

# FREE COLUMBIA

## NEWSLETTER #3 SUMMER 2020

Dear Friends,

Over the winter, I placed a few chestnuts—gathered from beneath two trees of the stunted American variety in my yard—in my fridge with some moist earth. Three days ago, I opened the bag, shook back the moist soil, and behold—two brilliant tendrils attached to the now more husky seeming nuts. Now in a ceramic pot, with soil enough to let them root and give them cover, they rest on a kitchen window sill. I am drawn to it rhythmically throughout the day. Today I discovered exquisite seed leaves (not from the chestnuts) with stems not hardy enough to stand them up. They are more like umbilical cords. I have never been so conscious of their delicacy and exhilarated by their vitality.

Suffering, anxiety, pain, and fear have been regular guests for many during these past weeks, as has selfless service and a renewed feeling of the power of intentional collaboration. I have noticed that I am drawn to the ceramic pot as I am to an unquarantined day. I sense this in others as well.

In this April mood I send out this third newsletter from Free Columbia.

This last year we have been working to establish Free Columbia as an independent not-for-profit organization. Last month we received confirmation that we have been granted 501 c-3 status and are now working with our longtime colleagues at the Hawthorne Valley Association to make all the necessary arrangements for a smooth transition. Free Columbia's existence is only thinkable due to the gracious and generous collaboration with Martin Ping and so many others at the Association. This is reason for sincere gratitude and thanks. We also have reason for sincere gratitude and thanks

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for the service of Free Columbia’s board, which currently consists in Allison Hoppe, Pete Lemire, Kai Naor, Sara Parrilli, Linda Park, Laura Summer, and Nathaniel Williams. Gratitude is also due to David Schwartz and Robin Andrews for their help in applying for our 501 (c) (3) status.

I am truly humbled and excited by the students that have already been accepted into the M.C. Richards Program for 2020–21. There are still spots available and I encourage anyone intending to apply to do so now. The researchers, artists and scholars who are teaching during this year make it a truly unique opportunity. You can see the basic curriculum and facets of the program below, and there is more detailed information on the website.

In this Newsletter you will find a fresh harvest of thought, poetry, music, philosophy, and painting, concluded by announcements of Free Columbia’s recent past and immanent future.

## MC Richards Program Main Blocks — Five mornings per week

Trimester One: Grounding	Trimester Two: Breathing	Trimester Three: Individuality and Wholeness
Aug. 24-Sept. 18	Nov. 9 – Nov. 25	Mar. 8 – Mar. 31
Explorations of Place and History through Visual Art and Excursions. — Nathaniel Williams	Discovering Meaning in Nature: Animals, Humans, and Evolution. — Craig Holdrege and Nathaniel Williams	Model-free Physics and the forces of Technology. — Gopi Krishna Vijaya
Sept. 21 – Oct. 2	Nov. 30 – Dec. 18	Apr. 5 – Apr. 30
Attending to Experience through Nature Observation. — Catherine Read	Taking Appearances Seriously – Visual Experience and the World of Light, Darkness, and Color. — Henrike Holdrege and Nathaniel Williams	How can poetry and creative writing foster aesthetic education, particularly of our relationship to the natural world? — Luke Fischer
Oct. 5 – Oct. 30	Jan. 11 – Jan. 29	May 3- May 21
Anthropology as Relationship: Self-knowledge through learning about people, culture and place. — Lucas Dreier	Plexus Listening Lab: Re-arranging bodies and identities toward a new vocal togetherness. — Faye Shapiro	Metamorphosis, Plasticity, and Context-sensitivity – Learning from Plants. — Craig Holdrege and Nathaniel Williams
<p><b>All Three Trimesters</b> Two afternoons per week students choose work in smaller group focus-areas such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Theory and Action</li> <li>• Ceramics</li> <li>• Visual and Studio Arts</li> <li>• Equine Arts</li> </ul>	Feb. 1 – Feb 26	May 24- May 28
	Transformation, Polarity, and Expanding the Boundaries of Thought through Projective Geometry. — Henrike Holdrege	Conclusion
		<a href="#">Learn more about the MC Richards Program</a>

# Bridgework and the Spell of Hilma af Klint's Contemplative Botany

By Nathaniel Williams

In the last few years, along with many others, I have had the opportunity to begin my acquaintance with Hilma af Klint. Her introduction to my life was the exhibit of her epic paintings at the Guggenheim<sup>1</sup>. The scale of the venue, and some of the first paintings on display, evoked the sublime and majestic. The thoughtful curation imbued the Guggenheim with an intelligent and bright atmosphere. Many of the paintings, particularly some of the large ones, radiated a festive mood. What was intriguing, and puzzling enough for me to want to explore further, was not my experience at the exhibit but what happened in the year that followed. The most outwardly striking and, one would assume, memorable works did not stay with me. Instead, some smaller and seemingly less dazzling pieces remained in my consciousness over this last year as companions. I had the feeling I had connected with something infinitely intriguing, and somehow exquisite, in these little pieces. Looking back on the sensorial cacophony of the exhibit, it is mysterious how these little ones endured. They were a few naturalistic watercolor presentations of plants and some abstract pieces in the method of wet paint on wet paper.

## **af Klint's Esoteric Botany**

In the weeks that followed I read articles about her life and work and met people who had also visited the exhibit and I began to note this mysterious distillation within me. It was only later that a sharper focus came about. This happened recently when I had the chance to see some of her work exhibited in Hudson at the Lightforms Art Center, where I also attended a lecture by the art historian David Adams<sup>2</sup>. Late in the lecture Adams turned to af Klint's "Spiritual-Scientific" efforts in botany. These were presented in a notebook she dedicated to botanical studies. She developed a method consisting in a series of observational approaches to plants that resulted in detailed and elaborate visual renditions, much like those I had seen at the Guggenheim.

As an artist, af Klint was both naturally gifted and highly trained. She was able to surrender to the detail and specificity of the external contours of the plant and turn inward and eliminate the sensorial impressions while practicing openness and receptivity. She would close down the senses while remaining receptive to sensing. In this attention, this open space, af Klint practiced observing. Obviously, she was interpreting what she encountered

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1 Tracey Bashkoff. Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future. Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018.

2 <https://www.lightformsartcenter.com/david-hilma-lecture>

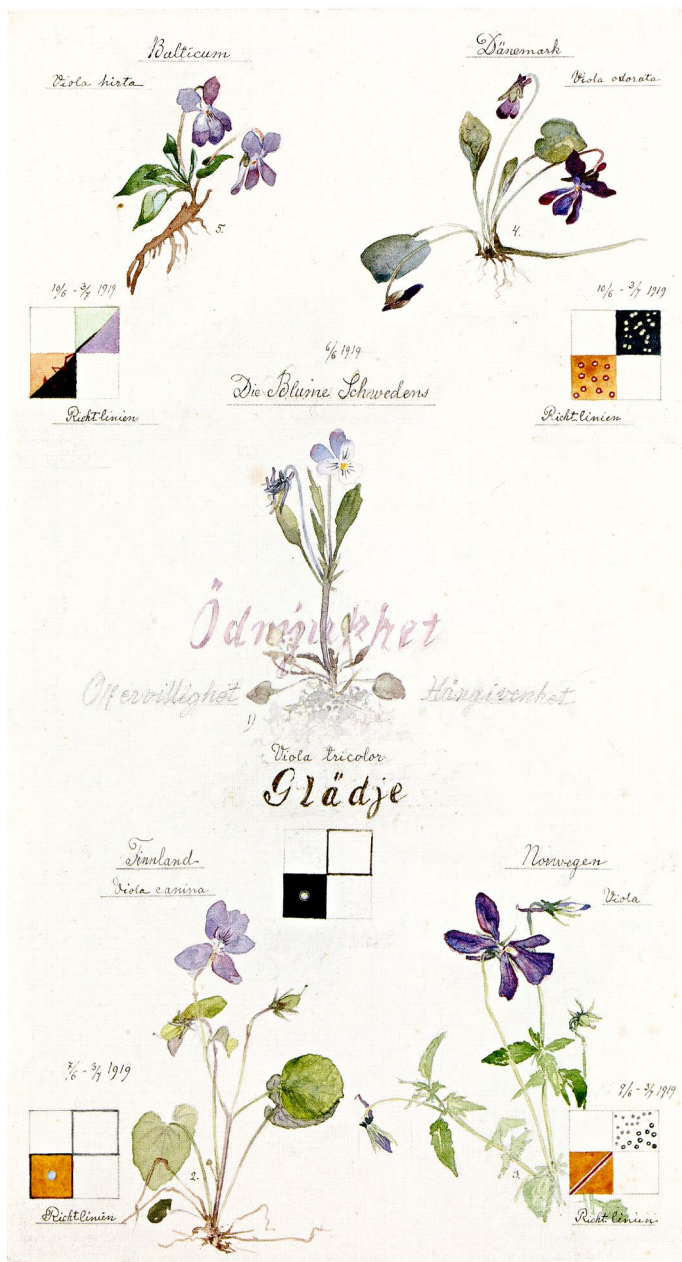


Image by Hilma af Klint

in this space as a revelation of the plants themselves. She was working toward a contemplative botany. Her notebooks of "Spiritual-Scientific" botanical studies contain such detailed realistic renditions, various abstract presentations, and notes expressing her experiences of the character and qualities of the individual plants. Driven, in part, perhaps, by her love of exploration and learning, she also felt these insights could be of therapeutic significance.

The curators at the Guggenheim noted the significant place Rudolf Steiner played in af Klint's life. Steiner's influence led to a shift in style and method, and, in part, to these experiments in contemplative botany. Adams pointed out that these plant studies coincided with a decade in af Klint's life that included frequent stays at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, a kind of independent university Steiner established dedicated to the pursuit of spiritual, contemplative science. One characteristic of the contemplative

path he encouraged was that clear thinking and fidelity to sensorial experience was an absolute pre-requisite to contemplative research. "The first requirement for understanding the subtle worlds is the most scrupulous veracity in regard to the experiences of the senses. Those who are not strictly accurate about these experiences can have no true understanding of the subtle worlds."<sup>3</sup> After visiting the Guggenheim I was surprised that it was the naturalistic watercolors that had most moved me. I felt somehow that they revealed an enchantment with the earth. It makes sense to me then that Steiner's empirically oriented contemplative efforts would have rung true for af Klint.

3 Lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Dornach, January 18, 1920, GA 196.



Lightforms Art + Spirit in Hudson, NY

After visiting the exhibit at Lightforms I continued to dwell on her botanical studies, both naturalistic and contemplative. I came to appreciate the dual fidelity to the earthly experience and to the more subtle, less bounded fields of consciousness. This also shed light on my experience of much of her other work. Many of the pieces resulting from her mediumistic practices were sublime, in the way I often feel about outer space. They have an airless majesty. It is the grandiose with no integration of the miniscule. It is the infinite without the exquisite. It is a cosmos with no micro-cosmos. In some strange way, they tend toward something eerie, as if they opened into a world truly separate from the earth, separate from humanity. But when she turns her attention, love, and care toward plants, I feel reassured. I sense this is connected to why her botanical studies, and the later contemplative studies, stood out to me in the Guggenheim. The Ouija board quality of much of the other work gave it something of a spooky character, something superstitious. But then, why should I feel mediumistic work to be superstition but not "esoteric botany"? Is this nothing more than a quirky prejudice on my part? Why do I feel that her esoteric botany is a kind of unconventional empiricism?

## Bridges between East and West

The truth is that I find myself on a perpetual search for individuals who are attaining an integration of outer observation and contemplative experience. In this article I will call this "bridgework"—the striving to balance two poles in human nature that seem to constantly escape each other.

Bridgework has been a central part of some of the most advanced contemporary research in cognitive science. At the Mind and Life Institute, for instance, advanced contemplatives

and western neuroscientists have come together to integrate these two horizons of human experience. Evan Thompson has described how the meetings between highly trained western scientists and highly trained Tibetan Buddhists challenged both research communities to practice open mindedness. The western researchers were extremely skeptical of the possibility of body free consciousness. The Buddhists were extremely skeptical of the notion that all consciousness is dependent on a nervous system, or the physical body. The Dalai Lama, who has been centrally involved in the work of the Institute, encouraged his fellow contemplatives to suspend judgment and entertain the propositions of western science. At the same time, scientists like Arthur Zajonc argued for open-mindedness among the western scientists given what is today still an enigmatic riddle, namely the relationship between consciousness and the body.<sup>4</sup> The scientists had to concede a point understood by Buddhist philosophy, namely that “consciousness has a cognitive primacy that materialism fails to see. There’s no way to step outside consciousness to measure it against something else.”<sup>5</sup>

Fully aware of this insight, for centuries Tibetan contemplatives have developed a phenomenology of experience that involves subtle abilities to discern different varieties of awareness. The ultimate state of mind, the end goal of the contemplative, is a state of mind that has traditionally been associated with bodily death, or consciousness undetermined by the body. In the end, both groups worked to suspend their judgments, practicing open-mindedness toward the veracity of each perspective. And weaving between these two perspectives I sense again the intriguing character of bridgework that drew me to af Klint’s striving to unite judgments totally surrendered to the senses and contemplative experiences that can be fostered through meditation. Thompson describes the two major enemies of bridgework, regressive tendencies of our time, as religious extremism and scientific reductionism.

Clearly, many will see contemplative botany as old wine in new bottles. We have to expect knowledge practices exploring horizons of subtle experience as participation in spiritual dimensions of the universe will be seen, by some, as hopelessly subjective. This is just an instance of perennial western fascination with exotic and unfounded beliefs from other cultures. Goethe once said that a person who only knows their mother tongue knows no language at all. More recently, Marilynne Robinson wrote that “A student of Greek or German begins to understand that languages both constrain and enable the thought of those who speak them. Touch a limit of your understanding and it falls away, to reveal a

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4 Anne Harrington and Arthur Zajonc. *The Dalai Lama at MIT*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

5 Evan Thompson. *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*. Columbia University Press, 2014, xxxv.



Drawing by Ella Lapointe

mystery. The one great lesson we can take from the study of any civilization is the appropriateness of reverence, of awe, and of pity, too.”<sup>6</sup>

The dialogue of the Mind and Life Institute resonates with this strain. Does this not reveal something of the mutual respect between the Dalai Lama and Arthur Zajonc? The Dalai Lama, and the Tibetan people, have been such emissaries for many. This is, of course, largely through their recent tragic history. What has come to the West with the political refugees of Tibet is connected to great cultural happenings in Asia, particularly China. And, even as globalization continues to unfold, it is remarkable how shallow our understandings are of Asia, how rickety our bridgework.

These last weeks, along with many in the world, I have been largely at home due to Covid-19. In the news I have read about how some Chinese Americans have been bullied in the USA as the virus spreads. I have read about the suppression of the free flow of inspiration and the gag orders placed on doctors in China. Few may feel awe toward the Chinese, or reverence, though perhaps pity. We should, however, remember that communism is a fruit, perhaps bitter, of European materialism. As necessary as it is to associate communism with China today, we look more deeply into a mirror than we may know when we see it in the East.

I have discovered awe, reverence, and pity for China through one of her greatest emissaries, Francois Cheng. It is likely you have never heard of him. Cheng is at home in the western canon, as in the Chinese. While he works translating Chinese into French, his more profound, emissarial translation weaves between Chinese and Western worldviews. We have the good fortune that his publications on Chinese poetry and visual art, his novels, and his recent publications on beauty and death, are in part available in English. Cheng’s estimations of the subtle and creative horizons of experience are imbued with the same feeling of reality as rain, red oaks, and field stones.

It is interesting to consider af Klint’s contemplative botany with Cheng looking over one’s shoulder, so to say. For Cheng it is absolutely clear that the subtle experiences of visual artists are not simply subjective fictions, but participation in spiritual fields of objective character. Through a meditation on Western experiences of Chinese composition he presents this as indigenous to Chinese experience:

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6 Marilynne Robinson. *The Givenness of Things: Essays*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015, 119.



Image by Mang Weng

“For the Western novice, whose eye is used to regarding works in which the subjects are represented in the foreground, thus relegating the landscape to the background, this figure is completely lost, drowned in the great whole. But that is not how the Chinese mind apprehends things. The figure in the landscape is always judiciously located: he is in the process of contemplating the landscape, playing the zither, or conversing with a friend. But after a moment, if we linger on him, we cannot fail to put ourselves in his place, and we realize that he is the pivot around which the landscape is organized and turns, that it is through him we are seeing the landscape. Better yet, he is the awakened eye and the beating heart of the landscape. Once again, humans are not those external beings who build their sandcastle on a deserted beach. They are the most sensible, vital part of the living universe; it is to them that nature whispers its most constant desires, its deepest secrets. Thus a reversal in perspective is taking effect. At the same time as the human becomes the landscape’s interior, so the landscape becomes the interior of man.”<sup>7</sup>

Cheng writes that those who practiced calligraphy or t’ai chi did not “doubt that the breath that enlivens them, released from the blank page by the brush stroke or from thin air by the gesture, is identical to the breath that has moved the stars since the Origin.”<sup>8</sup> With inner agility Cheng explores Chan landscape painting doing bridgework all along. He uncovers the filial experiences of Cezanne in the landscape, quoting in turn Lao Tzu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Cheng has learned his mother tongue by learning another. His careful articulations, so sensitive to Western prejudices and insights, culminate in personal clarity. He emerges “resolutely in the order of life,” which is not an epiphenomenon, for it is “contained in the advent of the

7 François Cheng. *The Way of Beauty: Five Meditations for Spiritual Transformation*. Simon and Schuster, 2009, 73.

8 François Cheng. *Five Meditations on Death*. Simon and Schuster, 2016, 31.





Drawing by Ella Lapointe

universe. And the mind, which bears this principle, is not a simple derivative of matter. It partakes in the Origin, and thus of the whole process of the appearance of life, which strikes us with its astounding complexity.”<sup>9</sup> How ready we are to brush this lyricism aside with gruff gestures common on either shore of the Atlantic today! Such is our loss and short-sightedness. For even among our philosophers of science it has indeed become clear that “There’s no way to step outside consciousness to measure it against something else.”

One characteristic feature of Cheng’s explorations of art is that they refuse to be colonized by the limited significance western thinking has granted beauty. Just as painting is connected to cosmology, it is connected to human birth and death. The Chan painter, who moves in the subtle fields of breath, directs attention to the so-called dead. The dead are the initiated who “are in a position to rethink and relive life differently, to measure life by the yardstick of eternity.” Their murmurings reach us “infinitely moving and illuminating, murmurs that well up from the heart, words close to the essence, as though filtered by the great test. Because with the dead we gain by remaining all ears.”<sup>10</sup> Cheng points to a part of the human constitution that does not suggest an ultimate dependence on the physical constitution.

### **More Bridges Needed! (Death, Consciousness, Science, Spirit)**

Cheng’s meditations on Death remind me of bridgework in a very different dialect. It is the work of one of the preeminent western authorities on medical resuscitation, Sam Parnia. In 2013, when he published *Erasing Death*, he presented the current state of research that indicates our notion of death requires rethinking. This was largely illumined by the intensification of serious efforts and research in resuscitation that have emerged over the last fifty years. Death has traditionally been associated with the cessation of the heart. Parnia describes how the most recent science requires us to conceive of death unfolding over multiple hours, and possibly days. The cessation of brain activity, moreover, does

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9     *Ibid.*, 3.

10    *Ibid.*, 16.



Image by William Blake

not necessarily relate to either the end of conscious experience, or the inevitability of brain damage. There is also the puzzling fact that consciousness, and memory formation, appears to continue in countless cases after the cessation of electrical activity and what is usually considered brain function. Decades into a career studying the process of death, and actively resuscitating people, Parnia suggests the most accurate description of current Western insight into death he has found with a quote by Ostad Elahi, “When a person first dies, he is not yet dead; it is the heart that has stopped functioning. Although his physical faculties have died, the individual organs in his body (such as muscle and skin) each have their own specific powers to keep the organism alive. These powers can remain alive for up to three days, though they can also perish sooner.”<sup>11</sup>

In 2013, Parnia related that his personal experience with around 500 people who had near death experiences, some during extreme resuscitations, had led him to a newly articulated inquiry into death. Parnia writes, “Today, the question of consciousness, psyche, and soul is a completely new area of discovery that, although an enigma, has thankfully become a point of major focus and interest in science. To better explain the scientific situation we find ourselves in, it is as if we have discovered a wholly new type of substance that we can neither account for nor even explain in terms of anything we have ever seen and dealt with before in science.”<sup>12</sup> Here, in a Western dialect, Parnia suggests the needed openness to a “top down” approach that “considers consciousness, psyche and the soul to be a separate entity that, while undiscovered by science today, is not produced by brain cells and can itself independently modulate brain activity” beside

11 Parnia, Sam, and Josh Young. *Erasing Death: The Science That Is Rewriting the Boundaries Between Life and Death*. Harper Collins, 2013, 289.

12 *Ibid.*, 281.

the “down up” approach that views consciousness as a by-product of brain activity. He suggests a major challenge for scientists today, based on the results of their own findings, is to bridge the discourses of science and spiritual belief that have largely excluded one another in recent history.

Something inside me is hungering for this bridge building: Af Klint’s esoteric botany, Zajonc’s contemplative inquiry, Cheng’s meditations, Parnia’s research. This is not only a matter of curiosity, the consumption of beauty or spiritual thoughts in hours of leisure. It is not simply privileged and idle pastime. It is connected to our immediate social, economic, and political future.

A friend recently sent me a link to an interview between Steve Paulson and the Dutch philosopher Rob Riemen. Riemen was describing the rise of fascism the world over right now and the unfortunate inability of people to recognize it. Riemen describes how fascism comes from within society, it does not come from without. He suggests one hardly needs a doctorate to understand that the spinning of truth into perpetual propaganda, the inciting divisiveness, fear and hatred will eventually lead to the ignition of self-destruction in a society. Finally he connects fighting fascism with fighting materialism. He provocatively asks, what is truth to those living in the transatlantic countries? What is justice and beauty? What compassion and empathy? The commercial culture of these countries is mostly focused on what is efficient. It is obsessed with the value of productivity, an ongoing materialism that tries to make everything useful. This obsession with usefulness is so characteristic of our particular culture of science and knowing. He closes by stating:

“We can change things, but what we are desperately in need of is a new counterculture. Not a flower power thing [like in 1968], but it will be a culture which brings us back to the recognition of the fact that ‘man does not live by bread alone.’ What makes our life meaningful? How can we have a society which is focused on the common good for everybody, instead of a society which is only focused on what's good for me, me, me.”<sup>13</sup>

Marilynne Robinson recently suggested that a study of legal culture in the USA will reveal two radical theories of human nature, “man, a physical creature to be judged by effects produced in Time; or man, a spiritual creature, to be judged by the development to which he is destined” these “are at the root of all the antagonisms between the spirit of northern and southern institutions.”<sup>14</sup> And she connects the intimation of the spiritual constitution of the human being with the most inspiring successes of democracy in our history. This throws an intriguing light on the fascist trends described by Riemen. Given

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13 <https://www.ttbook.org/interview/return-and-spread-fascism>

14 Marilynne Robinson. “Which Way to the City on a Hill?” July 18, 2019. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/07/18/which-way-city-hill/>.

the central role of spiritual intimations of the person have played in modern democracy we will need many more bridge builders like af Klint, Thompson, Cheng, and Parnia, especially as our inherited forms of faith and dogma no longer provide the support we require to reach them.

How are we doing on this front? We can throw a glance toward one of the fastest growing facets of our collective lives, with its capital in Silicon Valley. What a contrasting imagination of human nature we find is being put to work there. It is drawn from behaviorist psychology. In her recent study of surveillance capitalism Shoshana Zuboff has detailed the incessant exploitation of the “consumer’s personality” in the pursuit of greater consumption and sales. That is us, and it is us thinking about us. This involves targeting human frailty in one way or another. This is, of course, being put to work in political propaganda as well. It is justified by the one-sided irrational conception of human nature put forward by the likes of B.F. Skinner, who felt it possible to uncover “computational capabilities that would perfect behavioral prediction and control, enabling perfect knowledge to supplant politics as the means of collective decision making.”<sup>15</sup> It is a view of human beings that ultimately casts them as incapable of noticing the regularity of their own failures, adopting a paternalistic view.<sup>16</sup>

The intimations of af Klint’s esoteric botany sent out all these golden threads of connection. Their significance reaches from the moment of death to the meeting of East and West, from shopping on amazon to the rise of fascism. I do believe that it is the need of a new culture (counter culture?) that gives these bridgeworks their particular gravity. It is her seeking the creative in the earth, and clarity in the spirit. When she turns toward the flowers with care, then turns away from them allowing their sensorial specificity to arise in the spirit, I feel the earth itself reveals its nobility. And the deeper implication is that af Klint herself, her subjective activity, participates in bringing the plants to expression in the spirit. It does not only beg the question of spiritual dimensions of the plants, it asks the same of human nature and the rights this nature can inspire in collective life. It involves cultivating intimations of the human being that inspire reverence. It involves the interpenetration of varieties of human experience that usually elide one another. It is a bridge spanning East and West.

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15 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, 432.

16 *Ibid.*, 343.

## The River Below — By Nathaniel Williams

The day is a bed of seeds.  
They sprout in the soul,  
through the hard, yet so thin,  
shell of perception.

Bitter, sweet, the world opens the heart in life.  
The pulse, the rush and clench,  
is a gateway of myriad masks,  
the casts of Shakespeare woken through  
birdsong, flesh, language, liquor, wind.  
Each throws foliage into the infinite dome of consciousness;  
exhilarating attire,  
and the ungrounded mountain of the self stirs,  
soundless, unmoving.

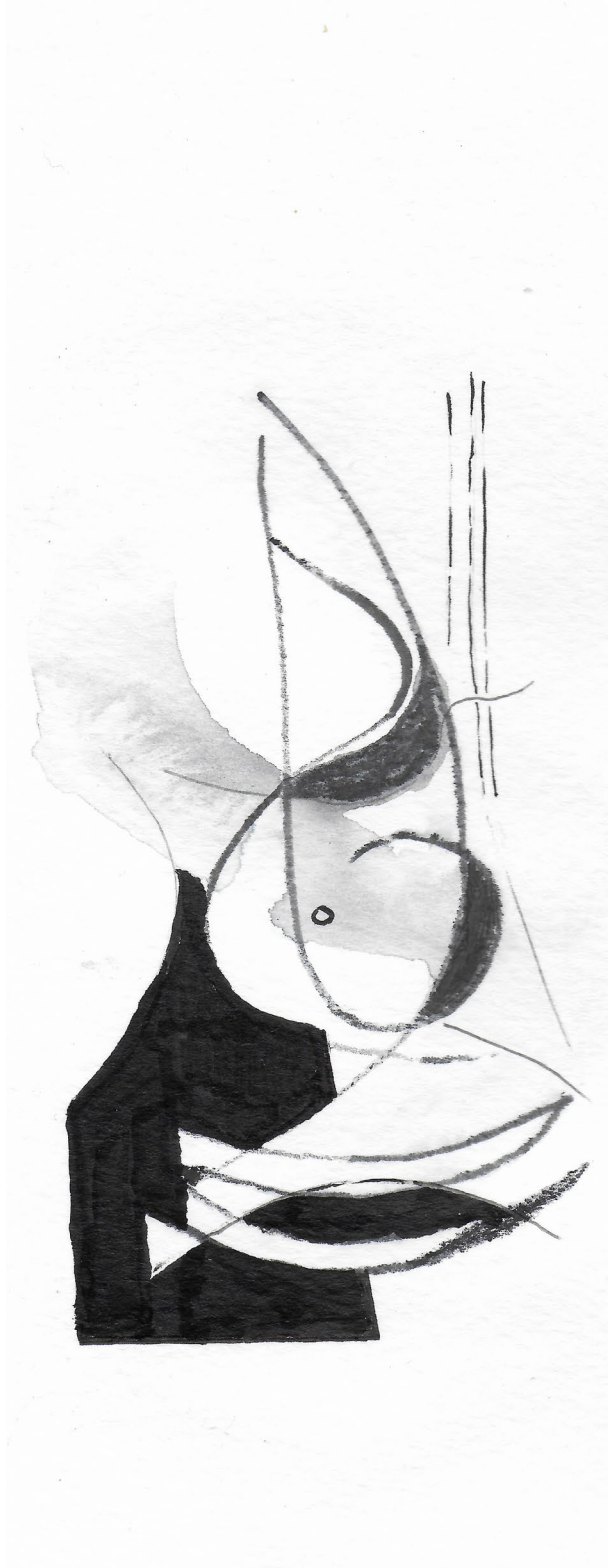
And we, between, sleep into the world as it dreams,  
seeking in movement the unmoving.  
And when we have found it,  
and arrayed the diadems gathered into a mosaic,  
celebrating happiness, yet unhappy,  
the storms of truth come,  
purple blasts chase even warmth away.

Then circling dark vultures fill the sky,  
picking, in turn, the remains of the once born,  
until only bones, hard, yet so thin, shield the creative marrow of  
life.  
The portals of perception, dry dust,  
deserts, the seeds of nature.

And then all is gone, save the streams of memory and action,  
naked and uprooted, invisible in the deep no-space.  
Shifting, rising like humid southern airs,  
only a divination, ephemera,  
until they climb to the cloud line,  
where dreams condense into day.

## Cloud Rider — By Leif Garbisch

Receive me O  
earth I  
rain  
as if glistening  
love upon fields  
tilled by day  
and sowed  
by night – I  
compose doors  
each season  
mend exits  
for years  
seep deep  
speak up  
grow us  
out of absence  
into all



After Cloud Rider — Painting by Laura Summer

## RACURA — by Faye Shapiro

What an accelerated wave of slowness, a global demand for listening, a beautiful newness. Whatever lens you use to look at the past month, the disease, the social phenomena, the reduced pollution, the hampered consumerism, one thing is clear, healing is on its way. These are my thoughts as I share this song with you—it's a simple Mantra, a word game between the Hebrew word for softness, gentleness—RAH-KUT—and the Portuguese word for healing—CURA.

RACURA

Take it slow  
Slow it down  
Given but not up  
Burned but not bad

Racuraracuracut

I'm in it with you  
You're in it with me  
Shining and crying  
Letting into the real

Racuracuracut

Ask me how  
I'll gladly let you know  
For just one word  
An entire world exhales

Here is a link: <https://fayeshapiro.bandcamp.com/track/racura>

Sending much love from Jaffa, Israel,  
Until we meet,  
Faye



Image by Faye Shapiro

## **A Story in Nine Sentences by Zvi Szir (from the German by Nathaniel Williams)**

Once, there was an angel who stewarded the keys to all the world's collapsed gateways and doors.

He was a silent type, but from morning to evening his key ring was the source of a majestic clashing and clanging.

Wherever he went people heard the mighty sound of the key ring, metal clashing against metal, but very few knew of their destroyed gateways and doors.

With nothing left to open the keys united into a disturbing cymbal.

Once, when a war intensified the weight of the keys to the unbearable, the angel brought them to the heavenly blacksmith.

The blacksmith threw the keys into the melting pot and stoked the fires until they began to flow.

Then he poured their flowing hearts into a sand mold, casting all of them into a great gong.

The angel took the gong and flew to the top of his favorite ash tree, and, holding the gong in his left hand, he struck it with force.

The smashing sound collapsed all the doors and gates of the world.

Everything stood open.



## LIBERTY!!! EQUALITY!!! ... fraternity? — By Nathaniel Williams

A reflection inspired by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's recent book *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope*

There is a variety of business that is essential to mental health and well-being. In the USA today we are so close to it, and so, so far away. The phrase "doing business" has become useless to indicate the values of work I am talking about. It is colored grey with a one dimensionality, an indifference of self-seeking, as when we say, "don't take it personally, it's just business." This is a crude simplification of the social significance of work in human life, and those who feel they have somehow captured the spirit of economics with these phrases are wrong.

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's recent book *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope*[1] is full of heartrending and moving stories that are explored and shared with a sensitivity to the deeper dimensions of economic life. These stories remind me of experiences I have had in Tennessee, where I am from, and of the beautiful Hudson Valley, where I have lived for the last twelve years. I am sorry to say that I am sure it will not be strange for people no matter where they are from in our country.

[Read More on Free Columbia's blog](#)

## Free Columbia Announcements

### Our Fall and Winter:

Over the last six months Laura Summer has been working creating visual art, distributing it and teaching. In October she facilitated an art dispersal at the Annual General Meeting of the Anthroposophical Society in America in Atlanta. She has been hosting artists regularly with intensive sessions in Philmont, NY as part of the ongoing low residency course. Laura has offered classes in Philmont and in Oregon. She has also been very involved in the opening of Lightforms in Hudson where she participated in exhibits and collaborated in the preparation and hanging of the Hilma af Klint show.

- Nathaniel Williams has been finishing the last requested revisions on a dissertation on aesthetic education at the University at Albany and working on a new play. At the heart of his work has been the organization of the M.C. Richards Program, raising funds and awareness and coordinating admission.

- Both Laura and Nathaniel are involved in regular meetings with the wider faculty and the board during this important year of transition.

## Looking Forward:

- It was with great anticipation that we prepared to welcome Andy Weintraub and two of his Magic shows to our area. These have unfortunately had to be canceled. We have also had to cancel the “Around the World” Spring Break Camp with Susannah White. We will be looking to reschedule these in the near future.
- Laura Summer will be exhibiting her “In the Figure of Divine Substance” paintings in New York City in July. After the exhibit there will be a show and dispersal of this collection of works in Hudson at Lightforms Art Center.
- Free Columbia will be hosting the current cohort of students in the low residency visual art course, July 6–10.
- Laura Summer will be teaching a workshop on Painting and Meaning, July 25–29.
- Laura will also be teaching at in the context the new Living Anthroposophy gatherings at Kirkridge Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, July 13–18.
- Free Columbia will be hosting Rooting Hope-Summer School by the Mill, July 25–30, in Philmont, NY. It is a gathering for young adults between the ages of 18 and 28.
- Nathaniel Williams is working on a new puppetry project that is currently planned to premier in August of 2020, and is being graciously supported in part by the Greene County Council on the Arts

## Gratitude:

We set out to raise \$12,000 with our Fall appeal last year and, amazingly, according to our final tally, we raised just under \$12,100.

For the first time we have been focusing on grant writing to support our work and activities. We are thankful for the work of Katherine Nickel and support from The Field Center, The Iona Foundation, The Greene County Council on the Arts, The World Goetheanum Association, and the Evidenz Foundation.

We have also received pledges from a few generous individuals that currently total \$15,000 annually for the next three years to help launch the M.C. Richards Program.

## The Free Columbia Community Cultural Center:

Many will have heard about the collaboration between the village of Philmont and Free Columbia to turn an old warehouse into a cultural center and artistic venue. After much work in this direction a group of property owners sued both Free Columbia and the village contesting the process and content that led to the lease. Paying the legal retainer for a lawyer on that suit was one of the hardest bills I have ever had to pay for Free Columbia. The suit was decided in the New York Supreme Court in Hudson and ultimately decided in their favor. The grounds they won on were largely procedural and they have declined repeated requests for mediation. We continue with the living question of how to move forward in this process while generating more light than heat.



Layout by Ella Lapointe  
Editing by John Scott Legg

*Save the Date*

# Summer School by the Mill

## Rooting Hope

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For young adults 18-28  
July 23-30  
Philmont, NY

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<http://www.projecthumanbeing.net/>