



SPECULATIVE FABULATION

A hot fertile compost pile of thoughts

Illustrated and edited by Yana Kisyova

BIOLUMINESCENCE GROWTH CHTONIC GAIA
HOLOBIONTGROW MOVE FLOURISH STIR SHIFT SEE
ROOT EARTH SOIL OCEAN ABUNDANCE MORPHIC
FLOWER CRITTER TREE WORM FUNGI LEAF HEART
MIND CONSCIOUSNESS MANDIBLES HUMAN ENERGY
IMAGINATION MATTER MICELIUM SUN MUSHROOM
ATTACH KIN ANCESTOR MOTHER TREE ABSOLUTE
SEED BIRTH RESONANCE FIELD GRAVITY COMPOST
IMAGINATION TENTACULAR THINKING RESPONSIBILITY
FUTURE PRESENT INTIMACY SYMBIOSIS MOON
BRANCH FUSE HYPHAE ANTENNAE ILLUSION DELUSION
SPECULATION CELL BODY MYTHIC LOVE TENTACULAR
NATURE UNIVERSE BRANCH MOSS HUMMUS CRITTERS
OCTOPUS PERMEATING ENTANGLED ENMESHED
CONNECTED ENTWINED OBLIVION FABULATION WAKE
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To all my kin: Thank you for your support and love.

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Intimacy of Strangers

Holobiont

Gaia

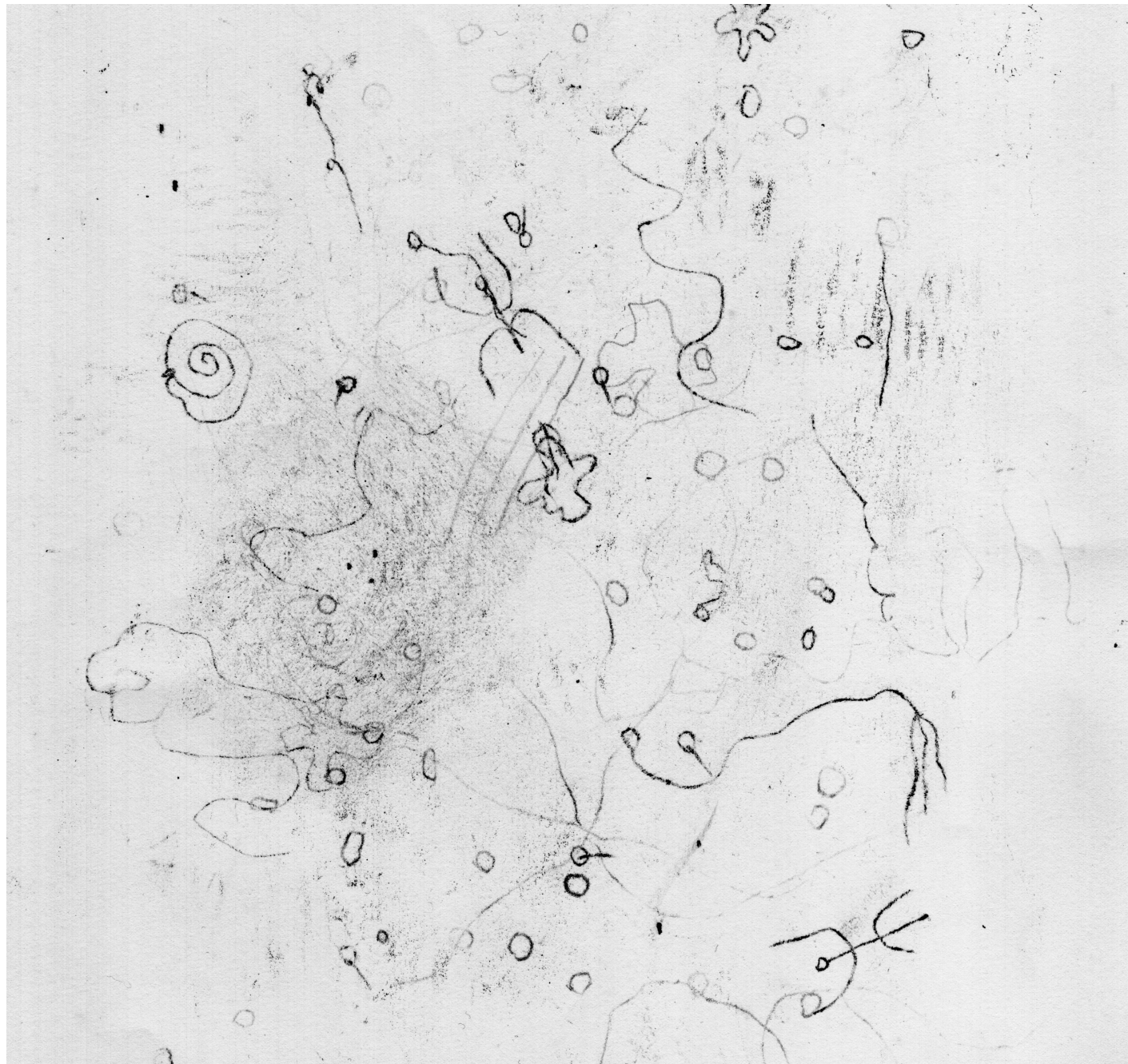
The Breath of Many

Symbiosis

Kin

Annihilation

‘Life is a planetary level phenomenon and the Earth has been alive for at least 3000 million years. To me the human move to take responsibility for the living Earth is laughable – the rhetoric of the powerless. The planet takes care of us, not we of it. Our self-inflated moral imperative to guide a wayward Earth or heal a sick planet is evidence of our immense capacity for self-delusion. Rather, we need to protect us from ourselves.’¹



Intimacy of Strangers

‘The phrase is from Lyn Margulis, a ground-breaking biologist who studied the processes of gene transfer and combination in living entities. It refers to hybrid entities that ‘combine the abilities of each’ to produce ‘composite life-forms’ in ‘cosmopolitan places’ by which the whole becomes ‘far more than the sum of its parts’ and allows for collective flourishing. This is particularly interesting in showing that species, including our own, often adapt and change sideways, not just like a growing tree of options. What results is a ‘long-lasting intimacy of strangers’ in a partnership that generates vitality and introduces a flexibility that is otherwise lacking. This creates the conditions for ‘entirely new possibilities’ that work to enhance the flourishing of all, including inconvenient and ironic relationships that defy mere logic.

The largest single living organism in the world, in Oregon’s Malheur National Forest, is mycelium, what we all call fungi. It is everywhere, though seldom seen until it flowers – in the form of thousands of different mushrooms. Mostly underground, it binds life above the soil in myriad ways. A useful metaphor for thinking differently about what life is doing, the networks of fungal cells, called hyphae, branch, fuse, flow and wrap around and under trees and plants that depend upon these mycorrhizal relationships, not just connecting them and exchanging nutrients, but sharing chemical and, in some cases, even electrical, information about what’s happening around them.

How might this inform our understanding of deep accountability? Although we need to be careful not to anthropomorphize nature once more, thinking about mycelium offers us set of metaphors that might help us understand better, and perhaps be amazed by, our own entangled lives. What mycelia do is facilitate new hybrid entities that ‘combine the abilities of each’ to produce ‘composite life-forms’ in ‘cosmopolitan places’. Through this association the whole not only becomes ‘far more than the sum

of its parts’, but despite being starting off as completely different forms of life, allows for collective flourishing. It’s akin to what Lyn Margulis, in another context, described as ‘the long-lasting intimacy of strangers’.

It’s a partnership that generates vitality, introduces a flexibility that is otherwise lacking, and creates the conditions for ‘entirely new possibilities’ that work to enhance the flourishing of all. As living networks that ceaselessly remodel themselves, mycelia are not only present everywhere but, crucially, as Melvin Sheldrake wonderfully puts it, they act as ‘brokers of entanglement.’ They quite literally bring about a ‘change from the roots.’

What if we think about our human relationships similarly? Adjacent lives, like mycelium, weave across each other in neighbourhoods, wider communities and, more often than we realize, even national and international boundaries. They also carry down through history, something we recognize now far more than we used to thanks to genetic tracing of our ancestors, whose origin turns out surprisingly often to be quite unexpected. These lives leave knots, lines and traces in us and around us. We awake with surprise to their presence. We can also decide how we respond to this ‘intimacy of strangers’ – either by rejecting it in fear or shame or, alternatively, by embracing it and gaining from it in joy and expansion. We don’t need to be credentialled for this to work – it does anyway. Appearing far less than a top-down intervention and much more like a bottom-up vitality, we need only look for those human hyphae, the leading edges of resilience, imagination, innovation and resistance that branch, fuse, flow, wrap around and under what gives life to relationships, connecting them and exchanging their nutrients. They draw from the past and the flow into the future. By looking for this in ourselves and in our communities and understanding how it finds its way, we can learn what to stay away from, what to join in with, which route to trust and which is likely a ‘dead’ end.’²

Holobiont

Atmosphere, oceans, and land, act as a single, interconnected, self-regulating system, where living organisms and their inorganic environment interact to maintain conditions suitable for life.

The resident life forms of the host planet coupled with their environment are existing in biological homoeostasis. The biosphere is evolving, and the conditions for life are constantly being refined by the interactions between living organisms and their environment.

Evolution and change are driven by intentions, connections and relationships.

Nothing here is separate.



Gaia

Is life, unfolding.
Abundance of creative energy with no beginning and no end.
A single consciousness, manifesting and flourishing into multiplicity of forms.

A body, vast and plural.

Atmosphere skin.
Ocean blood.
Bones: shifting crust.
Dreams: all that grows and moves within.





Roots, stems, spores, sprouts, tendrils,



horns, tails, wings, fur, hooves...



Webs, mandibles, shells, cocoons, antennae,



mucus, fins, gills, eggs and scales.

Are we in nature or are we nature?



The Breath of Many

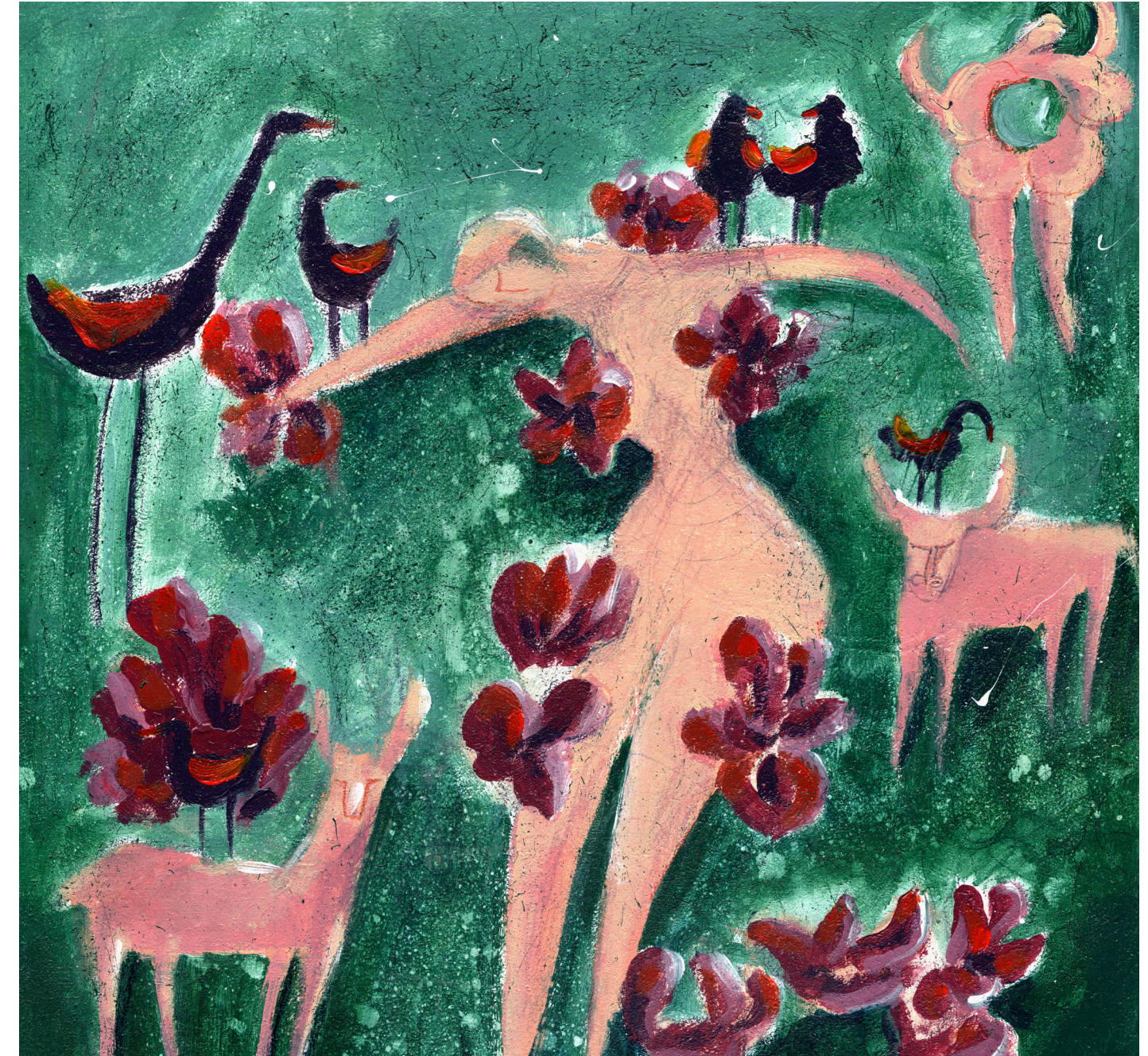
In Gaia's dreaming appeared the human.
Naked, upright creature.

We did not arrive.

We unfurled.

'There was time when you were swirling in the primordial waters as a single cell,
Carried by rivers,
Washed on shores,
Picked up by tides,
Sank to the deepest darkest oceans
And floated on the surface absorbing the sun.
You hold millions of years of animal bodies within you.
Multiplicity of life forms simultaneously.
Layers spiralled together – mammal, reptile, bird and fish tissues...'³

Fins becoming limbs, scales becoming skin,
Wings tucked into ribs, fur growing over bone.
They are within us still – in our tails tucked in the base of the spine,
In our animal hungers,
In our urges to sing to the Moon,
And gather around flame.



Everyone in Europe is descended from just seven women.⁴
Arriving at different times during the last 45,000 years, they survived wolves, bears and ice ages, birthed and nurtured what eventually became today's population.



The ancient living experience was being one with everything, part of.
Spirals. Snakes. Holes carved in rock.
People gathered around symbols.
The first language was the body of the Earth.
The Mother, the Goddess, The Creatrix.

She was the cave.
The grove.
The bleeding and birthing.
She was the fertile dark, the cyclical transformation,
The dying into living and the living into dying.
In those ancient times, the human animal revered transformation.

Saw in the cocoon and the moon a holy rhythm.
The sacred was not distant.
It was alive in grain and bone and breath.

The mythic mind was a way of perceiving the world as alive, responsive, and potent.

The sacred is about limits.

We stopped fearing nature since we named every one of her parts.



'What we name, we often feel we own. What we name, we feel we understand well enough to name. And when we believe we have arrived at understanding, we stop asking questions. We close ourselves off from surprise.'⁵

Tentacles sensing, feelers stretched out.



Symbiosis

Most psychological suffering comes out or is related to the experience of feeling separate, alone, 'different from', 'other than'.

Nothing has ever lived alone.
Life does not compete to survive.
Life communes to thrive.
Mitochondria that power the cells was once free-living bacteria.
Billions of microbes in our guts are shaping our thoughts.

Alive, interacting parts operating under the illusion of one.
You are not an individual.
You are a we.
A complex system, porous, inhaling, ingesting, expelling, touching, swallowing, seeing, living with, sensing, feeling, enmeshed inextricably with others...
We are walking symbiotic assemblages.
Self-organising structures of many.
A collaboration of thousand species,
Coexisting under the illusion of one.

Nature survives through cooperation.

There is no separation.
There are only relationships.



Kin

Lifeline.

It is not enough to think in human terms.

Consciousness isn't just human property.

We must make kin – with spider, with moss, with machine,
resist the story of separation.

Undo the delusion of dominance,
we are multispecies becoming.

It is not a metaphor.

It is a practice.

A practice of attention.

Of care.

Of accountability to the more-than-human world we are utterly entangled in.

To be kin is to recognize that your life is already braided with countless others:
bacteria, ancestors, data fields, forests, plastic-eating fungi,
your grandmother's hands, your dog's breath, the ant's path.

We are not alone. We were never alone.



Annihilation

*'Time is the mercy of eternity.'*⁶

'What is decay? Watching a compost heap transform into fertile soil it can seem like decay is genesis. Decay is the first scene in a comedy of mycelial threads and millipedes and sprouting wildflowers, seeds invisibly deposited by a bird flying overhead. Sometimes I think about death as being the transition from a solitary aliveness to an anarchic polyphony of aliveness. Years ago, a deer, hit by a car, managed to struggle into the woods at the periphery of my parent's property where it died. It was high summer, frying-pan hot, the peeling birch bark almost crisping into cinders under unrelenting sunshine. Day after day I would visit the carcass and watch as one life melted into a riot of lives. Worms. Ants. Maggots. Beetles. Mushrooms. Death was almost the moment when life overflowed its cup. Death wasn't an end of life. It was the end of the singular. The deer decayed out of its shape into explosive, generative plurality. One narrative diverged into four hundred narratives.

Am I decaying?

Well, yes. But decay is always a day, a microbe, a rootlet, away from sprouting. Maybe I'm losing touch with a self, and melting into a more-than-human mind.⁷



'The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination
The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated
Forms cannot
The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. Amen Hallelujah.'⁸

Imagination is the most important thing in the world.

Our minds are full of possibilities, of possible things we could do in the future. One of the functions of consciousness is to choose between alternative possible actions. As soon as we make a decision, we make it happen.
The world of tomorrow is the one we are imagining now.



