

Journey to the One¹

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“We cannot look directly at the past because we cannot imagine what it would mean to live responsibly toward it. We yearn for different futures, but we can’t imagine how to get there from here.”²

In the English language, the imaginary is often equated with the unreal and the utopian, the mythic, the marvellous, the allegorical, and the fictitious. We equate it with anything that contrasts an order of reality, as if material and libidinal affects to the commodity form were the only possible and desirable modes of living.

As if “it is as difficult to imagine the end of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy as to imagine that they will have no end, the imagination of the end is being corrupted by the end of the imagination.”³ We are experiencing an unprecedented assault to the imagination by rising forms of state repression, growing inequality, resurgent nationalism, environmental disruption, human rights violations, and racial supremacy ideologies heightened by digital technologies. The plunder of the earth, which has fuelled global capital through systems of oppression in centuries of racism, imperialism, enslavement, enclosure, extraction, incarceration, and genocide, is perhaps the overwhelming consequence of a perceived inability to imagine integrity, interdependence, and communion as fundamental ways of expressing and experiencing the world.

These words contemplate on the poetic labour of reorienting hope and reimagining possibility in this planet-time; on manifesting sensible forms in what we project before us and beyond us.

May a poetics of communion and comradery experienced through the sonic, in words and rituals, create subtle bodies – dispositions to unbound the heart and unburden it from the violences that weigh it into heaviness. May a poetics of temporal deprogramming guide us in conjoining our senses with the silenced and the unsound in our unjust pasts, complicit presents, and complex futures.⁴

Please bring your hands to the heart-centre. Feel the warmth of your palms connecting with your heartbeat. While holding your heart, please face the persons standing next to you and greet them with a gentle smile, knowing they share with you this planet-time and that behind their eyes are unmeasured reserves of wisdom and

¹ The title of this critical-meditation is borrowed from Pharoah Sanders’ 1979 album, *Journey to the One* and refers to Andalusian Sufi poet and thinker Ibn Al-Arabi’s notion of oneness: a state of communion with the divine exercised with Sufi devotional practices, which variously include prayer, meditation, poetry and sound. In Sanders, the practice of communion can be found in the translocal and transtemporal sonic continuum of his compositions and collaborations.

² Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 6.

³ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), ix.

⁴ Sofia Lemos, "Listening to Time at Sound's Limits," *The Contemporary Journal*, issue 3, 2021. Available online.

creativity. Face one another without speaking. Welcome them to this space and allow them to welcome you. Take in each other's presence as fully as you can.⁵

For cultivating our metaphysical gardens, let us share practices that hold space for grief, for lamenting the loss that surrounds us, the perceived scarcity of our creative imagination and the disconnection in our hierophantic hearts. It is imaginative awareness that reveals and manifests the synchronous co-arising of all things *in* and *through* the heart-centre. Let us seek the intimate labour of holding space for joy, for celebrating humble and active propositions making good with "ideals of the commons, the collective, the ensemble, the always-more-than-one of existing in the world."⁶

Please close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nostrils and gently out through your mouth, letting your jaw soften. Bring your awareness to your breath: allow it to softly continue in and out through your nose. Breathe in space. Breathe out any thoughts that lie heavy on you in this present moment. Please feel welcomed to repeat these words with me, silently, in your mind: breathe in, *I am*. Breathe out, *every thing in every way*. Focusing again on your heart-centre, feel your breath moving in, *I am*, exhaling, *every thing in every way*. Aware of the space that expands within your chest, let us take another deep breath, the start of all things that are with everything and everyone that has ever been. "To inhale is to allow the world to come into us."⁷

Please continue with your eyes closed if this is available to you. Feel the movement of your body as you inhale, in through your heart, and your body expands, and, as you exhale, breathing out, offering every passing thought. Feel how this motion resembles an oceanic tide. Inhale, resonant with your heart, and exhale. Feel how the whole of your body gestures in a simple movement coming together with the air and the temperature in this room. This is how all parts of a plant respire – the leaves, the stem, the roots, and even the flowers. Vegetal breathing is *distributed sensation*.⁸ Inhale and exhale. Listen out for the *deafening*⁹ rallying cry of our times: "I can't breathe."

As Gayatri Spivak tells us, our imperative today is to reimagine our planet with critical and transformative prospects.¹⁰ Let us unravel the many allegories of life enacted through narratives of linear progress that represent the world as made of separate parts; disconnected and independent from each other and the whole, dividing at once the material from the spiritual as well as the natural "out there" that is a measurable resource from culture as a product of the rational mind.

⁵ Freely adapted from Joanna Macy's reading of the Dharma and manual of spiritual practice for activists: Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2021 [1991]), 233.

⁶ Saidiya Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117:3, 2018, 471.

⁷ Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 66.

⁸ For Michael Marder, *Plant-thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) and, with Luce Irigaray, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁹ Portmanteau between deafening and defining.

¹⁰ Gayatri Spivak, "Imperative to Reimagine the Planet," *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 335-350.

Let us repair the self-affirming individual. Falling in love with the world is falling into oneness with it. Let us attune to the many-layered self in its simultaneously "this-worldly" and "other-worldly" manifestations. Let us seek the where of all things – the imagination – leaving the outer that cloaks the inner realities only to return to ourselves, making space for boundless engagement in the heart, for spaciousness in the mind, and fullness in the body.

In this journey, which is both an experiential invocation and existential realm of being,¹¹ implicit dualities of our usual perception of things, such as world-self or nature-culture, are transformed by a disposition to becoming subtle or unbound – by a mode of being and belonging that “surrounds actuality with real and objective possibility.”¹² Bring your awareness to our ways of perceiving, feeling, sensing, and knowing. Beyond the terrestrial and the sidereal, physical worlds, the imagination yields a poetics of way-finding and sense-making: a mode of navigating as much as a way of knowing the multidimensionality of life – the heart that uncovers the where of all places not covered by the where of sensible space.

May this practice be of benefit to you as every thing and in every way.

¹¹ See Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and The Imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6, 1964, and "Towards a Chart of the Imaginal," *Spiritual Body & Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For a more in-depth reading of the relation between the imagination and the heart as its psycho-spiritual organ of perception, see Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Al-Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

¹² Following Ernst Bloch's definition of "utopian margins" cited by Avery F. Gordon to describe a political consciousness and a sensuous knowledge of "being in-difference", i.e. lives lived in the key of refusal, resistance and non-participation in hegemonic frameworks. Oftentimes blinded from view, these utopian modes of life and critique spatialise pasts, presents and the not-yet as "what if as if." See Gordon, *Letters from the Utopian Margins: The Hawthorn Archives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).