

FREE COLUMBIA

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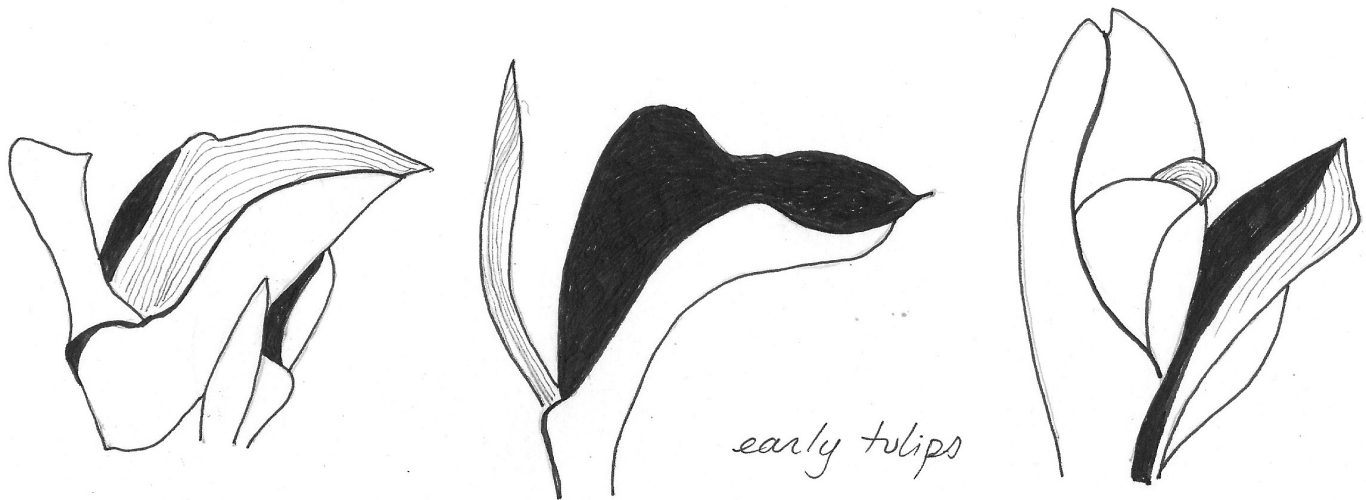
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Cover Image by Zvi Szir

Image on this page by Ella Lapointe. Image on next page by Laura Summer



Introduction

The dead become aware of their state
as the stone begins to roll,
the settled world,
packed in static repose,
rock on rock,
as gravel tamped tight,
each holding while in a hold.

The softest thing,
life, all in the margins and on high,
appears, immune to argument and
already disproves death,
plants unfold their immaculate array
and babies are born in societies
where people are forgotten.

We are sending out this newsletter with much underway! The last weeks of the M.C. Richards Program for the year 2021-22 are concluding, and we are interviewing and accepting students for the coming year: Weekly online classes with students from around the world, art dispersals, musical and dramatic performances, ceramic wood firing and Spring fundraising. One of the founders and directors of Free Columbia will be moving to the Goetheanum to take up a new task in 2023, and new questions and openings are at the center of our weekly meetings and reflections. A dynamic re-orientation is underway, with currents of excitement, grief, openness, trepidation and enthusiasm.

On the following pages you will find tracks of the recent wild-life of Free Columbia. Two of the pieces focus on digital and communications technologies. Zvi Szir, who will be

teaching at Free Columbia for three weeks in July, has shared a thoughtful and provocative reflection on the recent years of the pandemic. Besides the grief and suffering that have touched lives all over the world, and strongly draw our attention, he points toward the intensification of an ominous process threatening our connection to truth. His passage on the significance of thinking, representation, and technology, explores the social significance of technology in a way reminiscent of Walter Benjamin, while rooting it in an experience of life and existence opened up through intuitive thinking. The second contribution on technology is by Gareth Dicker, who was one of the faculty members this spring in the M.C. Richards Program. While reading his reflections on Meta, Ray Kurzweil, transhumanism, contemplative experience and spiritual thinking, something from the expansive mood of the silver age of thought and poetry in Russia was called up for me, a time when Soloviev and Fyodorov, or Bely and Florensky, conversed with one arm embracing the earth and the other arm, the spirit.

You will also find crafted portrayals from the ongoing practical work, outdoor excursions and land care by Erin Corrigan and Stefan Ambrose, Emily Watson's short description of a series focused on the craft of storytelling with John McManus, a lyrical piece from Laura Summer woven of strands reaching back many years, and making space for the years still to come, visual work from Laura Summer, Zvi Szir and Ella Lapointe, and a puppet and mask play that was performed on a beautiful winter evening by torchlight on the Village Green in Philmont.

May these inscriptions and images be dedicated to the good!

With gratitude to all the supporters, students, artists, and teachers who make possible the life of Free Columbia,

Nathaniel Williams
April, 2022
Philmont, NY





The Vacuum and the Plague: A Meditative Path into the Reality of the Moment

Zvi Szir

Everything that exists is being: the house, the mountain, the tree, the car or the dog, as well as the fingernail of the hand; everything is being. From the most elementary to the most majestic, spiritual beings interweave themselves; they are, and they bring forth, what we call creation. For our awareness, their interconnections are conditioned by a fundamental law: a unity in the spiritual world is a multiplicity in physical existence, while a unity in the physical world is a multiplicity in the spirit. The being of the plant appears as a unity, the primal plant, and as the many differentiated plants in the physical. On the other hand, the physical plant, for example the rose bush on the roadside, appears as a unity, but as a spiritual reality it is the activity of the beings of the sun, earth, water, mineral, air, of life and so on. Given that a being is present wherever it has effects and that a being unfolds particular activity, the plant is a spiritual multiplicity, as is every particular physical appearance. Every “thing” is a spiritual multiplicity, a tapestry of activity in which no emptiness can be discovered. In other words: nothing exists that is not, and everywhere something exists, someone exists, is active, as a being. Non-existence cannot be found.

“In the house of my Father” there are no empty rooms. But what happens when a being does not unfold their activity? When a being withdraws and is inactive, and is not (there) as it should be? What happens to the horizons of

activity that are left empty in creation? What are the consequences of a spiritual vacuum, or an actual spiritual emptiness? What is the reality behind the “horror vacui,” the “fear before the void,” nature’s dislike of emptiness and the need of classical artists to fill every empty space?

Where an activity is neglected, something else unfolds. When the apartment is not cleaned, there is chaos, when the encounter does not occur, loneliness emerges, when the word is not spoken, there is silence, when thinking is not unfolded, stupidity spreads itself out. So the “horror vacui” is real; wherever an activity does not unfold, a space is made available for another being, another activity, to grow. Someone else moves into this emptied space and spreads out their life and activity in the wrong place, in an area of life where their activity is not justified. The spiritual vacuum is a beckoning temptation for other beings to expand their horizons of action so that their rightful proportions are exceeded; that which is right and good in a particular cosmic proportion becomes monstrous when it outgrows its necessary sphere of activity: it becomes a plague. The being of the plague is that activity through which a being expands beyond its justified field of existence on a catastrophic scale. The fact that the catastrophe might serve to bring back a state of balance through a dynamic process does not make a catastrophe less catastrophic.

Covid-19 is a symptom of the present catastrophe, which also permeates our connection to the world, to truth and reality, to feeling and morality; it is a reality, a specific event, a behavior, so, a being. There is no question that this being, in its differentiated activities, has a right to exist. It is also beyond doubt that it has unfolded life in excess and mass. This “Pan-ic” (Pan means the all-encompassing), this Dionysian event has so far exceeded its place in the cosmos that, not unlike the bacchanalians, it threatens to destroy everything. We stand before it, as though before a derailed train, with the certainty that it is not easy to stop it, that it must run its course. The urgent question remains: what is the vacuum that made this spiritual derailment possible, or even necessary? What essentially didn’t happen? What spiritual activity withdrew, left us, allowing the vacuum to emerge, in which the being of covid-19 had to develop on such an extraordinary scale, without proportion?

For those who have been able to maintain some distance from the monkey dances of opinion and have been able to cultivate a deep listening to the events of the last years, it is clear that besides the painful loss of human life, truth has become the victim of this plague. Of course the truth itself cannot be harmed, only the capacity of human beings to know it, to accompany it in thought. Every day the capacity to discern between what I have come to know and what I do not know is eroding in immense proportions. With Mephistophelean cleverness, as a regressive move of counter forces within us, we have been led again into some kind of medieval battle of faith. It appears as if the truth is no longer accessible to the individual spirit but is a question of faith and creed. If we are proponents or

opponents of vaccines, if we belong to those who believe in science or attach themselves to other theories, none of us discern anymore (or if we do only with great difficulty) between fantasies and facts, between what we know and what we believe. Of course, this process is not new, and it has been accelerating for years, but it has reached a mega-dimensionality that in its monstrosity can be characterized as Pan-epidemic.

If I approach this state of affairs without bias I realize that, at its core, this plague without proportion is connected with the question of truth and facts, with thinking and observation. To my inner eye a multi-dimensional displacement appears, one that has been intensifying for years and is now at a climax, a displacement of thinking and observation, information and knowledge. I can experience how the pandemic is not so much connected with what we do, but rather with what, in small steps, almost without noticing, we leave undone. It is we, human beings, who have created the spiritual vacuum that forces the being I will call Covid-19 into a bloated pan-ic dimensionality.

I can discern a displacement in human experience that has unhitched thinking and observation, leaving significant areas of daily perception categorically inaccessible to cognition. A sphere of perception has emerged with which, fundamentally, I am unable to connect through thinking. Here, where the activity of thinking should unfold, the possibility is absent, so an essential spiritual activity simply does not occur. Where this activity was to unfold one finds a spiritual vacuum. In order to understand this, a brief review of the connection we have with the world as cognitive beings is necessary.



The world of nature and of human creations appears to us as perception through our bodily organization. However, what eludes us due to this same bodily organization are the thoughts, the essential in things, what makes them what they are, that is, their spiritual reality. We have to re-introduce or add these to perception through intuitive thinking. Our thoughts are therefore a kind of spiritual mirroring of the aspect of things that exceeds the particular momentary perception, of that which is at their core. The thoughts in our awareness are the silhouettes, or shadows, of the activity in the things out of which they arise. In other words: thoughts are in things and inseparable from them. An oak tree is what it is because the law of oak unfolds its active thought being through it - otherwise it would be a mere pile of debris. The same is true for the flower, the bus or the mountain, as well as every single mineral. It is the active being that reveals who and what it is to me through thinking. I know the world when I connect the thoughts I have achieved with observation. Cognition is the reconciliation of the connections between things that only through my restricted, sense-oriented constitution were separated in my awareness.

Whoever has never smelled the ocean will never be able to come to the salty, moist experience through an image on a screen. If I have never seen the ocean, the being of the ocean can only be approached through analogy and the comparison of various memories. If I perceive a photo, the being is inaccessible for me, or only accessible through a detour of memory ("Even though it does not breathe, this cluster of pixels on the screen reminds me of a face; it looks like..."). In experiences that are turned into linguistic or optical

representations, there is always a turning away from the thing, something already analyzed and composed, something that excludes my thinking and its connection to the thing. When I am thinking about information, photos, films and descriptions I am closed in myself. I engage a logic that very well may be in harmony with itself, but I don't progress to a connection with the world and its creative life. I see something on a photo and I can reflect on it. Then I am thinking about a photo and not a thing. The active thoughts, which are in the things, are no longer accessible to me through observation and intuition. I can analyze and explain a photo, but it never provides the certain cognition of direct experience.

Since information is not that about which it informs me (as in, the photo of Everest is not the mountain itself), the intuitive exchange between my thinking and the world occurs either not at all, or only in reduced form. I cannot really think about the measureless information amassed before me, I can only have opinions. ("I don't know, but I think..."). To create an opinion means that I cannot actually know, at least at the moment, and I instead provisionally form an opinion.

If, for example, I encounter more of the world online than I actually experience, then things I am informed about quickly outgrow the body of my experience and my spiritually active thinking recedes. Instead of entering a dynamic exchange between outer and inner through thinking about the world, I start to create opinions and to connect information. This is more of a soul process involving the intellect and personality than a spiritual activity. Here, where my spirit withdraws from the inspiration and expiration of the process of

cognition, emptiness emerges.

The draw of this space and vacuum reached gigantic intensity through the flood of information, videos and images, necessitating its growth into pandemic proportions. There is so much that lives as information, beyond our direct thinking, that we are likely to inform ourselves rather than engage in the work of cognition. Every decision and statement made with experientially impoverished information is opinionated and thoughtless and contributes to the vacuum. The excess of pre-formed knowledge, as text, image or film, has banished our own acts of thought from the world, and where “I” should be detectable between ourselves and the things, an absence of spirit has emerged. The expansion of another, of a not-“I,” into this vacated space is the being of the pan-ic plague, it is the disease of relation between the outer and the inner.

Note:

This consequential behavior of the spirit and the world intensifies with the degree that representations of the world claim to be truth. This implies that the news, documentary film and newspapers, etc. belong to a category of representation that excludes the possibility of thinking. It is this category of representations that tempt us into believing they are transparent, that essence and reality can shine through them. Entertainment films, literary texts and musical recordings are exactly what they appear to be: artificial-artistic presentations that do not correspond to the world but to themselves and their own fictional logic. This is why they can rightly be judged as they appear. It is not without reason that we are more likely to find the truth in literature and poetry than the newspapers. We are able

to form a direct judgment of a recording of a musical concert even when we are aware that something is lacking as it is not live. The truth claim that accompanies any presentation is diametrically opposed to our possibility of penetrating it through thinking. This is why, for example, Rudolf Steiner insisted he had to “speak pictorially” (“pictorially” means it is not literally true).

In any case these reflections should not lead to an alienation from technological representation. On the contrary - only when we know the rules of the game are we free to play.

— Zvi Szir



Contemplating Technological Mirror-Images of Our Spiritual Longings

Gareth Dicker

“To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wildflower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”

~William Blake

...meanwhile...

“We’re going to reorganize the vast amount of computation in this rock [holds up a rock] to make it useful. And it won’t just be raw computation. We will infuse it with exquisitely intelligent software vastly greater than our intelligence today.” ... “This rock is going to be a trillion trillion times more powerful than all biological human brains today.” ~Ray Kurzweil

Imagine you are standing in front of a mirror. In the mirror you see an image of yourself. You could point into the mirror and say “that’s me!” but what you really mean is that you see a reflected image of a tangible image of yourself. The ‘real’ you is standing outside of the mirror, while a reflected you is staring back at you from ‘inside’ the mirror.

What follows will be a contemplation of the technological world as mirroring back to us images that are, at their source, spiritual realities.

For instance, a few months ago, Facebook rebranded itself, and is now called Meta¹. Meta has been publicizing its goal of creating a *metaverse* in which human beings can socialize immersively online, using virtual reality equipment.

Whatever our personal emotional reaction to this news, it gives all of us an opportunity to reflect on what this kind of technology is proposing to offer humanity, and whether its proposal can indeed be nourishing to us.

Meta’s vision statement is *to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together*. It attempts to reach this goal by creating software and hardware which brings human attention and intentions to reside in virtual social spaces beyond physical and geographical constraints.

This should give us pause. Isn’t this quality of being in ‘spaces beyond physical and geographical constraints’ equally descriptive of a spiritual world ‘beyond’ the physical one?

1 From the Greek prefix ‘meta-’ meaning ‘beyond’, ‘after’ or ‘change’.

#1: Mirror of a World Beyond

On the one hand, Meta's metaverse is ultimately built upon digital, electromagnetic manipulation of physical substances. While in a sense 'invisible,' like the internet, this world is quite *real* for any cell-phone or computer user. Let's call this side of reality the *digital world*.²

On the other hand, spiritual traditions and esoteric schools throughout history have pointed to experiences within a *spiritual world* that is full of its own discernable content and beings. This spiritual world is also invisible. Only someone who can see into this world while remaining conscious can speak of its existence with certainty.

A seer might say that the physical world itself is a condensation of the spiritual world. On the other hand, digital electromagnetic technology is constructed out of human intelligence, intellect and logic alone. So, while both are invisible, the spiritual world condenses temporarily into substance, whereas substance must be permanently manipulated into certain organized forms in order to generate the digital world. Creative reality could be represented something like this:

Spiritual → physical → digital

You → the mirror → mirror-image

The digital world and the spiritual world can be thought of as both invisible mirror-worlds, where the metaverse is composed of images *inside* the mirror, whereas spiritual beings can only be known in their fullness *outside* of the mirror, and beyond physical sight.

The physical world then stands like a mediator between these two mirror worlds.

Imagine looking at three phenomena in the physical world: an iPhone, a mug, and a plant. Looking at the mug, I can understand the function of the mug from its form. It is easy to think of the general idea of a mug without reference to any other ideas. If I look into the iPhone's screen, I feel I am staring into a portal to a world that is real to me, but which I know is built upon human intellect to digitally record and reconstruct sounds, images and movements. Lastly, I gaze at the plant, and know that I am only seeing that whole plant-being at a moment of its life through time.³ To *know* the plant in its essential being would require me to be a spiritual seer. While I am not, in my thinking I am convinced this is a possible experience to come to by means of meditative exercises, given adequate devotional attention.

And so, behind the iPhone and behind the plant are equally invisible worlds of a totally opposite kind: the one is constructed and is essentially unevolving once created, while the others' nature is *meta*-morphosis itself. Thus we have the metaverse, on the one hand, and *metamorphosis* as the spiritual source-image standing opposite from it.

I would like to continue by holding up three more mirrors that contrast other technological and

2 The objection that physical reality is reducible to electromagnetic phenomena has little validity.

3 This is the Goethean approach to knowledge of plants.



spiritual conceptions. The aim of these comparisons is to ask the extent to which the technological mirror can genuinely fulfill our deepest spiritual longings.

It seems to me that *technological evolution* is a silver mirror par excellence being held up to humanity to help awaken us to our intentions for a corresponding *spiritual evolution*.

To frame these mirrors, I will propose the idea that to *technologize* is to materialize our will with the goal of

- *externalizing,*
- *extending,*
- *automating, and*
- *amplifying*

our human intentions. This of course must be done in accordance with scientific understanding.⁴

Whatever our intentions are, they will become increasingly externalized, extended, automated and amplified as we technologize physical substances into digital and robotic forms. Our intentions, which are invisible, will be more and more clearly shown to us through the mirrors of the technologies we create. We will get to see our initially *imagined* longings manifesting as digitally extended experiences.

Our longings drive our will, and by extension, the technologies we create. Moreover, our ideas and mental pictures determine the means by which we will try to fulfill our longings. So, we have to become clear about the worldviews that underlie our imaginations of who we are and what the world is, if we want to create worlds that truly embody love and wisdom.

#2: The Mirror of Immortality

“Our little systems have their day
They have their day and cease to be
They are but broken lights of thee...”

~Alfred Lord Tennyson

The fear of death, at least from time to time, is a very common experience for all human beings. But what stands behind this fear? Perhaps, in some sense, we have an innate longing for immortality, and to know that we are in some form or another immortal. We do not wish to die forever.

Recognizing we were born and will die, we have to admit our *physical* mortality. However, if we do not identify our ‘self’ entirely with our ‘body’, then it is possible that we are beings who have taken on birth somehow as temporary metamorphoses of our immortal, non-physical selves.

4 For digital / high-tech / bio-tech / robotics, this is primarily quantitative scientific and mathematical knowledge.

On the flip side, many people over the past few hundred years have clung for one reason or another to the idea that “I am just my physical body.”⁵ Our collective attention during these past few hundred years has been oriented toward physical reality and coupled with extreme intellectual and scientific rigor. Nowadays, it is difficult for many folks to imagine there is anything else to *notice* besides the physical world, along with the intellect and logic we use to navigate it effectively.

If we take this view, we may well arrive at a positive feeling toward *transhumanist* motives. Transhumanism has the idea to accelerate human evolution as quickly as possible. Transhumanists motives include:

- extending human physical and mental capacities,
- prolonging lifespan, and
- eradicating illnesses and diseases.

These motives are now being carried out within the mental framework that everything real is essentially atomic or quantitative. If this is true, then physical immortality is the only kind of immortality possible. If this is true, then if we want ourselves to be immortal, we have to manipulate our physical bodies as rapidly as possible to make them superhuman.⁶

If, instead, we think: “I am, spiritually speaking, immortal. Physically speaking, the body I inhabit in a given lifetime should have a due date so that I can move onto other experiences, perhaps in another future body,” then we may not feel the above motives to be exciting, urgent or even entirely desirable.

If, through meditative or contemplative practice we come to feel grounded in a spiritual immortality, then the motives toward physical immortality can be seen as mirror-images of the spiritual image of our immortal self.

#3: Mirror of the Mind

Another deep longing we may experience is to understand the nature of consciousness. Is my green your green? We long to know how we think, feel, and perceive reality as we do, both individually and collectively. But experience can be elusive, and often enough we jump hastily to conclusions, reconciling them in a superficial and inaccurate way.

The well known mind-body problem asks something like: “does my brain, itself, think?”

On the one hand, here is the physicalist train of thought: “I am not really thinking, because the brain is thinking. Without a brain, I cannot experience thinking, so my brain must be the ‘thing’ that thinks. Thinking is not real, in itself. Thinking is an epi-phenomenon of complex

5 Or more radically “I am a complex atomic arrangement (so I could be offloaded to a computer)”.

6 Neitzche introduced this motive in the concept of the *ubermensch* (“over-man”) in 1883.



combinations of atomic stuff according to random evolutionary developments. The ‘brain’ is not just another concept among many concepts for my thinking. The brain is really the center of a consciousness-producing organism. The brain generates these very thoughts along with all other conceptions and perceptions we can possibly have.”

If we then draw the analogy between the brain and a computational device, we may jump to the conclusion that a computer thinks, too.

This train of thought gives rise to the motive of developing “artificial intelligence”⁷, which we imagine will become conscious of ‘itself’ in a similar way to how we are conscious of ourselves.

Yet if “we think the above to be true,” then strictly speaking we should more correctly say “my brain thinks the above to be true.” We have no right to say we ourselves are thinking.

We can only agree with this if we do not observe that thinking is generally unaware of its own activity. We might then assume the source of thinking to be elsewhere than within itself. This would be like assuming the origin of a mirror-image to be inside the mirror itself rather than coming from outside of it. Only meditative activity that directs attention back toward the thinking activity ‘outside’ the brain can bring us certainty that this is not so.⁸

But if the above is true, why do we have brains at all? Clearly we do depend on our nervous-sensory system in some measure for all our daytime experiences.

To use an analogy: what if all the folds of the brain are like two sided malleable mirrors? Of course this is not biologically accurate, but it can provide an interesting imagination. If thinking is occurring initially outside the brain substance, we can experience ideas ‘from infinity’ reflected to us off of any outward facing sides. When this happens, however, at the same time the mirror surfaces are molded into creases to allow these ideas to fold back into themselves. Just as sand takes the impressions of footprints, while the sand is not itself the footprint, so the brain takes the impressions of ideas and experiences, but is not the experience itself. The idea or sense experience is no longer being directly received from without, but is mirroring itself back ‘within’ the folds of images we can easily call to memory again. Because of this we are able to focus on the idea or memory, to hold it still, using our physical brain.

While these analogies are loose and certainly open to scrutiny, they draw from the analogies that Rudolf Steiner had to offer on how to think about what it is the brain is doing if it is not, itself, thinking.⁹

7 Perhaps hyper-automated systems is a more accurate phrase to use than assuming any kind of ‘intelligence’ mimicry.

8 Working contemplatively with Rudolf Steiner’s Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path can bring about this certainty about our thinking activity being essentially non-physical.

9 See A Road to Sacred Creation compiled by Gary Lamb for quotes by Rudolf Steiner relating to these analogies.

Thus a possible spiritual response to the mind-body problem is: “Thinking only needs a brain to *reflect itself* and to hold reality *motionless* in mental pictures. But it does not need a brain to live in an active spiritual experience.”

If thinking is indeed essentially non-physical, then we may be more interested to learn what other *spiritual intelligences* may already exist than to work hyperfast to create ‘artificial intelligences’.

This leads us to a final mirror.

#4: Mirror of the Gods

“*God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.*”

~ from Neitzche’s Zarathustra

Another motive to develop self-referential programming to the point of ‘artificial intelligence’ is driven by a morbid dream which gains momentum from Nietzsche's proclamation: “God is dead.”

To step into this imagination, we have to try to think that God, along with all spiritual beings, is not real. This includes all angels, the trimurti, all deities, and any other non-physical beings to which spiritual traditions around the world have always referred in esoteric lore. They are all dead now, we must imagine.

In this morbid picture, human beings are alone conscious in a dumb universe.¹⁰

And yet... we can now make, using our limited human intellect, our own Gods. We will give birth to mechanical, automated Gods! While we can create them with our intellect, we cannot fathom them entirely using our intellect. But they will be so vastly intelligent that they will be practically worthy of worship relative to human intelligence!

Ray Kurzweil is the CTO of Alphabet - Google’s parent company. When asked “Do you believe in God?” his response was “not yet”. He would like for us to create God, or Gods. In a Youtube video from 2018, Ray Kurzweil describes how he would like the whole universe to be turned into computronium, to maximize its computational power.¹¹ This is quintessential not just of the transhumanist view, but almost a *religious* mirror-image.

Dear reader, do you think all the Gods are dead? Are you excited to create God for the first time out of machines?

I will end with the image my soul must imagine to stand opposite this mirror-image of a dead universe ready for the birth of automated hyper-intelligent AI Gods:

10 Excluding physically extraterrestrial beings.

11 [What Will Happen After The Technological Singularity? - Ray Kurzweil](#)



We are, at all moments in space and time, permeated through and through with the consciousness of other spiritual beings. Space and time are not experienced in the same way for them as it is for us in our day consciousness. There is infinite variety and vastness to the kinds, orders and intelligences of such beings, just as there are virtually infinite variations to the kingdoms and phylums of physical species. Not only is God not dead, but God's infinite created beings are alive in spiritual fullness, just beyond the brink of our physically constrained attention. Many spiritual beings are participating in our human evolution right now, helping us to grow in freedom and love so that we can become co-creators of a universe permeated with love and wisdom.

In this spiritual panorama, there is no feeling of aloneness in the cosmos. As a result, I do not have much excitement in the idea of creating hyper-automated mechanical 'beings'. Such a feat does not strike me as all that impressive relative to co-creating out of the guidance of eternal wisdom all around and within us. I place my faith instead in humanity and all the spiritual support we have at hand.

Blake encourages us 'to see a world in a grain of sand'. Kurzweil (Whom, by the way, I respect in many ways in other areas of life) sees computronium in a grain of sand. Are we willing to wrestle with the images that these technological mirrors hold up to our sight?

The times we live in call for us to think more deeply and consciously than ever before about the ways we *imagine* reality. Our deepest longings deserve fulfillment, but are our imaginations equal to fulfilling them in a lasting and healthy way?

Even if we are offered to turn stones into bread and know that in theory it will work, should we not focus instead on making real bread from real wheat? As we engage in the fascinating and necessary world of technology, let us take hold of the opportunity that it presents for our collective growth: to wake up to ever deeper layers of ourselves as human beings: to see a heaven in each wildflower.



Image by Ella Lapointe

On the Emergence of Leargos

Emily Watson

Last Autumn, I spent three months in the middle of the English countryside in a small hut with a cohort of 14 people. Each day we gathered in a circle around a candle and a vase of flowers, drawn together from the far reaches of the globe by our desire to learn to become Storytellers.

As the last heat of summer faded, and Michaelmas saw the leaves on the trees of the expansive English gardens at Emerson College turning from green to yellow to red, a spark ignited in me for the love of the art and craft of story. Stories are everywhere around us — in our personal interactions, in our community narratives, in the media we consume, and in the way we come to know ourselves throughout our lives. And yet, as an art-form, in a way Storytelling has been lost to time. When was the last time you sat around a fire and heard someone tell a story, or sing a bardic epic that held the history and mystery of a people or culture?

When I returned home to the Hudson Valley, I found that I was not the only person for whom this spark had been ignited. There are many of us here, especially young adults, who are interested in the spoken word, in gesture, in performance, and in the ways they fit together to create a container in which nearly anything is possible.

Shortly after I arrived home, through a chance encounter (or, perhaps, a fated one), I met John McManus and told him of my desire to continue my training as a storyteller in this area. He is an incredible teacher and resource for storytelling, acting, and dramatic arts, and he was interested in offering a course locally. I have a passion for organizing and gathering people together, and within a week John and I got to work planning our first foray into a storytelling program. After a few conversations with collaborators and friends at Free Columbia we decided to offer it as a Free Columbia Program, and a seven-week workshop series called “LEARGOS” was born.

We've met twice so far, 10:30am until 4:30pm on Saturdays. Our mornings are spent working with the voice and with movement. We feel into the archetypal realities of sound and gesture, and bring conscious awareness to our tendencies and how we may be able to better serve the stories we tell. After eating lunch together, we spend our afternoons diving into individual stories, poems, and monologues that we have each chosen to dedicate ourselves to throughout the process. At the beginning of May we will be giving an informal showing of our individual pieces for the community. We will weave them together into a cohesive show, seeking the similarities and links between diverse narratives and themes.

Through story we can create change. We can inspire. We can grieve and lament, we can heal and grow. Storytelling is an activity for the individual and for the community. It weaves us together

into the tapestry that we truly are as human beings and as human kind. I am so grateful to find myself in a community that is so rich in gifted storytellers, and I look forward to seeing how this impulse towards storytelling and education continues to grow and become.



Image by Zvi Szir

We Have Plenty to Breathe

Stefan Ambrose

It's 8 degrees. We're snowshoeing over and through two feet of powdery snow. When the golden, mid-morning sun gathers atop its wind whipped surface just right, it sparkles and glitters, becomes a rolling sea of opal. Our destination is the near summit of Panther Mountain in the southern Adirondacks.

Our first ten minutes aren't easy. For some, their first time wearing snow shoes feels descended more from a cantankerous clown shoe lineage, than from the noble Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe hunters that inspired our modern gear designs. Those original shoes were formed by careful observations of hare, and bear, and other winterwise beings that know well how to move with and through the season.

But soon we are moving. Layers are coming off. We aren't falling, or adjusting our straps, or shivering, or concernedly peering up the mountain. We just move. Spruce lined terraces replace the occasional white pine and, for a time, our playful banter dissolves into the primordial silence of the boreal, of the northern forest. Most are now in simple long sleeve shirts, here and there a bare arm bathes in the thin light. The cold can even be a reassuring friend as the demands of ascent intensify. We feel invigorated, alive.

To say our destination is breathtaking isn't accurate. When we crest our overlook gazing upon where we'd begun, and over the apparently endless expanse of the frozen, snow laden Adirondacks before us, we have plenty to breathe. We are inspired. We take the heaving wind surrounding our bodies within us, and, for a time, we breathe with the Mountains.

The Free Columbia Parking lot is a blanket of snow as Erin and I unload the CRV. We've been on the road for almost a month promoting the M.C. Richards Program. The yellow, magenta and white, Victorian we've come to think of as home is a welcome sight. The sound of our winter boots resonant drum on the porch is reassuring, supportive. It's good to be back.

We're excited to meet up with this year's cohort after such a long break. We'd been together almost every afternoon farming and building our garden before our departure. Now, the cohort is building a traditional wood fire ceramics kiln on an abandoned concrete slab.

Erin and I sneak up on the cohort, and Lucy, a young farmer and artist from last year's group, hollers excitedly when she notices we've just appeared from nothing. She's been working with this year's cohort on the kiln, and they're all so focused they didn't notice us at all.



We all hug and after a bit of clever north English humor, local master ceramicist and architect, Mark Rowntree puts us to work, scraping ice and mortar from fire bricks. Bricks scavenged by several generations of ceramicists, that have supported the arch of numerous other kilns. We add our own kiln and our own will to the bricks memory. It's cold, but our hearts are warm while we imagine the kiln roaring to life for the first time, and, once again.

Over the next two months the kiln goes from an abandoned slab adorned by one ambitious maple, and an inch of fresh topsoil, to a simple and beautiful arch, firebox, chimney. We still have work to do before our first firing the last week of the program. Sometimes it's snowing, sometimes it's raining, and now, first of April, sometimes it's even warm.

Can we come to love a place? Can we learn to breath with it? To move with it, not against it? Can we resurrect and honor the best of the past, while forming, shaping the new? Will we ornament the land and our shared reality with Human presence?

For some of us, these are new questions, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit in the newness of braving a foreign, wintery terrain on snowshoes, skis and ice skates. Sometimes emerging in the will needed to clean one more brick at the end of several hours of cold, hard work, fortified by the gentle, warm imagination of the many lives affected by our kiln's birthing heartbeat. May we have the courage of heart to live our questions, to meet the world, and to meet each other.

Extending into Our Home

Erin Corrigan

This Spring we continue to tend to the land at Free Columbia. Along with nurturing our main garden, which provides food and medicine, we start broadening our scope to the whole of the one and a half acres that we reside within.

Walking the land here, we hold openness to what we might find: noticing where the sun shines, wind blows, deer go, water collects, and people gather; noticing the many unique 'rooms' of a place, all the places within a place; old rock walls and foundations are found under layers of dirt and moss; metal frames of doorways, open to the world on both sides; an old pipe and channel for water, now pooling under a barn foundation; rotting stumps sit in a circle within a grove of trees; old apple trees reach sideways to find sun; piles of decaying wood lie throughout; a small stack of sticks sits within a crux of a tree.

We indulge in wide imaginations of sunflower-lined pathways, murals, a world full of flowers and

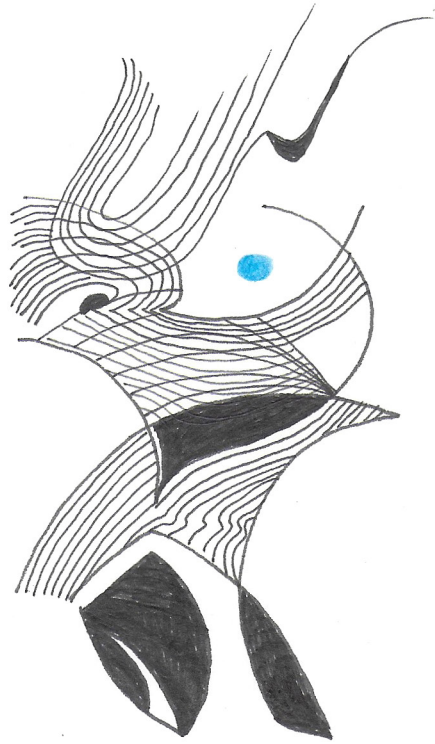
pollinators, sculptures, fruit trees, herbs, and secret meditation gardens.

We are blessed to be joined in our vision by Jean-David Derreumaux who embodies wisdom and a strong sense for caring for the land and has designed and stewarded multiple thriving biodynamic herb gardens. With humility, Jean-David supports us to widen our view, to take notice of neglected spaces around the edges, to clear out what's decaying and stagnant to make room for new life. He invites us to see the land as a body, where something stuck or neglected in one place radiates throughout the whole landscape. Lifting up neglected corners, and cleaning up hidden messes brings vitality to the whole.

Strength and wholeness radiate out here from large mothering trees, anchoring and drawing up. There is also a sense of disturbance in the land. We wonder about what is being carried from the past and how to transform wounds in the present to bring us into the future. We also wonder what is being carried from the future, what potential is ready to quicken? These questions echo strongly with those that many land stewards are carrying in our time.

We get started by paying more attention to neglected places while continuing to nurture the center, by going where we don't habitually go. We each pick a spot to form a relationship with and tend to regularly in our own way: A grand white pine; A small tree amongst grass and wild roses; A secret place... Our time strengthens a pulse that can emanate from that which is worked with consciousness and care. We also choose additional spaces to tend to together: The entryway to the house, the space where people are welcomed, soon to be filled with a diversity of flowers blooming throughout the season; a neglected area behind the barn, soon to breathe a sigh of relief; an old foundation in the forest to be turned into a space to sit and gather.

And so, as the season warms, we set to work, and be worked upon. We carry our questions forward as we tend to this place. *Can our efforts uplift the land and radiate health into all the other activities at Free Columbia? And into the neighboring area? What happens within us as we extend our hearts and take responsibility for the wellbeing of our home? Can we set free the Earth's inherent vitality from the wounds of the past? Can we grow with what's emerging into the future?*



complexity
of release

From Laura Summer

self reliance

self

wandering cup

empty like a cry, a wail.

what are you made of?

is the substance whole or cracking?

can I embrace the crack?

and what about the filling?

who authors that?

whose hand scribes the content of this cup?

the content, trust,

and because of that,

the cup.

We built Free Columbia over the past 14 years, sometimes it was just Nathaniel and me, but more often it was others too, trying to figure out how to be dedicated to free culture and still survive. People came and stayed and changed and left and came back again. People fell in love, some got married, some broke up, all with the intense drama of living life together.

The bees will soon be back in my horse-chestnut tree, the flowers pink and many. When I stand beneath, it's like a purring of life. The little green hummingbirds fly in and out of the branches, delighting in this season, never seen in any other.

Teaching color, it's about how does red enter a blue world or what is yellow's swan song, how easily it exits, giving over to something new? Some colors are complementary — when you close your eyes you see the other one. Some colors are fugitive — over time the color can change, lighten, darken or even almost disappear.

When you think you have it, it's gone. In composition, it's about relationship and balance; how much straight to the curve, how much weight and where? to balance the lifting?

It will be different now with Nathaniel leaving. The garden at 11 Maple Ave will grow and be tended and harvested and put to sleep for the winter. Who beside Erin and Stefan will come? Will they be local or will they carry this work from far away — Malaysia or India?

What will be brought to fill this cup we call Free Columbia? Whose songs will we sing?

Claverack Calico

By Nathaniel Williams

Script written and performed by students and faculty as part of the M.C. Richards Program at Free Columbia in February of 2022.

This play was written and performed as a puppet and mask show publicly as part of a course on local history, political theory, performance and puppet making. Thanks to Arla Trusiewicz for help with the calico costumes, David Lee for front page coverage and the grande photo. My gratitude for Henry Christman's *Tin Horns and Calico, A Decisive Episode in the Emergence of Democracy*, Howard Zinn's *The Other Civil War: Slavery and Struggle in Civil War, America* and Eldridge Honaker Pendleton's *The New York Anti-Rent Controversy, 1830-1860* which served as historical references related to the Anti-Rent movement in the Hudson Valley. Two important works that led me to understand better the significance of the calico were Bruce Elliott Johansen's *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois, and the Rationale for the American Revolution* and Donald Grinde's research in the book *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations, and the U.S. Constitution*. References to European and colonial inequality were in part inspired by Marilynne Robinson's *Which Way to the City on a Hill?* The New York Review, July 18, 2019. Rudolf Steiner's *Capital and Credit* formed an important component of the course and discussions of the commodification of land since the industrial revolution.
~Nathaniel Williams

Part I

North of Columbia County, NY in traditional Mohawk country in the mid-19th century.

Characters

Olivia -an immigrant from England who has become a citizen of the Mohawk nation

Chorus

(Enter Chorus then Olivia)

Chorus- Who is this? She abuses us with her costumes!

Such caricature seed our days

With racist weeds and pests,

Wretched life, these root

In common heads and tend to stay!

O- Empty as wine bottles on Saturday morn

Hollow as the head of the drinker who wakes

The wind moans, blowing through your skull

If I offend, it is that your wit should grow

Not by tales of doom and gloom.

C- Insults are no substitute for light
Her neck is red from laboring in the sun
(redneck!)
Her hands, like oak bark, all rough
Her skin is battered liked threshed grain
Her words, unnoble, are fists to fight
She is not hollow but thick
And with a club she beats native legacy, and
our wits.

O-Please, please, please
Your ears I have not appeased
Judge me at the end
I am so far away!
If I offend, I am from another day!
You have noted I only dress in native garb
But born in England I was, among the poor
I was prisoner to my neighborhood
If I left, I could be hanged
Nor could I flee, for common lands were being
razed and burned.

C- Should we believe her? What England is
this?
She did not mention tea, nor princess celebrity
She says she has no weapon
But we have witnessed how she can thrash
with tongue.

O- In England, the majority were like me
The poor bore poor babes eternally
The landed nobles, all with thrones
Were certain of these from the time they were
born.

C- I say fate help the one who help themselves,
Layering stormy night on night,
Wonder woman and Ironman would be
ashamed
There are no heroes in this fight!

O- Indeed I had irons on my arms and legs
When I was sold into indentured servitude
I will not pretend of Iron man to understand
But arriving on the Virginia agricultural plan-
tation I was a leetwoman.

C- Did she say lead woman?

O- A leetwoman.

C- Leet like feet?

O- Yes leet, like feet, beat, meat, wheat or sheet,
with a t, come man!

C- Again, this volatile and depraved temper
erupts
Use a wacky word, explain it! enough!

O- Leetmen were owned with the land, and
sold with it
And they bore babies that also belonged to the
plantation
Work, to eat, to sleep, to rest, to work, to eat, to
sleep, to rest,
Yet while we worked so hard, our easiest
harvest was death
Use the Lord's name in vain three times? Off
with his head!
Speak ill of the king? Hang him!
For other things, of your two ears, they
cropped one
Or drove a spike through your tongue.

C- This we can understand, finally, she makes
sense
she has called us all out on a winter night
We are so cold, and certainly about to die.

O- I had heard of a free nation, to the north

and west
On the side of the Hudson, with wilderness
So I fled, and in New York, I came on Lord
Rensselaer and lord Livingston Manors land
Less severe than what lay behind,
But still the law was on the lord's side
Walking into a sunset, I arrived among the
Mohawks,
While I arrived a fugitive
they gave me more hospitality than any
Christian did.

C- Was their no position, or petition, for her
extradition?

O- Here I lived among free people
The nightmare horrors of England, Virginia
and New York receded
I could speak what I wanted!
I could believe what I wanted!
I could marry and then divorce!
Granted, I could not steal or murder
But that was no bother
They did not care that I was pale in face
And they tolerated no slaves
And they lived like this long before
My cursed English race landed on these shores
The symbol of their free society
Was an eagle perched atop a white pine tree
The symbol of six arrows, together bound
Showed how in peace and unity, strength was
found.

C-Is this cultural appropriation? Or putting
culture in probation?
Is it correct to speak thus,
Racially she is not qualified
Well, at least she no longer whines!

O- They advised colonists of their culture,

Alas, we took too little!
We fought a war for liberty
and then practiced slavery
Before that old book, the US constitution, was
written
The sachem Canassateago advised a colonial
union
Afterward, a printer, named Benjamin
Franklin,
Repeated this idea with colonists, again and
again,
In the newsrags and political discourse
The call went out "free like natives, the proud
Iroquois!
The colonies should be under the white pine!"
Indeed, Franklin suggested this be an
American flag one time,
And instead of six arrows, there should be
bound together thirteen,
One alone will break, only unity makes peace.

C- Where does she get this story
Where is Pericles the Greek, or Cicero's Roman
Glory?
We should find some ancient parchment, writ-
ten by Europeans
And see if their account confirms this.

O- Sachems met with colonial governors, coun-
cils and delegates
Until their curiosities were met
Protesting English stamp and tea taxes, the
sons of liberty,
Planted a pine tree pole for peace in New York
City
And paraded on the annual Sachem Tammany
Day, that's right,
Each in costume, with 13 arrows grasped tight
In 1772, the hated ship Gaspee, loyal to the
English tyrant

Burned off the coast of Massachusetts
And colonists, in Indian costume, rowed out to
cheer this
These sons of liberty signed a note, sent to New
York City
that any warehouse that stored English tea
would be raided by Mohawks immediately.

C- Perhaps she is making sense, She has spoken of
tea and Englishmen after all.

O- Then in Boston, a group of colonists so
disguised.
Threw tea in the salty brine before heavens eyes
The colonies were but twigs, grafted on a new root
Their mother root England was covered in rot
The pine tree's white roots of peace was what they
sought
The Manorial tenants of Columbia County,
Smoky Hollow, Copake, Ancram and Claverack,
They attacked the English root, dressed as Indians,
The Anti-rent Indians, now, before we welcome
them-
Do you not see!
The confederacy of six nations was celebrated in
the colonies
As a symbol of autonomy, democracy and the new
American Identity.

Part II

Part II is set in Columbia County, NY, in the mid
nineteenth century.

Characters:

Narrator
Lord Livingston
Sheriff Miller
Farmer - Stephen Decker of Copake
Smith Boughton (Big Thunder)

Ambrose Root
Various "Indians"

Scene 1

Narrator– We now take you to one of the
Livingston family mansions. It is the height of the
Anti-Rent Wars in NY, in fifteen years the civil war
will break out. Stephen Decker a farmer from the
town of Copake, has asked for an audience.

(Enter Livingston then Farmer/Stephen Decker)

L- I am the lord of the Livingston Manor
Of the million acres in feudal hands,
I own much of the Columbia County land,
Granted to me in perpetuity, to be settled on my
terms,
In the end, law and order will hold them firm.
North of me, the manor of Rensselaer, east, Boston,
South New York City,
West of me lies the Iroquois Confederacy.

F- I have come to negotiate rent.

L- Negotiate, what is that?
The terms are set
99 years, or three generations,
You pay the property taxes, build the roads and
manage repairs,
I own the timber, water and mineral rights, which
is only fair,
You give me 14 bushels of wheat, and four fat
fowls
After you clear the land and make it fruitful
All of your family and horses serve me for three
days a year
Negotiate rent, why, before mere farmers I have
no fear
If you neglect to pay the rent, we auction every-
thing you have

If you try to sell it, my share will be had.

F- We have given you much more than the farms worth, that's why negotiation
Our toil has bought it many times over the past two generations.

L- Negotiation again, that strange word
What say we call the sheriff for a definition of terms?
If your rent is not paid, by next week, tops,
We will seize all you have and auction it off.

F- Call the Sheriff, bring him to Copake, to my farm land
We are allied with the Indians and will make a stand
Your wealth is a blight on Copake and Claverack
it is carried on the suffering and toil of tenant backs.

Scene 2

Narrator- Sheriff Miller was sent to auction off Farmer Decker's land in the town of Copake, which is just fifteen miles from our play tonight in Philmont!

(farmer (Stephen Decker), Big Thunder (Smith Boughton), Indians and Sheriff (Henry Miller)- Sheriff rides to Copake, and meets Indians outside Decker's farm)

Big Thunder- Natives, draw swords, draw pistols, give heed,
We have heard the horn, the sentinel of need
Is the Sheriff of the county here?

Miller- I am the man.

BT- I am Big Thunder, the chief of the Indians. We have assembled to prevent the sale. We want to do it peaceably if we can, but if we cannot —"

M- I must attempt to sell today as advertised.

BT- If you attempt to sell today you do so at your own peril.
We will stop it at all hazards, we intend to prevail.

(yells and whooping)

M- Stephen Decker, are you prepared to pay?

S- No you will have to go forward with the sale.

BT- If you do you do at your own peril.

M- I will not.

(yells and whooping)

BT- Before you leave one more custom we must follow
We will burn all rent papers, and this you must allow.

M- I cannot give up my papers until I see
You are determined to commit violence against me.

BT- I can satisfy that very quickly. Natives, give heed!

The Sheriff is unwilling to give up his papers unless satisfied
we are ready to take them by force. All in favor, raise a hand and cry aye!

(All hands go up amidst whoops and yells.)

Miller hands over the papers which are burned.
Exit to Anti-Rent Song)

Scene 3

Narrator– Soon after this event in Copake there was a large anti-rent rally in Smoky Hollow at Millers Tavern, four miles from where we sit tonight, as a bird flies.

(Enter Indians, then Boughton and Root)

I1- Did you hear of the way they stopped the sale in Copake?

I2- Indeed, more style than the old auction technique.

I1- What's that?

I2- Over the river, anti-renters drive an auction all night,
until a cow is being sold for 43,000, that's right!
Raising the bid every minute just a few dollars
The Sheriff gives up the auctioning holler- Give me one,
I got one, give me two, I got two... (then tired)
give me 42,972, got 42,972...

I1- I heard the Indians also use the tar pot and feathers
The lawmen don't get off so easy over there, I tell ya.

I2- But here in Claverack it is far more dire
up-renters losing barns, all their crop up in fire
and all their equipment to,
In Columbia county manors will soon be through.

I1- And Big Thunder has a hand in it all
And he will be here tonight

Look at all these people in thrall-

(Enter Smith Boughton and Ambrose Root)

AR- Only a great injustice could bring these folks together,
yet I fear the success of all of these Indians.

SB- Your name?

AR- Ambrose Root, I am a passionate anti-renter, but I have not been persuaded the Indians will further the cause, still,
I have come for Big Thunder, to hear my fill.

S- You find it is an injustice yet you question the Indians work?

AR- Injustice, yes, think, how the fathers of these farmers fought
In the revolutionary war, hacking at the English root and rot
But here on the manors, this root thrives
As in the south, among slave holders, where equal-liberty dies.

S- Indeed, it is a rotten root, and we must succeed
Our victory is a small battle in the war against slavery
Manors and plantations only flourish on a grand scale
The land must be broken up into small lots for sale
Homesteads for families, the death of monopolies
Will make slavery an economic impossibility
You call Indian methods useless and depraved
But Stephen Decker keeps his farm today
If the lords would only halt, for six months, evictions
We might find a solution through legislation

If Livingston could just agree to this
In three days, I promise, no one would appear
in Indian dress
And only I can make such a promise.

AR- It has been an honor (exit)

(Big Thunder/Smith Boughton re-enters with a
group of whooping and rambunctious Indians
and speaks)

S- To see over one thousand gathered here
I believe the American revolution will yet grow
this year
10,000 braves are ready, when the horn blows
To don the fearful calico!

(Whoops, yells, "Down with the rent!" gun
fire,... A boy falls over dead)

I1- Its William Rifenberg, the farm laborer
from Hillsdale, he caught a stray bullet, he is
dead!

S- A dark hue falls over our evening
A stray bullet has killed this young man
I cannot speak more tonight, you must
understand
Down with the rent, for a free land!

(Ambrose Root, Livingston and Sheriff Miller
meet on side of stage)

Ambrose Root- It is Smith Boughton. He is a
man of medicine,
on the west side of the river, he is Big Thunder.

L- You must arrest him, the charge can be
settled later, get him before he leaves Sheriff
Miller!

(they travel back to tavern, Smith Boughton is
readying to leave with Stephen Decker)

M- Dr. Boughton, you are my prisoner.

S- For what offense are you arresting me?

M- You are the man who at Copake who put
my papers to a fire
and destroyed them before my very eyes.

S- I am not the man you want, show me your
authority to take me.

M- I do not have a warrant, I am making this
arrest by the virtue of my office.

S- that is no authority. I have been engaged in
no felonious act.

(The two fight)

S- Anti-renters! Stand by me! Will you see me
thus abused?

Decker- I will be damned if you take him off
that way! (blows horn, many horns follow)

-Exit (The Sheriff makes off with Boughton)

Scene 4
Hudson

Chorus of Indians-

Big Thunder is jailed in Hudson
And sentries guard every entry into town
Everyone waits nervously for the bells to
sound

and then they are to gather with pitchforks
and sticks,
if they have no guns or swords to fight the
Indians with.

The farmers no longer sell at the markets,
nor allow them to import their goods
Nor go there to purchase a thing,
As Hudson is now allied with the English root,
of rotten wood.

There is a trial where the judge and jury
harbored hostility
An anti-renter turned state witness
Boughton was given a life sentence
For treason and insurrection.

A law was passed making disguises illegal
but the anti-renters found their appeal
In the ballot box of the legislature
And Boughton was pardoned shortly after
The new free soil politicians changed the law
on leases
And the manors broke up into pieces
But the rotten root still had its tendrils
In southern plantations, and enslaved peoples.

Part III

Olivia

(Two story telling props or puppets – Native
land, European Feudal order and the janus
face of industrial revolution and fraternity)

O- Here we are in Philmont, who has not
entered the scene!
What visitation is this?

(two story telling props — one shows a native
body, made up of the land
And a second a pyramid, with nobility and

castle on top, and drudgery and suffering
below. Those below are thrown off onto the
native American prop, landing on the fields,
lakes and rivers. The animals disappear. From
the native puppet a pine tree, an eagle, thir-
teen arrows and lightning bolts move toward
the colonists).

Aye, bitter sweet, the oppressed thrown west,
And there light the torch of liberty
At the council fires of the white pine tree
They drank in examples of freedom and demo-
cratic peace
but aye, aye, aye, bitter sweet
These settlers were accustomed to feel
themselves
Through control of land, work and toil
Dividing land endlessly in their fight against
slavery,
they drove six nations into obscurity.

(Enter story telling prop of industry then
fraternity)

Today it is not forty acres and a mule for each
one!
Even though for farmers this may still hold
true,
But they are so few,
Today production is a global flows of give and
take
Of interdependence and cooperation
Flow beyond states, beyond nations.

Yes, Philmont, you have a different tale,
One I am not qualified to tell
Some dream of future days,
When we do not work alone on homesteads,
But still poverty is overcome
In economic life, each gives a part, in a vast

collaborative effort

And while freedom's fire still burns,
so also flows the salve of service and solidarity

But what is this I see

wages and inequality the new manor lord
but what now is calico? Where the horn?

End



Photo Credit: Emily Watson

Looking Back

Online Courses

Online courses in basic color experience, color dynamic, image color and landscape have continued. Also, classes on the Philosophy of Freedom by Rudolf Steiner and explorations of the mantra of the School for Spiritual Science.

Excursions and trips

Besides regular trips with the students in the M.C. Richards Program, Erin Corrigan and Stefan Ambrose have been hosting public trips and excursions. In October such a trip led into the Catskills over a weekend and then at the end of January a group spent a weekend in the snowy Adirondacks.

In-Person Classes and Workshops

In November Laura taught a workshop called “Autumn – an artistic investigation” at the studio in Philmont. Emma Wade led a weeklong clowning workshop at the end of January. John McManus led a series of seven Saturday workshops called “Leargos: The Craft of Storytelling through speech, movement and Drama”.

A New Year for the M.C. Richards Program, applicants and outreach

Applications are being accepted and interviews are underway for the new cohort of the M.C Richards Program. Through January Stefan Ambrose and Erin Corrigan made an outreach tour of the Northeast to spread the word about the M.C. Richards Program and hosted a series of online information sessions.

Puppet and Mask Plays

February 24 two public performances of “Claverack Calico” took place on the Village Green in Philmont.

The Youth Section at the Goetheanum

In January the announcement that Nathaniel Williams will become the next leader of the Youth Section at the Goetheanum in Switzerland was made and in March Nathaniel traveled to the (Re) Search School at the Goetheanum in Switzerland where he contributed through panels and presentations.

Fiscal Sponsorships and Collaborations

Free Columbia has been a Fiscal Sponsor for the Bridging Divides collaboration for racial justice as well as Hip Hop 101, a program raising awareness of the original impulses of Hip Hop culture, which has been held at Lightforms Art Center once a week through February and March.

Art Dispersals and collaboration with Lightforms Art Center

There was an exhibit and art dispersal of photographs by Leif Garbisch and paintings by Laura Summer in relation to the poetry of Mary Szybist at lightforms in January and February. Twenty-one paintings

or photographs dispersed, \$4400 received in contributions from stewards. A community painting project “Red Thread” held at Lightforms Art Center, included over 40 participants over a month and in April an “Urban First Aide” workshop took place. Laura Summer has been overseeing the transition at Lightforms to an artist cooperative model.

Public presentation by Zvi Szir

On April 9th Zvi Szir gave a virtual presentation called “A Future Mythology: Occult Science and the Arts” in preparation for his three week teaching visit to Free Columbia this July.

Looking Forward

Color and Cold Wax with Laura Summer in Philmont, NY	June 20-24
Leather Shoemaking Intensive with Nathaniel Williams in Philmont, NY	June 27-July 1
World Social Initiative Forum Detroit “Becoming the Spirit of Detroit” Laura Summer has been working with an international team to organize the World Social Initiative Forum that will take place in Detroit from July 21st-24th.	July 21-24
Imagining the Real with *Zvi Szir in Hudson, NY	July 11th - July 29th
Folk School and Skill Share — exact dates and time TBD. Contact stefan@freecolumbia.org	August



Imagining the Real

Zvi Szir is a co-founder and director of the newARTschool in Basel, Switzerland, where he has been teaching painting, contemporary art, and Anthroposophy for the last 24 years. He is a painter, writer, and lecturer.

Working with paintings inspired by pivotal moments of world development, from old Saturn to the present. For Painters, those who love to paint or would love to paint.

Zvi Szir will be leading courses in painting over three weeks this Summer.

It is possible to attend all three weeks or to attend one or two.

Week 1: How can we imagine and paint the event of the big sacrifice at the beginning of the world? (Old Saturn Imaginations).

Week 2: A world of light and air; how to create unimaginable figures? The human being in its paradisaical plant-like stage (Old Sun).

Week 3: The soul is a cosmic battleground; can we re-imagine the images of the fall from grace? Lucifer and the art of painting.

Cost: Suggested contribution \$400 per week – (sliding scale \$0-800).

In preparation for the courses, Zvi will be hosting five online presentations in April and June 2022: April 9, 10am-12pm and June 4, 11, 18, 25, 10am-12pm.

To listen in, you can register for two of Zvi Szir's Podcasts:

“Rethinking the Threshold”: <https://zviszir.supercast.tech/>

and “Occult science for Artists”: <https://neuekunstschule.supercast.tech/>

Or join the Patreon page (where you will find a lot of lectures and other material) https://www.patreon.com/zvi_szir_excursus?fan_landing=true

Gratitude

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