of the creation is visualized as an optic experience for the viewer. Berger (1977) described this further:

Perspective makes the single eye the center of the visible world. Everything converges onto the eye as the vanishing point. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God. With perspective there is no visual reciprocity... [There is] an inherent contradiction in perspective as it structured all images of reality to address a single spectator who, unlike God, could only be in one place at a time. (16)

As time evolved, especially with the invention of the camera, and later the movie camera, the mechanistic view of perspective has gradually been challenged. The camera demonstrated that there was no unique center of the world and that a single picture can be endlessly replicated and seen from different viewpoints, indirectly challenging the theological roots of perspective (Benjamin 1936).

### **Art is perspectival thought**

Perspective, as an artist's technique to create pictures, has been increasingly scrutinized in contemporary times. As a phenomenological field, perspective has been examined by philosophers. Perspective implies related issues of vision and perception and is not only limited to art.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty made perspective the object of his phenomenological inquiry as he critiqued the dualistic object-subject view of perception. He questioned this latter method of looking as it implies that it always occurs from above. He understood the depth of viewing as an existential dimension of the visual field (Grootenboer 2005). Merleau-Ponty was influenced by the thinking of Erwin Panofsky who viewed perspective as the expression of a schema linking

the social, cognitive, psychological, and especially technical practices of a given culture into harmonious and integrated wholes. He demonstrated a perceptual schema of each historical culture as unique to a different but equally full vision of the world (Panofsky 1991). Merleau-Ponty visualized the chiasm of seeing and being seen by revealing how objects return the viewer's gaze. He assigned paintings an important place in his philosophical thought. For him, paintings were capable of making the complexities of depth visible in humans' perceptual fields (Andrews 2019).

One of Merleau-Ponty's students, Hubert Damisch, argued that if a theoretical analysis of perspective was attainable, it is only possible in the context of a close look at how it appeared in history. Damisch suggested beginning with the details of how perspective was invented as a language. He postulated that a painting does not only show, but also thinks something (Damisch 1995). This leads to an exploration of the notion of perspective as thought. Or, in other words, perspective as a way of thinking.

Another phenomenologist explored perspective beyond a technical formula. Jacques Lacan elaborated the theory of the gaze, engaging the complexities of perception in the visible world (Johnston 2018). The visual field carries a reversibility of seeing and being seen. As one looks at objects, one is simultaneously the subject to the vision of the objects being looked at. One shares the quality of visibility with the things around one. Objects return the gaze. Objects always look back. Lacan, also known as the French Freud, extended his view of the gaze into his psycho-analytic perspective.

Hanneke Grootenboer (2005) extended Damisch's view that perspective is the rhetoric of a painting. She stated:

Perspective as a model of thought is a system of persuasion... [Perspective] as a rhetoric convinces us of that which a painting shows, while it provides a method [or technique] for that which a painting "thinks" (10).



John Faul. *That moment.*

I suggest the notion that perspective in painting is a particular way of thinking. Or, in other words, perspective in painting is much more than a technique to present an image as truthful and real. Relationships in paintings are between what is meaningful and true and its appearance. But there is more to it than that. Images, either realistic or abstract expressive, anticipate to be looked at as they appear within the limits of their perspectival configurations.

A painting appears within its very own perspectival matrix. Perspective, as a model of how a painting thinks, presents the relationships of what was painted. The returned gaze of a paint-

ing is not only how it looks back at the viewer, but how the painting thinks in showing the various relationships within its perspectival arrangement.

The painting *That moment*, by the author, demonstrates how a painting thinks. From a frontal perspective, the figure is down on his knees, waiting for that moment to get up, or to give in. From the bird's-eye perspective of a drone, the figure is punching a quick jab. *That moment* is captured with different perspectives. The painting is thinking as the viewer looks at it.

### **Perspective as Thinking and Expressive Arts Therapy**

As a practicing expressive arts therapist, it has been my experience that many of my clients produce creative work that is informed by various artistic techniques, such as perspective. However, to develop art skills is not the focus in expressive arts therapy.

During expressive arts therapy sessions, the perspectival thinking of art is often demonstrated. Paolo Knill et al (2003) stated clearly:

Perhaps the single most important determinant of success in expressive therapy is the therapeutic relationship. It forms the foundation for therapeutic work and influences the impact of whatever techniques or methods may be used. [My] bias is to treat the establishment and deepening of the therapeutic relationship as an art where parties engage in imagination... it is a dance of exploration, discovery, and transformation (123-124).

From the foregoing, I suggest that the therapeutic relationship is not only between therapist and client, but a relationship is also formed between the client and what the client creates. The art product that is created during a therapeutic encounter is a unique and alive entity. What is created is a manifestation of the imagination of the client. This creative expression is seeking to be present within its own relationships. The creative product wants to show its own

colors, voice, and movements as it arrives. The richness and bounty of the therapeutic encounter is deepened when what was created is allowed to stand on its own.

Natalie Rogers (1993) described what she called the “creative connection,” as a process of allowing one art form to influence another directly in expressive arts therapy sessions. She assumed that various expressive arts modalities used in sequence will heighten and intensify the inward journey for the client. I postulate that the creative connection occurs as what is created is thinking for itself. What clients create wants to make its own sensory arrival known. What they create relates back with the client. This is the creative connection: a reciprocal interchange between client and art produced during the therapeutic encounter.

In my experience as an expressive arts therapist, perspective, not the technique, is a way of thinking in the therapeutic encounter. There is a reciprocal relationship between the client and the creative expression made. What a client creates, gazes back. The client looks, and at the same time, the creation gazes back.

Another perspective in therapeutic sessions could be that what the client creates has its own voice and deeply wishes to be heard. What the client creates can be seen as a projection, but can also be viewed as an animated and alive expression of the imagination itself. Simply put: it is not all about the client! The created expressions—a drawing, a painting, a sculpture, a poem, a dance, a song—yearn for their own connections within the psyche where they are hosted! The images from the universal and collective imagination are emotive and alive! Expressive therapy has added depth when the imaginal is embraced in relationships of awe and terror.

## Conclusion

I appreciate the historical technique of perspective and the value and meaning it has delivered in art. Within the context of contemporary times, the notion of perspective of how art

thinks and returns the viewer's gaze warrants further worthwhile discussion. But even more, how art is thinking within itself and relates with the viewer, invites further dialogue.

## References

Andrews, Jorella. *The Question of Painting: Rethinking Thought with Merleau-Ponty*. Bloomsbury Academic. London. 2019.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Penguin Books. London. 1936.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books. London. 1977..

Damisch, Hubert. *The Origins of Perspective*. MIT Press. Cambridge. 1995.

Grootenboer, Hanneke. *The Rhetoric of Perspective*. The University Of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2005.

Johnston, Adrian. Jacques Lacan. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: [plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/) accessed February 7, 2021.

King James Bible. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. 2010.

Knill, Paolo; Barba, Helen & Fuchs, Margo. *Minstrels of Soul: Intermodal Expressive Therapy*. EGS Press. Toronto. 2003.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. Zone Books. New York. 1991.

Perspective. *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition*. February 2020:1. [https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=so&nd=ulh&AN=1344\\_87640&site=adslivescope=site](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=so&nd=ulh&AN=1344_87640&site=adslivescope=site). Accessed February 2, 2021.

Perspective. *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*. January 2018:1; [https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=funk&AN=pe0\\_55700&site=edslive&scope=site](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=funk&AN=pe0_55700&site=edslive&scope=site). Accessed February 2, 2021.

Raynaud, Dominique. Les débats sur les fondements de la perspective linéaire de Piero della Francesca à Egnatio Danti: un cas de mathématisation à rebours. *Early Science & Medicine*, 2010, 15(4/5), 474–504. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338210X516297> Accessed February 1, 2021.

Rogers, Natalie. *The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing*. Science & Behavior Books. Palo Alto. 1993.

Rohland, Louis. Perspective (graphical). *Salem Press Encyclopedia*. 2017. [https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ers&AN=8732\\_4295&site=edslive&scope=site](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ers&AN=8732_4295&site=edslive&scope=site). Accessed February 1, 2021.

**John Faul** is an MD and RCAT/REAT in private practice in Calgary, AB, Canada. He is the founder of the Parabola Institute, a centre for individual counselling, expressive arts therapy, professional coaching, and psychoanalysis. His expressive arts and counselling practice is mainly informed by archetypal psychology. He was mentored by Natalie Rogers during his expressive arts training. Faul is also a visual artist and is currently completing his MFA in painting at Lesley University. His large abstracted figure paintings done in mixed media are exhibited in Canada, USA, and Europe. Visit [www.johnfaul.com](http://www.johnfaul.com)

## Rudie goes shopping

Irene Renzenbrink

I thought I saw you in Coles today.  
At the end of Aisle Eleven,  
You were pushing your shopping cart,  
Blue walking stick safely stowed,  
Wearing your signature flat cap,  
The Kangol we found at Schiphol.

Carefully you gathered what we needed,  
And didn't need.  
Reading the labels and looking for treats.  
The apple tart from Holland  
Became a special favourite.  
It tasted just like the one my mother used to make.  
It was big enough for ten, but in it went.  
We shared it with friends,  
Until Coles stopped importing them.

You chose the thick Greek yoghurt,  
Easier to swallow, you said,  
And the Dutch cheese, but never Edam.

You bought the frozen berries.  
They're still in the freezer 5 months after your death.  
I can't bear to finish them.

One day there will be nothing left that you touched,  
Except me.

## By the Raven's Eye

Alexandra Fidyk

Not every descent swings upward. The night sea journey, marked by intense inner fire, burns away rigid patterns and lets light in. The heroine endures. She returns fortified—in better shape for the tasks of life. A meeting with the dead, a calling of the ghosts, a *katabasis*, drops deeper into the unknown. The swallowed soul sinks beneath the flames of hell, below pressurized containment to utter coldness.

Journey to the depths  
jet ink icescape, barren land  
no *nostos*, no turn.

Here she becomes isolated, slowed, cocooned from light and reflection and life. Hades: Ultimate dissolver of the luminous world, harbinger of alteration, courtier of dissolution, stands guard. Blacker than black, few enter; fewer depart. Every loss and sorrow requires a living through in order to be with. Such coming to self is a monstrosity, a freeing for an imaginal life.

To see at such depth  
to live by the Raven's eye  
the art is Raven.

Alexandra Fidyk is a professor in the Department of Secondary Studies at the University of Edmonton. She teaches advanced research, curriculum studies, analytical psychology, and trauma studies. Her recent research focuses on the voice of youth using body mapping and a symbolic approach. She is a Jungian psychotherapist; Integrated Body Psychotherapist; Somatic Experiencing (Advanced 2) practitioner, and currently training in Expressive Arts and Sandplay Therapy. She remains deeply tied to her prairie roots.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*2 February 2021*

Surrender, that's it,  
as if you were Christian

Do not rage against the night,  
let it envelop you

There will be beauty  
in the darkness,  
gleaming  
like the sun.

# How Expressive Arts Opens Spaces in the Pandemic, But Still What If?

Bonnie Nish

I have been running expressive arts workshops for some time at our local Jewish Library along with my colleague Ali Denno. These in-person sessions were aimed at guiding people through different life themes such as resiliency and renewal. There was a small but consistent group of individuals who appeared weekly, eager to see what might emerge for them through our work together. As time went on, a connection formed within the group, as the space we had been given by the library—as well as the “space” provided by us, the group’s facilitators—wrapped around us all, providing safety and warmth. Wonderful surprises arrived weekly with words and art which became gifts to and for one another. We held each of these individuals with respect as they sought to know more about themselves and share something of the journey. It was becoming a small and intimate group. Then we stopped. The pandemic had taken hold.

Not too long into the pandemic, we were approached by the Waldman Jewish Library and asked if we would consider doing an online workshop. They would provide a Zoom link and we would just show up. We quickly agreed, partly needing the interaction ourselves and partly because we knew there would be a real need for this kind of opportunity. A few of the original

group tried the online platform but they missed the intimacy of the face-to-face work. There was an adjustment period for everyone as a result of not understanding whether this would pan out.

In the very first workshop I assigned an exercise. I did not know when people had actually finished the writing or artwork because they all just looked done. I couldn't actually see what they were doing on the screen. I had to back up, slow down and bring them to a place where they had more time to explore what was arriving for them. As time went on, we came to know one another and I came to know how long it would take for what they were doing. Moreover, what I came to see was a desperate need for connection, recognition, and love. The pandemic was a quiet attacker who stole the space we lived and the air that we breathed. What I had come to realize was that the one thing that we could do for all of these individuals was to create that space.

In expressive arts we are the gatekeepers. We help those who come to us to find a way into a place to which they haven't been able to go previously. We open rooms so that others can tear down walls and replace them with a vision of how the whole house might stand. We help them to harvest through the work, to find the treasures that are buried in the everyday that they can't seem to see in any other way. As Paolo Knill (2005) states about going into the arts, "with these options come new perspectives, fantasies, ideas, and images of alternative ways to act or respond" (p. 93). What was shared in this space was sacred. It came from a place for most of these people who were trying to understand what had happened to them—to all of us. They moved in and out of memory, of childhood, of relationships, of crazy nights on Mexican beaches, of beloved places they had lived now thousands of miles away and to where they longed to return. The pandemic had stopped us all, but in these sessions, we took the world back, imagining what it could be like once again, holding onto the space that this new way of being forced upon us. Finding the gifts that were uncovered along the way, we came to know that this was a special time. Lynn Fels (2014) tells us:

A stop is not a moment of paralysis, but recognition that we arrive with all who we

are, and in our arrival at this intersection; there is the gap between past and future, what we have been and who we are to become (p. 55).

I look toward a time when we come together again in more than small squares on a screen. In the meantime, I recognize that this in-between time is important as well. As much as we don't want to, we find the resiliency in ourselves when we acknowledge our fear of the "what if." What if I don't survive? What if the world never is the same? What if there is no meaning or purpose to all of this? There is freedom in the questioning, in the fear, in the quiet surrender of tiny faces in little boxes on my screen all telling me, I am here too, listening, being and knowing that in this moment the what ifs are all we have to hold.

What if tomorrow is forever waiting  
around a corner where the traffic light  
never changes and the cars don't stop  
to let me cross. I try to push the button  
but the little hand on the screen  
tells me to stop, yells at me to step away  
from the edge of a street  
that I am on the wrong side of.

What if tomorrow is forever waiting  
for the stories that are not of my ancestors  
to arrive with some message that they  
seem to have forgotten to write down.  
The Egyptians found locusts and plagues  
on their doorsteps, and the cries of mothers  
whose first-born sons lay stone cold  
on a messy bed now never made.

What if tomorrow is forever waiting  
for the candles that should be lit along the way  
in a drafty castle, where dropped wax on tile floors  
heat the sizzling sinking eye  
which never stops looking up  
even though I can never look downward.

What if tomorrow is forever waiting  
if it is all illusion—the past,  
the present, the worrisome future.  
I stuff it in a sack and carry it outside  
worried the sun might melt it  
if I let go too soon.

## References

Fels, L. (2014). Catching My Breath: In Full Flight Over the Prairies. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 11, 52–60.

Knill, P. J., Levine, E. G., & Levine S. K. (2005). *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*. Jessica Kingsley

**Bonnie Nish** is Executive Director of Word Vancouver and Pandora's Collective Outreach Society. Bonnie has a Masters in Arts Education from Simon Fraser University and a PhD in Language and Literacy Education from UBC. She uses Poetic Inquiry and Life Writing to research how those recovering from trauma are affected by the kind of care they receive.

Poems from the Pandemic

Stephen K. Levine

*12 February 2021*

Is this the day  
the day I've been waiting for  
the one that's been waiting for me?

Is this the day  
I break through  
the little prison of my self  
my fears my needs my loneliness?

Is this the day  
I reach out to you my friend  
and touch your lonely life at last?

The day in which my love  
is greater  
than all my pain?

For you my dearest  
all of you  
for whom I write

O friend of sorrow and joy  
friend I've known forever  
who I've never met

Is this the day  
that is our day

together in this life?



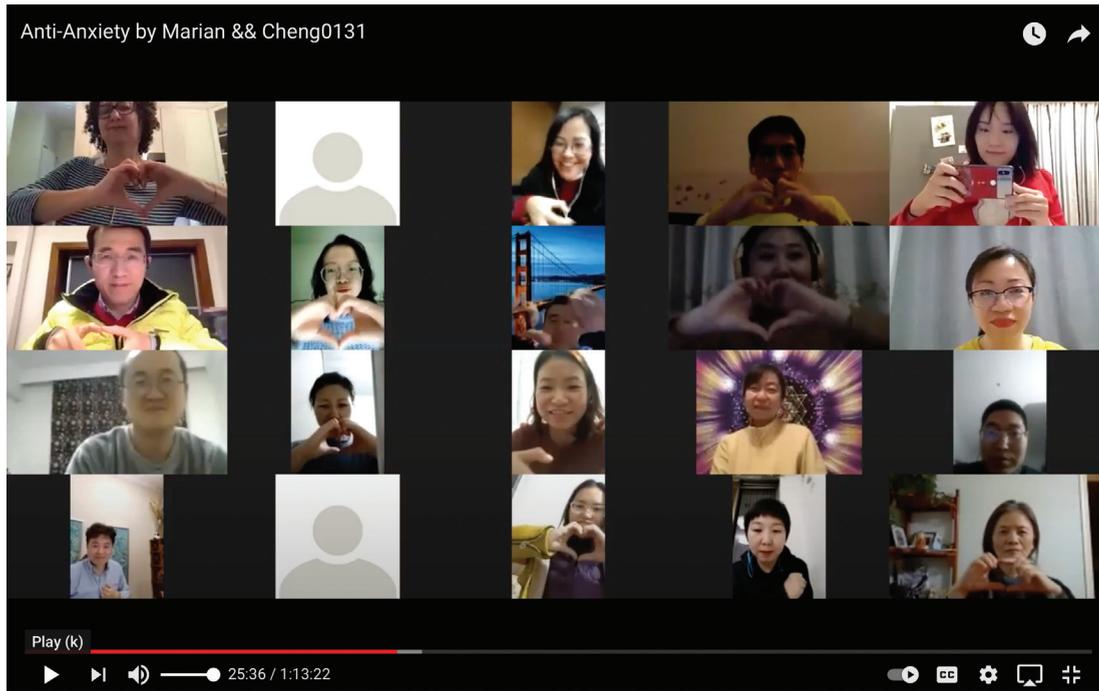
# A Year of Creating a Heart in a Havenless World

Marian Rich

In a talk I attended in 1990 by my mentor, the late Fred Newman—public philosopher, political leader, social therapist and playwright—Newman was playing with the name and premise of a scholarly article he had recently read called, “The Family as a Haven in a Heartless World,” by sociologist Christopher Lasch. In his talk, Newman said:

There is no haven, no place to hide. There is no escaping the cruelty, the pain, the torture. Many people try. They turn to families, to intellectual endeavor, to relationships, to drugs, to crime, people look to politics, people look everywhere to find a haven. But there is, in my opinion, no haven. I want to talk about community not as a haven, not as a place where we can go and hide, but as an active principle, as a human, passionate, living environment which has the capacity to nourish those of us who are committed to engaging the cruelty of a havenless world.





January 31, 2020

Cheng Zeng, an applied improvisational coach, teacher and improviser based in Beijing, invited me to lead an hour-long play session on Zoom he called, "Anti-Anxiety with Marian." He was doing this because people were in lockdown due to something called a "coronavirus" that was spreading around China. I felt nervous early that morning, as it would be a new activity for me to play with a group of 25 people from around China. I reached out to Elena Boukouvala, a dear friend, fellow performance activist and drama therapist in Greece, and asked her for emotional support. She suggested that I begin with having everyone share their name,

location, how they were feeling, make a gesture expressing their emotions, and then have the whole group reflect back the words and gestures.

Cheng introduced me: "Marian is very rich in spirit and improv knowledge." I began: "Thank you, Cheng. Creating connections with all of you is how we will make this a better world. I'm part of an international movement we call performance activism. The power of play is something I'm very interested in. So, let's play! Share your name, make a gesture and a sound—or a word in English or Mandarin—to express how you feel. Then everybody will make the gesture and sound. I'll start! I'm Marian and I feel incredibly happy to be with you (hands on my heart)." I began to call on participants to share:

"I'm nervous from staying home and not happy being alone, trying to find a way to connect with you."

"I'm in Beijing, it's boring at home, I can't go out but now connected to friends from all over China... and New York!"

"I'm peaceful with my family, I'm curious about what will happen tonight!"

"I'm excited about tonight but since the virus a lot of concern for the people. I hope the situation gets better. I am hoping something good happens."

"I'm feeling very sad, but I make some improv games with my family, so I feel more confident."

"I feel constrained at home and I have butterflies in my stomach, and I feel love from all of you."

"I feel relaxed and also feel touched and worried."

"I'm from Chengdu where the pandas live, and now I feel really relaxed."



March 14, 2020

My father had recently turned 94, when his nursing home, The Actors Home (run by the Actors Fund of Actors Equity union), went into lockdown due to COVID19. Thankfully we were able to celebrate his birthday together at the Home a month earlier. In 2015, after my mother died, we moved my father, who had dementia, from the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles to be closer to me in New

York. We had secured a spot at this wonderful facility. My father, a character actor, used to say to us: "If, god forbid, your mother dies before me, don't worry... just put me in the Actors Home!" My brother, my only sibling, was estranged from my father. So, since I couldn't share much or anything about my visits to my father with my brother, I began sharing photos and posts about my visits on Facebook with the hashtag #joyofdementia, named after work that my colleagues at the East Side Institute, a center for the study of social therapeutics and performance activism, were doing to transform the tragedy narrative of dementia. My father was always playful, but with dementia he became so much more so.

March 22, 2020

As a faculty member of the East Side Institute, I ran the first free play session sponsored by the Institute. We had 60 people together on Zoom from Europe, Latin America and the USA. This was the first of five sessions, I hosted the other four sessions which were co-led by

an international team of performance activists (from USA, Costa Rica, Italy, Japan, New Zealand and Mexico), all of whom were trained by the East Side Institute and selected by me. We had 460 people attend the sessions from 29 countries—many came to more than one session; we had over 100 people playing across borders in some of the sessions.

I greeted everyone by sharing that I have participated as a client in a social therapy group that meets on Zoom every week (before the pandemic) and that had taught me how intimate we can be online, sharing our emotionality, creating and developing our lives together. I said that I chair the International Organizing Committee for the Performing the World Conference and that I had been holding Zoom meetings for various groupings of 40 performance activists around the world who were members of the Committee. I also said that an informal grouping of activists, therapists, clowns, improvisers and coaches from around the world had begun meeting to create a new initiative in response to the pandemic.

That morning I watched a video of a 2001 talk that Fred Newman gave after 9/11 called, “Will We Ever Be Normal Again?” He spoke of chaos as an opportunity for development and described the possibilities it opened up and the value of not knowing. We don’t know what will happen—we have to play and perform.

### **March 22, 2020**

Is it possible to make eye contact on Zoom? I made up an exercise for the play session. I demonstrated it, playing with looking at everyone in gallery view (all 50+ of us) and sometimes looking in the camera so it appears to others that we are looking more directly at each other. I played John Coltrane’s “Naima.” Afterwards, we all did the exercise for 2 minutes or so. Then I asked people what that was like. Two responses:

"I started crying and I was surprised at this experience and how the music helped to create this time we are together, so wonderful to see you and to imagine being seen."

"We can't touch each other physically, we have to social distance, but we can be there and not be there together."

### April 5, 2020

The 20<sup>th</sup> Performing the World Conference was scheduled for October, 2020 in New York City. We received 180 proposals from 40 countries. We surveyed our Organizing Committee to find out what a virtual Performing the World (PTW) conference might look like.

"Online workshops can be held to support creative reframing activities, e.g., people are singing and playing saxophone on their balcony, people are performing hand-washing dances, etc., and do them collectively across borders."

"Improvise about meanings of the pandemic and problems we are facing, deconstructing them in the process."

"Video or voice responses to particular prompts/topics (What is home for you? How can we create a world of belonging?)."

"With our community of 300 youths in Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria as a pool of resources, we can start organizing a local PTW event in Nigeria."

"Share some thoughts on the politics of 19-coronavirus; Taiwan could host a small virtual PTW with several online performance and workshops that will be held internationally."

“Create a learning community/network of Performance Activism in Mexico and elsewhere.”

“Create a brigade of international support for the difficult times we are living.”

April 23, 2020

I was granted an outdoor visit with my father. My husband Ed and I were asked to put on full PPE, gowns, paper shower caps, and the best N95 face masks available. My father could no longer walk and was in a wheelchair. They wheeled him out to where we were waiting outside under a tent—it was a hot day—he was much further from us than six feet.

“Move me closer to my daughter!!”

“We can’t come closer to you, Daddy!” He was hard of hearing, so I was also shouting a bit.

“Why not???!!!” he responded with annoyance.

We liked to make funny faces together and to mirror each other. But we had on masks. I couldn’t figure out how to play, to improvise, to “accept the offers” we had to build with. I felt stuck. I softly began to cry. Ed whispered in my ear, “It’s okay...” But it wasn’t okay. In my mind I kept thinking, “This is SO FUCKED UP!!!”

All of a sudden I heard myself screaming, “I can’t come closer... there is a virus!!!”

It was hot and my father seemed very tired. The next thing I knew he was asleep in his wheelchair. I was too upset to be there. We left after 10 minutes. We went into town and picked up Chinese food for my father’s lunch, dropped it off and drove home. I must have cried for half the trip.

April to May, 2020

Cheng invited me to teach a 6-week class about social therapeutics for 12 coaches, educators, improvisers and human resource professionals in China with him on Zoom. We played a lot with emotionality, philosophy and performance. I made notes of their responses after each class:

"I felt listened to, important and respected."

"It was powerful, we can feel our emotions. I was being seen."

"I am having self-awareness of the emotion and how to use the emotion to develop leadership."

June 27, 2020

We launched the Global Play Brigade early in June. We were asked to run a training for a grouping of healthcare providers, yoga teachers and art therapists in Mexico who wanted to bring play into their work during the pandemic.

I teamed up with social therapist and performance activist Miguel Cortes from Juarez, Mexico. Miguel co-designed and co-led the final East Side Institute play session in April for over 100 people from around the world.

After a presentation in English and Spanish about social therapeutics, we came up with the idea of having the 15 participants break into small groups and design a short play activity to help me. I shared some things about me to give the participants some offers to create with: I had recently had a difficult visit with my father who has dementia, I want to learn to speak Spanish, I wear my heart on my sleeve and can never hide my emotions, which are plentiful and



often feel almost too much, I love working with young people, and I also used to love visiting with the other residents at the Actors Home when I would visit my father.

They came back with the most delightful performances—Hack the Mask where everyone played with face masks; How to be Mexican where everyone wore a costume, played an instrument or drank a Mexican drink; they recited a collective poem to me; and they sang to me.

I cried. I felt “healed.” We talked about the experience. They went on to run free play sessions for nurses working on the frontlines with COVID patients.

August, 2020

My father's infected toe got worse and worse. His doctor said it was gangrene. He was in enormous pain. I agreed to start morphine. I was granted end-of-life visits. Ed came with me. At first my father was semi-conscious. I'd whisper in his ear, "Don't worry about me, it's okay to go, Ed will take good care of me."

He opened his eyes and looked at Ed and with a huge, loving smile said: "Eddie!!!" and immediately fell back into his morphine haze.

The next time he woke up, he glanced at Ed and then looked at me and said, "Who's *that* guy!?"

Even as he was close to death he managed to make me laugh with a classic comedy routine. Did he know that?

August 21, 2020

Ed and I were dining outdoors. I was sad. My father was close to his transition. My phone rang. The hospice nurse said that if I wanted to have a final visit, to come today. He would most likely pass in 24 hours.

We arrived at the Actors Home and after putting on our PPE we made our way to his room. He was curled into a fetal position. We were together in silence.



Death takes work. Dying takes patience. Death comes slowly but surely.

**August 22, 2020**

I got the phone call in the late afternoon while I was walking along the East River to meet a dear friend. "Your father transitioned." I had attended the morning session of our virtual Performing the World Happenings. It was about the relationship between theatre and repressive environments. I began thinking of my father. I put a small photograph of him and me on my laptop so he could be part of the discussion. I had to miss the evening session about Clown Vets, the documentary that was made about Patch Adams taking war veterans on a clown trip to Guatemala.

**I can't remember when—in August or September, 2020**

I got a phone call from my friend Patch Adams. I had sent him a letter to tell him my father had passed. He recited this poem to me:

If I die, survive me with such sheer force  
that you waken the furies of the pallid and the cold,  
from south to south lift your indelible eyes,  
from sun to sun dream through your singing mouth.  
I don't want your laughter or your steps to waver,  
I don't want my heritage of joy to die.



Don't call up my person. I am absent.  
Live in my absence as if in a house.  
Absence is a house so vast  
that inside you will pass through its walls  
and hang pictures on the air  
Absence is a house so transparent  
that I, lifeless, will see you, living,  
and if you suffer, my love, I will die again.

–Pablo Neruda, *Sonnet XCIV*

### September 5, 2020

I held an Allan Appreciation Shiva, the Jewish ritual of mourning, for my father on Zoom. I showed a video of some of the hundreds of photos I had taken during the 5 years of caring for my father while he lived at the Actors Home, including still photos of FaceTime and Zoom calls the Actors Home managed to do with family members and residents during lockdown. The chat was very lively. The love came pouring in from my friends in New York and around the country, from family, colleagues from the Global Play Brigade, the Applied Improv Network, and the performance activism community in Nigeria, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Austria, Mexico, Costa Rica, Israel and China.

Playing with my last name, someone wrote: “Rich and Rich Enrich!” and Cheng Zeng who joined us from Beijing, responded: “Rich & Rich! Rich spirits, rich life experiences, rich emotion, rich love, rich happy, rich relationship. You represent the great quality of human, Marian.”

December 10, 2020

I joined the *Alchemy of Archetypes* workshop led by British theatre-maker/clown/performer Peta Lily on Zoom. I kept feeling my father's presence, especially because Peta's selection of Shakespeare's text had me reciting words that resonated so much for me. The Bard wrote my father's favorite words to recite. Right after my mother died, I remember he came into the bedroom where I was sleeping and climbed into bed with me early in the morning. He laid there so deeply sad, somehow processing his grief with his dementia. And yet he began to recite from memory:

Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown;  
Here cousin: On this side my hand, and on that side yours.  
Now is this golden crown like a deep well  
That owes two buckets, filling one another,  
The emptier ever dancing in the air,  
The other down, unseen and full of water:  
That bucket down and full of tears am I,  
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.

–Shakespeare, *King Richard II*

December 13, 2020

On the morning of the last session of *The Alchemy of Archetypes* class I laid back in my bathtub and the room began to spin. For the next two months, I was spinning, dizzy, and unable to do much more than sit still, rest and watch relaxing shows on TV—stand-up comedy, na-

ture documentaries and anything else I could find that calmed me. After almost a year of being in our world as we were experiencing the COVID19 pandemic, political upheavals including the brutal murder by police of George Floyd, a Black man, the protests against police brutality, the police attacking demonstrators that led to an imposed curfew in June in New York City, the dysfunctional electoral process and hyper-partisanship in the USA, the untold suffering and death from the incompetence of world leaders in handling the pandemic, the increasingly widening chasm between the wealthy and the poor—I began to wonder, was the whole world experiencing vertigo?

### **December 13, 2020**

In our final class we explored the archetypes of the Clown/Fool/Jester, the Old Woman/Crone, and Death (“I am the inevitable.”) Death was the doorkeeper. Death was a skeleton doing stand-up comedy.

### **January 16, 2021**

I went to my vestibular therapist and in the bathroom there was a picture of a skeleton at a microphone. I emailed the photo to Peta.

I wrote, “I hope your new year is going better than mine! Believe it or not I’ve had vertigo since our last archetype class. As some have said to me, seems the whole world has vertigo. I started seeing a vestibular therapist. And today I saw this photo in the rest room. I had to laugh...took this photo to send to you... Death doing stand-up comedy!”

I received this poem in return from Peta:

## The Clown

Roll the drums and raise the curtain  
chaos is glory and uncertainty, certain.  
The facts are all useless,  
speak nonsense instead—  
because down is up when you stand on your head.  
How delightful it is to be defective—  
a kick in the pants brings a fresh perspective:  
serious is stupid, dignity overrated—  
the fairground mirrors are all silver-plated.  
Deliberately misread the riot act—  
know that smart is never as clever as the cracked.  
Step up, step inside,  
make failure your friend—  
bake a cake with sawdust  
make despair wag its rear end.

Let identity slip  
balloon, string, fingertip  
transform:  
artichoke, angel, bookcase, fish.  
Let loose your grip, tumble,  
stub your toe, trip  
and blow your nose with a victory trumpet.  
Dance badly, cry buckets.  
let us see you survive,  
then hang out your unholy laundry to dry—

for chaos is glory  
and clumsiness divine  
and the buddah  
is always known by his smile

–Peta Lily, 2015 (revised 2019)

### February 24, 2021

The dizziness finally subsided a couple of weeks ago. I slowly begin to get back to the things I love—teaching, co-facilitating workshops, and creative work. I made a new friend in the *Alchemy of Archetypes* class. He sent me an email today asking if I had an article to submit to the journal he edits. So, I wrote this for Stephen and for all of you.

The world keeps spinnin'  
With me upon it.  
The world keeps sinnin'  
And I can't stand it.

–Fred Newman, lyrics to song *I Don't Get It*, from the musical *Coming of Age in Korea* (1996)

All photos published with permission from the author.

**Marian Rich** is a comic educator, performance activist and play revolutionary. She has spent over 30 years leading playful workshops and programs in which people come together to grow and develop. As faculty at the East Side Institute, she trains activists, educators and scholars around the world who want to infuse their work with the power of play and performance. Marian is a founder of the Global Play Brigade.

Poems from the Pandemic  
Stephen K. Levine

*Coda*

O future you await me

I open my arms,  
calling on the sacred,  
with my feet on the ground  
my eyes turned to the sky

I go to you with passion and art,  
friendship and hope  
falling, rising,  
facing death  
with fear and love  
thankful for life

Yes, I say,  
thankful for this life.









The European Graduate School

