

What follows is a transcript of a series of recorded conversations the two of us had, with the conversational assistance of Lois' colleague Janet Wootten, over the latter half of 2022. We two, Bayo and Lois, come from different cultural and political traditions and environments and, as you will see, speak quite different languages. What fun we had creating meaning together! We share our conversation with you hoping that you will enjoy and/or be provoked not only by what we say but equally by how we play and dance with each other. Please write us with your comments and questions!

A Meandering Search for Method: Becoming Human in a Post-human World **Bayo Akomolafe & Lois Holzman**

Part I. Suffering, Victimization and the Tyranny of Trauma

JW:

We're examining notions of trauma, suffering, victimization, identity, and ultimately healing. If OK, I could help guide the conversation around those main areas, where there may be some interesting connections. And then we can build off of that. Does that sound too constraining?

BA:

No, it sounds liberating, actually. It sounds attractive, open, emergent. Yes. Patterns merging with patterns. Let's do it.

JW:

Okay...emerging and merging with patterns.

The mess of the Anthropocene (Bayo)...the wicked world stage (Lois) -- I'm putting your *languaging* together here. The world is performing cracks, fugitive openings. I'm wondering if we three today *are* some of those fugitive cracks. (I'm hoping we are.) And I'm hoping that we can get lost together in one of those cracks.

I hear you both say that the paradigms of healing are collapsing, the paradigms of feeling are collapsing, the orthodoxies are collapsing, the planet is at a crossroads. And both of you, I hear you saying, ***can we create new sources of power for our people?*** I hear you both articulating that.

I did a quick overview of the organizations and entities *addressing the issues of trauma and healing*. Bayo, you spoke recently at SAND (Gabor Mate), and at the African mental health conference and a group in the Low Country. The W.H.O. now has a global emergency and trauma care initiative. The World Economic Forum is lecturing on the need for leadership to address trauma. In the philanthropic world, the Crown Family Foundation is piloting informed global mental health programs and doing their trial work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. So all kinds of things are happening.

So why don't we start with this *notion of trauma*, which is receiving some backlash around its use as a **buzzword**. [Bayo, you've referred to "trauma-speak."] In *The New York Times* the other day, they ask, "[If everything is trauma, is anything?](#)" Another platform, *Vox*, "[How trauma became the word of the decade](#)," and *The Guardian*, "[Tedcore](#)" discussing how self-help books have turned us all into narcissists." So we are among a growing bubbling- up of voices taking on this issue.

Lois, I know that when you saw some of that conversation around trauma as a buzzword, one essay that you put out was that [if everything becomes trauma, what do we lose](#)? And I was wondering if you could speak to that a little bit, what do we lose?

LH:

Sure. I find it tricky, because so many people insist that they have been very helped by understanding that they've been traumatized, whether that's as an individual or collective. So I try to speak in a way that accepts their experience, of course, and then give expression to my understanding that we lose so much when we accept the cultural capital of being traumatized...that we lose ourselves. I think we lose ourselves in the buzzwords, and we lose our ordinary language. We just lose the way people talk, whatever language they speak in.

In our [International Class](#), which has people from all over the world, we had a conversation...one of our last conversations in June 2022, turned to the issue of trauma (We had three Nigerians in that class, two young activist women, and an older woman.) One of the women said, "I don't know what you're talking about," because another woman was talking about her *personal trauma*. She said, "In Nigeria, trauma has to be something like worse than death. It's not a word that anybody would use to describe *almost* getting hit by a car, or whatever."

So that was really, really interesting and it seemed to me: what's the *ordinary language* in Nigeria for experiences that now people in the US and elsewhere are speaking of as *trauma*? I think we lose that. I think we lose the invitation to our imaginations to create other ways of speaking and relating around painful things that might have happened to us.

And then finally, we lose our wholeness. So ironically in "trauma," which transferred from [referring to] physical trauma of the body to emotional or psychological trauma, one would think that this [migration of meaning] kind of brought the mind and body together. But instead, I think we *lose our wholeness*, and obviously we lose our political social and cultural world.

Those are some of the losses. I haven't found a way to unpack all of that. I was hoping you might help with that, Bayo, because I think you probably agree with all of it and following Jan's direction, we could discover some things. But there's this terrible loss, I think, to people's capacity to create their lives.

BA:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW:

Bayo? It's jumping out to me that *you talk about this loss in terms of disassociation*. I'm very intrigued by that, *disassociating from our histories*, but can you speak to all of the above?

BA:

Yes. Most of the above, I guess. I find it very interesting hearing the account of that Nigerian woman who is wondering why every event has to be tinged with this notion of trauma. And I can understand that's definitely a Nigerian person, and maybe many Africans as well. People from the Global South might find it difficult understanding this Western jump to the ubiquity of trauma.

And maybe one way that I've tried to theorize around that, or with that, is to dance and play with what's happening here. I've tried to look at the legacies of trauma as a **world building project**. And I forget the authors who have done some work on the **morality of trauma**, the **empire of trauma**, the **imperialism of trauma**. I can't remember their names right now, but some of their insights stay with me, that trauma is less a clinical model than it is a **political welding project, a terraforming project**. I'm using the word fetishization in a way that of course does not respect its cross-cultural meanings, but I'm using this very limited dictionary form here, like to suggest something that is incarcerated or frozen, like Baldur, the Norse myth/god who is rendered impervious to pain and pleasure because the mother does not want him to die, right?

It seems like the fetishization of the individual is the **political landscaping project of trauma**. I mean, it wasn't always named trauma for instance. It started as a somatic notion. I mean with JJ, what's his name again? [[Shell shock history](#)] My night brain is at work now so I'm forgetting all these names. An English physician [John Eric Erichsen] called it [railway spine](#). And it had to do with the phenomenon of the rapid industrialization, the accidents that came with that, the industry of compensation that emerged around that and the imperative of the nation state to turn to the citizen subject and take care of the citizen subject in these rapidly changing environments.

Trauma became a **political assemblage**, like an ethical assemblage *inviting the individual to be reinforced as individual*. So this is where dissociation comes in. *Trauma is already the political project of dissociation from our co-emergence with ecology*. I mean, the very notion is a colonial imperial settlement ethic, right? It's about preserving my coddled, isolated, separated mind and preserving that. And in that sense, psychology has been, like many people would say... (well, some people would say) psychology has been the best policeman [of the consumer] for capitalism, right? The individual consumer preserves that morality.

So yes, trauma is much more than a clinical concept. It is for me, a Saro colonial discourse around suffering and pain and where we stand in a world that is constantly shifting, constantly upending our models like accidents on the railway track. The questions are deep within this field: How do we meet suffering? How do we respond to it? And maybe our stuckness is revealed by the **over-generalization of trauma**, of the trauma concept today. Everything is trauma. Everything is potentially triggering. You look at someone the wrong way, you've potentially traumatized that person. But not in the land that I come from anyway! I find that this is increasingly true when I'm in the West, when I'm in Europe or when I'm in the United States. It's like, we've become (and by we I'm talking about bodies gestating in Western arrangements), we become so brittle, so brittle that it seems *anything that inhabits or touches our inseparability* is immediately called out, *is immediately poisoned or pathologized*. But I'll stop here so we can go deeper into it.

LH:

Yeah, two things come to mind. Well, maybe there are three. Years ago, my co-founder of the institute and my mentor, Fred Newman, wrote and spoke about [The Myth of Addiction](#) (1992). And there's so many parallels it seems to me in that it's an industry, as you were saying, psychology's marriage with capitalism, and addiction, and individualism, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And the other thing is...I started a column called [The Developmentalist](#), and people write letters asking for my advice, and I relate to what they're asking as a developmental dilemma. So my first letter was from someone who watched a TV show called [The Shrink Next Door](#), an American television miniseries – a popular show. Evidently the therapist [psychiatrist] was bleeding-dry the client, took his money, became his friend. But the thing that I picked up on as the challenge, was the **challenge to the assumptions of psychology**, the main assumption being that *once you go into therapy, you're vulnerable*, you're not the same person anymore, because if you need help, then you're vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

I realized that the person who comes into therapy with that cultural mindset now has *two diagnoses*. The first diagnosis is borderline personality, schizophrenia, who knows what else. And *the second one is being in therapy. Being a therapy client is a diagnosis*. And so it's so interesting that being traumatized as an individual is *not* quite related to in this current moment as a diagnosis. It's a badge of sorts: "I count." It's almost like your existence depends on being traumatized. How sad it is that that's what we've come to in the West!

BA:

That is so important to say, Lois, that is incredibly insightful. The way that I've tried to meet that is I think the forces of whether climatic, ecological, spiritual archetypal forces are convening and haunting this **paradigm of the citizen**. I mean, we live in a paradigm of steel and metal that has negotiated for a *Faustian deal*: Give us this period of stability of relative stability, push back the ice, give us this period where we can create tools and look into [the beginning of the universe] with our James Webb satellites, into the further reaches of the universe and do things, build cars and stuff.

But I think this deal with the universe to give us the space to build the anthropological project, that deal is collapsing. And **the world seems to be mounting an insurgency on the citizen**, which is the cherished treasure of modern civilization. The world is encroaching, or you might say it's withdrawing its endorsement. *So as the space for the citizen shrinks, the only other space that might be inhabited is the space of the victim, right?* The victim is the new citizen, right? Because I mean, the citizen is premised on recognition. The citizen is a creature of being seen, right? The fugitive turns the idea of the citizen on its head. The fugitive does not want to be seen once you escape and run in a zigzag way.

But the citizen's whole idea is on being recognized. This is another conversation about *identity politics*, it's about being seen by the city state, "Look at me, see me too," which has its limitations and its shadows, the shadows of recognition, of course. But that's another conversation. As the world encroaches on the citizen space, the space of the victim is expanding, because it's the only way to now be seen, it's the only way to gain recognition. It's like a fight for the stability or yearning for the stability of coloniality, of modernity. *The victim has gradually taken the space of the citizen*. And, I like you said, maybe that's why people think of it as a **badge of honor to be traumatized**.

JW:

Both of you have pointed to this -- that *with the spotlight on the victim, we look away from the actual conditions that are producing the victimization*. Can both of you say more to that.

BA:

Lois, you want to go first?

LH:

Well, yeah. I think I might even question causing the victimization. The *badge of honor of victimization* (and trauma's misplaced role in creating that) *draws our attention away from what's actually going on whether or not the person is victimized or not*. So, poverty is a disgusting, horrific creation of human beings. It does such a disservice to all of us human beings to say that poor people are traumatized. It's as if poverty is not bad enough, you have to add this layer onto it. Or rape, in the news in the United States a lot lately as you know Bayo because of change in the abortion laws. They're now debating an abortion performed on a 10-year-old girl who was raped, who had to go to another state. Now they're trying to say that they will prosecute the doctor who performed the abortion. And interestingly, Jan, no one's talking about the trauma of it yet. I think we need another week, but I don't know. It just seems so obvious to me. Isn't it bad enough to be raped? You then have to be traumatized because you were raped? It's nuts.

I don't like the word victim at all, and my recollection in the States is, I don't know what decade it was, but *people went from being victims to survivors*. And I don't like survivors either. I don't know if people are still survivors. I think they are. What do you think?

BA:

I think so. I would say that and in social media, there's a lot of use of the word *survivor*. It's definitely more politically palatable and definitely more politically correct to say one is a survivor than one is a victim because the idea of the victim, there's something passive and diminishing about it.

I think "survivor" is saying the same thing in a different way. It's still this trope that seeks and yearns for recognition, it's still a secondary order issue and the primary order problem is the context that is creating and secreting these arrangements. As you said, **the therapy is the diagnosis**. The clinical alliance, the therapeutic context ironically becomes a place that preserves this terrain, this **traumasphere** if you will. It preserves it, because it focuses on the symptom and allows the syndrome to thrive, right?

JW:

The Guardian report ridicules the ocean of crap that's being written about trauma right now. Processing the trauma is **the green juice**. And what it ignores is everything that produced the traumatic experience.

BA:

So beautiful.

JW:

And there is no attention to that. I don't know if you have green juice in India now...But it's such a diversion, and I think it ties back to what you were saying about the loss of citizenship and how our primary identities are as victims and survivors.

Would it be okay if we talk a little bit about **healing**? Because that's this gigantic sphere. So much is bubbling up. I think I heard you talk about this in the SAND presentation, Bayo. The Bible, so to speak of this work, is **Van der Kolk's** [The Body Keeps the Score](#), which locates trauma somehow in this entity, the body. There is every kind of therapeutic intervention that is directed to the individual and their body -- from polyvagal toning to workshops on empathy, where you learn to calm down, to meditate, et cetera. Storytelling is another individualistic healing model. I read you saying, Bayo, that **healing becomes an avoidance**, because essentially it's a *burying process*, you're running from what it was that traumatized "you" ... You're soothing yourself, you're calming yourself, you're diverting yourself -- which is very different than sitting in it.

Brian Stevenson has done a lot of racial justice work in the United States -- bringing communities to some of the [lynching sites in the deep south](#), terror sites. He brings people there and has them dig up the dirt to literally exhume the terror -- not run from it, but to stay with it. Haitian filmmaker **Raoul Peck** had a series that's just beautifully done, called [Exterminate All the Brutes](#). (You wish that every high school student in the world could be immersed in this history.)

I thought also important for our discussion was a [new book that just came out on Frantz Fanon's work, by Nigel Gibson](#), which describes **revolutionary healing**, a decolonizing process that seemed very simpatico. And then work that is being done, that Lois is helping to direct and give shape to where people coming out of the theater and out of the performance world are generating an upcropping of [Performance Activism](#). I think that it's a fairly stark break between these individuated approaches to healing and the social/political/historical approaches. So maybe both of you, if you could speak to that, because it seems very important that we address that.

BA:

It is, it is. Lois, you want to go or would you like me to start?

LH:

Yes, I will. Although, yes, the reason I will is I have come to accept the term healing. I have come to accept it after 40 years, and I'm still conflicted about it. And the reason is that it's *still a medical model term* applied to human emotionality and human relationships, and I don't like that. *I don't like any analogy between healing my broken leg and working through and playing with and dealing with and creating a life with the moment we're in in this world*, which could be vast, the whole world, or it could be the pain that you're and your family are going through. So just maybe this is controversial, and we totally disagree.

I don't think it's developmental to heal from these experiences, Bayo. I think they're part of your life and the big question is what do you with that... There's no question, but if there was a question it's, is what you do transforming who you are becoming? And do you have some say in that, that you are created with it? So anyway, that's my take on healing and it's a very extreme position, I know.

BA:

I prefer to use the term **shape shifting**, not healing! There's something definitely restorative and probably invisibly conservative about the notion of healing, like *restoring a former image*. And that's where it becomes troubling for me, that's where things get troubling for me. I've said on some occasion that *a clean bill of health is no less ideological than the Bible*, for instance. There's something about the medical record that presumes to be this ahistorical, apolitical neutral account of what's happening to your body. But even the notion of your body as this isolated object in space, time is already an ideological commitment.

And this is some of the things that I brought up with body work these days, like people who talk about tending to the body, and I'm thinking about the context, *isn't ecology part of our body?* It's like sitting on the Titanic and doing some self-help work!

It's like **self-help on the Titanic**. "Breathe in / breathe out / breathe in / breathe out." There still seems to me that when we speak about healing, it presumes to be this innocent, progressive moving toward harmony when it is actually troubled and cross-cut and **crosshatched with certain imperial commitments to the reinforced, isolated, dissociated individual**.

Privately, I haven't written about this and shared it publicly yet, but I actually talk about trauma in the same breath with healing, right? I actually hyphenate them just like I stopped speaking about the "body," I write about body process or body processes to disturb the idea that bodies are these fates are complete, already made predetermined, pre-relational entities in space time. I like to say that the body is molecularly in conversation with our environment, there isn't a clean cut here or there except that which is agentially enacted, enacted by actors.

In the same sense, I feel that trauma is healing. It's **trauma healing**. They connect with each other, they call upon each other like *yin and yang* from the same universe. Free will and determinism might feel like opposing ideas, but they're the same idea -- each/both committed to the notion that nature is mute. In the same sense, trauma calls upon healing, almost in the same way that the **activism of resistance is almost entangled with reinforcing the status quo**. These days they're hyphenated. The more I act to resist, the more Kafkaesque the city becomes.

JW:

You discuss the incapacitation that we confront at this moment; the falling-down, or (which spoke to me directly) the decomposition, the composting. So it's not free will v. determinism, it's a whole other picture. Could you open that up or embellish that?

BA:

So it's what Lois was saying a while ago...if I'm touched, I'm immediately offended. **Being offended is now currency**, you can spend that to some degree, that's the one way to get wealthy in our political environment. And why is that the case? It's because the cracks, the ontological cracks, which is the universe's technology for novelty has been put in the family way, instrumentalized to serve a certain economy – i.e., the economy of trauma that we speak about. So if I'm offended by something, or if I'm traumatized by something, the recourse, I immediately will seek is the recognition of the nation state. And then the cycle completes itself, until I seek...well, not necessarily seek, but I perform survivorship again. I become a survivor in another context, whether unintentionally or not, and then the city/state compensates for that also terrible event and then it completes a cycle again.

Now, I think those cracks, those openings, those places where the modern subject is disturbed, shaken off its course a little bit, those incapacitating, debilitating moments, disabling moments are actually gifts. They're openings. Through one cosmic vision that I operate in, the world of healing looks nothing like getting well. It's not about getting well or being perfect, it's about being in touch, right? It's about touching openings and staying in cracks when they open and when they call out to you. And maybe that's what I mean **by generative incapacitation is the places of failure where what we have labeled as trauma is trying to dislodge the circuitry**, the algorithm of modern subjectivity so that it can be alive and in touch with other things that are afoot these days.

JW:

Lois, what are you thinking?

LH:

Oh, I was wondering if our little dog was traumatized because he was barking.. Not really, not really. Thinking of the activities that might be accessible to the average person in various ways -- **what are the activities that create the cracks for them and how do we help them stay in those cracks?** And the big thing is the tyranny of trauma. **How do you create cracks in the tyranny of trauma?** Because you're talking about the tricksters and how do you do that with someone who... I don't know, how would you do that with 10-year-old American kids?

BA:

Hmm. I think there is, I dare say, a 10-year-old kid that is... I mean there is right now, because I know that story and I've read it (it's shocking to say the least), but there is definitely a 10-year-old kid phenomenon that is the *co-production of media intersecting with the politics of trauma* in this moment. It makes the image, that image is what we're in touch with, right? What a healer priest from my part of the world might be in touch with will be certainly perspective different from what is the discourse in the United States right now.

We speak about the **slave ship experience as we name our tricksters, our complicity**. Not that we wanted it or that we called for it for, to be transported across the Atlantic. But in the stories we tell or in some stories that we barely share with each other, sometimes share with each other, we name our trickster figures as part and parcel of that experience. One account says that the trickster issue is the one that called for the slave ships to come, or at least made the conditions tenable for the slave ships to arrive and sailed with the slaves across the Atlantic. So that in a sense, we understand that some

shattering, disturbing events are *rights of passage*. There are *rituals of becoming*, and we may not understand the objectives, the agencies that are afoot, but there are openings of some kind. And we imperil ourselves when we name too or too sturdily these things as pathological.

I'm in a place of grieving, loss and pain. I remember sitting with a Babalawo priest, a healer, and he was speaking to me about hearing voices. I was interviewing him about voices in one's head, what I learned to name and label as auditory hallucination, right? And he said, "Why pathologize it that way? Why would you want to do that? What if that's your grandmother? What if that's your grandfather? What if that's an ancestor speaking to you?" It was so naturally obvious to him that there were other things afoot. So that tells me that we are the human project, this enlightenment based modern civilizing subjectivity that is subjugated by the city is an asylum of some kind. We're trapped there, and the stories we will produce there will shut out, exclude and occlude the other things that are happening in this time.

JW:

I know you both speak a great deal about joy and the dialectic of the horror and the joy. Bayo, you say you're willing to not run – to sit with the pain -- you're willing to be where you are in these moments, that there **is joyfulness in that**. Lois, we have a little song that was invented about horror and joy and playing with that [Embrace the Horror: The Performance Activism Song]. Would that be good to listen together?

BA:

I would like to. [Song plays.]

JW:

Okay. Let's speak to joy, everyone.

BA:

I like the idea of **embracing the poison**. That is very, very deep stuff, and I'm sure disturbingly shocking to the modern subject who has been conditioned to not embrace, but to do as much as possible to keep your insights, your gilded interior, your interiority clinically clean, sterile if you will.

LH:

One of the other things that Fred Newman said regarding *The Myth of Addiction*, when he put that idea out in 1992 was very controversial. It's still controversial -- that one is the hardest thing for people to get was his understanding of joy. For him it was embracing of the finality and majesty of life and its utter banality. Joy is not like: "Oh, I'm so happy." Joy comes from being fully present, if you will, historically and culturally. Now, years and years later, he would very much be speaking about the connection with the Earth and with non-human beings. And so mostly when people talk about joy, they are speaking about the good stuff. I had an influence on this song, which was that you have to embrace the poison if you want to lead (as Fred Newman said) a **joyful life**. Joyful life, you're not all consumed by the bad and being a victim, you know what I mean? So I'll stop there. But that's what I think about joy, Jan.

BA:

I heard a story from a friend about a woman who was always laughing, always happy. She was this happy person, very attractive, attractive in the sense that people just surrounded her because of the joy she radiated. And one day, it was either him or someone else met with her and said, "So why, what's your secret? What's the secret of your joy?" And she said, "I'm joyful. I'm happy because I know how to cry. I know how to cry." And maybe that's the thing for me here: there's something reductionistic about the *pursuit of happiness* – i.e., let's build a tower of Babel and climb into the ethereal regions, the atmospheric regions, the highs. Let's get high, let's escape the lows, the doldrums, the depressive, let's escape the flood of tears.

And the gift of the gods in response to that attempt was to offer the *gift of confusion*, to bring them down to Earth. And **maybe what you're looking for is the depths, not so much the heights.** *It's staying with the depths that you know how to be open to the heights.* But the thing is *modernity has no space or hardly has any space for grieving.* The psychologist's office is to put you back together again, to make a productive member of society depending on the modality at work, right? Yeah, we'll stop there.

JW:

So the one thing I wanted us to touch on is **pointless activity**. I feel that it may have a family resemblance to **composting**. But I fell in love with the concept of composting and I'm much better with composting now. I do feel that it is informed by this notion of pointlessness, of going nowhere, of being where you are and creating with whatever you have...Both of you talk about creating with the brown stuff, the shit, but **being in it and going nowhere**. So could you speak to that before we wrap?

BA:

I like that because there's this Dogen, this spiritual teacher, ancient spiritual master of meditation who suggests that *meditation is good for nothing*. It's not for enlightenment or anything. I mean, everyone else around me was saying, "It's for enlightenment." No, it's good for nothing! And that wasn't a dismissal, a disparagement, it was the highest compliment you could pay. It's like this apophatic statement. The cataphatic traditions of theology want to name God or the sacred by assigning more labels and names to finally come to a concrete definition of what God is-- maybe describing capacities of God. But there's the other **apophatic tradition that leans away from naming things**, right? Because *to name things too sternly is to blind the eye*. I feel that this **pointless play**, I love it, is maybe one way to hack the adult-isms of our time and it might be the most gracious form of activism and inquiry that we could invite for ourselves. (The adultism that prop up our children -- putting children in the family way, school, insisting that they be good adults and citizens. That's what I mean by adultism, yes.)

LH:

I 100% agree about pointless play being a....I think you used the word *gentle*-- form of activism?

BA:

Might have, I can't remember.

LH:

And also incredibly powerful, incredibly powerful form of activism. That's why this other name of that song is The Performance Activism Song.

I have a question, Bayo, you're anti-capitalist, anti-colonial. Where does that come from? Mine comes from Marx. But where does yours come from?

BA:

I wouldn't even say that I'm anti-capitalist. I would rather say I'm anti-fundamentalist – but that doesn't quite capture it. Because **my worldview is very generous**. Maybe too generous because what is immediately apparent for me, if one takes for granted that we live in a processual relational universe that is never still, it is ecstatic, it is constantly beside itself. This is what I call **ontofugitivity**, that the world is constantly escaping its own self, constantly exiling itself from itself.

I feel that even *capitalism is becoming other*, is becoming something else. And this is why I say for instance, that *we want to be critically aware of our social analytics*. For those of us who are saying “down with capitalism,” for instance, “let's pull it all down,” we might be incarcerating ourselves in a binary and -- in resisting -- doing further harm. So I want to notice the spaces, the cracks that are emerging in this speculative enterprise that we call capitalism. I want to notice what it's trying to do. What is this welding project? So mine is a **post-humanist, animist commitment to emergence** *instead of an anti this or anti that. I want an alchemy that allows it to become other.*

LH:

Great. That was really, really helpful....I and we have for many years articulated what we understand to be a [postmodern Marxism](#), which is not “anti-“ either, but has a whole different grounding.

JW:

When you said the cracks in capitalism, Bayo, I wonder how you put that together with your sense that we're also on the edge. There are both these profound openings and there's the liminality of this moment...as we seem to be on the edge of extinction, at least for us, humans. So it's both the cracks, but then this is a particular moment in the evolution of the capitalist system that we have built. So how are you playing in that space?

BA:

I like to think in terms of **assemblage and territories** more than individuals enacting social transformation. I think that's an impoverished account of things to me. So for me, I'm given to thinking through “stability”....how **machines wear out over time**. These are models of reality making work, place making rituals. This is how we are in entangling relationships with microbes, with diet, with ideologies, with theologies, with archetypes, with images, with social algorithms, to create worlds that work for a moment.

But **over time, those worlds give way because the world is too promiscuous**. The universe is too promiscuous to abide fateful to a certain arrangement. So it loses its loyalty, and that's when cracks start to emerge. And I think these cracks are for instance, what we're calling trauma, what we quickly named as trauma to put a band-aid on the cracks to say, "Keep on walking!" And maybe in my view, the most powerful work, I don't like to speak that way, I'd rather say one kind of work that this ecology of speculation that I dabble in might suggest is that we [can/must?] do is to stay with the cracks, is to stay in the cracks, to provide room for exploring these openings, these ontofugitive openings.

Healing gets in the way of that justice gets in the way of transformation, right? So how do we stay with these models changing, the ice coming back, if you will, or these agents that have never really left and have always been part of the monstrous, always been a part of our stability. *How do we make room for them? How do we become radically hospitable to them?* This is the experiment, the playfulness, the, and what's that word again in the song? **Embrace the poison that allows a fungal entity to become weaker like a delicacy. A disease becomes a delicacy**, I think within new formulations, **this is shape shift for me**.

JW: Wonderful.

LH: Stay in the cracks!

BA: Thank you so much. Goodnight.

###

Part 2. Search for Method

JW:

I am hoping that what we can do today is to bring together the power of your different perspectives -- to play with our language and concepts, and see if we can create some new ways of speaking and new ways of tackling the Traumadome, the Traumasphere, the tyranny of trauma. Can we circumnavigate traditional ways of healing (i.e., returning people to normal) and see if we can come up with some ways of approaching the concept, a new approach to power and transformation.

I had three questions: The first has to do with a **search for method**; the second addresses the HOW (in your language Bayo) of **ontological apostasy**. And third would be to consider **emancipatory power**. Does that sound good?

Bayo: The power situation and my lateness also means that I cannot spend as long because I have to jump into another meeting. Can we get started, and then we continue, because I really want to get into this. Yeah.

JW: Okay, good. Trauma, suffering, healing,

Bayo, you have situated trauma politically, economically, culturally, ethnographically, and so on. Your formulations around the **transjective** -- a monistic unity of the subjective and the objective -- is

extremely helpful in approaching this discussion. Central to situating trauma for you is the revelation of **cracks**.

Lois you have addressed this question in terms a **search for method**: how to **perform the cracks**, how to **remix the cracks**, how to **appropriate the cracks**.... Can you address this issue of the search for method in the cracks?

Bayo: I love that. I love the idea of the cracks being a search for method. It becomes this disabling, incapacitating -- to borrow a word from the literature -- **para-ontological**. It's ontology -- Being -- at subterranean levels -- it's where Being doesn't know what to do. It's this squishy, fecund, fertile place where **only rehearsals are possible**, only rehearsals and experiments and attempts (to use the language of Deligny) -- only attempts and play is possible -- because nothing is so congealed that it becomes a surface. I often playfully like to distinguish between a crack and a canyon.

A canyon is of course not quite a crack, but it's a crack that has given its ground to the surface. But the question is around what do we do in cracks? And I think it's play: this is the call for play. Deligny was famous for taking these autistic children out of the asylum, because he intuited (along with thinkers of his time) and his colleagues, understood that the hospital was ill. And so he took those kids out of the asylum and went into a network of **fugitive communities** and created there. He wasn't exactly sure what he was setting out to do. All he knew was we need to come and engage with the autistic child. We need to meet them halfway. There's something about being with them that [inaudible]....and that's the only way we can touch the Radical Exquisite otherwise. It was basically an invitation to play. It was an **aesthetic of touch**. And maybe that's where I'll stop, for that part of the response for now, so that Lois can go.

Lois:

Well, I'm glad that you like the cracks being the search for method. *And* I want to also propose that the **search for method creates cracks**. There are the cracks that exist -- like in the wonderful Leonard Cohen song where he says -- the cracks are where the light comes in -- it's a very beautiful image. And that creates the possibility of creating hope and creating something positive. AND....

Our experience of practicing for 40 years is that if you **practice method** as the How that you live your life, the How that you deal with so-called trauma, the How of your learning and development, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*, you actually are creating cracks that aren't at the surface.

I agree a hundred percent: we play in the cracks. And the **play** is how we both heal the cracks that we feel the need to heal, and how we **create more cracks**. So in political terms, how we've been practicing the possibilities of involving people in transforming the institutions of this world are that we PLAY -- creating something new... *including cracks*. And in the play, we are discovering the results of the playing. It's a **dialectical tool-and-result methodology**.

That is the deconstruction; it's in the reconstruction -- re-making of something that the old gets destroyed or as Wittgenstein says, that the problem vanishes. You're not trying to excise or create negative resistance, but rather you are embracing the dialectic of the horror and the beauty and the fact that human beings do have the capacity to transform. And so how do you fuel that? How do you invite people to transform the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity, for example, which we really do need to

get rid of. And I love you for getting rid of it in your way, and we're getting rid of it in our way. And maybe Jan, you want to see where that leads us?

JW: I want to throw in the mix this notion of **sociality**. In the literature on the porosity of the individual you see these notions of *sharing, contagion, seepage* among --- Individuals! Fundamentally, the reference is to groupings of interrelated individuals. And I'm wondering if we can play with the notion of a monistic/transjective unity of the social – and the collective creative power of the social. Lois, I think you might call it performance. Bayo, you might talk about it in terms of slowing down/getting lost/ as socially connected beings. So can we play with sociality a little bit?

Lois: I'm doing a course called *Exploring Development*, and I'm **interrogating development** as a very contested term. And Jan, as you were talking, I was thinking that **sociality** is another one I'd like to examine. So anyway, Bayo, I figured you would want to interrogate it as well.

BA: I mean, what I'll say within the time we have is that at least central to my attempts to dance with the concept is to query: "Are there **forms of sociality that move away from human centrality**?" That is, is it conceivable to think about sociality without thinking about humans being the ones that are social, right – i.e., about human assemblages? Is there a sense in which I and my table and my laptop and the air conditioner behind me are a **social assemblage** -- producing sociality -- producing some kind of relational language that may not be reducible to syntax or larger meta-narratives, but is a form of sociality? And I think that spills into the discourse on trauma and playing within cracks. Because I am quite reticent about thinking of cracks as things that humans do, even though what you propose, Lois, is very intriguing and will give me sleepless nights for a week.

But I'm thinking about, I think of **cracks as a transversal**, hence the name **Transjective Transversal Theory of Trauma**. That is something beyond the human, something outside of a network of becoming --an assemblage -- interrupts the assemblage, right? And reviews the tensions within an arrangement. Something that has been hidden, something that has been silenced in order for things to business to go on as usual. So it's with speaking about sociality on multiple dimensions now and the crack as a form of sociality. Let me leave it at that.

LH: Well, I may have daydreaming days instead of sleepless nights off of that! Oh, this is such a both fun and important topic. The **crackedness of the world**.

Lev Vygotsky, one of my heroes, says this thing: he's talking about development of the child, the **transformational nature of becoming**. And he says that through play, we/the child, discover what had to have been there in order for the development to have happened. How could something that wasn't there at the beginning reveal itself -- that it was there?

And that's what I was thinking of when we were talking about **cracks being a sociality** and this possible difference we have in understanding the cracks is because I definitely think that they are trans- *more than human*. So I agree with you on that.

And actually, that's part of why I was saying that I was *questioning sociality and social as it's understood*, and as I have used it for all these years. But I'm questioning the language in a way you are. And so your made up words (although all words are made up), your made-up words are more, oh, I don't know, evocative or poetic.

Fred Newman and I made up words: **tool-and-result methodology**. We made up the **practice of method**. We made up **zones of emotional development**. And on and on and on. I made up **The Developmentalist**. I am in this process of reexamining these terms first invented some 30-40 years ago.

It's very (I want to use the word, "developmental" but that's one of the contested words) -- growthful to do. It's growthful, it's exciting.

And at a point we're doing that, or I'm doing that in particular and meeting other people to come along and do this with me at a point where our practice has some gravitas, tiny, but in the larger world, but there are now hundreds of practitioners. So it's like, "Wait a second, I finally got that what we're doing all these years is developmental. Now you're going to ask me to come along on a journey of questioning, 'well, what does that mean?' Hey, that's not fair!" (But of course it is!)

BA: The conversation's making my toes curl. And I wish we had longer, but I really have to come out of this.

###

Part 3. Performing the Other / Meeting the Monster in the Twilight of the Anthropocene

JW:

I'm suggesting we continue our consideration of the *limits of the human project*. We're looking at how we move through and beyond this moment. You have both said in various ways that the "traumadome" is not political neutral: it's a zone of oppression; it's a zone of harm that is inflicted upon billions of people.

Last time the questions had to do with, Bayo, your invitation and insistence that our conceptions of *sociality* and *trauma*, are insufficient if related to as solely a human enterprise. We have to broaden to consider the assemblages of the world.

Lois and Bayo, you discuss life in the crack-up of the Anthropocene -- we've possibly reached the limits of where humanity can take us in this human-centered universe. And...we're trying to build our way out and around (with the detritus /the crap).

We humans have language. Bayo, you do not want to privilege our species because of that: Language does not become the be-all and end-all in a transjective/transversal world.

But, yet, we do have language; we do have the capacity to tell our story, we do write history, and we search for method. And that's what we began to get into last time, this *search for method*: this *search for a transformatory activity*.

Bayo, you caution that, "The thinking subject is dead." Lois, for you, it's the End of Knowing.

Could you both speak to how it is that we humans are struggling through possibly the twilight of the Anthropocene? We don't want to recreate a human-centered way of approaching life, and yet we

humans do have a particular role to play in advancing that pursuit. Those are some of the elements I hear in listening to you both.

Lois Holzman:

Are you okay with this direction?

Bayo Akomolafe:

Yes! We're ready to go! We're swimming deep this time into the Atlantic Ocean.

LH:

I have been thinking: Can there be an end to the **human-centered world**? That's where I went from what you were sharing, Jan. Because any attempts to do so are human-centered. Some people could say that the oceans are speaking to us; however, it's human-centered to think we could understand the oceans, even if they are. Same with the trees; same with everything. So then, where are we? I don't think we can end the human-centered world until all the human beings are gone from it.

BA:

I hear that. The way it's landing for me is that even human-centeredness, or anthropocentricity, is already haunted and beleaguered and struck through with the post-human, so that anthropocentricity is not fully itself, it's not a thing apart, like an essential idea apart. *So even human-centeredness is a performative dismissal*, a performative turning away from all the voices, not just a poly-vocality, but a transcorporeality that is already at work when we claim to be the center.

I love the framing Janet offers with noticing the limits of the human project, and that is just such a potent way of noticing this space we're in, the Anthropocene. I don't think the Anthropocene does too well a job at spelling this limit, right? It's a cautious or a cautionary planetary tale, you might say, about the consequences of industrialization, that we've become a dominant Earth-wide planetary-skilled species. Yes, but I don't think it does a good job at noticing the human as a territory and a human as a political project.

It seems to start from the observation that we are already *fait accompli*. We're already there, we're already givens. And now, this given must address a world that has gone awry. We must marshal our resources as thinking, languaged beings to address the problems of the world. And that is already a troubling place to start. That's why I think the Anthropocene might be a way of saying we're in trouble, but it doesn't really know how to language or meet this monster that has suddenly crossed our paths.

I usually think through concepts, like the Afrocene. The Afrocene is a way of noticing the hybridity of bodies -- how human lives are already post-human lives, are already microbial and bacterial and tentacular, so that Anthropocentricity is not essential. It's not an essence unto itself. It's a performative turning away from how we are already reticulated, implicated, entangled with a multi-species planet. Let me stop there for now.

LH:

Yes. I guess it goes back to Janet's question – i.e., that all of everything you just said (which I agree with 100%), is from *our* perspective. It's *our* story. There's a wonderful film, "[Wittgenstein](#)," made by Derek Jarman. It's just hilarious and presents his life and work in such an accessible way. Somewhere in the beginning (it's a scene of him teaching a class to philosophers), he gets really mad at the philosophy students, and he says, "If a lion could talk, we couldn't understand him." We are so language-centered that we think, for example, the microbes and the bacteria that live within us and around us are speaking to us. And they very well might be, but we can't understand them.

So what am I thinking? Many people are theorizing, and many people are putting into practice some ways to deal with this new story that we are *not* human-centered. And yet, what does it mean to *acknowledge in practice* that [what we've created] is a completely human-centered story? What does that mean? So is our question, *how do we go on?*

BA:

Right. Right. Right. Oh, there's a lot that I want to dance with there, so many invitations to the dance floor. One very useful way of thinking about the Anthropocene for me (and I'm going to jump into language now), seems to be the way we mark something that is fleeting and transversal. I like to imagine a giant foot, like this huge... Gulliver's Travels had the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians (the giants)...

I often imagine maybe we wake up one day, somewhere in New York, maybe in Times Square, a giant foot just comes. In the middle of all our conversations about the midterm elections and Trump's recent announcements, and the state of the world and the recent defeat of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil -- this giant foot just comes out of nowhere. And there's no way to make sense of this, because within an hour it's gone.

We start to theorize. Maybe it's the foot of God. Maybe it's the foot of a species we don't know. Maybe this is Big Foot -- *literally* Big Foot. And we come up with all these theories. But something about it remains fugitively unavailable for analysis, right? And this is a true form of the monster. The monster is this rife and generous incoherence, this deep and troubling lack of intelligibility that haunts our claims to sanity, if something just disturbs and haunts.

I feel the Anthropocene is how we mark. We make this feeble animist mark on the moment that that occurs. It does nothing to represent. We're still thinking through representationalism here. We're trying to capture the event, but something about the event just does not want to be available.

And I think that's what the Anthropocene tries to do. It's like something has come to us, and we must stand still, but we don't know what to do, and so we're fidgeting. We seek solutions and new manifestos and new economies, and Green New Deals, and face masks, but there's no way to address this monstrosity, this Frankensteinian beast.

I feel that this is where language stops in a sense. It's where language fails. Maybe this might be a good way to segue, but not entirely depart from that premise, that centrality for me is always a constellatory phenomenon/effect -- a parliamentary effect. It's a multi-species effect. We often think that because we have language, and we can express ourselves...

It's a multi-species parliamentary effort. It's not the one thing, which seems ironic and paradoxical. Centrality should be about us, but it's not about us at all. It's a phenomenon, and it is limited and fleeting, just as much as anything else that is embodied.

The Anthropocene is where language stops, and where something else that is beyond the human is called for. I'm trying to string together a couple of amniotic ideas.

The idea that we possess language, that we have it, is also a troubling occlusion of post-humanist processes. I think *language has us*. And language has ridges and valleys and mountains and plateaus of legibility, clarity and deep, dark obfuscation. So that language feels more ecological than an ability that a certain species has suddenly sprouted against the evolutionary tide of things.

It seems that there is a sense in which the world is inviting us to a different form of participation within language *that doesn't privilege understanding*, so to speak. There are certain moments that are transformational, that don't rely on our ability to figure things out.

We are in a moment right now, that does not call for your solution or your genius; this is a different form of intelligence that is at work. And it may not be language-able in terms of your cultural affixations with the alphabet, or with syntax, or with dictionaries and concepts, *but it is no less language*, and it is no less a call to agency of some kind.

This simultaneously invites other species. It becomes this animist ferment, this atmosphere, where we are always together in this, without dismissing stories we might tell about human exclusivity, which is still a very, sincerely potent thing to stay with -- human exclusivity.

LH:

Well, I think that our Institute, our global community's response has to do with... (I'm veering off a little bit, I think, Bayo, from where you were)....it has to do with the capacity of humans and others, I believe, perhaps, *to perform, to be other*. Because I also agree very much with you about this not being a moment for figuring things out. It's not a moment for understanding. And that if we can harness our ability to engage in the activity, for example, *of languaging that has nothing to do with understanding and everything to do with embracing connectivity*, that it involves us in the search for method, if you will, then we might be able to live in the cracks.

And I think people are just so afraid of living in the cracks. Maybe that's where we are now....in this desperation to figure things out, and desperation to clutch and cling to a belief in certainty of some sort or another. "Certainty" certainly has to do also with superiority and exceptionalism, human exceptionalism. We're the smartest, we have hands, we have thumbs, on and on and on. People don't want to take a look at, "Well, big deal. Look what all of that did," at this moment. [holding up her thumbs] So these are not going to help us get out of that.

JW:

When we began circling around this in the last conversation, Bayo, you said, "The aesthetics of touch is something that we need in this moment" – perhaps relevant to getting beyond the language of figuring things out... Can we explore that for a minute?

BA:

Yes. In fact, I want to string together this idea of *staying in the cracks* with this notion of the *aesthetics of touch*.

Maybe I'll start first from a genealogy of cracks and the way that I see it and how this might lend itself to an aesthetics of touch. Hiroshima seems to be a prime example of a crack. And anytime I want to think about cracks, I think my head goes to the Tunguska Event, June 30, 1908. Bigger explosion than Hiroshima...The explosion left sediments of itself in bodies. Carbon-14 traces of radioactive elements were deposited in bodies, in flesh, in the atmosphere, just something else that's not supposed to be there, if you will, something that exceeds the modernist traditionalist notion of the liberal human subject citizen, right? And as recently as the 1980s, and I think even the 1990s if I'm not mistaken, babies were still born with that radioactivity in their cells. In a sense, they were participating in that explosion. Whether they liked it or not, we were born with that explosion. These deposits feel like emissaries of a sense of surplus -- excessive.

I never think about cracks as deficient spaces -- negative spaces, lacking something. I think of cracks as overly generous; it's when things spill away from their containment, from their ontological units and become something else. That's what a crack means to be. So the metaphor is duplicitous. Instead of something being taken away, it's something that's added on.

We are in touch in ways that we don't even know how to language. Babies born decades after, and possibly even centuries after, that event might be still *entangled with that event*. This is what I mean by staying or abiding within an *aesthetics of touch*. It comes right down to what I mean by cracks, like these excessive events.

Even with Autism, there are compelling stories about how the rise of autism is correlated with our increasingly toxified environments and our stay-at-home cultures, and the dwindling levels of vitamin D in children. There's a lot to say about that.

Even in our efforts to create a hyper-rationalized realm, where we and our design is the final say, we kind of made the conditions possible for something else to steal into the room, steal into our bodies, and render us slightly more monstrous than before -- more monstrous than our design and our blueprints allow us to be. And for me, *that is the space of emancipation*. It's in the coming to touch, or coming to be in touch, or *coming to be touched by this monstrosity* in some sense and following its errant path to where it might lead.

LH:

And by calling it monstrosity evokes what?

BA:

I'm using not the Hollywood-ized trope of a monster, the pathological evil, morally burdened being. I'm thinking of the monster as a cultural or cross-cultural figure that has often been used as an edge-walker, someone that doesn't fit in. Not just a recluse or an outlier, but some being that cannot fit in because *its body is a critique of normativity*, right?

You think you are complete, or you think you are stitched together in a wholesome way. No, we come from the same place. We come from the same matrixial womb. So that's the idea of the monster: this cultural figure that has been used over time to tell stories. My parents used it, my elders used it to say, "This is where you do not go. This is the line you do not cross. You don't go away into the dark forest."

All our stories are technologies of monsters guarding the moralities of our time, but moralities themselves can become incarcerating. And so when that happens, the thing to do is to go to the monster, or to recognize that the monster is already within.

LH:

So the evil people of the world -- or the people who visit atrocities -- how do we think about them in this framework?

BA:

It'll come down for me to a distinction between ethics and morality. I don't think of ethics and morality apart from ontology and epistemology and agency. I think of them all together. I live in that kind of monogamous relationship with the universe, that how we know the world and what the world is and matters of concern and value are all intricately entangled with each other. So it's an ethical, onto-, epistemological emergence of things, right?

There isn't some kind of transcendent idea of right and wrong that is imposed upon us from some divine entity whose magistrate is this Christian notion of the conscience. There isn't something from above, is what I'm trying to say. I'm saying *above* is already beneath, and we're all wrapped up in this thing together, including with the things we usually count-out of human sociality.

As things move, we create stabilities. And these stabilities are social, political, geographical, and also moral. Every place-making land-making project is the conjuring of a god, if you will, a god of the realm we worship and are worshiped by in a sense.

But there are often moments when a moral territory loses its steam, if you will. It loses its ability to hold the tensions of becoming, and so it spills. I distinguish ethics as *morality in flow*. It's moral spillage. Morality might be matters of concern when they have coagulated long enough to become laws and principles and values and ideas of who the villain is and who the hero is. But in times of transgressions and transformations, it's difficult to say who the villain is or who the hero is. In other words, there is no abiding sense of right and wrong that just persists in times of fluid transitions.

And this is immediately clear from stories of interactions between the white slavers and African communities. Most of the tales are usually about the white slavers and how bad they are. But we don't usually talk about how African communities sold their own to these people. Those stories are suppressed. Because there's a political moment that champions this idea of minoritarian rights, and it gets too complicated when we say that, "Well, minorities were also part of the business of selling themselves." It becomes too complicated.

LH:

Right. It's supposedly not ethical to say that.

BA:

Exactly. It's not politically convenient or correct to say that. So that's what I mean by that, that our sense of the politically convenient, what is say-able, what is admissible, what is permissible, is morality in its dynamics. But ethical flows, for me, refer to how the invitation of a trickster. And this is where I refer to the story of Eshu, the trickster, traveling with a slave. To everyone who he left behind, they would've thought of him as a villain, a monster. How dare you? Instead of stopping this horrible traffic of bodies, you decided to travel with them, almost permitting the traffic to happen.

But the idea of the trickster is that the trickster must open new worlds by playing with binaries, and he understands where binaries become stuck. So that is what I mean there: territories create the room for us to make interpretations about who's bad or evil. But those are contingencies; they're always dependent upon larger forces at work, which are not stable or permanent or foundational.

JW:

Lois, you've introduced the human capacity to be the other – the *capacity to perform*; and Bayo you've discussed the *capacity to cross the line, to be touched by the monster -- monstrosity*. We've talked about this in terms of embracing the horror, drinking the poison, living in the cracks. Could we speak to those together: the capacity to be the other, the capacity to be touched by the monstrosity? And with regard to what I think this project may be addressing: how do we lead people in their day-to-day lives to do that very activity. Does that make sense?

BA:

It does, it does. It's very generative for me. Yes.

LH:

Well, I think that where I can connect the two -- **to be other and to be touched by the monster** -- they're so intimate, they may be descriptions of the same thing. Because to be the other is *not*, for me, putting yourself in someone else's shoes. It couldn't be farther from that. It seems that one of the desperate attempts to stop the fleeting ethics is *empathy*. People touting this thing, everyone has to learn to be empathetic. You see empathy training for doctors, empathy training for teachers, research studies on empathy, as if you could -- not *perform* as other -- but *be other*. But everyone *is* other -- already. Everyone is other. So it seems to me ***empathy is a way to avoid being touched by the monster***.

BA:

Could you say more about that? Did you say empathy is the way to avoid being touched by the monster, to avoid it?

LH:

I think that empathy in the sense of the attempt to understand someone else *by imagining yourself in their shoes* is not only philosophically and linguistically and bodily impossible, but it leads to a narrowing -- it's incredibly egocentric. Do I have to imagine that a tree has feelings before I decide not to cut it down?

I mean, it's ridiculous. It's all me-centered *in the name of being other-centered*. That's what it is.

Do you have to imagine what your son is feeling? You can't. I mean, you can imagine [that you can], but you can't possibly feel what he feels. And assuming that he is neurodiverse in some way, and assuming that you might well be neurodiverse, but not in the way he is... But there's no necessity, there's no reason one has to either understand someone else or feel what someone is feeling in order to embrace the unity and, for lack of a better word, the humanity, or to be loving, to be all the things that the three of us aspire human beings to be.

So your way of thinking about it is that we have a capacity to be touched by the monster, and it would be good to recognize that. Maybe something new could emerge if we as a species recognized that. And I think it's so similar to *perform who you're not*. And I think both of those are not just alternatives, but ***antidotes to this egocentric empathy movement***.

BA:

That is shockingly insightful.

No, I really, really, really love that. Janet's question was about the capacity to be the other and crossing the line...and the effective condition that prohibits that capacity. It's like a prohibition of that capacity to be the other, right? I want to stay with that phrase: *to be the other*, just a little while longer. What is being asked when we think about *being the other*, right? Lois, like you've said, it's not entering someone's shoes. We cannot fully do that. It's not embracing another experience, right? There's something performatively or let me just go right down to theatrical about that. Almost like this very, very peculiar image of Nancy Pelosi kneeling with other Democratic senators wearing a Ghanaian/African outfit. It's nice for the pictures, but from multiple angles, I read, that it wasn't really appreciated.

Well, my point is that if modernity is this effective condition that bottles us up, even though we're already children of the monster, so to speak, we are already children of the interface. We're not even fully ourselves, so there's no "be authentically yourself." That is just as fascist as...The claim that we can be authentically ourselves is a form of fascism, right? It's too ideologically incarcerating to think that way.

So maybe then our turning away from being the other is really not an ontological negation, that we're already touched by the other. Like I've said earlier on, *it is more a socio, material, performative, languaged, ideological, political commitment to our own centrality, to our purity, right?* And then how we try to bridge the divide is with empathy. But empathy becomes yet another algorithm of our siloed situation.

LH:

Exactly

BA:

It's just another form of coloniality. It's like, "Here is restitution," but restitution is still using the same maps of capture in the same place. It's just like people saying, "Love is a bridge." And I often say, "No, love isn't a bridge." Because to say "love is a bridge" is to presume that we are isolated and separate. I would say love is a hyphen.

Love is a hyphen, not a bridge. We are already hyphenated. Whether you see it or not, whether you language it or ritualize it or not, there are things that will remain so in spite of that. So that's how I'm responding to that: *empathy as this attempt to bridge the divide, but the attempt to bridge the divide ironically reinstates the divide.*

LH:

Exactly. Because there is no divide. I mean, obviously, we see the world through a divide, but what if we start with, "Everything is connected."

We have this ideology, called psychology, that created the myth that we are all separate, and we're born isolated and separate, and then we've got to figure out how to live together, because, obviously, we do live together. And when that fails, then you, "Ah, I know what we need to do. I need to put myself in your shoes, then I will not kill you." It's ridiculous.

BA:

There's something to that that is really potent, really potent.

JW:

Could we play a little bit with what it means to be popularizing, proselytizing, organizing, making...a conceptual revolution -- a way of helping people move into what we've been calling this transjective, this transversal space, this activity of mobilizing ordinary people all over the world to participate in this, I mean, how do we want to address that?

LH:

Why are you asking that now? In the way you're asking. You could say, "Thousands of people around the world are doing this..." But that's not what you said. I'm wondering why you asked it as a *generalized* question?

JW:

Okay. Yeah. I obviously know about the work, Lois, through the East Side Institute. And, Bayo, I'm just learning about the work through The Emergence Network and the many projects there and...

LH:

Yes, there's so much unorganized activity -- but *not systematized* activity around the world that is coherent with what we're saying.

JW:

Yes. Right. So what is the relationship between this kind of conceptual and languaging development and advancing this *unorganized, unsystematic* activity that's sprouting up around the globe? What do we think about that?

BA:

Well, my thoughts are not fully formed on this, but a sense of a ***pedagogy of the cracks*** comes to me. Is it defined by empathy? Maybe not. But there is a sense of appropriating cracks. I'm trying to work with the tensions of the post-humanist, that transformation does not begin at the human, does not begin at language, does not begin at understanding, does not begin at us saying, "Ah, there you go. We now know what to do."

And I'm thinking of people like Fernand Deligny. I mean, Deligny tried to get around language, right? He saw the autistic child not as an opportunity, but as a strange invitation to get to the other side of subjectivity. He felt maybe modern subjectivity was getting in the way of our conceptualization or living in the Exquisite. And not the exquisite as a place to arrive at, like, "We're finally home," but a different sense of things: a sense of novelty and of the new. He was addressing fascist arrangements; he was addressing the asylum; and he felt, "Maybe instead of trying to rehabilitate the nonverbal autistic child, how about I stay with this crack?"

There was creativity there. There was experimentation. There was a search for method. I mean, literally. They would do some tracing, and something would erupt, and they would create wander lines: just a beautiful search for method with monstrosity. It was like accompanying this more than human, this dis-human community, this dis-human entity, where "dis-" is not a disadvantage, but a differing of the human, a critique of human stability.

So that's what I mean by appropriating cracks, that it's not entirely left to us. And this has proven to be a worthwhile meditation for me: It's not entirely left to us to know what to do and, moreover, maybe it's not even desirable to know what to do all the time. We're way in over our heads. This is not about us submitting everything to the family way, to the algorithms of capture and conceptualization and indexing and languaging and archiving and then resolution. Maybe that's not how things work all the time. Maybe that's a very modern pragmatic approach, yes, but maybe the world exceeds that pragmatism.

Appropriating cracks means that we are living within the tectonic fields of principalities and powers and territories, and they're interacting at levels that we cannot comprehend. And sometimes when bodies clash into bodies transversely, then the thing to do, or the thing that we might want to do, is to stay within the machinic middle, is to stay with this excess, and this excess might guarantee a movement away from the familiar.

Now, what this looks like aesthetically, I'm still figuring out with many, but it seems like this is a pedagogy of cracks

LH:

Some of the work that I do is to find ways to help people see and experience and *embrace the unknowability*. Is that a pedagogy of the cracks?

BA:

Well, unknowability would be an aspect of it, but I would very, very emphatically frame it within a sense of animism. I would frame this unknowability not as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, but as...What's his name? What's the other guy? The father of quantum mechanics, Niels Bohr – the one who gave Einstein nightmares. So he spoke about quantum indeterminacy.

It wasn't a matter of, "Oh, we don't know where the particle is," it's that where it is non-linguistic, it is not locatable. The moment you locate it is...When you measure it, you're measuring it into being, it's not here or there, it's in the state of a super location, it's indeterminate, right?

This indeterminacy... I mean, I don't think there's a binary, like, "Here is a macro level and here is a micro level." I think the pandemic has taught us that even things that are infinitesimally small are macro.

So I guess my point is that...if you take that indeterminacy, then even the human is not determinately there. We're not accomplished. We haven't arrived. And immediately, you give a little room, even this tiny molecular space, of indeterminacy for what it means to be human, you've already opened the flood gates of animism. You are saying we can be something else, *we are always already something else*, we have been something else, and we are yet to be something else.

It seems to me that that's how I think of a pedagogy of the cracks as shape shifting. It might not be, Janet, you sprouting gills literally overnight, as in that Kafkaesque story of the man becoming a bug. But I think that's too juvenile. I think of the human as the cartography, I think of shape shifting as disorientation. Like our bodies are not "there," our bodies are movements in space. And if we see ourselves as movements in space -- anything that errs away from the patterns that we're used to is a form of shape shift. It might show up in time as an evolutionary disadvantage or advantage, but shape shifting means getting lost somehow and being available for other senses.

LH:

So I see the indeterminacy is not quite radical enough, or not quite provocative enough...***Embracing unknowability*** seems to me to fit so much better with what you're talking about than indeterminacy, it's more monster-like. It's more...I don't know...it's more mysterious. Not mysterious like scary... See, *we can't possibly know*. It's like a limitation of this egocentric, language using, image making, warmongering human being. *We simply can't. It's beyond us to know*. Not like in the unknown sense, but in the actual lived life of the universe, things are unknowable. It seems so different... And not different. It seems bigger than indeterminate to me. So I wonder what you think about that.

BA:

Is this unknowability in terms of scale? And is it gradually reduced by the availability of information? Is it like drinking from the sea with a teaspoon? Is it that kind of skill? Like it's unknowable, but maybe I've just taken a little bit, a morsel, of its unknowability away by taking of it? Is that the kind of unknowability, numbers, information, bits and pieces?

LH:

Well, I think that's what people think, and that refers to *the unknown*. The idea is that, "Well, it's unknown now, but it's knowable -- absolutely knowable." It is *unknowable* what will happen in 30 seconds. It is. And if we're still talking, we would then explain (because human beings explain), we would explain that none of us lost our connection. We would explain it, but we didn't know it. It wasn't predictable.

See, if you live your life embracing unknowability, from my own experience, it's not like you don't go around doing the things you do. But your eyes are so much more open. You can see new things perhaps. You can hear more. Anyway, I love it. *I love embracing unknowability*. And it is such a challenge...Because people live their lives so much in the Known (even if they don't know it). That's the beauty of infants and very young children, and perhaps your son. I don't know, because I don't know him. Knowing has nothing to do with life, with living.

JW:

Lois, this is helping illuminate what you said in our last conversation about transformation, and Vygotsky helping us understand that in the *process of transformation in which we come to know [at the end of a transformatory process] what it was that we had to have known to do what we did...* But it's helping show time working backwards. Do you think of that as us as humans *explaining the unknowable* after the fact? Is that what we have the capacity to do?

LH:

We certainly do, but I think that Vygotsky was talking about something a little different. We rationalize all the time, and we make sense of things after the fact -- things that don't make sense.

For the child, it's sort of that realization in the process of trying things. The child is falling down every time, trying to walk. There's all this encouragement. The walking performance is a theatrical scene in the child's life that gets played over many, many times with nuanced differences. Sometimes the lines in the play get more and more heightened, "Oh, my God, you almost did it. Oh, come on, come on, come on, come on!" And then -- it's not the finale of the scene -- but the high point of the scene -- is when the child lets go of the hand or the couch, table, whatever it is... And s/he has that experience...(everyone has that experience), "Oh, my God, s/he did it!" The joy of that, the excitement of that, the so-called "end" of the process. However, it was a tool-and-result-created theatrical scene with an intended result at some point. But it's not like, Bayo, when that first happened, it's not like you said, "by January 12th, when my kid is six months old, he will walk." It was a continuous process. So how Vygotsky puts it, *what was there at the beginning only shows itself at "the end."*

So that capacity, that ability to participate in this theatrical scene of an infant's life is there from the beginning. We willingly enter performative scenes, both the adults and the infant. We enter this together, and *that ability shows itself at the end*. How did that happen?

BA:

I like this sort of soft... It definitely doesn't put us at the edge of anything, like the *avant garde*, frontier species who knows stuff. It's makes knowing a very creaturely habit of making marks on the planet's body. It's like we're just making marks here and there. Even claims to professional insights to forecasting or anticipation practices -- it's like reconvening those marks and looking for patterns so that they tell us stories. It isn't a form of capture. This is deep uncertainty, a troubling of certitude, but it is also animist in my sense of things, because to know is to be altered. Every time we make a mark, we are marked in return. Every time we strike a bargain with a surface and pattern the world in particular ways, we are digging ourselves into a cartography. And so we are shape shifting or reinforcing ourselves, so that to know, or like Deleuze would say, to know is to become monstrous.

There isn't a knowing that leaves us apart. There isn't an independent knower. Knowing is this interface between things. So yes, it's like *uncertainty already troubled with indeterminacy*. Because it's not that I am uncertain, you are uncertain, uncertainty is not like a property of some already established entity. It's like *this uncertainty within a milieu of shape shifting practices*. So we're putting it to work in a very, very profound way.

JW:

Thank you both.

###