

Unit 7: Strategy and Dynamics

Parable of the Sower: Poetic License is a dangerous thing

“As Akomfrah contends, artists, as image-makers who insist on emancipating the infinite, act as “custodians of a possible future”...if so perhaps what Vertigo Sea offers is, ultimately, optimism, if not without its cruelties: where past injustices have failed to utterly destroy their aftermath, we can maintain hope, despite all, of a different time to come. If that time will not necessarily redeem what has been, then at least, as dramatised by Akomfrah, it insists on holding historical failings within the realm of visibility - so that they will not ever be forgotten in the creation of future alternatives.” - Feeding the Ghost: John Akomfrah’s Vertigo Sea by T. J. Demos



Abstract: Reflections on the development of my 'roaming' strategy as a method of network building via mythology and the interplay with my performance of self.

#mirrorworld #undercurrentsea #ethicsoflove #ecopedagogy #marronage
#alchemisingthesoul #motherofthehouse #grief

ROAMING

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell starts:

*"Over these many decades of being a keeper of stories, I have come to see that almost invariably every story, myth, legend, saga, and folktale begins with a poignant question of one kind or another. In tales, this premiere query may be spoken—or only inferred. But regardless, the poignant question strikes a spark to the engine that ignites the heart. This starts up the energy of the story; it rolls the story forward. The mythic tale unfolds in response to that single igniting question. Thus Odysseus answers, throughout his entire saga in *The Odyssey*, the single mythic question posed at the beginning, the one which could be phrased as: How do I ever find true home again"?* (Campbell, 2004, p. 25).

The short documentary that begins my audio-visual presentation, *Flag of People*, locates us near the beginning of my practice of cultural production. Created with Manchester-based refugee group 'Afrocats' and Romani-Gypsy activist Lolo Jones, we spent the week exploring sensations of 'home' beyond the borders of place, through discussion and creative play. On this particular day, using materials chosen by the participants and inspired by Lolo's story of the Romani people who are united not by land but by symbol and cloth, they created capes and maps of their own design to describe the desired feeling of their journey to the future. This became the spark of my own 'roaming' quest, rooted in a desire to develop a methodology of collective homemaking where forced migration and dystopian narratives were becoming increasingly normative.

There is a tragic irony to reading Octavia Butler's 'Parable of the Sower' in the year 2024. The dystopian science fiction, written in 1993, begins in July 2024 and speaks eerily to the dark times we find ourselves living in at this very moment.

Science fiction has fascinated me for as long as I can remember, in the same way mythology has. These genres, it seems to me, through devices of artifice, semi truths and projection, prize open the landscape of the present moment, like an enormous land-crack, a disturbed portal of all our current fantasies and fears, an exhibition of our most human hopefulness and hopelessness. In other words, these genres expose that which lives under the surface of our illusion of 'civilised' reality. In these alternative worlds, a tension is caused by a rush of heat of the past (narratives from history, whether reimagined, invented or excavated), clashing with often cold predictions of the future.

Sometimes the tales tell on imagination, at other points are ferociously lived but ignored, downplayed or disregarded histories. Stories of lives that have been lost, or inevitably

will be lost. Often they combine the two. Whether truly historical or speculative, these methods of fantasy provide fertile land for unheard narratives. This is why, in my creative work, I am so drawn to these playful arenas and alternative truths that can be teased out of new, imagined worlds. This aspect of my work only became clearer in light of my learnings around intercultural practice.

Love is at the heart of my questions and creative pursuits. Love, because it seems imperative to any collective work we do towards sustainability in learning, as alluded to by our ancestors, James Baldwin, Bell Hooks et al. At this juncture, I see no future for our planet at all, let alone in education, without love.

“The world is held together really, it is held together by the love and passion of a very few people.” - with love, James Baldwin (1970).

If love is holding everything together, we have to learn and share our ways of loving. Which better way to show love than to show full acceptance to all of oneself or another? To invite in the ugly parts of oneself/one’s society/one’s culture/one’s history. To acknowledge everything, with radical acceptance, from the darkest dark to the brightest light. As above, so below, as within, so without. To be indiscriminate. To be a mother of the house. I created M.O.T.H. my sacred clown alter ego. I rationed that, if we see ourselves as mothers, then we can relate with others and also to ourselves the way mothers care for their children. This opens the possibility for us to be fully ourselves and to remain loved. This love allows us to address difficult issues that we may otherwise attempt to ignore or avoid. We all seem to know the value of unconditional love on an individual level. Now we are being called upon to apply it on a collective level.

Love, then, provides fertile land to be different, to make mistakes, to be ugly, to grow in our own way - for me specifically this morphed into the desire to understand how to ‘Subaltern-Speak’, not only in the ways we might typically refer to, as in the marginalised voices highlighted in Gayatri Spivak’s essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’. Through the blending of myth, fantasy and pop-culture with underground activist communities, I was energised to extend this definition to include all species, elements, ghosts, ancestors, gods, the land, movement, shadows, serendipity. To engage with the frequencies of the deep and the unknown as part of the ‘Subaltern’. An important reality to face in this quest is the existing demonisation of the ‘third-world’ Subaltern and its cultural heritage; is it really my place to synonymise the shadow and chaos of the Chthonic world with this term?

Dancing with the chaos, I was led to Carl Jung’s theory of the shadow, which represents the unconscious or subconscious parts of ourselves which live below the surface, which we want to turn away from. Since the demands of conscious life in civilisation require us to suppress that which is threatening to peace, stability and order, the shadow is where

we would store our violent, lustful, or irrational tendencies. The things we did not want to face. As Carolyn Elliott says in *Existential Kink*, this shadow was not only individual but also collective (Elliott, 2020, p74). We humans have an unsustainable, and arguably erotic, desire to hide the waste of our overconsumption in landfills and oceans. I am interested in transmuting the dark matter of unprocessed emotionality into love and growth, to compost as a strategy and dynamic of optimism as resistance, and hope as discipline.

So - fantasy, mythology and science fiction, provide us with an apparatus to experience, temporarily, the undercurrent of our current reality (as we know or believe it to be), much like an oxygen tank enables a diver temporary access to flow inside the ocean. Like the diver in the ocean, the unknown becomes known but not as a containable, conquerable thing. Not as an object, an artefact or even a knowledge. Not as anything complete in itself. It becomes known *in* and *as*, motion. It is a slippery, wet thing, ephemeral and moving, like music. It cannot be captured and contained. It cannot be stopped or sliced. It can only be experienced and dare I say, enjoyed.

Towards the end of my degree, I myself was getting lost in love, meeting my shadows in a way I had never experienced before, which much like love itself, was terrifying.

“He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.”
(Nietzsche, 1886, p146).

These dialogues between the present moment, the future and the past, opened up the possibility of play with the present moment, in my creative practice. This felt exciting, erotic, dynamic, though it would later come to feel careless, callous and chaotic.

The importance I placed on the act of roaming had developed into a rhythmic dialogue between myself and my environment. Truths that emerged through the creation of imaginary conversations between these untold histories, characters and half imagined futures. I felt encouraged in this pursuit by practices and modes of new spatio-temporal consciousness for marginalised peoples, such as in an essay entitled ‘The Point of the Maroon Poet’ in *Black Quantum Futurism*: *“If as beings, our ideas of ourselves include not just us as individuals, which is just a very ‘human’ way of looking at being, but our beings incorporating (literally, embodying) a constellation of ancestors, a collaboration of organisms, a communion of Divine and matter, then we see ourselves and our possibilities very differently than those who see themselves as a body housing a human psyche. We can stretch into our plurality and infinity. Our vehicles for liberatory possibilities look very different. Our timelines look very different. We are longer and broader and beyond the comprehension of a timeline of enslavement. This is the job of a poet who is liberation minded: break the language. Become the lightning or the water.*

Reflect a timeline from the perception of a god whose people are free." (Phillips, 2015, p49).

I arrived at my studies of Intercultural Practice, with a collection of objects and spells, which grew over my time roaming. I held these remnants as valuable gifts left behind by the gods, the creatures of the universe, the outcastings of hidden angels. I wanted to discover more, by accident, on purpose, open to the possibilities of openness itself as explained in the likes of object-oriented-ontology. My method allowed my wanderings to guide my work through encounter, in a similar way perhaps to what Nietzsche said about *wandering in Human, All Too Human*, to find truth on the path.

"Sit as little as possible; do not believe any idea that was not born in the open air and of free movement - in which the muscles do not also revel... sitting still... is the real sin against the Holy Ghost." (Nietzsche, 1878).

I was inspired by the work of Firelei Baez, a visual artist whose work, lying at the intersection of ecology, power and resistance, examines the legacies of Afro-Caribbean diaspora.

"My works are propositions, meant to create alternate pasts and potential futures, questioning history and culture in order to provide a space for reassessing the present." — Firelei Báez

I leaned further into the fantasies of these untold stories, considering them not as solitary vacuous narratives, but in relationship with one another. I became engrossed by truths discovered in the blurring of time and space which did not totally ignore culture and nationhood but engaged with them as active 'players': to invent my own realm of fantastical non-fiction and be led by it myself, in real life. A blurring of life and art, the long term goal of which was to map a network of mythology between underground spaces and cultures as a strategy for mutual aid. I wanted nothing to do with maps in their noun state, the way colonisers understood the word. My mythology map would be based on 'map' as a verb. *Mapping*. What alchemical processes might emerge should we embark deep into the verb as a way of relationship building? Guided not by a search for a final destination and subsequent ownership of place, as the colonisers had, but on a set of guided principles on *how* to travel? This brings me back to the question that began my roaming quest: *"What do we want our journey to the future to feel like?"*, the principles I used in considering *how to travel* were inspired by theories of ecopedagogy and by the public UNESCO 'Issues and trends in education for sustainable development' as set out in their 2030 Global Education Agenda.

Specifically, in connection to ecopedagogy, a theory of education concerned with making better planetary citizens through the process of training inclusive and

responsible (response-able) learners, I was drawn particularly to the seven 'pedagogical keys' as listed by Francisco Gutierrez and Cruz Prado in their essay 'Ecopedagogy and Planetary Citizenship':

1. *You make the road by walking.*
2. *Walking with meaning.*
3. *Walking with the attitude of learning.*
4. *Walking in dialogue with one's surroundings.*
5. *In walking, intuition is the priority.*
6. *Walking as a productive process.*
7. *Recreating the world as you walk.*

Additionally I was encouraged by the optimism and centering of UNESCO's agenda to ensure that all learners, by 2030, acquire the knowledge and skills:

"needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through Education for Sustainable Development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2018, p14).

UNESCO have outlined the key pedagogical approaches in Education for Sustainable Development as:

- *A learner-centred approach where students are autonomous learners*
- *Action oriented learning based upon (i) having a concrete experience, (ii) observation and reflection, (iii) formation of abstract concepts for generalization and (iv) application in new situations (Kolb, 1984)*
- *Transformative learning which "can be defined primarily by its aims and principles, not by a concrete teaching or learning strategy"* (UNESCO, 2018, p49).

These guidelines were further illuminated by the ideas of intellectuals I found deeply inspiring:

"The subversive intellectual, we learn, is unprofessional, uncollegial, passionate and disloyal. The subversive intellectual is neither trying to extend the university nor change the university, the subversive intellectual is not toiling in misery and

from this place of misery articulating a “general antagonism.” In fact, the subversive intellectual enjoys the ride and wants it to be faster and wilder; she does not want a room of his or her own, she wants to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew.” Moten insists, “...I believe in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world in the world and I want to be in that.” (Moten, 2013, p10).

Whilst Audre Lorde in ‘Uses of the Erotic’, writes:

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.¹ (Lorde, 1978, p58).

Putting these texts in conversation with each other, it felt as though going deep within, as deep as we could go, both within the depths of the world and the depths of ourselves, were essential to our response-ability in the world and as Lorde says, ‘...allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us.’

In order to be more sustainable, we need to be in deeper kinship with the other inhabitants of our ecosystems.

Over the course of my degree I learnt it was not enough to ‘give voice’ to untold stories, something in the framing of which was inherently dead. Only colonisers fail to understand the aliveness of things. My aim was for these stories to be full of *Aliveness*. To interact with each other, spontaneously. To take it further and bring in characters and narratives that had never previously been known to each other. For example, I did not want to rewrite a mythology or a science fiction story about the Hare pounding the elixir of life on the Moon. I wanted them to meet Tortugueta, the activist killed by Georgia State Patrol during my roam through Atlanta in January 2023. To see what sparks of magic and anarchy they might create, what truths might be uncovered through their unexpected collaboration and how an audience might interact with this emotively and

¹ Uses of the Erotic

educationally. To then respond to these new narratives and knowledges, in real life, in real time, to take us forward to the next chapter.

This, it seemed to me, was a practice of spell-casting, that is to say, a method of calling truth into being, with spontaneous collaboration between texts, ideas etc etc. The seeds of what would later become the citation economy of my life-art. I ritualised the conditions, spaces and locations that could open these portals to the underworld, slowly weaving a web of connection. The more I searched, the more I found. This started to become a problem in my methodology and practice. I was roaming without boundaries and moving at an unsustainable pace. The portals were open and I was without protection. There was no risk assessment form for my mental health. No disclaimer to sign at the door of the anceSTORES. I had taken this quest upon myself, believing it to be a personal mission that I had to resolve on my own, in part to honour some of the characters I met on the journey like Tortuguita. Perhaps I had also developed an addiction to the rush. I was making decisions in my personal life based upon it. I was too *in it*.

I had forgotten, in my action orientated and transformative learning, the practice of self care and reflective principles beyond the action of 'roaming'. Through all this exploring, experiencing, collaging, attributing meaning and responding, I found myself *doing* more than *being*. I discovered that speed itself could also become a tool for silencing. Had this not been one of capitalism's master tricks? A scream cannot be heard in full timbre at high speed. A genocide cannot be captured in a soundbite. Rushing through the road, hopping from one thing to the next, was cutting the head off the potential learnings before they had time to see the sun. It was also creating a synthetic, unnatural environment for different elements from the underworld to form real, proper relationships with each other. It was applying the *swipe right* culture to the underworld. What had intended to follow the principles of ecopedagogy was eating the road, as it was making it.

"Demeter is the Greek Mother Goddess, the essence of nurturance for earth and for humans. She undertakes a horrible, grief-stricken journey to seek and retrieve her innocent daughter who had been snatched down into the dark underworld against her **will**. Throughout Demeter's unfolding story, the question is posed: To what great lengths can the immortal soul be pressed and still retrieve the Beloved? The account of Oedipus in the play by Sophocles, throughout to its end, answers a question like this: What darkness, dead-zones, and deaths can occur when secrets are not revealed and truth is not told?"²

How do we want our journey to the future to feel like?

² The Hero with a Thousand Faces

Not like this.

METAVEVERSE MIRROR WORLD

If you google 'ghosting', urban dictionary will define it as someone cutting off all communication without explanation. How do we wrestle with a legacy of ghosting where this has been done violently on behalf of other voices? How do we make space for the unknown, and untold histories that have been unrecorded and undervalued. How do we bring ghosts into conversation?

The idiom "a picture is worth a thousand words" would be an apt descriptor for the closing chapter of the last few months of my life and degree, where I myself became a ghost. Trapped in this prison of my own design, I weaved a tapestry of something I called 'love', using found materials from the archive of my life and the ance-stores I encountered in the streets, creating a citation economy evidencing a future that was rooted in the past. The final thread to unlock myself from this torturous slumber was the mirror that brought me back to myself and shut out the gaze of others who I had invited to consume me. A pair of Versace sunglasses, found on the streets of Notting Hill Carnival next to a bus with the Dominican flag and the sign 'Intelligent Money' plastered on the front. It was this selfie that broke the accidental curse of my own making in Unit 6, where the lines between art and life were blurred beyond my control. 'Drink me up, fill your cup, just drink me up, Atabeira' these are the words of a song included in the radio broadcast of my unit 6 experiments with 'DWIVIYÉTA'. Another name for the Taino zemi Atabey, "The term is used to describe a powerful and generous Earth Mother, who, for the Indigenous islanders, is manifested in more than just the lands; she is the life-giving waters of the bountiful sea. This was, and for some, continues to be, a harmonious, spiritual relationship linking appreciative peoples to life above and below the waters."³

As stated in my conclusion of my unit 6 submission, I had the urgent understanding that my theory of change did not work and was developed during a period of increasing psychosis. One major mistake was underestimating the danger of careless and callous poetic license, a breeding ground for chaos. I invited deities whom I had a very loose connection with and had not shown enough respect for. I included learnings from my Obeah mentorship which I had not taken the proper time to understand. I used water from the river Lea because it was closest to campus - a coincidence - and the book States of the Body Produced By Love which I had not properly read, but found intriguing. Overall, I blurred the line between art and life so far that a portal opened to my entire spirit, leaking onto social media for months as I carried on my methodology of

³<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/making-peace-atabeira-time-climate-crises>

'roaming'. A fundamental error with my use of this text and methodology was the way it came into contact with my own personal desires at the time.

"It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories."⁴

In my confusion, my desperate desire to navigate my way home led me right back to the 'water hopes w/ muvas underground' jam, by which time I had gained a totally different perspective on that piece, as naive but careless actions and following the coincidences took a manipulative and sinister slant. I had absolutely no expectations for the results that would ensue, but I understand it to be poetic justice that my careless and callous actions led to more poetic license about my own personhood.

"When confronted by the primal sexuality between the Chthonic Gorgon and the untempered Poseiden, Athene was outraged. She demonized Medusa, related to the ancient fertility goddesses, making her monstrous. Anyone who looked upon her, friend or foe, god or mortal, would be turned to stone, thus banishing her from consciousness."

The desire to outcast me due to my summer-long dance with the shadows of self and society, at the expense of myself and others, was the action that enabled me, in the end, to close this portal of consumption, by way of owning my shadow with the Versace sunglasses I found at Carnival.

"Versace, Versace Medusa head on me like I'm illuminati

This is a gated community please get the fuck off the property."⁵

'The window to the soul they say is the eyes' was a repeated refrain in the water hopes jam, which coupled with the invitation to 'drink me up' linked a direct transaction between my performance of self and the Gaze of my audience. In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helen Cixous urges women to reclaim their identity through writing through the rejection of Western patriarchy. She calls writing "an act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal." She claims "we must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman."⁶

⁴ Staying with the trouble,

⁵ "Versace" song by Migos and Drake

⁶ The Laugh of the Medusa

My 'Versace' selfie cited me right back to a post from March 13th 2024, and my participation in the 'Shades' collaborative album project.

"Come into existence, hard stance on time track. Me nuh go nowhere.

Glancing past and prancing future-now, let the dust settle

Luna loves you mad, even when you're bad

Cos when the fruit goes rotten it gives to the land

Embrace the shade and sit in the gradient...today is your day."⁷

To reject the banishment of myself and my shadow was the final act of resistance that led me back to my body and away from the "Tower of the Past", the stonewalls of which had cemented around the fibers of my heart.

"In clinical phenomenology it is possible to find a woman with anger on her face turned to stone. However, the principle of the petrification of emotions also occurs in the body and is the basis of the phenomena of somatization. This cycle is aggressive and is typical of its repetition (repetition compulsion), which is the basis of symptoms and a far cry from his resolution. This transformation allows for reflection on how this complex mechanism of isolation affects."⁸ (The Medusa Complex)

I am genuinely grateful to every antibody who rejected me from the 'red sea' and back to myself, as long as it took. The membranes between river and sea are to be respected and protected. In her essay, *The Site of Memory*, Toni Morrison (1995) describes water as carrying perfect memory (p. 77):

"...the act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and liveable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory - what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding."

⁷ "Come into existence" - from Shades album

⁸ The Medusa Complex

As I return to the memory of my body, I bring with it a new perspective on what it means to be Chthonic, as in the words of Donna Haraway: “Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. They are who are.”⁹ I bring back an understanding of what I perceive as an ‘UNDER-CURRENT-SEA’. If money was the root of all evil in this world, it was perhaps only a follower to another currency: the *under-currency*, an economics of shadow and play, in conversation with - trading and moving around underfoot with a chaos that is also inherently natural and amoral: “...forever trying to get back to where it was”. Perhaps this was why our world could never dissolve its despair and find peace. The Western World, built on colonisation and capitalism, built on slavery, would simply drive its shadow from place to place, from Vietnam to Palestine, Cuba to the Congo. “*Shadows (like other holes) can survive the destruction of their originators. Consider a tree that is constantly illuminated as it petrifies into stone. The stone continues the shadow begun by the tree.*” - Philosopher Roy Sorensen¹⁰

It seems clear to me now that until we resolve this, through invitation and play, guided by the dynamics of a structured ethical code that allows us to listen deeply to our collective shadow, we cannot become the love that we need to fulfill our future-present responsibilities.

THE DREAM: *As I approach the top of the hill, I am met with the barriers to the building of a roofless Central Saint Martins. I enter an uncanny collage of industrial and natural in the landscape of what used to be my childhood home. There is an alcove, like a library, in the space where the Jolly river used to run. Students sit silently, immersed in research. A three-eyed raccoon-like creature sits with them. Its presence feels unwelcome but necessary, like a naked life-drawing session but the artists are the ones who are naked and the monster model won't stop watching them draw. Across the street is my house, pre-hurricane. My mother has packed up to move out but the fridge is filthy. It's clear that her memory has failed and she is not at all present, eyes glazed in a vision somewhere else. We sit her down and clean the fridge together.*

Within her chapter, Alchemising the Soul, Aysia Dorsey states

⁹ Staying with the trouble, page 2

¹⁰ Alchemising the Soul, BQF

“The dreamworld contains all past, present, and future creations recombined in infinite diversity by our unique witness. Dreams communicate the secret desires of the soul in the language of symbols. By catching, listening to, and workplaying our dreams, we have direct access to a fuller spectrum of ourselves. By acting on our dreams, we use our own Sulfur to reunite with our soul force and experience new levels of creativity, self-expression, and connection. This is when we choose the path of healing.”

As a society, we are stuck in the shadow of the Tower of the Past. This domination of our minds, bodies, spirits and ways of being together has made it incredibly difficult to imagine alternative paths and horizons of the future. Increasingly unsustainable however, it is a path that will eventually consume itself, being as it is out of alignment with the natural world. But in today’s climate where the sacred waters of Atabey are home to the ghosts of pirates and enslaved people alike, coral reefs and plastic ‘waste’, how do we amalgamate the toxic mess gifted from past to present for a more hopeful future than the dystopian wasteland sold to us by Hollywood and performative politicians? How can we *curate* (*cura-* as in ‘to care’) a strategy and dynamic for cultural production that does not abandon or banish shadows and ghosts (historical and spiritual) but approaches them with an attitude of ‘ten-der’ -

1. Gentle, loving or kind
2. Something offered especially money, as in payment. (time is money too)

There is a very necessary distinction of labour to be made here however between working with those abandoned houses invisibilised to the margins of society and those who chose, actively or passively, to disconnect from the home of their heart and soul, walking the path of Versace eyes and hands.

“My work has been to distill my own essence. My own god principal. My own internal truths. I am only now less of a fool, I innerstand my imperfect self and a little bit of others and the imperfect systems we create with more clarity. I got soul, but I am no longer a soldier. This war is over. I lay down my arms around myself and in this, I experience a universality that is true. This is my alchemy, what is yours is for you.”¹¹

Part of sustainable education is for those engaged to take on both the role of the teacher and the learner, as a method of dialogue with the self, from multiple perspectives, across time and space, to hold in themselves multiple truths. This would be a particularly useful and relevant skill in societies that have failed to promote community and collectivism. If it takes a whole village to raise a child but Westernisation has done away with the village, then perhaps we have to learn to become our own constellations of one, to be shared with neighbours and strangers alike.

¹¹ Alchemising the Soul, BQF

Something that has emerged in my practice, in regards to the times we are living in, is the necessity of experiences for collective grieving. It is something that I want to centre in all my work from now on, not only as a theme or topic but also as a pedagogy. I feel strongly that not only do we need to uncover our pain, together, but we need to continue to grieve it, together. It feels essential as a learning skill in a world where the majority of people, now, are oppressed, living in collapsing democracy, deteriorating environmental conditions, authoritarian governments and right wing nationalism. It feels vital to the well being of the central nervous system of our species, in order to prevent a mental health epidemic. It is a practice already embedded in many indigenous cultures, as a natural process of living. I think the meeting of art and community can make grief a beautiful, perhaps even joyful experience.

“Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing. Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think. Like the crows and with the crows, living and dead “we are at stake in each other’s company.”¹²

Another important learning from this time is the plight of activism burn out as depicted in a cycle of burn out. Staying with ‘Alchemising the Soul’ Aysia Dorsey states

“Soul and the Soldier: In the depth of my depression, my soul went Alu and my body became the God of Social Justice. I saw movement work as a kind of Spiritual Warfare. And I, a perfect soldier. I spent myself, teaching, preaching, organising “The People” directly through King’s Nonviolence and Marxism focusing on prison abolition. Leaving my body allowed me to work it to the bone burnt out and suicidal, but this is what all zealots do.”

How can we embed within our pedagogies, institutions and communities, an understanding for the necessity of care work for those on the frontlines of organising and activism? As a responsibility to be shared (and so integrated and nurtured) and as a positionality not to be glamourised by the performance of the ‘social justice warrior’ without regard for health. I am reminded of an interview I did with my boss at Royal Maroon Herb Shop in Peckham ‘Twin’ and his response to the question: **What does it mean to be Maroon as an identity and resistance?**

Twin: That’s a very good question, I like the spirit of that question. People can just take the title of an identity, ‘I’m a Christian’ or ‘I’m a Muslim’ but they don’t fully carry the identity of whatever they say they are. When you call yourself Maroon, you have to carry the African identity of sharing, loving, caring. Want for yourself what you want for others and that’s what I like to be when I call myself Maroon. It’s not just by title, it’s by

¹² Staying with the trouble

action. I've seen that in my grandmother, the elders of my community. The way they were generous to me, explaining things lovingly, they didn't raise their voice. So I am here to carry that tradition and teach it to my fellow men and people I come in contact with.

CONCLUSION

I was surprisingly moved by the signature on my most recent correspondence from tutor, Marsha Bradfield. 'Rooting for you', she said. It highlighted the fact that I very simply need to root. The project that preceded 'Roaming' was in fact called 'Rero(u)ting', a dream, like many of mine, that was never fulfilled as I moved on to the next. I think I will return to this space and time of mine, bringing with me the additional learnings that have resulted in the desire to expand my meditations with UNDER-CURRENT-SEA and collective shadow-work. I feel a deep need to be still and to listen. To realign my sense of self and values with the community and heritage I feel most closely aligned with. As a starting point the "United Maroon Indigenous Peoples" and their six pillars of Marronage offer clear dynamics for moving forward:

1. Uhuru: we are united in the cause of freedom
2. Kpaale: we gather in the names of our ancestors
3. Ujima: we work for the upliftment of all
4. Gayap: we are stronger together
5. Mbongi: we gather to learn from each other
6. Livity: we respect the forces of life and nature

The necessity to oscillate between root and roam as a strategy and dynamic for my intercultural practice is much clearer to me now, with the guiding principles of Marronage to heart. I feel a commitment to support UMIP and their path toward self-determining as indigenous under international law, possible because the Maroons landed in Dominica before the colonisers, a trick of time! How then, do we relate to other indigenous communities, on island and worldwide, if such an identity is claimed via a colonial vehicle? It first requires a shared definition of indigenous, that is “to carry the practices, languages, faiths, trauma and knowledge of those that came before us to forge sacred relationships with land and other beings.”¹³

I am also faced with the reality of needing to heal and grieve what I have lost, due to my own extractive adventures the last few months. I think I would like to claim this space without the need to generate anything, except perhaps to sit more deeply with my own mantra as M.O.T.H.

I believe my queer body is sacred.

I believe sex is sacred.

I believe this can be understood from any age.

I believe mothers can be sexy.

I believe a trans body can be a mother.

I believe a sea body can be a mother.

I believe ‘the house’ also includes the sea, and the land, and the rocks.

I believe therefore that we mother ourselves.

I believe fathers can mother.

I believe society *should* mother.

¹³ Maroon Gathering 2021



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