

## WELCOME

What are we?

creativity as cultural practice

we are in process

emerging with - in conversations

improvising with

the other-than-human

## AN INVITATION

What does the experience of disability - impairment - aberrance - chronic illness offer you, us & the world in this ecological moment?

Inspired by the following quote from Fiona Kumari Campbell,

" A relational, counter- ableist version of impairment might explore what the experience of impairment produces and ask how does disability productively colour our lives?" (2013).

We invite you to join us in a media arts experiment.

WHAT ARE WE?

CREATIVE RESPONSES FROM YOU!

UPLOAD HERE <https://app.ezfiledrop.com/81574/what-are-we>

if you feel inspired to respond to the themes,

core question or the audio visual work below.

It can be anything - words - video - audio - images - anything!

Your responses could be shared on this site or be shared [in the private online community](#).

### **visual description of the video (above)**

The visuals begin with images of a paddock with white Ibis dotted around and old growth Kari forests in the background. It then morphs into a moving image of the sunlight reflecting off leaves that are gently being tousled in the wind. The images are all slightly blurry, resonating with the notion of life being made up of inter-acting porous assemblages.

Note: There are impairments in the audio. I have left them there on purpose as a nod towards the idea that our constant striving for perfection is part of the ableist enterprise.

[click here for more multi-modal accessibility](#)

### **About**

What are we? emerged out of conversations with a group of friends. Inspired by the following quote by Fiona Kumari Campbell (2013)

" A relational, counter- ableist version of impairment might explore what the experience of impairment produces and ask how does disability productively colour our lives?".

Through sharing our lived experience of disability & chronic illness - & how an animist lens might assist in blurring the pathological categorisation that occurs in the ableist society we inhabit - rich conversations emerged.

Can an animist perspective, a sense of there being other agents in play beyond the human, tapestried with an awareness of the ableist framework, shape shift - create alternative ways of experiencing reality & understanding ourselves & our relationship with the diverse social & biological ecologies we are part of?

Having a digital space to share asynchronously allowed for imaginative threads to diffract, coalesce & weave themselves in our lovingly tended digital space. The spoken word piece was a riff - an improvised response with-in this thick conversational thread. The music emerged alongside the riff during the same time period & the two were merged with visuals to create the whole.

A random visit from a friend, Ilona McGavock, developed into an impromptu recording session which the gorgeous violin arrangements emerged out of.

THANK YOU to my dear friends who have inhabited the eye of the whale with me & thus are co-minglers of this work : Craig Slee, Julie Johnson, Natasha Terry, Aerin Dunford, Irin Tudor, Robyn Filla, Ilona McGavock & Tricky Singer. Thanks also to Headquarters for spurring me on with financial support & a deadline.

audio version

## **What Are We ?**

### **Porous Aberrant Vitality**

#### **diverse body mind ecologies**

#### **intra-connected - porous assemblages**

#### **exploring ableism through an animist lens**

My disability has inspired an examination of the processes of ableism. This exploration has been particularly inspired by the work of Fiona Kumari Campbell, whose writings & thought broaden the scope of disability studies. She identifies how ableist frameworks attempt to obsessively categorise & define disability & how the concept of 'normal' is constructed through a process of negation. This process of categorisation creates the 'ideal human' by naming what it is not. The 'ideal', 'normative' human is slippery, ever changing & thereby impossible for anyone to attain. It is created at the expense of all humans - & indeed all life - with every-thing embroiled in culturally defined jostling on the 'value' - 'am I /we/they/enough' - bell curve. Defining a solid separation between what is 'human' & what is not - opens the door to oppression of every description as well as the narrowing of our lived experience of being human. As part of this process of separation, categorisation & placing in a hierarchy of value & worth, the disabled & chronically ill are subjected to obsessive data gathering, constant unnecessary describing of their condition to everyone from government departments to random

acquaintances & the need to prove the 'permanent' nature of their state, repeatedly, in order to qualify for care. By separating 'others' & the ecologies we are part of - we allow for care to be diminished & all too often, for harm & destruction to be perpetuated.

The closer we look, the more we realise that 'we' ALL are in a state of flux.

We are ALL porous assemblages interwoven with the ecologies, cultural narratives & physical realities we exist in. We ALL require care! We ALL require different varieties of care. We are ALL intra-dependent on each other & the other-than-human. Our normative concepts of the value of independence, a separate solid self, blind adherence to a narrow definition of capacity as the gauge of our worth, are delusional constructs which separate us & inspire a deep fear of dependence, intra-dependence & death.

In response to questioning what it means to be human through ableist & animist lenses - a process of de-centering the human has developed in my life & creative work & has seen me creating work in collaboration with birds, cicadas & rivers as well as humans from around the globe. Can these perspectives loosen the grip, muddy the water, create some porosity in the normative, ableist, frames which are currently complicit in the ecological & social crises we face?

We create NOTHING alone.....

Join the What are We? Collective in a private online community.

Through dialogue & inviting the other-than-human into the conversation, let's explore our lived experience in relation to who we are as humans - porous assemblages & what we mean when we say normal - abnormal - disabled - well - healthy - sick - un-well - less than - more than - other than - the un - definable - never attainable - ideal human. What does vitality look & feel like in diverse body/mind/ecologies?

Can an animist perspective, a sense of there being other agents in play beyond the human, tapestried with an awareness of the ableist framework, shape shift - create alternative ways of experiencing reality & understanding ourselves & our relationship with the diverse social & biological ecologies we are part of?

Although the outcomes are unknown - perhaps visceral digital connectivity & the co-creation of a digital map of ideas & creative - multi - modal - responses to the core questions may arise.

We create NOTHING alone.....

We are the complex webs of relationships with all that we are not ..... yet moves through us.

As part of this project we have created a private online community where we can communicate via written & spoken words, visual art, photography & film. Many of us have the means of production in our pockets. Collecting sounds, images, thoughts & video can be done with whatever you have, including your phone. Sometimes the birds or the wind or an encounter

with a curious ant, may whisper information to us - relegating a complex matter decipherable in an inexplicable way.

Or you can simply observe the progress on this site from a distance.

Or share a creative response via the upload page here.

The project will run from May 2022 to ..... & may or may not spill over into another container.

## **WHAT ARE WE? PARTICIPATE**

[If you would like to be part of the conversation in the private online community fill out the expression of interest by clicking on this text which will take you to a form.](#)

[Click this text to share a creative response which could become part of this website or be shared in the private online communities.](#)

What are We? is running alongside a commission I have received via Headquarters to create a work for "a dedicated, disability-led digital space; centering & celebrating the work of disabled creatives." however, it has a life of its own. Its nascent cellular divisions emerged through the We Will Dance With Mountains 21/22 Black Hole Thread and it will continue beyond the bounds of the Headquarters commission.

Click [HERE](#) to find out more about the WWDWM course.

### **Situate my (self)?**

I am not the me I thought I once was.

I can no longer portray the performative, slightly surreal & fictitious image of a drumming, singing, dancing creative who is hyper-capable, productive, successful, talented etc ..etc This has been the externalised image of my 'self' for a number of decades.... This cultivated image has never been the full picture.

These days I have added elements to my assemblage for mobility assistance including a walker & a wheelchair. Walking is a risky business. I use the same level of focus to walk across the room as I used to use to perform complex choreographies with multiple dancers. I have a neurological condition which means that my body/mind requires a level of focus on the basics of life far beyond what I had become accustomed to. Mastery looks very different these days.

As part of my transition / transformation / un-ravelling / re-weaving of my 'self' as a crip artist - a crip art-ivist, a disabled artist with a chronic illness, I require witnesses, collaborators, a collective hive mind who are open to sharing & acknowledging that our intra-actively vulnerable challenges may actually have something to offer this broader, ecological moment in time. We find ourselves in an extraordinarily precarious moment with- in - part of - a planet full of trouble. Our individual troubles are signifiers to the troubles in the world.

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I am fascinated by cripistemologies - the shifting sands of reality where simply existing is a kind of mastery, & ENOUGH, where concepts of - time, existence, 'human', nature, capability, us, them, in, out - unravel & coalesce, compost into new / old / meta realities. What if the re-weaving that is necessary when a person is clearly not a 'normal', 'productive' member of society, has some keys or pointers to what is needed with - in a planet with a growing number of, what Sunaura Taylor refers to as, 'disabled ecologies'. What if there are multiplicitous, vital, flourishing, exquisite possibilities in the experience of crip / impaired / otherwise / disability, which could ease our path in traversing this ecological / social / more than - other -than human - planet - galaxy - where do we begin & end moment.

This is not to say that there is no suffering or grief or discomfort or difficulty in my experience of having a chronic health condition & a disability - it is to say - that is not all that is happening - i am not defined by my illness or by the discomfort or suffering that it inspires. My condition inspires suffering & frustration as well as, inspiration, joy & a sort of liberation from the constraining constructs of my social world. One of the most challenging things about my condition is the ableist lens that people see me through - the inability to see me through their assumption that suffering must be the extent of my current lived experience.

I can not shape shift / realign / transition / transform into something else on my own. My understandings, sensed reality, lived experience are not separable from yours or the other- than -human with - in me, intertwined with me in a complex, tapestristic ecology that is a turbulent flow of exterior / interior - isation.

If I am a crip artist in a darkened, sealed room - am I a crip | disabled artist? Schrodingers Crip is a paradox. I am what I am because of my interior experience of the world & yet this interior experience of the world is in constant relationship to that which is not me & yet moves through me. Furthermore, to be 'seen' - for my gifts to be acknowledged & received - to be accepted by a community of human & other-than-human for being richly, vitally, flawed (as we all are) feels pertinent. Our experience of crip - time and crip - cult can be offered as a gift, as clues to the emerging realignment , un-ravelling of late stage capitalism, a kind of prophesy of the rich impairment that we will all experience at some stage in our lives & transition to death. A reminder that in each moment the priority - the what is needed - may morph - that tapping into what is needed by ourselves, our families, our ecologies may well be more important than our job or doing whatever we said we were going to do. Honouring Crip Time, being 'un reliable' or 'irresponsible', in other words allowing for what-is-with-us now, may well be the most responsible thing we can do for ourselves, our loved ones, our communities & other-than-human ecologies.

For my transition / un-ravelling / re-weaving / transformation to become riper, I feel the urge to be seen in my re-woven-ness. This is not an exercise in destination pedalling - and yet ? Can my un-ravelling / re-woven-ness into a crip art-ivist with a chronic illness be celebrated ? Could I

have a series of ritual celebrations similar to when someone finishes a book or completes a theatre project or has a baby or some such meaningful emerging from a liminal state. Can I celebrate never going back to the self whose sense of self worth was dependent on the last successfully, peer reviewed creative project? Can we celebrate the flux, the, "I don't know what I am becoming - anymore than anyone else does"?

I have entered a great un-knowing - where 'self' representation has become an enigmatic signifier for a new way of being in the world that accepts illness, impairment, endless diversity, death, flux, grief & loss as intricately interlaced, fundamental elements of the extraordinary world we are part of - rather than as somehow opposed to, or an obstacle in the way of, my true, healthy, whole self. Where the politics, anxiety & status stuck to 'identity' like limpets has melted & oozes into the soil like rotting, semi decomposed food - ripe to becoming sweet smelling, life giving compost.

Inspired by the glorious thinkers /writers Craig Slee, Sophie Strand & others, being crip or chronically ill or disabled, can be seen as a portal to another way of experiencing the world, where our interior experience of the world, as a shifting porous assemblage is utterly intra-dependent on all that could be seen as exterior to 'us', where we can inhabit multiple bodies, shape- shifting from tree, to bee, to dappled light to mountain. A vital free unencumbered, multi bodied - porous assemblage. Where the ability to dis-associate from the singular, separate 'self' is a homed skill rather than a pathologised problem to be solved.

Thanks to Bayo Akomolafe and Friends & the We Will Dance With Mountains cohort I connected with Craig Slee who introduced me to the ideas of Fiona Kumari Campbell & the concept of Ableism. Within the WWDWM course/festival I discovered dear friends who were as intrigued as me about these ideas. These creative works & writing are a testament to the vitality to be found through connection. All of this was fertilised by & emerged out of these connections, between our brains. I consider these connections as priceless gifts. Dealing with the physical challenges of illness & disability is challenging. Understanding the flux of transformative understandings required to make sense of who & what I now am has been an extraordinary journey. It is a gift of unparalleled proportions to be welcomed into the world of crip.

Marianthe Loucataris

## **SOURCES**

### **Further Reading**

Explore the work of Sunaura Taylor on disabled ecologies [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

Explore the work of Fiona Kumari Campbell on ableism [HERE](#) on academia and [HERE](#) on youtube.

Explore Bayo Akomalafe's work [HERE](#).

"An autistic politics reframes disability as the dis/human signals of dis-assembly and incapacitation streaming through culture. Instead of being something to fix, to get rid of, the dis/human becomes a zig-zagging cartography disrupting the colonial linearity of progress, calling into question the assumptions we make about the human body and human subjectivity. It enshrines the promise that in losing our way, straying away from the marked tarmacs of the conventional, we might find ourselves in different, surprising places."

**Explore Sofie Strand's work [HERE](#) on substack & [HERE](#) on youtube.**

**Explore Marianne's work [HERE](#).**

### **Art as Process | a mini manifesto**

In this moment of late stage capitalism, as normative, colonial culture, un-ravels, tangles & re-weaves, art is inextricably linked to the notion of product. Art as completed, differentiated 'thing', which can be viewed from an external perspective, critiqued, categorised, valued, a price tag placed beside it, a 'thing' that can be bought & sold or experienced as somehow outside of time, flux, continuance. The creation of 'art' is in the past tense, separate from the processes & contexts with-in which it 'was' created, continues to live in & with.

Throughout the 90's & early 2000's I was mentored in community cultural development practice, a politically charged lens, imbued with nuance around cultural diversity & oozing with intentions of equity & giving voice to divergent, non-normative voices. Art / creative practice was seen as a means of giving voice to people who did not have the same access to the time, space, language skills or resources required to participate in creative pursuits, outside of their own cultural groups. Process, meaningful long term connections & empowerment were prioritised over product. However, even within this frame & the ensuing de-politicised community arts -

there were / are still imperatives for flashy outcomes, product, in order to satisfy funding bodies, to prove the efficacy of engaging communities in creative work & to tell the story of the generosity of the funders in supporting either the less fortunate, or hyper capable.

Meanwhile many creative / cultural practices - which are core to peoples lived experience of the world - are not recognised as even existing, as they do not fit within the confines of the restrictive frameworks of what 'art' is.

Community arts - still requires a separation between the completed product & the processes & ecological - social contexts with-in which it is entangled & emerging from. It is often only recognised as 'art' when an 'outsider', or 'expert' or 'facilitator' engages with cultural practices & weaves it into the normative art world by creating marketing, documentation & reports which somehow validates the flux of cultural practice. Community arts and cultural development could be seen as a colonial enterprise that 'extracts' cultural practice out of the thick webs it emerges from.

From an anthropological / cross cultural perspective, through time & space, art can be seen, in many cultures, as a means of communicating cultural understandings & nurturing practices which give meaning to life through mapping complex intra-related components of culture & life. Creativity - music, dance, visual art, making things - can map and embed patterns of relationship between the social world, ways of doing things, ways of breathing, moving, spending time in conversations, interacting with humans & the other-than-human. Creative pursuits foster connections between humans, the ecological world, earth, the other - than - human world - a bridge between everything that has come before, the present and possible futures. In the Egyptian music & dance traditions (I had the great fortune to be mentored by master drummer, Ibrahim el Minyawawi (RIP)) as the music & dance traditions fused with the Western cultural influences of Hollywood, Jazz & night club dancers - cultural traditions centred on trance, ceremony, mourning, weddings - ritual transitions accompanied by at times 100's of drummers and dancing improvising in an auditory version of a murmuration, responding to the needs of the collective / community / broader human & non human provocations - was extracted, simplified, codified, appropriated - bought & sold as cultural trinkets, denuded of the more complex & inexplicably nourishing eco - cultural substances.

This project prioritises process & the creation, acknowledgement of connections & relationality. The premise is that we exist in an intra-active, interdependent reality. What we are - is dependent on what we are in relationship with - human & the other-than-human.

The ideas presented here, emerged through conversations & inspirations from other people's writings and thoughts. Becoming aware of the work of Fiona Kumari Campbell, Craig Slee, Sunaura Taylor, Sophie Strand and Bayo Akomolafe has changed my life / mind / way of experiencing the world. These writings have been instrumental in a transitional re-weaving process, a grappling with an alternative way of perceiving my 'self', my porous assemblage, my disability and my connections, relationships to the social and ecological landscapes I am part of. This project is - art as process - a technological infrastructure which invites further



conversations. It is not a finished product, rather, it is a seed, a container which invites further conversations - improvisations - through multimodal communication, through acknowledging that we are, what we are, in relationship.

Art is a means of creating shared understandings, a communicative tool, a tool to re-pattern, re-member, un-ravel - re-weave - Art is an ecological systems process.

## **Accessibility**

Watch the video of What are we? [HERE](#) on youtube.

Download the spoken word as a pdf [HERE](#).

Listen to the audio version [HERE](#) on soundcloud

In a conversational exploration of accessibility with my friend Craig Slee, the following concept arose. What if we turned the idea of an accessible website on its head and created a website that was inaccessible to humans who identify as 'normal'. In response - the private online community was formed where only those who identify as crip, disabled, Ddeaf, chronic illness or neurodiverse are [invited](#). The concept then widened - to include anyone with an interest in the themes, as we are all woven and threaded through with impairment, disability and all need each other.

It seems to me, that it is an impossibility to create anything that everyone, would want to or be able to or have an interest in participating in. There is so much diversity amongst humans & so much diversity within the cohort of those who identify with crip, disabled, Ddeaf, chronically ill or neurodiverse. This website may well be inaccessible by virtue of aesthetic, by interest, by a willingness or desire to participate in convoluted philosophically obtuse dialogues & that's okay. We are not all the same. The hope is that this website will be accessible to those who have an interest in grappling with the incomprehensible & that the multiple formats it is presented in will broaden the accessibility. On the home page you will find an audio version of the core spoken word piece & a video version - I have placed them above for ease of access as well as a pdf of all the words.

At the core of accessibility for me, is open dialogues, being willing & able to articulate my needs & contexts of care where others are willing to adjust in order to understand the need & a willingness to respond to those needs - to change course in relation to constantly fluxing needs.

If there is something I can do to make this site more accessible for you - reach out and I will do my best to assist. I am keen to learn & happy to adjust. It may sometimes take time & it may sometimes be beyond my capacity. If so I will be honest with you. The invitation to the online community on the home page and [HERE](#), will act as an infrastructure for

multi modal dialogue and will engage the hive mind in coming up with creative responses to accessibility issues as well as the more philosophical foundations.

If you have an interest in participating in multi modal conversations, in creating connections, grappling with ideas - please feel free to send me the EOI or email me to arrange a conversation.

We acknowledge the Noongar Nations of Bibbulmen (Pibbleman) and Menang (Merningar) as the custodians of the land this website was built on. We recognise their ongoing relationships to this land and pay our respects to their Elders past, present & emerging.