

# ECOPOIESIS:

## ECO-HUMAN THEORY AND PRACTICE



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ECO-HUMAN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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## EDITORIAL. ECO-HUMAN PERSPECTIVE: WORLD TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY VISIONS

There is a complex turmoil taking place in the world in this historical moment: violence in Gaza, and war in Ukraine involved the whole world community and revealed the fragility and dysfunctional nature of the current state of affairs. Ukraine as any other 'hot point' on our planet is never far from mind, since all of them are facets of the same situation. The so-called *capitalist world ecology* (Jason Moore) appears to be at the core of the current dramatic state of affairs, impacts the living matrix of cultures and ecosystems and drives the whole logic of actions and policies of the world hegemon in its struggle for control.

Attempts to overcome the current systemic crisis of civilization will be ineffective as long as humanity is captured by the anthropocentric picture of the world and the prevailing system of relations that are characteristic of industrial civilization, the culture of a modern globalized market. To overcome the crisis affecting the environment, economy and the human state of being and self-perception, the world community is required to come to a different stance in the world.

The ideas of this stance in the world are in the air and are currently formalized in a holistic program that could affect the fate of humanity and nature in their unity with each other. The civilization of the exploitation of nature and the human community, unbridled and destructive consumption, should be replaced by a new mode of existence based on ecological thinking, redefining the relations between humans and nature.

These ideas present a real 'counterforce' to anthropocentric 'annihilation' of human beings and their living environment and have different historical predecessors in the cultures of the West and East. Worldview positions, very close to the ideas of ecological, or the eco-human stance in the world, can be found, for example, in the philosophical systems of the East related to Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Sufism, in the spiritual heritage of St. Francis of Assisi which impacts the position of the Catholic Church on environmental issues, in indigenous cultures around the world.

The ideas of American environmentalism, Russian Cosmism, and the more recently, ideas associated with the Gaia hypothesis, each recognizing the reality and significance of the biosphere and the noosphere, can be regarded as components of the eco-human perspective and what is now called 'ecological civilization'.

Currently, the design of *post-capitalist world ecology* and ecological civilization is facilitated by both world environmental traditions and new ideas in ecology. All of them are contributing to a new eco-human approach to understanding the world and humanity. The constructiveness of the eco-human approach or a paradigm is determined by systemic environmental thinking. "Ecology" is a radical system-forming concept necessary to rethink the entire cultural practice of humankind and realize new opportunities to solve the problems of preserving humanity and the planet.

The ideas of natural and cultural ecology united with human sciences and the arts are able to withstand the disintegration of modern knowledge about humans, the dehumanization of culture and undermining its fundamental values, to form the platform that serves the understanding of the present and revealing the ways of moving into the future. The eco-human approach can hardly be successfully implemented without relying on different forms of artistic and aesthetic comprehension of nature and human beings.

The present issue of the journal, again, presents an international network of people and ideas that help to recognize and further develop the 'counterforce' to the anthropocentric worldview. In the article "Practicing ecological spirituality with a Franciscan-artistic sensitivity," Br. William Ng ofm, a *Franciscan friar, with training in landscape architecture, town planning and theology* pays his particular attention to the influence of the spiritual heritage of St. Francis of Assisi on the position of the Catholic Church on environmental issues. He reveals the concept of ecological spirituality and emphasizes the important role of the arts and aesthetic experience in the spiritual heritage

of St. Francis. The correlations between the phenomenology of the creative process, considered from the standpoint of expressive arts and therapy and the structure of *Lectio Divina* (divine reading in Latin) are shown.

In the joint article “To moisten the heart: Reflections from community art,” the group of co-founders and teachers at TAE Peru institute, including Marin Zavala, Odette Amaranta Vélez Valcárcel, Mónica Prado Parró, and Ximena Maurial MacKee, recognize themselves as living in a particularly difficult time for peaceful coexistence between countries, cultures and with nature. Presenting themselves as part of this system and complex fabric, they ask themselves about a way to live healthily in a hostile environment. They describe the experiences of faculty, students, and alumni at *Estudios en Artes Expresivas* (TAE) in Lima, Peru, in hosting creative activities. They welcomed the events present in their reality by making art in community, to imagine different ways of responding to it, finding the possibility of transforming pain and responding aesthetically, in community.

In the article “Memories of the future: Speculative fabulations on the future of the *Opuntia* Cactus & the Cochineal Insect” by Roseline de Thélin, an interdisciplinary artist, expressive arts teacher, creative coach and art therapist, presents an eco-poietic project, “Memories of the Future,” which is aiming to raise awareness on the disappearance of the Prickly Pear cactus, in the Balearic Islands and mainland Spain due to a plague of Cochineal. Inspired by Donna Haraway's writings (“Staying with the trouble”, in particular) the artist created surreal scenes as “speculative fabulations” from a mix of artificial intelligence, digital and

analogue manipulation, with the aim of fostering new narratives and perspective shifts in the face of ecological issues.

This issue also touches on our relationship with the Moon, an exceptional celestial body which established complex connections with our planet and human beings. “The Poetic Anthology of Eco-Human experience: Poems About Moon” section presents poetry from different ages, dedicated to various facets of human relationship with the Moon as a natural object. Poetic works allow us to comprehend the eco-human, eco-poietic nuances of our ability, together with this celestial body, to generate new facets of subjectivity, to discover new forms of experience and meanings revealed on the threshold of human and more-than-human reality. The selection includes poems by Du Fu, Konstantin Balmont, Mina Loy, Edward Estlin Cummings, Robert Frost, and David Bowie.

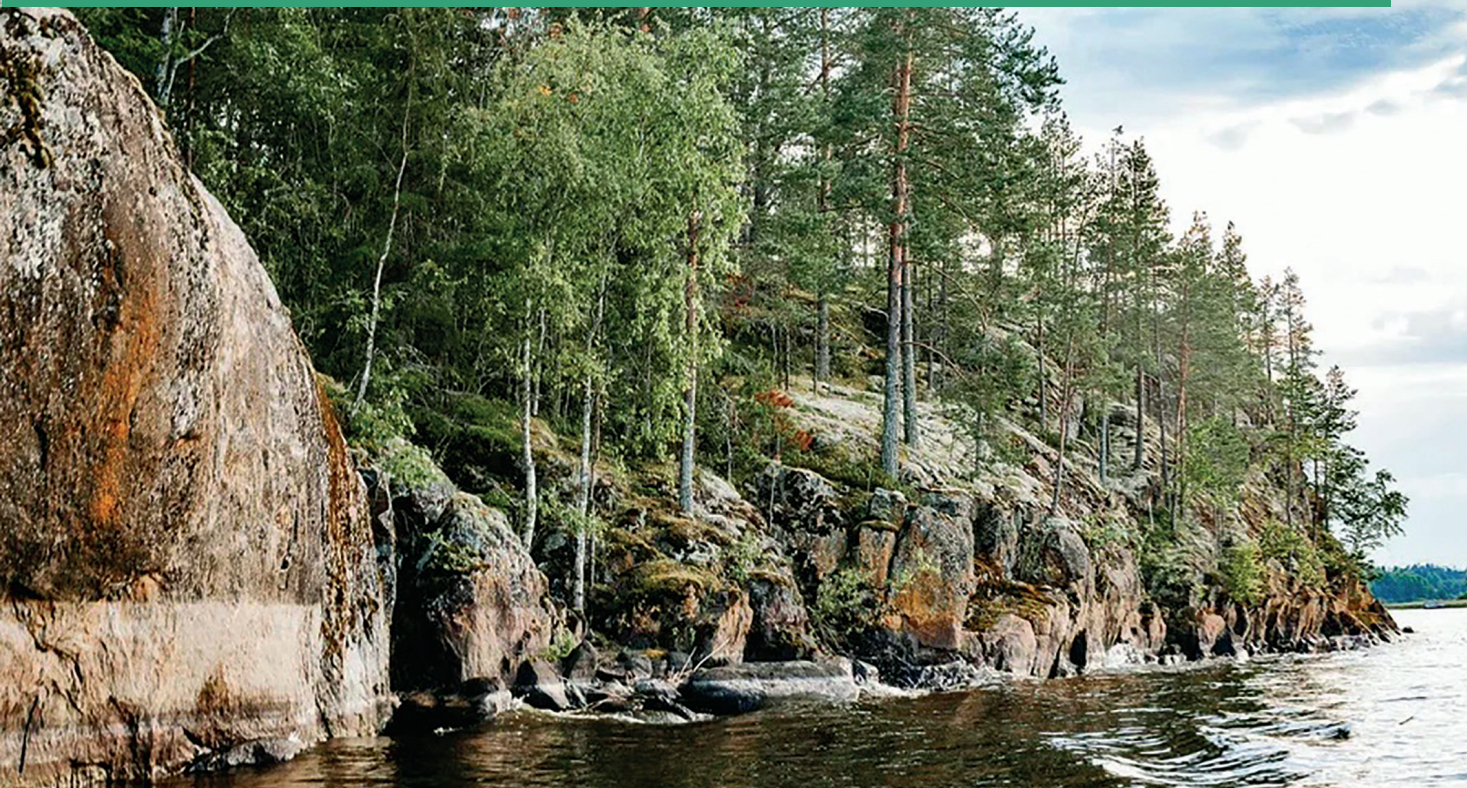
Alexander Kopytin's essay further brings to forth the great value of human physical, mental and spiritual connections to the Moon and the significant role it plays for life of our planet and culture. Considering the enormous influence of the Moon on the biosphere and noosphere of the Earth and humans, it is not surprising that, since ancient times, people have paid increased attention to this celestial body and used various mythological explanations and sciences to explain the role of the Moon in their lives, and applied the arts as an effective tool to explore their relationship to the Moon.

“In Resonance with the Earth” section of the journal includes an essay by Vadim Ryabikov, “One day in a flock with wolves. Lessons of wildness,” and a poem by Alexander Kopytin, “Steppen She-Wolf.”

## Section

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# In search of the eco-human paradigm: theory, methodology, concepts



# NATURAL ARCHETYPE OF THE MOON IN CULTURE AND THE ARTS



## ALEXANDER Kopytin

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**Abstract.** The article examines the influence of the Moon as a celestial body of the solar system, closely connected with the Earth, on humans. It is shown how, through creative activity in the interaction of humans with this celestial body, new meanings and forms of experience are formed and their renewal in culture takes place. In this case, the Moon acts not only as a physical object, but also as one of the natural archetypes, due to which a complex of human potentials is realized in their connection with the environment. When considering the Moon as a natural phenomenon, special attention is paid to those types of activities when it is perceived through the prism of non-pragmatic, artistic and aesthetic experience, closely related to the sense of beauty. When considering this mode of perception of the Moon, the concepts of poiesis and eco-poiesis are used.

**Keywords:** Moon, archetypes of nature, eco-humanitarian approach, poiesis, eco-poiesis

## Introduction

The Moon is the only satellite of the Earth in the solar system. In size, it is not so radically different from the Earth, so the Earth and the Moon can be considered as a double planet, thereby recognizing that the Moon forms a single system with the Earth.

The Moon plays a huge role in the life of our planet: it stabilizes the Earth's rotation axis and its climate, and has a huge amount of natural resources that can be used for the needs of humanity in the future. The explored reserves of gold, diamonds and zinc on Earth remain for 20 years of mining, and the reserves of platinum, copper and nickel will dry up in 40 years. The Earth's resources are exhaustible, while there is a constant replenishment of useful resources due to asteroids falling on its surface on the Moon. Huge quantities of iron, nickel, cobalt, platinum, and platinum group metals can be found in lunar craters. The Moon has reserves of Helium-3 that can provide earthlings with energy for five thousand years to come.

The contribution of the Moon to the development of the Earth's biosphere can hardly be overestimated. It has also been significant for billions of years due to the close relationship between the Earth and the Moon. With its gravitational field it affects the earth's biosphere and causes changes in the Earth's magnetic field. The moon significantly influences the ebb and flow of the tides, air pressure, causes changes in temperature and water level. There is a hypothesis about the stabilizing role of the Moon on the Earth, due to the retention of the Earth's orbit, as well as the tilt of the axis of rotation, which in turn affects the formation of the seasons.

It is no coincidence that for centuries the Moon was perceived by humans as a mysterious force that is capable of controlling many life processes, influencing all four shells of the earth, various living organisms, including humans. The special location of the Moon relative to the Earth provides suitable conditions for life. The presence of a natural satellite near the Earth leads to approximately the same time of day and night throughout the day.

The moon has a strong effect on the body and psyche of people, especially before the full moon and new moon. Considering the enormous influence of the moon on the biosphere of the Earth and humans, it is not surprising that, since ancient times, people have paid increased attention to this celestial body and attracted various natural scientific and mythological explanations of the role of the Moon in their lives.

## The moon as one of the archetypes of nature. Archetypes of nature from the viewpoint of the eco-human approach

The concept of archetype was introduced by K. G. Jung to designate the universal foundations of human mental experience, manifested in the images and motifs of dreams and fantasies, myths, works of literature and art, and in the perception of external reality. Phenomenologically, the existence of a significant number of archetypes is confirmed, that cover certain classes of mental phenomena that do not have a clear source in an individual and are characteristic of all people.

In the last decades of the 20th century — the beginning of the 21st century, ideas about the archetypes of the collective unconscious have undergone certain changes. The development of archetypal psychology towards its closer connection with ecopsychology and the eco-human approach [3] considering the psyche in its multifaceted interactions with the environment is indicative with this regard.

The eco-human approach serves as the basis for a new perception of archetypes, making it possible to identify and substantiate such their category as “archetypes of nature” (“natural archetypes”). Archetypes of nature are mental images and works of art that combine various natural phenomena and objects, on the one hand, and the world of mental/psychological phenomena, on the other hand.

Trying to solve the problem of determining the relationship between human subjectivity and the environment, the mental and the physical realms, C. G. Jung introduced the concept of a “psychoid” (or “psychoid factor”), realized through the archetypes of the collective unconscious. As Murray Stein explains, “psychoid” is a concept, “... referring to the

boundaries of the psyche, one side of which interacts with the body and the physical world, and the other with the kingdom of the “spirit”” [28, P. 234]. Thus, in order to solve the problem of determining the relationship between the human subjectivity and the environment, the “psychoid” foundation of mind as partly material, partly psychic, a merging of psyche and matter is proposed. [15, p. 234].

The eco-human approach recognizes that the key problem of the humanities — the problem of understanding ourselves as “environmental subjects” — cannot be solved within the framework of Cartesian science that separates a person (the subject) from the external world of objects. The eco-human approach posits that subjects are considered in relation to the environment, and seeks to reveal their subjectivity and to shape the world in order to fulfill their needs and take care of the well-being of the environment.

The eco-human approach postulates the poietic (from the ancient Greek “ποιέω” — I create; “ποίησις” — creativity) nature of human beings, their ability to shape the world around themselves with a view to beauty. It also suggests that humans exist in the mode of possibility; they can choose to shape the world and themselves in a way that is not yet actual but that is contained potentially in what is already given. Based on the idea of the poietic nature of humans, the concept of *ecopoiesis* (from the Greek words “Οἶκος” — home, housing, and ποιήσι — creativity) is introduced as an important part of the eco-human approach, supporting the idea of humans as “environmental subjects.” This concept is designed to provide the foundations necessary to consider human beings in their relations with the environment as willing and able to take care of their “earthly home.”

This approach considers the creative ability, denoted by the concept of *ecopoiesis*, as the fundamental basis for the existence and development of physical, biological, social and psychological phenomena. They all arise, function and develop according to general laws, and in the process of interaction with each other they can create something new, participating in the process of evolution. In this case, humans are considered as an actively operating self-developing part of nature, which implements general principles that ensure the self-realization of nature itself in various forms of its manifestation.

As V. I. Panov admits, “With this approach, a human being is understood as carrying out its

development and at the same time the self-development of nature as a whole, such a system as “humanity–planet,” which manifests itself, in particular, in the emergence of the noosphere. Thus, the formation (being) of the “humanity–planet” system acts as the generation of an integral ontological subject, realizing in its development the general natural principles of the formation of forms of being, common for “humanity”, and for the “planet”, and for the psyche — as different forms of being with common principles.” [11, p. 14].

In accordance with the ideas of the eco-human approach, realizing the ability to *ecopoiesis*, nature and humans act as subjects of joint development and creative activity. At the same time, according to M. M. Bakhtin, through humans, nature realizes its ability of “expressive and speaking being.” [1, p. 8]

## The Moon from the point of view of ideas about *poiesis* and *ecopoiesis*

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When considering the Moon as a natural phenomenon in its relationship with humans, such aspects of their interaction with nature when it is perceived through the prism of non-pragmatic, artistic and aesthetic experience should be emphasized. When considering this mode of perception of the Moon, the concepts of *poiesis* and *ecopoiesis* become important.

The concept of *poiesis* has a long history in European philosophical thought and is touched upon in the works of thinkers of different eras. In particular, Plato’s work “The Symposium” [7], constructed in the form of a polylogue on the theme of love, is dedicated to this phenomenon.

In this work, the speech of the key speaker of the dialogue, Socrates states that Eros expresses the desire for an original androgynous wholeness that has been lost. With the story of the androgynes, Aristophanes explains that “love is the thirst for integrity and the desire for it” and that “our race will achieve bliss when we fully satisfy Eros, and everyone finds an object of love corresponding to themselves in order to return to their original nature.”

Socrates enters the dialogue after Agathon, who extols Eros as possessing the highest qualities of beauty and kindness. Socrates objects to Agathon,

stating that Eros is love directed towards someone or something, and its object is “what you need.” The object of love is a beautiful object of desire, and Eros is the love of beauty that a human being gains by connecting with its other half.

This part of the Symposium also describes how through love (Eros) mortals achieve immortality. This occurs on the basis of the realization of the ability to create in different senses of the word. *Poiesis* can be realized as procreation, performing a heroic act, learning the truth, or cultivating virtue. *Poiesis* provides a way out beyond the cycle of human life, which runs from birth to death. At the final stage of its ascent to immortality, through *poiesis*, Love (Eros) comes to a “single type” of knowledge, the wisdom of Eros.

Considering the category of *poiesis*, S. Levine [5] draws attention to the fact that, starting from the ancient tradition, there was a characteristic division of different forms of knowledge into the highest forms of extrasensory, speculative comprehension of truth associated with philosophy, and forms of sensory knowledge of the world related to the arts. The tradition of philosophy either denies that truth can be comprehended through the arts, or believes that this way of knowing is more mundane and inferior to intellectual understanding. If philosophy is aimed at going beyond appearance and getting closer to the essence, then *poiesis* is aimed at external manifestations and can only be a lower way of existence. For Plato, the arts deal with the changing world of the senses, while philosophy seeks the unchanging object of the intellect. For him, the chaos of sensory appearance is an obstacle to comprehending the unchanging truth.” [5]

As S. Levine [5] puts it, it is not until Nietzsche that *poiesis* was restored to its central place as our fundamental mode of being and knowing. Nietzsche’s rehabilitation of *poiesis* implies a greater valuation of the sensible world as well. He even accuses the philosophers of a “hatred of the earth” in their attempts to reach a realm of existence beyond the world of the senses [14].

It is possible to see Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology as a continuation of Nietzsche’s fundamental project of restoring *poiesis* to the center of human existence. Heidegger’s task is to consider the opposition between essence and appearance, intellect and senses, being and becoming, and to overcome it once we give up the idea of an eternal unchanging world behind the world of appearance [14].



In his essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” [5] Heidegger considered the primary manifestation of Being to take place in the work of art, i.e., through poiesis. For Heidegger, poiesis is understood to be a mode of disclosure proper to finite beings, who live their temporality within an historical horizon. Art does not reveal eternal essences, rather, it realizes possibilities that were previously hidden.

Heidegger connects the ability for poiesis with human mortality and, at the same time, calls poiesis “birth” and, to illustrate it, resorts to natural images: the blooming of a flower, the emergence of a butterfly from a cocoon, the melting of snow. He understands poiesis as a threshold event, a moment of ecstasy when something departs from its previous state to become something else.

Poesis as a capacious philosophical category associated with the creative ability of humans and nature was subsequently considered by different thinkers. This function of poiesis allows a person “...to make transitions of the ontological order, from one type of existence to another...” [9].

H. Dreyfus and D. Kelly [12] encourage everyone to become a kind of “master”, improving their abilities for poiesis in order to find meaning in life and reconcile their bodies with any transcendence that exists in life itself: “The task of the master is not to create meaning, but to develop in oneself the ability to distinguish between those values and meanings that already exist in earthly, natural, bodily existence” [12, p. 209].

The concept of *ecopoiesis* appeared on the basis of a rethinking of poiesis and has an ecological basis. It denotes the ability of living organisms not only to continue and reproduce themselves, but also to create an environment (“homes” or “niches” for life), interacting with each other and forming a “web of life” [4]. Thus, it is emphasized that life is a systemic phenomenon, uniting many living organisms operating in a certain environment, participating in a process of co-creation.

According to the eco-human approach, the ability for *ecopoiesis* is associated with the ability of different organisms and ecosystems to cooperate with each other and cultivate life. The ability for *ecopoiesis* in humans is realized as an instinctive mechanism that underlies the construction of mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationships with different living beings, on the one hand, and as the ability for conscious cooperation with the natural world, on the other hand. In this case, it

involves the reflection of these relationships in culture, through the creation of a certain system of figurative representations of nature, the Moon, for example.

It is necessary to emphasize that the creation of a certain system of figurative representations of nature, of the Moon as one of the natural archetypes, takes place, according to Hillman [18], as the self-generative activity of the soul itself. Axiomatically, in archetypal psychology, the word “image” does not refer to an afterimage, the result of sensations and perceptions. Neither does “image” mean a mental construct that represents in symbolic form certain ideas and feelings. The image has no referent beyond itself, neither proprioceptive, external, nor semantic. Archetypal images comprise the “psychoid factor” of the human mind and as a functioning generative “organ.” [10]

## The moon as a subject. Subjectification of natural objects

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When considering the relationship between humans and the Moon from the eco-human perspective, it is difficult to do without the concept of subjectification of natural objects. Subjectification plays a crucial role in the process of developing human relationships to natural environments and objects, and enables an ethical perception of nature to be established. At the same time, the endowment of natural objects with subjectivity can be viewed from different perspectives. One of the positions, thoroughly described and investigated by Sergey Deryabo [2], is associated with the recognition of natural objects as a means of reflecting human subjectivity; the self of the individual. “The basis of the subjectification of natural objects is the human desire for ‘subjective expansion’ onto other beings. It is the manifestation of a person’s profound need to ‘appropriate the world.’” (p.4)

According to Deryabo, the process of subjectification of natural objects has the following basic functions: a) to provide a person with an experience of one’s own personal dynamics, b) to act as an intermediary in a person’s relationship with the world, and c) to act as a subject of joint activity and communication [2]. This type of subjectification described by Deryabo is based on the human tendency to project one’s subjective qualities

onto external objects. It is nothing more than the reflected subjectivity of human beings [2].

Russian eco-psychology [5, p.13] describes a type of interaction between humans and natural objects that differs from Deryabo's perspective on subjectification and is associated with the concept of subject-generating interaction. It is considered to be a process whereby the psyche takes on actual existence, passing from "being in possibility" to "being in reality" through the human interaction with nature. In this case, the psyche embraces both human and non-human qualities in order to produce a new aggregated quality:

*"...the psyche appears as the emerging quality (property) embracing the whole 'human-environmental' system, which (since it is systemic) is not reduced to the actual properties of either 'human' or 'environmental' as components of the specified system, but is determined by both of them. This means that the formation of psychic reality as a quality of this specified system occurs in the functional range, the limits of which are set by the relevant properties of its components, that is, an individual and the environment."* [6, p.14]

In consequence, this type of interaction between humans and natural objects and environments establishes a new subjectivity that is not reducible to the subjectivity of the individual and the qualities of natural objects that were present before the start of the process. A new quality is formed, which is not reducible to those qualities that were characteristic of a person and a natural object, such as the Moon in particular, before their interaction.

According to J. Hillman [10], various subjective entities that appear in the process of human interaction with natural objects are a vivid personalized expression and empirically the most convincing way of creating, experiencing and reflecting various human properties. When considering natural archetypes, in particular, the natural archetype of the Moon from the standpoint of the eco-human approach, it should be recognized that it is important to take into account the specific qualitative characteristics of natural archetypes, which are not reducible to the physical properties of objects, but constitute their subject-generative potential ("hidden subjectivity of natural environments and objects").

As Robert Macfarlane puts it:

*"I have long been fascinated by how people understand themselves using landscape, by the*

*topographies of the self we carry within us and by the maps we make with which to navigate these interior terrains... For some time now it has seemed to me that the two questions we should ask of any strong landscape are these: firstly, what do I know when I'm in this place that I can know nowhere else? And then, vainly, what does this place know of me that I cannot know of myself?"* [13, p.26–27]

## The Moon as a natural archetype and a factor in the generation of subjective qualities of nature and humans in different cultures

Based on the analysis of cultural information, the main functions and meanings of the Moon as a natural archetype are as follows:

- The moon acts as a factor in connecting humans with spontaneous, unconscious manifestations in themselves and in nature, closely related to intuition, that which escapes the control of reason and common sense.
- Interaction with the Moon as an archetype helps to reveal the characteristic properties associated with the feminine principle and its many archetypal incarnations, such as Beauty, Great Mother, Wise Woman, Witch, etc.
- The Moon serves as a factor in actualizing the experience of intimate relationships, erotic and sexual experience at different moments in the development of these relationships.
- Affects the perinatal experience associated with the moments of conception, pregnancy and feeding.
- Affects both positive experiences, such as joy, delight, awe, tenderness, compassion, etc., and negative ones, such as anxiety, fear, sadness, despair, etc.
- Often concerns the experience of death, sleep, suspended animation and rebirth.

In the history of world culture, the Moon has often been associated with the feminine principle, spontaneous, unconscious manifestations, intuition, and that which escapes the control of reason. People associated the masculine principle

and reason with the sun. This can partly be explained by the fact that during the day people are awake and engaged in various activities, while at night they rest. And this is typical not only for humans, but also for other life forms.

The Moon is often represented by female deities associated with the manifestation of intuition and instincts. Moreover, they were not only worshiped, but also feared, since those manifestations could be perceived as a threat to stability and rationality. The perception of the Moon and the night in many cases, in art and spiritual culture, is often associated with the experience of anxiety and sadness, which is mixed with the feeling of meeting something mysterious and incomprehensible, what not only frightens, but also attracts human beings.

Examples of female deities expressing the “lunar principle” and qualities associated with it are Isis, one of the significant goddesses of Ancient Egypt, embodying the ideal of femininity and motherhood. The worship of Isis was widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world.



Figure 1. Ancient Egyptian image of Isis.

Isis was the faithful wife of Osiris. Having learned about the adultery of Osiris with Neftia, Isis shook the universe with a cry of despair and tore the ribbons from the marriage bed. Seth decided to take revenge on his brother and killed him. Hearing about the murder of her husband, Isis cut her hair, put on mourning robes and went in search of Osiris, turning into a female kite — the bird Hat. Having found his body, Isis spread her wings over the mummy of Osiris, uttered magic words and became pregnant.

Ancient poets (Pindar, Aeschylus, Sappho) called her “the sparkling eye of the night” and imagined her as a beautiful woman in the sky, with a torch

in her hands, leading the stars when she appears in a silvery splendor at the time of the full moon.

The poeticized perception of the Moon as a mysterious feminine entity is clearly shown in Sappho’s poetic miniatures.

### The Moon

*The stars about the lovely moon  
Fade back and vanish very soon,  
When, round and full, her silver face  
Swims into sight, and lights all space*

(English translation by Edwin Arnold)

In this poetic miniature, Sappho conveys her condition through the image of the Moon.

*The Moon has left the sky,  
Lost is the Pleiads’ light;  
It is midnight,  
And time slips by,  
But on my couch alone I lie.*

(English translation by J. Addington Symonds)

Another lunar deity of the Ancient World was Hecate, who also acted as the goddess of the underworld, everything mysterious, magic and witchcraft. At first, in ancient Greek mythology, Hecate was not a negative character, but later, with the development of the cult of Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis and other goddesses, she increasingly began to be associated with the domains of Hades, embodying the horror of the night and death, appearing in the image of a pale woman with black hair, which goes out at night to hunt, accompanied by dogs. The perception of the Moon is thus filled with a variety of meanings and evokes a variety of experiences, from peace, love, admiration, to anxiety, sadness and fear.



Figure 2. Triple-formed representation of Hecate. Marble, Roman copy after an original of the Hellenistic period. Chiaramonti Museum, Vatican

The moon and the night world have inspired poets, artists, and musicians for centuries, who are able to listen to the sound of the night, see the richness of its colors and unravel its “secret messages,” comprehend its spirit and states.

In his poem “To the Moon” (1820), the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley experienced the state of the moon this way:

*Art thou pale for weariness  
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,  
Wandering companionless  
Among the stars that have a different birth, —  
And ever changing, like a joyless eye  
That finds no object worth its constancy?  
Thou chosen sister of the Spirit,  
That gazes on thee till in thee it pities ...*

Having published his first collection of poems at the age of 18, Alexander Blok included “The Full Moon Rose Over the Meadow” (1898). He describes nature as sleeping, resting, while insomnia forces the lyrical hero to leave his home and, experiencing fear caused by the unrecognizability of the familiar world, and his defenselessness before the mysterious night life, experience inspiration and see the world in a new light.

*The full moon rose over the meadow  
Unchanged marvelous circle,  
Light and silent.  
Pale, pale blossoming meadow,  
The darkness of the night for him crawling  
resting, sleeping.  
Terribly take to the road,  
incomprehensible anxiety  
Under the moon reigns.  
Though you know: early in the morning  
The sun will come out of the fog,  
field light up,  
And then you will pass the footpath,  
Where under every blade of grass  
Everyday life.*

Written by Beethoven in 1800–1801, the Moonlight Sonata was named so by music critic Ludwig Relsstab, 5 years after the death of the author. Relsstab compared this work to “moonlight on Lake Firvaldstät.” The sonata is dedicated to 18-year-old Giulietta Guicciardi, to whom 31-year-old Beethoven gave music lessons in 1801. The composer was in love with the young countess and wanted to marry her. However, from the first months of 1802, Juliet showed a clear preference for the composer Gelsenberg and, as a result, married him. Six months after writing the sonata,

Beethoven wrote the Heiligenstadt Testament in despair. Some Beethoven scholars believe that it was to Countess Guicciardi that the composer addressed a letter known as the letter “to the immortal beloved.” It was discovered after Beethoven’s death on March 26, 1827, in a hidden drawer in his wardrobe. Beethoven kept a miniature portrait of Juliet along with this letter and the Heiligenstadt Testament. The melancholy of unrequited love, the agony of hearing loss — all this was expressed by the composer in the Moonlight Sonata.

Another outstanding piece of music associated with the Moon is the piano piece “Moonlight” by Debussy. This is the third part of the Bergamasco Suite, which the composer wrote, as some believe, inspired by the poems of the symbolist Paul Verlaine. One of his most striking poems is called “Moonlight”. In fact, exactly the opposite happened. Inspired by the light and harmonious music of Debussy, Verlaine wrote three wonderful quatrains.

### Moonlight

*Your soul is like a landscape fantasy,  
Where masks and Bergamasks, in charming wise,  
Strum lutes and dance, just a bit sad to be  
Hidden beneath their fanciful disguise.*

*Singing in minor mode of life’s largesse  
And all-victorious love, they yet seem quite  
Reluctant to believe their happiness,  
And their song mingles with the pale moonlight,*

*The calm, pale moonlight, whose sad beauty,  
beaming,  
Sets the birds softly dreaming in the trees,  
And makes the marbled fountains, gushing,  
streaming—  
Slender jet-fountains — sob their ecstasies.*

(English translation by Norman Shapiro)

The moon has left a significant mark on the fine arts of different times and peoples. Very significant for its time is the image of the moon in the fresco “Assumption of the Virgin Mary” (or “Immaculate Conception”) by Ludovico Cardi, known as Sigoli (1610–1612; Rome, Santa Maggiore, Paolina Chapel). Sigoli was a great friend of Galileo Galilei, thanks to communication with whom the artist was able to create the first realistic image of the Moon in a work of art, which was at odds with the ideas of the Catholic Church, which believed that the Moon is a round, flat, smooth, clean body. Still, Sigoli’s work was not censored; church authorities preferred to remain cautious.



**Figure 3.** Fresco "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" (or "Immaculate Conception") Ludovico Cardi (1610–1612, Rome, Santa Maggiore, Paolina Chapel)

European painters often use mythological material as a source for creating images of the Moon. In this regard, the painting of the Italian painter of the 17th century, a representative of the Bolognese school, Guercino (real name Giovanni Francesco Barbieri) — "Endymion" is indicative. According to Greek mythology, Endymion was a young, handsome shepherd who fell madly in love with Selene, the moon goddess. Selene was so passionate about him that she begged Zeus to give him eternal youth and eternal sleep so that she could come to him forever.



**Figure 4.** Guercino, "Endymion" (1647; oil on canvas)

The English artist Edward Robert Hughes (1851–1914), considered a follower of the Pre-Raphaelites and aestheticism, created many paintings on literary and allegorical subjects, filling them with romantic images of the Moon, the night, conveying the amazing night world and special states experienced by humans and other creatures.



**Figure 5.** Edward Robert Hughes. "Tired Moon" Cardboard, watercolor (1900).

An allegory for the posthumous repose of fallen soldiers is the work of Viktor Vasnetsov "After the massacre of Igor Svyatoslavich with the Polovtsians" (1880). Vasnetsov's canvas depicts the imaginary result of a real battle that Prince Igor gave to the Polovtsians. A large moon rises on the fallen warriors, illuminating them with its light of sorrow and compassion.

The moon in Rene Magritte's painting "The Sixteenth of September" (1957) "settled" on a huge tree, perhaps a monumental ash or oak. Throughout his work, Magritte created effects of mystery, for example, by placing one object in front of another, causing the viewer to want to solve the riddle given by the artist.

In contrast to the relative permanence of the giant, strong tree, the presence of the moon in the picture is a symbol of changing phenomena, the natural order of things. The Moon truly expresses the cyclical changes in the natural world, and itself supports them.



**Figure 6.** Viktor Vasnetsov, "After the massacre of Igor Svyatoslavich with the Polovtsians." Oil on canvas (1880).

Magritte's painting can be seen as a memory of the deep relationships that connect a person with the forest, the sky, the Moon, and the watery shell of the Earth. All of them seem to "breathe", support the flow and life cycles of nature and humans, the ebb and flow of their vital activity.



**Figure 7.** Rene Magritte. "September sixteenth." Oil on canvas (1957).

In its ever-repeating monthly cycle of waxing and waning, the Moon goes through phases of birth, maturation, aging and "dying", almost disappearing and soon reappearing again, thus reflecting the process of sowing, cultivating and harvesting.

The Italian artist Osvaldo Lichini felt a strong connection with the Moon, which he called "Amalassunta" and saw it as the embodiment of "beautiful, eternal silver, personified in a few words, the friend of every little weary heart."



**Figure 8.** Osvaldo Licini, "Amalassunta on a blue background" (1951; oil on canvas, 25.5 x 34 cm; private collection)

"Private Moon" is an art project by Russian artist Leonid Tishkov. It is a series of photographs and light installations that tell the story of a man who fell in love with the moon and stayed with her for life. Leonid Tishkov calls "Private Moon" a visual poem. The author accompanies many photographs of the project with poetic texts written in blank verse.

*The sky is nearby  
Open the attic and you will see  
Where the wasp nest is,  
A blinding light is buzzing  
Lost moon.*

According to the plot of this art project, a man saw the living Moon falling from heaven in the attic of his house. He covered the Moon with a blanket, drank tea with her, treated her to apples, and then transported her across a dark river to a bank with lunar pines, descended into the lower world, and then returned back, illuminating the path with his personal Moon. Together with the Moon, man crossed the boundaries of worlds, fell into sleep, and became a mythological creature that can live in the real world as if in a fairy tale.

The romantic fairy-tale quality of the project is ambiguous: it allows you to see the world in a new light, to introduce notes of poetics, mystery, fabulousness, childhood, tenderness, care, reciprocity, contemplation into a person's perception, and highlights everything around. A meeting with the Moon revives in us the ability to perceive the world as a living universe, sharing with a person the feeling of loneliness, and pain, and the joy of meeting, and living together, and wanderings.



**Figure 9.** Leonid Tishkov. From the project “Private Moon”. Uvarovka, Russia (2003). Photographer: Boris Bendikov.

## Conclusion

The article examined various aspects of the influence of the Moon on humans. It is shown how, through creative activity in the interaction of a person with a given celestial body, new meanings and forms of experience are formed and their renewal in culture takes place. The moon acts not only as a physical object, but also as a subject, together with which people are included in various forms of subject-generating interaction with the natural world, realizing the wealth of their potentials in their unity with the world of nature. When considering the Moon as a natural phenomenon, special attention is paid to those types of activities when it is perceived through the prism of non-pragmatic, artistic and aesthetic experience. When considering this mode of perception of the Moon, the concepts of poiesis and eco-poiesis were used.

Through the examples of a large number of mythological images, as well as works of fine art, music and literature, it was shown how the Moon acts as one of the natural archetypes, interacting with which people reveal their essential properties in their unity with the “web of life”.

Interaction with the world of natural archetypes, such as the Moon archetype in particular, develops a sense of beauty, thanks to which people, in the process of interacting with the natural world and each other, attach importance to love and reverence for life. The sense of beauty has an ecological basis and is associated with the perception of the world of nature and various forms of life as possessing beauty, health and creative potential. Addressing the Moon as a natural and, at the same time, cultural object supports the unity of scientific and artistic ways of comprehending the world and human relations with nature.

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Section

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# Practices and technologies of the eco-human approach



## TO MOISTEN THE HEART: REFLECTIONS FROM COMMUNITY ART\*

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**Abstract.** Authors of this essay recognize themselves as living in a particularly difficult time for peaceful coexistence between countries, cultures and with nature. Presenting themselves as part of this system and complex fabric, they ask themselves about a way to live healthily in a hostile environment. They describe the experiences of faculty, students, and alumni at Estudios en Artes Expresivas (TAE) in Lima, Peru, in hosting creative activities. They welcomed the events present in their reality by making art in community, to imagine different ways of responding to it. They know that the arts and their vitality allow them to respond to what they have experienced and bring them closer to beauty. Arts are part of human nature. In them human beings find the possibility of transforming pain and responding aesthetically, in community.

**Keywords:** expressive arts, expressive arts therapy, Quechua, aesthetic response, community art, Agwa sukur

*I long for fresh air. The dawn, the sunset, the tides, the cycles of the moon, nature and its presence, the ancient stones, the green leaves, desert-forest-beach-mountain, foods, fruits and their aromas, taste; all of this reminds me that we inhabit this world shrouded in mystery, that there is something that transcends the horns, the blows, the everyday lies. I long to escape from this asphyxiation although I know that I too pollute the air that we breathe, because my exhalation — my response and actions as part of this society — cannot be simply a filter that helps purify the air we breathe.*

[9, p.261]

In the last four years, many events have impacted our lives in a special way. The pandemic left millions of people grieving and revealed the precariousness and business of health systems. The war, first in Ukraine and later in Gaza, demands the imposition of force in favor of particular interests and values. Climate change reached emergency scenarios worldwide with the highest temperatures recorded to date. The earthquakes in Turkey and Syria left thousands of dead and revealed premeditated failures in the construction of houses. Various far-right movements came to power in Latin America and in Europe, among other impacts.

Within this panorama, in Peru we live in a particular situation of enormous instability, with recurring disrespect for laws and rights, and with poor defense of the lives of the citizens. There have been six presidents in the span of five years. Mafias and misgovernment. During this time, waves of protests broke out across the country to express disapproval of the attempts to break the democratic system. We have been experiencing social despair for months. Marches and countermarches. Fifty people killed for no reason. Directly shot. Deaths that receive no regret or sorrow from any state institution.

We coexist in a system that imposes violent forms of relationship between human beings and the

world. It seems that human life—and all life in general—is no longer a right nor considered sacred. In our country, as well as in the world in general, a way of relationship has been established where justice or treating each other well does not predominate.

How does this violent context impact us? How does it become present in our bodies and psyches, minds and souls?

Sometimes our body shakes and speaks. Various symptoms and pains emerge: muscle tension and contractures, insomnia, dizziness, loss of focus, chronic fatigue, breathing difficulties, among others. The body resents it. Difficult emotional states arise: apathy, indifference, bad mood, pessimism, frustration, sadness, helplessness, fear, guilt, anger. Sometimes we pretend not to feel anything. We become as if we were deaf and dumb. We hide our feelings or deny them by acting as if everything is fine. We anesthetize ourselves to survive and continue walking. We bite our own hostility, that which we receive daily in the streets of our city, that which inhabits us and inhabits the world, that which sleeps with us every night.

Other times, we express what we feel: we breathe deeply, we talk, we write, we cry, we scream, we smash our emotions against someone or against ourselves. We react to what we experience. Excess appears, the possibility of abuse and damage: the transgression of the limits of coexistence. The aggressive tendency, an innate and autonomous instinctive drive in human beings, constitutes the greatest obstacle that culture stumbles on [3]. Violence takes up space, hits us and nests within us. We debate whether to hide what we feel or express it, sometimes violently. Sooner or later, all that darkness disturbs us and intoxicates or poisons our bonds. What to do with those emotions to get out of this violent circle and how to respond to this reality with a different language?

I breathe in the same air as does my country, and that inevitable transfusion causes me to become that from which I seek to distance myself. How

should I respond to my everyday surroundings if I wish to live using a different language, a language devoid of that harshness? Breathing in violence affects my perception, and so I see only that which is violent. Where does one find eyes for beauty when living amidst gunshots? [9, pp. 259–260]

We recognize that our environment shapes us because we are part of the system in which we live, we are within the cultural fabric that we build daily. And, at the same time, we also know that we can respond imaginatively and creatively to this difficult context.

But isolating and oppressive walls do not extinguish the light of human reason, much less if it has had centuries of exercise; nor do they extinguish, therefore, the sources of love from which art springs. Within the isolating and oppressive walls, the Quechua people, quite archaized and defending themselves with dissimulation, continued to conceive ideas, creating songs and myths. And we well know that the isolating walls of nations are never completely isolating. They threw me over that wall, for a time, when I was a child; They threw me into that abode where tenderness is more intense than hate and where, for that very reason, hate is not disturbing but a fire that drives us [1].

As Arguedas mentions, the arts come from a vital source that allows us to respond to what we have experienced and brings us closer to beauty. They are part of human nature. In them we can find a great strength that opens the possibility of transforming pain and responding aesthetically in a community, as the Quechua people have done for millennia, like many other ancestral cultures.

Within our field we give place to images that come from artistic practice. These creative actions are expressed by longing to recognize the enchantment of the world. Our work as expressive arts facilitators makes sense when we go in search of those images. Our challenge is to persist on the path of inviting ourselves to move the imagination individually and collectively.

The vitality of the imagination is frequently experienced within groups and communities that are given the freedom and support to create. The community of creation is an energizing force that acts upon the people within it. As the Romantic poets observed, the life of imagination is furthered by an environment where “flying sparks” pass amongst people and ignite new ideas. This interactive and participatory dynamic also occurs

within the individual imagination. The community of creation that we discover in the company of other people exists within ourselves. [8, p. 23]

Faced with this complex landscape, in March 2023, about to start a new academic year in our school of expressive arts, we saw the need to embrace this challenging context and we put it at the center. We decided to respond aesthetically, to imagine multiple ways to go through that moment, to foster new expressions to continue with life. The educational space allowed us to meet as a community and, thus, recognize the hostility in which we live and also discover something different, perhaps hope and peace, guided by the arts.

## Community art

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One of the first activities at the beginning of the academic year at TAE Peru is the Community Art. Generally, we leave the city and the urban environment, meeting in spaces where nature predominates. We make art in community with current year students, alumni who wish to participate, and the team of teachers. Together, we put community artistic creation at the center of the learning experience offered. The community art allows us to respond artistically to the natural environment, accepting different ways of doing so. In this experience, we learn and feel together, in connection with the images that arise.

This kind of community art has the objective of strengthening the resilience of the community to establish and retain well-being... One could also say, metaphorically, that community art is designed to strengthen the “immune system” of the community, so that members, or member clusters, can respond early to conflicts before they escalate. [5, p.213]

This time, as in some previous years, the social and political reality, with its overwhelming presence, was included. Not bringing these facts to the community of students was to ignore the reality in which we live, risking to leave it aside, disregarding it. Given the social circumstances mentioned above, we intended to remember the pain that what we experienced caused us. To name it. To look at it. To give it a place. To not avoid the sadness and frustration of living in the midst of so much violence. To recognize, in the midst of this, our privileged situation. To moisten our hardened heart tired of so much war. Giving flowers

to sorrow. Responding creatively to sustain ourselves as a community. To evoke a song. Singing and dancing in choir. Having a space to purify what contaminates the soul, giving ourselves time to flow between sounds.

As Ellen Levine reminds us:

“When human beings find themselves in “dire straits” situations, the experience of the capacity for making or shaping, for taking action and feeling effective, is lost. It is precisely the task of expressive arts to bring individuals, groups and communities back into the experience of *poiesis*, the capacity to take effective action in the world... By engaging in the art-making process and by shaping works that have a life of their own –songs, dances, paintings, poems, plays, stories–human beings are also taking part in the fundamental work of being human’ [6, pp. 37–38].



Upon arriving at the place, we created an altar. In the center of the space, on a hand-woven Andean blanket, we placed a white stone heart immersed in a small container of water. We moistened the heart of stone. We accompanied the center with three whistling vessels, that whistle and share their sound when the water inside of them slowly moves. Eight bowls of water allowed some rose petals to float. On the columns of the place, we hung several photographs of the recent protests and rallies in our country. Rose petals were offered at the foot of them. The work setting, surrounded by gardens and trees, was ready to receive us: ‘The communal artwork can touch or move the community members. All the senses are engaged, and therefore the art-work makes sense in its beauty’ [5, p. 217].

Then all the participants arrived and, after welcoming them and making a brief introduction, we began to invoke water by singing an indigenous

song, an ancient and traditional song from the northern Andes of our country. A song in Quechua — *Agwa sukur* / Succor water –, a language that none of us understood. A song that is sung at the baptism of girls and boys from that region of the Andes, a moment of gathering to share and celebrate life. We chose a traditional and ritual song of the life cycles. To be born again –among the ashes–. To receive a baptism. Music, singing and dancing to continue being. Community melodies and rhythms. We invoked the soul of water, that mother who wets us and cleanses us, so that she can succor us from so much pain.



At the beginning, we learned and sang a part of this song. This song talks about the importance of being present, of having come “just like that” – as we are–, without forgetting the time we have been. We sang without trying to understand each of its verses but simply being held by its essence, its form, its tones, its rhythm, recognizing its intention for the community.

From different angles of the place, we could all read the lyrics of the song *Agwa sukur* written in Quechua on cardboard. Since it was a language that we did not know, we decided to write a phonetic guide under each verse, to know how to pronounce each word. Little by little, as we sang, we discovered its sound. We sang together, pronouncing unknown words that twinned us. The song began to emerge as a weave. We were guided by the sound and the certainty of being a choir: we were not singing alone; all the voices were together. A large circle of beings holding the melody. Time stopped. The photographs of what happened, just two months before, in the protests in

**Agwa sukur**

Chaynulamiqa shamushaniqa,  
kananqa aligriqa kashunqari,  
agwa sukurrunchikta,  
chaynulami kashunqa,  
manamiqa tyimpu kashanchikta  
qunqashunchu,

chaynulami sigishunqa,  
chaynulami sigishunqa tantalamiqa  
tantalami sigishunqa,  
tudituqa tunun waqan,  
tyimpu kashanchiktaqari,  
manami qunqashunchuqa,  
wamraykunami tantala kaypi.

**Agüita de socorro**

Así nomás he venido,  
ahora hay que estar alegre,  
agua de socorro,  
así nomás seremos,  
no hay que olvidarnos del tiempo  
que hemos sido,

así nomás hay que seguir,  
así nomás seguiremos juntas,  
sigamos juntas,  
todos los tonos suenan  
del tiempo que hemos sido,  
no nos olvidemos,  
mis hijas están juntas aquí.

**Succor water**

Just like that I have come,  
Now let's be happy,  
succor water,  
that's just how we will be,  
we must not forget the time  
we have been,

just like that let's continue,  
just like that we will still be  
together,  
let's stay together,  
all tones ring  
of the time we have been,  
let's not forget,  
my children are together here.

our country, witnessed our singing. There, in the middle of nature, were these images, as responses of pain and vitality, showing the hostile environment we inhabit.



We moved forward. We retreated. While the choir sang and the constant rhythm of drums sustained the dance, we moved, leaving one spot to reach another. Between sounds and bare feet, we sang in Quechua. Between movements and displacements, we were seen by the environment and its images. The movements chanted in their own language. The intensity of what we experienced left us touched, in silence. When we finished, we lay down on the floor to breathe and rest.



Then, in a next step, we took a moment to walk, to recognize the images and to respond with postures of our bodies to the movements and actions that they showed us. Little by little, our bodies responded with movements of their own to the actions that these images presented. Afterwards, we joined the different body postures explored to create movement phrases. Each of us let the body and its movements guide our walk and gradually invite us to dance, giving rise to a choreography.

Then we formed four groups that would cross the space from four opposite directions. Each group, from a different corner, began the final choreography. Thus, with our own dance, we moved from one corner to another, mingling, coming closer and apart from other, each time.

Inhaling and exhaling what we experienced together, supported by the floor, accompanied by the serene sounds of the whistling vessels, was important. Afterwards we slowly rejoined, and we had individual time of free writing in the garden to share what we experienced in small groups. Finally, we made a large circle for each group to poetically name the resonances of the community experience.

According to Knill [5], in the improvisations of a community art, new connections are made, we enter a practice ‘...until the whole ensemble becomes one connected company’ (p. 214). Thus, in our community art we were a choir and an

ensemble of dancers who responded to images of pain, creating new images of connection and togetherness. We released our song of hope to the wind so that we could then find new words that allowed us to contain the experience of inhabiting our suffering country. Through art, we created a new way of intertwining and, at the same time, of being a community. In that sense, we didn't get lost, and we had a safe place to get to. We created together "food for the soul" because every creative experience is concrete and at the same time close to the soul in its emotional resonance.



Beauty emerged from our chants, from our encounters and crossings in dance. New views, resonances and contacts appeared. We did not change reality but we did respond to it aesthetically. We learned a new language, which implied a cognitive commitment and, at the same time, we danced together, which implied a commitment of our bodies in movement, and we inevitably resonated emotionally. All our senses were engaged.



## Songs of water: resonances in community

*Wherever a work of art is given and received in an authentic manner, a community springs into being.*

[7, p.53]

In a context like the current one, coming together to make art as a community is betting on the vitality brought to us by the creation and the authentic presence of all the people gathered together. It is a sensitive encounter where the imagination manifests itself artistically, summoning beauty as hope, bringing us closer to the uncertainty and mystery that life entails. Expressive arts teach us to trust the process. The world appears like this with another face because it has looked back at us. As Atkins and Snyder say [2], the world responds, it stops being an object, and we experience it in communion:

'...the idea of a skin-encapsulated individual self expands to become part of earth, air, fire, water and all of the other living beings of the world... The word "communion" suggests that our interrelationship with the world is both intimate and sacred.' (p.117)

To build community. To know we are accompanied. To learn together new languages that carry the voices of our ancient culture and our ancestors to create new containment weaves. To recognize pain and its various repercussions on our being. To not become numb and to not ignore our surroundings. To listen to our emotions, to name them and to share them so that they are expressed, and they can find a creative and transformative riverbed. To assume responsibility for responding aesthetically, cultivating the imagination and, above all, responding communally through creative action. To generate a collective resistance that invokes the arts and the forces of nature in community, as indigenous peoples did and do from their ancestral wisdom, to breathe better and to free our voices.

May our songs of wounded hearts and desire for beauty be heard, may we dance with creative force so that the rage that inhabits us does not poison us and instead preserves our vital energy. To moisten and to soften the hardness, the stone shell that forms in us as a way to protect ourselves, to isolate ourselves from such violence. To respond to the harshness of

the world without the impetus of omnipotent action  
or the reluctance of impotent inaction.

The images of our singing and our dance remain  
inscribed in all the people who participated. The  
song of Agwa sukur is now impregnated within  
us and we are impregnated by it. Every time that  
song arises in our minds, the entire group experi-  
ence returns to our hearts, moistening it.

where do you come from succor water?  
to bless my tired feet  
to breathe with us  
to ring our memories  
and give us joy

I open my arms  
I stretch my legs  
I move forward  
we move forward  
in sway  
we surrender before you

*madrecita agua*  
protect us from oblivion and indifference  
moisten our hearts  
with the petals of your heartbeat<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Aesthetic response of Odette Amaranta, teacher at TAE Perú and at EGS.



# MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE: SPECULATIVE FABULATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF THE OPUNTIAE CACTUS & THE COCHINEAL INSECT\*

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## ROSELINE de Thélin

*is an Interdisciplinary artist, expressive arts teacher, creative coach and art therapist. Roseline's artistic inquiry, as an artist, researcher, and teacher, revolves around perceptual shifts and evolution. Her creations are transdisciplinary, blending analog and digital mixed media with processes of deconstruction, juxtaposition and hybridisation. Through the use of collage, assemblage, poetic tableau, performance, video and installation, her work delves into layers of reality, memories, nostalgia, and visions of past and future.*

**Abstract.** "Memories of the Future" is an ecopoietic project by artist / expressive art teacher, who is aiming to raise awareness on the disappearance of the Prickly Pear cactus, in the Balearic Islands and mainland Spain due to a plague of Cochineal. Inspired by Donna Haraway's writings ("Staying with the trouble", in particular) the artist created surreal scenes as "speculative fabulations" from a mix of artificial intelligence, digital and analogue manipulation, with the aim of fostering new narratives and perspective shifts in the face of ecological issues.

**Keywords:** Opuntiae cactus, Cochineal insect, tentacular thinking, "cosmovisión", "speculative fabulations", surrealism

## Introduction

*Memories of the Future* is an ecopoietic project, part of the "SoS Cochichumbas" action, a collective of women artists based on the island of Ibiza (Spain) who decided to raise awareness through the arts about the disappearance of the Opuntiae cactus/Nopal, Prickly Pears, or Chumbera in the Balearic Islands and mainland Spain, due to a plague of Cochineal.

This collective undertaking was born from the realisation of our emotional and aesthetic connection to this beautiful cactus. For us, it had always been part of our landscape and our memories — it seemed indestructible and yet all of a sudden it was dying. We wanted to do something about it.

The project began with researching the history and context of the Opuntiae cactus, as well as its relationship with the Cochineal insect. Why is this seemingly indestructible cactus disappearing suddenly? What is the origin of the plague? What is

the history of this plant and its predator? We first discovered that the Opuntiae cactus was originally from Mexico, and imported 400 years ago to Spain and Europe, following the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish, because of its intimate relationship with the Cochineal insect which produces a precious and coveted carmine red pigment.



**Figure 1.** *Witness of Change* — 2024 Limited prints & Nfts. Courtesy of the artist

This research took me on a journey from Ibiza to Oaxaca, Mexico, the cradle of the Nopal/Cochineal golden match, and progressively shaped as a visual storytelling inspired by Donna Haraway's writings and vocabulary [1, in particular] to imagine possible or impossible "futurics" or "speculative fabulations," weaving ecology, history, artificial intelligence and expressive arts.

*Memories of the Future* explores the web of interconnectedness shaping our world through the lens of the symbiotic relationship between the Opuntiae cactus and the Cochineal insect. This inter-species relationship serves as a gateway or "contact zone" for "tentacular thinking" [1] spanning across the historical ties between Mexico and Spain, colonization and cultural hybridization, the intricate play between nature and culture, biodiversity and human/non-human interactions.



**Figure 2.** *Opuntia* — 2024 Limited prints & Nfts.  
Courtesy of the artist

## Tentacular thinking: the historical and ecological context of the project

To tell the story of the Opuntiae cactus and the cochineal insect, we must start by honouring the "cosmovisión" of indigenous cultures in Central America who perceived the cosmos as a harmonious and interconnected entity where plants, animals, insects, humans, and celestial bodies, coexisted in a delicate balance. This world view emphasized respect for all forms of life and the natural environment. Plants, animals, and insects held sacred significance and were revered for their symbolic importance and roles in myths,

rituals, and ceremonies. The indigenous "cosmovisión" is spiritual rather than exploitative and offers valuable insights into sustainable living, ecological stewardship, and holistic approaches to health and well-being.

Indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica possess extensive knowledge of plants, herbs and remedies derived from their observations and interactions with the environment. Both the Nopal cactus (*Opuntia*) and the Cochineal insect (*Dactylopius coccus*) have historically been significant and respected resources among Aztec, Mayan and local indigenous cultures since the second century BC. The Nopal cactus features on the Mexican flag and is depicted in many ways in traditional and folk art. Both its pads (nopalitos) and fruits (tunas) are great sources of food rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. It is a natural anti-inflammatory and is used in traditional medicine to treat wounds, digestive issues, and diabetes. The cactus also provides materials for construction; its fibres were used to make ropes and adobe. Today it is used to create a vegan leather.

Indigenous cultures in Central America have been mastering the art of breeding the Cochineal insect on Nopal's pads for centuries. The insect, particularly its female, produces carminic acid, used as a valuable natural red dye for textiles, wall paintings, pottery and ceremonial body painting as well as in natural medicine. Cochineal played a role in indigenous rituals and in artistic expressions. Its vivid blood-like red hue symbolized life, vitality, and sacredness.

Following the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, the carmine red Cochineal pigment became a highly valuable trade commodity and a source of immense wealth for the Spanish Empire. Red has always been a powerful symbolic colour, representing love and war, blood and sacrifice, beauty and anger, revolution and progressive forces. Cochineal dye became the popular red pigment used to colour clothing for royalty, the church, European nobility, and lavish interiors. It also became the preferred carmine red colour for European painting schools and a natural food colorant.

To exploit the cactus' potential for breeding the Cochineal insect and produce the coveted red carmine dye, European colonizers imported the Opuntiae cactus to Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. This is why today this cactus is present in all continents' temperate and hot climates. In many of these regions, the Opuntiae's myriad

other uses remain often unexploited or even unknown. Today in many countries the plant is labelled as invasive due to its remarkable resilience to heat and drought. The cactus reproduces itself not only through self-pollination and seeding but also through fragmentation; any pad falling on the ground can root and grow a new cactus. The Opuntiae cactus also has the ability to hybridize with many other cacti, creating hundreds of sun-species. Its rapid reproduction can potentially endanger more fragile eco-systems, as has been the case in Australia where the cactus, imported to host Cochineal insects for dye production, has spread over hectares and hectares of land.

However, the Carmine Cochineal insect (*Dactylopius coccus*) has never endangered the cactus before in our region; what was happening now in Spain? We then discovered that the origin of the plague was due to the introduction of a new strain of lethal Cochineal (the *Dactylopius opuntia*) by the Spanish preservation administration to eradicate the Opuntiae cactus from a nature reserve where it was endangering other native plants and eco systems.



**Figure 3.** *Cochineal* — 2024 Limited prints & Nfts.  
Courtesy of the artist

The propagation of this new breed of Cochineal, coupled with a staggering 50% decline in insect diversity in Spain, many of which are natural predators of the cochineal, is what actually contributed to the plague that is decimating the Opuntiae cactus not only in Spain but also in Morocco and could potentially spread to other European and African countries. This is a notable loss of an amazingly resourceful plant that has been part of the aesthetic of our Mediterranean landscapes for the last 400 years.

## Artistic exploration: Artificial Intelligence, surrealism, hybridization and shifts of perspective

What if the Opuntiae Cactus and the Cochineal insect were to play a central role in our future? This question started to inspire possible or impossible narratives for the future of these two species. These narratives became prompts that I fed into an Artificial Intelligence Image Generator (Mid-journey) to create series of “speculative fabulations” scenes.

“Speculative fabulations” are a type of imaginative storytelling that enables us to unfold new worlds through what could take place in the future or could have taken place in the past. “Speculative fabulations” enlarge our perception of history, fantasizing stories that re-shape possibilities, creating characters and myths, to shift our perspective in the face of global and local ecological crisis [1].

For this project, I collaborated with Artificial Intelligence Image Generators that produce hybrid images from written prompts. Algorithms search the internet for available images related to the “prompt” and combine them into seamless “collages” in an unpredictable surrealistic and aleatory fashion. At the heart of surrealism is the idea of pushing beyond the limits of the human conscious mind to explore the irrational and the subconscious, as well as freeing the imagination from pre-conceived ideas. AI art, in creating unexpected connections between previously unrelated images, is questioning the possibility of a new kind of human/machine collaborative imagination.

Some will argue that AI art reduces the artist to a typist and is “offering the fruits of creativity without the effort, the search and the self-doubt” [2]. This has not been my experience on this project, as working with AI demanded many trials and errors to finalize artworks. Others defend that AI-generated art offers a fresh perspective on surrealism. “By using algorithms, AI can create images and compositions that might never have occurred to human artists, but still need the artist’s creativity and imagination to be truly innovative.” [3] AI art is born of a new type of creative collaboration between humans and machines.

In *Memories of the Future*, the created artworks imagine a world in which the Opuntiae Cactus and the Cochineal insect are central to our past-future evolution. The generated images or

“speculative fabulations” scenes are produced from a hybrid blend of artificial intelligence, digital manipulation, and hands-on analogue craftsmanship. As arts-based research, and by engaging with AI, the project aims to experiment with processes of artistic hybridization, crossing between heterogeneous medium/techniques/modalities, and tests how they shift our perspectives while expanding creative and imaginative possibilities.

*Memories of the Future* wishes to sensitize the public to the aesthetic and emotional relationships we have with our landscapes, the fragile equilibrium of our biodiversity, and the complex network of historical, cultural and ecological connections we are weaving with the plants and insects that surround us. Through this project, we realize that our landscape is the result of 400 years of cultural and ecological hybridization, enlarging our perspective on the role that these processes play in our evolution.

Many questions remain open. What will be the impact of Artificial Intelligence on art and creativity? Between curiosity, hope, fear and ethical questioning, how will Artificial Intelligence impact our evolution? Will Artificial Intelligence help us address some of our global and local ecological issues? Will AI, a pure product of our imagination, be our saviour or our curse?

## Weaving digital and physical: The final artworks

All images displayed below are part of the “speculative fabulations” series ©roselinedethelin 2024. The article features only a few images from the series developed for this project, there is a total of 100+ images divided in 4 series.

The project comprises four physical artworks (60cm x 60cm), each featuring 25 miniature “speculative fabulations” scenes, woven in strips of printed and hand-painted canvas with vintage ribbons, in Rococo frames.

Each of these four pieces explore one of the following “futuristics” or “speculative fabulations” themes:

*Witness of Change* fabulates a world in which the *Opuntia* Cactus is the main plant species of our planet, flourishing and flowering on all continents and land types. In each image, the silhouette of the “payesa,” the traditional peasant woman from the island of Ibiza, a disappearing human species, an archetype of ancient knowledge close

to the land, becomes a witness of the ecological changes happening around her. She also used to be part of our landscape and I have embodied this character in a live performance (Nostalgia 2019). The silhouette was drawn from photos of this act *Hybrid World* fantasies imaginary global transportation and trade of *Opuntia* cacti across seas and continents, reshaping our planet’s landscapes with all types of hybrid species.



Figure 4. *Hybrid World* — 2024 Limited prints & Nfts. Courtesy of the artist

*Planet Nopal* invents a world in which the *Opuntia* cactus is central to life on earth, providing energy and food for humans, animals, cyborgs and humanoids, as well as medicinal products, cosmetics and fibre, to create all kind of objects.



Figure 5: *Planet Nopal* — 2024 Limited prints & Nfts. Courtesy of the artist

*Living Red* revisits and re-invents the myriad uses of the Cochineal red pigment, which is notably less toxic (though not vegan) than synthetic red pigments. It can be employed in food, medicinal products, cosmetics and fabric dyeing.



**Figure 6.** *Living Red* — 2024. Limited prints & Nfts.  
Courtesy of the artist



**Figure 7.** *Memories of the Future*. 4 woven canvases printed and painted with vintage ribbons, each 60x60cm. Courtesy of the artist



**Figure 8.** *Witness of Change*. Limited edition prints on Eco paper 27x27cm. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 9:

The project also includes:

A video with the full series of the miniature scenes: [https://youtu.be/UiqGEt-NV30?si=pFCnr\\_eja1cUfz4r](https://youtu.be/UiqGEt-NV30?si=pFCnr_eja1cUfz4r)

A physical world map collage (160cm x 120cm) that will be finalised in a participatory way during the exhibition. The map will gather visual information relevant to the Nopal/Cochineal's history world-wide. Participants will be invited to imagine their own “speculative fabulations” from the miniature scenes and images, and collage them on the map.

*Memories of the Future* is part of my doctoral research on “Hybridization & perceptual shifts in artistic creation.”

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# PRACTICING ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY WITH A FRANCISCAN-ARTISTIC SENSITIVITY<sup>[1]</sup>



## BR. WILLIAM Ng ofm

*is a Franciscan friar, with training in landscape architecture, town planning and theology. After gaining a Master's degree in Religion and the Arts from Yale Divinity School and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Expressive Arts Therapy from European Graduate School, he now provides spiritual direction and workshops, for both groups and individuals, exploring the interface between the artistic process and eco-spirituality with the inspiration of St Francis.*

**Abstract.** The essay examines the key points of Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. It pays particular attention to the influence of the spiritual heritage of St. Francis of Assisi on the position of the Catholic Church on environmental issues. The concept of ecological spirituality is revealed. The important role of the arts and aesthetic experience in the spiritual heritage of St. Francis is shown. The correlations between the phenomenology of the creative process, poiesis, considered from the standpoint of expressive arts and therapy and the structure of *Lectio Divina* (divine reading in Latin) are shown.

**Key words:** *Laudato Si'*, St. Francis of Assisi, expressive therapy, poiesis, ecopoiesis, ecological spirituality, ecological citizenship

## Preamble

In the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* in 1979, raised the issue of "the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialisation" (paragraph 8), showing how the world "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (quoting Romans 8:19).<sup>[ii]</sup> In the same year, he proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi as the patron saint for ecologists, "[f]or he singularly perceived all the works of the Founder, and, inspired by a certain divine spirit, he sang that most beautiful Canticle of the Creatures," through Brother Sun, ... Sister Moon and the heavens and the stars, he gives due praise, glory, honour and every blessing to the most high, almighty and good Lord."<sup>[iii]</sup> John Paul II is well remembered for coining the phrase "ecological conversion" in 2001.<sup>[iv]</sup>

When the Jesuit pope who has surprisingly taken on Francis as his name, Pope Francis wrote his first encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, with a strong Franciscan overtone.

The title itself is a direct quote (in an unusual vernacular form and not Latin) from St. Francis of Assisi's famous poetic prayer, "Canticle of the Creatures". Indeed, the entire document shows how insights and ideas of this beloved medieval saint can be applied in a response to the urgent "groans in travail" of the planet of today. This is the first time in history the Catholic Church discusses environmental protection in an official document with the highest rank of an "encyclical", a sign of the seriousness of the ecological problem, compelling the Church to respond.

As a matter of fact, since the 1960s, when the issue of environmental protection gained much attention, many Westerners, outside of Christianity and even outside of mainstream religions, have begun to explore the relationship between faith and the environment from the point of view of aboriginal cultures, non-traditional religions, and nature worship, etc. Therefore, Pope Francis' promotion of ecological spirituality is of great significance. This paper first introduces how Franciscan thought is presented in *Laudato Si'*, and then

discusses Chapter 6 of the encyclical, Ecological Spirituality. Finally, it will discuss how St. Francis of Assisi's example can be a basis for an artistic eco-spiritual practice.

## The Franciscan elements in *Laudato Si'*

The influence of St. Francis on Pope Francis can be said to be considerable. The entire encyclical mentions St. Francis as many as 13 times, including three paragraphs, numbers 10–12, in the introduction before the main text, which directly discuss the connection between the Franciscan spirituality and ecology. Pope Francis has adopted the view that all creatures as brothers and sisters, a theme explicated by St Francis of Assisi in his *Canticle of the Creatures*. The Pope said:

“Laudato si’, mi’ Signore” — “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs” (LS 1)<sup>[v]</sup>

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. (LS 2)

Paragraphs 10–12 lay the theological foundation for the rest of the encyclical:

I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. (LS 10)

Indeed, “Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human.” (LS 11) And that core is love: “Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise.” (LS 11) It is love that makes Francis one with all creation. “He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them ‘to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason.’” (LS 11, quoting Thomas Celano: *Life of St Francis I*, 29: 81).

This love from God led to an affective, if not a spiritual, connection with all things: The Pope said that “[The saint’s] response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.” (LS 11)

From the inspiration of St Francis for the unity and interconnectedness of all things, the Pope concludes as follows:

Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. [...] The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. (LS 11)

In the chapters that follow, the ideas of St Francis are mentioned again and again, showing how important the *poverello* — the little poor man, as he is affectionately known — has been to the Pope. For the scope of this paper, It would be sufficient to mention the following quotations.

Through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the



abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature. (LS 66)

[I]n the canticle in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: “Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love”. Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society. (LS 91)

In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realise that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change. (LS 218)

It is important to point out that this 2015 encyclical has made an epoch-making move to elevate the concept “stewardship over God’s gift of the environment” from the Church’s previous teaching on environmental protection to the idea of the common co-creaturehood of all things. Indeed, St Francis’s vision of all things being created by the same Creator allows him to see the divine in all things. And it is through an ecological conversion that we too can adopt this vision of a cosmic fraternity. The important keyword in this encyclical is “fraternity”. It is mentioned nine times in Pope Francis’ encyclical in various forms. It is not only rich in the Franciscan spirit, but also the basis of care for the created world. One of these quotes is significant.<sup>[vi]</sup>

The Pope emphasises a change in lifestyle, rather than staying merely at a theoretical level. “Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle.” (LS 211) So we see all these faith-based insights of environmental protection are not just concepts because they point towards to a change in daily life which can be sustained by a spiritual practice.

## Ecological spirituality

Chapter 6 of *Laudato Si’* discusses ecological spirituality in detail. The result of spirituality is to realise “an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared

with everyone”. (LS 202). Indeed, it is human beings who are most in need of change — a change in beliefs and attitudes would motivate new ways of life. Sound spirituality should be transformative, rather than providing superficial comfort or satisfaction of the ego. In contrast, spirituality would be the basis to allow one to “overcome individualism”, recognising the true worth of the rest of creation, being attentive to the good of others, and exercising self-restraint in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of the environment (LS 208). Environmental education on the covenant between humanity and the environment would bring about “ecological citizenship” and this must be coupled with a conversion of heart both on the personal and the corporate levels (LS 209–221).

From the point of view of poiesis, this encyclical has a subtle theme of aesthetics. An ecological lifestyle can be filled with joy and peace: those who live with sobriety can “live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.” (LS 223) The Pope sees the same kind of spiritual fulfilment in both the arts and ecological living.

Further, Pope Francis also cites John Paul II’s proposal to contemplate God’s creation through the lens of beauty, as there is a strong bond “between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment” (LS 215). The Pope goes on quoting Ali al-Khawas, a prominent 9th-century Sufi poet: “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” (LS 233) Such sentiment is echoed in the words of St. Bonaventure, a great Franciscan theologian, “contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves” (quoted in LS 233).

Both the Roman and Byzantine traditions of Christianity place importance in sacraments where “nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life” (LS 235).

Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane.

Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. The hand that blesses is an instrument of God's love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ, who came to accompany us on the journey of life. Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life. Beauty ... is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured... (LS 235)

In the last two paragraphs of the encyclical, Pope Francis portrays the end of the world as a time when one can finally see the infinite beauty of God directly face to face, and be able to recognise with admiration and joy the mystery of the universe, with which we will share an infinite abundance. (LS 243) We are admonished about what have to do before we arrive to that point. "In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast." (LS 244) To end this paragraph on ecological spirituality, the Pope invites to "sing as we go" (in Latin: *Ambulemus cantantes!*) I personally find this is a call for a direct engagement with music and dancing — if not all the arts: Singing (*cantantes*) while walking or moving forward (*ambulemus*).

## St. Francis' personal artistic experience of ecological spirituality

As mentioned above, St. Francis is often mentioned in the Pope's encyclical, and this section will analyse how relevant his actual experience for our search for a practice of eco-spirituality. Thomas Celano, one of the early biographers, describes succinctly the saint's interaction with the creation:

This happy traveller, hurrying to leave the world as the exile of pilgrimage, was helped, and not just a little, by what is in the world. ... Toward God, however, he used it as the clearest mirror of goodness. In art he praises the Artist; whatever he discovers in creatures he guides to the Creator. He rejoices in all the works of the Lord's hands, and through their delightful display he gazes on their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he

discerns Beauty Itself; all good things cry out to him: "The One who made us is the Best." Following the footprints imprinted on creatures, he follows his Beloved everywhere; out of them all he makes for himself a ladder by which he might reach the Throne. He embraces all things with an intensity of unheard devotion, speaking to them about the Lord and exhorting them to praise Him.<sup>[vii]</sup>

I would like to think of the above as the fruit of an eco-spirituality. However, we cannot hope to find from the writing of St Francis any concrete teaching on practising eco-spirituality as a method like how St Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556) has compiled a set of meditations, prayers and contemplative practices, known as the Spiritual Exercises. So, in order to find inspirations in the experience of St Francis to postulate a method of "ecological spirituality", we have to find out relevant elements from his words and deeds.

From the above discussion on *Laudato Si'*, one can safely conclude the Canticle of the Creatures is a testimony of St Francis's own spiritual journey. I would like to recapitulate this trajectory using the fourfold framework of "Lectio Divina" and the architecture of the phenomenological approach to Expressive Arts Therapy. "Lectio Divina" (divine reading in Latin) includes the steps of reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*), and contemplation (*contemplatio*), in which one attentively and prayerfully reads the word of God, not as an intellectual but a spiritual pursuit.

The reason for juxtaposing St Francis' story with a creative therapy framework is two-fold. First, religious activities rely on rational thinking such as preaching and writing, whereas the process of any art form involves a combined use of the senses, feelings and thoughts plus a sense of beauty. Second, the concepts of expressive arts therapy are employed to explain St Francis' spiritual practice because his practice is both art-based and therapeutic, as we shall see.

One of the theoretical and practical frameworks for expressive arts therapy, advocated by Paolo Knill in Switzerland, is intermodal decentring, based on phenomenology.<sup>[viii]</sup> It emphasises several key elements.

1. The process is low-skilled, enough to allow the participant to enjoy the pleasure of creative artmaking in a short period of time.

2. It has to be highly sensitive, in a way that the participant has a heightened sensitivity to the one or more of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), enough to appreciate the process with an aesthetic sense and to shape materials at hand.
- 3: Poiesis — creative artmaking in any materials — is regarded a medium of healing because psychological damage often causes one to lose one's creativity.
4. Beauty itself becomes an agent of healing.

Let us now consider the mental and physical state of St Francis before he starts writing the Canticle. From one of the biographies, we know how exhausted he has been.

Likewise, two years before his death, while he was already very sick, especially from the eye disease, he was staying at San Damiano in a little cell made of mats. The general minister, seeing and considering how tormented he was with the eye disease, ordered him to let himself be treated and helped. ... Blessed Francis lay there for more than fifty days, and was unable to bear the light of the sun during the day or the light of a fire at night. He stayed in the dark in the house, inside that little cell. In addition, day and night he had great pains in his eyes so that at night he could scarcely rest or sleep. This was very harmful and was a serious aggravation for his eye disease and his other illnesses. Sometimes he did want to rest and sleep, but there were many mice in the house and in the little cell made of mats where he was lying, in one part of the house. They were running around him, and even over him, and would not let him sleep. They even disturbed him greatly at the time of prayer. ... One night as blessed Francis was reflecting on all the troubles he was enduring, he was moved by piety for himself. "Lord," he said to himself, "make haste to help me in my illnesses, so that I may be able to bear them patiently." And suddenly he was told in spirit: "Tell me, brother, what if, in exchange for your illnesses and troubles, someone was to give you a treasure? ... Wouldn't you greatly rejoice?" "Lord," blessed Francis answered, "this treasure would indeed be great, worth seeking, very precious, greatly lovable, and desirable." "Then, brother," he was told, "be glad and rejoice in your illnesses and troubles, because as of now, you are

as secure as if you were already in my kingdom." (*The Assisi Compilation* 83)

From the above, it seems that Francis was in a suffering situation in need for healing, and that the dialogue with God could be said to be a religious experience, as if a person of faith were rationalizing the meaning of suffering in religion. According to the biographies, he was transformed the next day, and wrote this Canticle of the Creatures.<sup>[ix]</sup> How did that transformation of accepting suffering happen? The text of the Canticle may shed some light.

First of all, Francis uses a variety of adjectives to describe the elements, showing a result of observation of nature — mostly visual and descriptive, comparable to the sensitisation phase in the expressive arts therapy architecture:

- The Sun is described as “radiant with great splendour”.
- The Moon and the stars are said to be “clear”.
- Wind is observed in “the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather”
- Water is “useful”
- Fire is described to “light the night” being “robust and strong”
- The Earth is observed as one “produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

To come up with such observation can be said to have gone through a stage of *lectio* — reading, like in the first steps of the *Lectio Divina*. Pope Francis has also pointed out the readability of nature: “[...] Saint Francis [...] invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.” (LS 12)

In the second step in the *Lectio Divina*, viz. *meditatio* (meditation), the intellect generally imagines, reasons, etc., about what is being read. The artmaking process of expressive arts therapy invites the participant to work with the activated senses, be it sounds, words, lines, colours and this shaping process and to shape materials in an intermodal fashion. From the text of the Canticle, we can interpolate as such: stemming from a level of visual experience with nature, the medieval saint now writes with multiple focuses: functional, allegorical, and poetic, and this is very much akin to a kind of intermodality.<sup>[xi]</sup>

- The sun... give(s) us light and ... is *beautiful*.
- The moon and the stars... are *precious* and *beautiful*.
- Wind...give(s) sustenance to creatures.
- Water... is very **humble**, *precious*, and *chaste*,
- Fire... is *beautiful* and **playful**.
- The earth ...sustains and governs us.

In the architecture of intermodal Expressive Arts Therapy, crystallisation of experience comes next. I would point out that St Francis employs a language of fraternity in his understanding of the elements of nature because he has experienced brotherhood and sisterhood, discovering a theological connection among creatures and the Creator, now expressed in an I-Thou<sup>[xi]</sup> way with the Creator while also placing emphasis on the role of “us”.

- Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, through whom You give us light and he ... bears a likeness of You.
- Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear...
- Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind... through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
- Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water...
- Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night...
- Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth...

No wonder the Pope calls this Canticle a “magnificent expression” of a sentiment of seeing “God reflected in all that exists” and the “hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them”. (LS 87)

The third step of the *Lectio Divina* is *oratio* (prayer), which can be understood as a form of dialogue in which the inner thoughts of the heart are made known to God in the form of confessions, requests, praises or thanksgivings. No wonder St Francis starts his canticle by acclaiming, “Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honour, and

all blessing,” and then bursting out the phrase *Laudato Si*’ (Praised be you) for each stanza. In the process of Expressive Arts Therapy, the participant has to harvest the resources available in the poiesis process. St Francis, according to the biography:

said to his companions: ...“I must rejoice greatly in my illnesses and troubles and be consoled in the Lord, giving thanks always to God ... for such a great grace and blessing. ...Therefore, for His praise, for our consolation and for the edification of our neighbour, I want to write a new Praise of the Lord for his creatures, which we use every day, and without which we cannot live. Through them the human race greatly offends the Creator, and every day we are ungrateful for such great graces, because we do not give, as we should, our Creator and the Giver of all good.” (*The Assisi Compilation* 83)

The fourth step of *Lectio Divina* is *contemplatio* (contemplation). We do not know exactly how Francis practises contemplation after writing this Canticle, but we can see from a line in one of his *Admonitions* that he had a certain understanding of contemplation: Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness. (27:4) Some scholars point out that “rest”, *quies* in Latin, is the only time St Francis uses this word in all of his writings, borrowing from an earlier monastic understanding.<sup>[xii]</sup> In the expressive arts framework, perhaps we can imagine this *quies* is the closing of the poiesis process when the heightened aesthetic sense comes to a rest, letting go of the artmaking process. For St Francis, this *quies* is the fruit of healing, coming to terms with his own creaturely condition, an understanding of being part of creation. Pope Francis speaks of “the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of [the] rupture [between human beings and nature]”. (LS 66)

The process of expressive arts is therapeutic, having transformed one to face reality with renewed resources. In the same way, some may add *actio* (action) as what happens after *Lectio Divina*. Indeed, the transformation of the person, effected by a spiritual practice is observed in the encyclical, “[St] Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wildflowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be

solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” (LS 12)

Catholic Church in trying to make a response to the ecological issue has drawn on the inspiration of St Francis of Assisi. Eight hundred years ago, St. Francis of Assisi practiced eco-spirituality with an artistic sense. Perhaps, the world can benefit from an artistic practice of eco-spirituality that can help us on the path of ecological conversion to ecological citizenship.

## Conclusion

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The pandemic of the past few years has shown itself to be a global tragedy. Do we need another ecological disaster to make the world repent? The

## Notes:

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- [i] Adapted from the article published in the *2021 Symposium of Six Religious Leaders: Reflecting on the Relationship and Balance between Heaven, Earth and Humanity in the Epidemic from Different Religious Beliefs*, Hongkong.
- [ii] [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html)
- [iii] Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Inter Sanctos*, November 29, 1979.
- [iv] Numerous articles have been written on this topic. One excellent summary is Christopher Rice. “Pope John Paul II and care for God’s creation” 2022. <https://laudatosimovement.org/news/pope-john-paul-ii-caring-creation>
- [v] LS is the official abbreviation for encyclical *Laudato Si’*, followed by its paragraph number. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html#\\_ftnref172](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#_ftnref172)
- [vi] From the definitive Latin text, these nine occurrences of words with the root “fraternitas” can be found in paragraphs 11, 70, 82, 92, 201, 221, 223 and 228. It is not easy to spot this in translations.
- [vii] Thomas of Celano. “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul” 165 in Armstrong, Regis, eds. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. The Founder*. [https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999-v2/francis\\_of\\_assisi\\_early\\_documents\\_the\\_founder/1999-00-00?pageNo=353](https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999-v2/francis_of_assisi_early_documents_the_founder/1999-00-00?pageNo=353)
- [viii] As a graduate of the European Graduate School, I am heavily inclined to the method of Intermodal Decentring. Many monographs are on this subject, for example, *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004.
- [ix] [https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999/francis\\_of\\_assisi\\_early\\_documents\\_-\\_the\\_saint/1999-00-00?pageNo=113](https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999/francis_of_assisi_early_documents_-_the_saint/1999-00-00?pageNo=113)
- [x] Functional words are underlined. Poetic words are italicised. Words used in an allegorical way are in bold.
- [xi] “You” and “Your” appear 16 times in English 16 times among the six paragraphs.
- [xii] Footnote b in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: The Saint*. [https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999/francis\\_of\\_assisi\\_early\\_documents\\_-\\_the\\_saint/1999-00-00?pageNo=137](https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/document/bx4700-f6f722-1999/francis_of_assisi_early_documents_-_the_saint/1999-00-00?pageNo=137)

## Reference for citations

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Section

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# Poetic Anthology of Eco-Human Experience: Poems About Moon



## POETIC ANTHOLOGY OF ECO-HUMAN EXPERIENCE. POEMS ABOUT THE MOON

The new section of our journal, "Poetic Anthology of Eco-Human Experience", presents poetry from different ages, dedicated to various facets of our human relationship with the moon as a natural object. Poetic works allow us to comprehend the eco-human, eco-poietic nuances of our ability, together with this natural phenomenon, to generate new facets of subjectivity, to discover new forms of experience and meanings revealed on the threshold of human and more-than-human reality.

*Du Fu (712-770 AD) is one of the greatest poets of China and an outstanding classical luminary of the Tang Dynasty. He left a huge poetic legacy, about 1,400 poems, from quatrains to poems, varied in style and content. The most important source of inspiration in Du Fu's poetic work is nature. The close connection of his imaginative thinking, like many other representatives of classical Chinese poetry, with nature and the constantly changing phenomena of the living environment is obvious. 'Communication' with nature in his poetry is one of the main conditions for mental health and human's knowledge of themselves.*

### Full Moon

Above the tower — a lone, twice-sized moon.  
On the cold river passing night-filled homes,  
It scatters restless gold across the waves.  
On mats, it shines richer than silken gauze.

Empty peaks, silence: among sparse stars,  
Not yet flawed, it drifts. Pine and cinnamon  
Spreading in my old garden . . . All light,  
All ten thousand miles at once in its light!

*Konstantin Balmont (1867-1942), Russian symbolist poet, translator and essayist, one of the most prominent representatives of Russian poetry of the Silver Age. For Balmont, the Moon was an extremely attractive phenomenon, with which his entire system of images was closely connected. The moon took him into a special space of dreams, helping him to distance himself from everyday reality. Finding himself for some time the leader of the "new poetry," Balmont formulated its principles: the connection of symbolist poetry with the region of the "beyond," its penetration into the "mystery of the world."*

### Moonlight

When shines the moon amidst the dark of night  
With sickle's scintillation, bright and tender,  
It's then my spirit starts to take her flight,  
In thrall to all that's filled with distant splendour.



And in my dreams, I race towards the chases  
Of forest glades and snow-white mountain peaks;  
With pining soul I guard serene world's places,  
And sweetly weep and breathe by moon's mystique.  
I drink in all this pallid incandescence,  
And, elf-like, swing amidst the gridded rays,  
And bend my ear to bliss's silent accents.  
My people's passions fade then in the distance,  
And alien are all earthly struggling days,  
I am a cloud, a breath of wind's quintessence.

*Mina Loy (1882-1966) was a poet and artist, futurist, dadaist, surrealist, feminist, conceptualist, modernist and postmodernist. Her "Lunar Baedeker" poem, first published in 1923, stands out as a significant piece in the modernist poetry landscape, reflecting the unique style and bold themes that characterize Loy's works. In this poem she sets the stage with a captivating mix of celestial imagery and abstract concepts. The poem acts as a guide to a deep inner exploration of psychic reality, paving the way not only through physical space, but also through various spheres of intuition, visionary mind and consciousness.*

#### **Lunar Baedeker**

A silver Lucifer serves  
cocaine in cornucopia  
To some somnambulists  
of adolescent thighs  
draped  
in satirical draperies  
Peris in livery  
Prepare  
Lethe  
for posthumous parvenues  
Delirious Avenues  
lit  
with the chandelier souls  
of infusoria  
from Pharoah's tombstones  
lead  
to mercurial doomsdays  
Odious oasis  
in furrowed phosphorous

the eye-white sky-light  
white-light district  
of lunar lusts  
Stellectric signs  
“Wing shows on Starway”  
“Zodiac carrousel”  
Cyclones  
of ecstatic dust  
and ashes whirl  
crusaders  
from hallucinatory citadels  
of shattered glass  
into evacuate craters  
A flock of dreams  
browse on Necropolis  
From the shores  
of oval oceans  
in the oxidized Orient  
Onyx-eyed Odalisques  
and ornithologists  
observe  
the flight  
of Eros obsolete  
And “Immortality”  
mildews ...  
in the museums of the moon  
“Nocturnal cyclops”  
“Crystal concubine”  
Pocked with personification  
the fossil virgin of the skies  
waxes and wanes

**Edward Estlin Cummings** (1894-1962) was an American writer, artist, poet and playwright. In his experimental poetry, Cummings sought to free poetic language from romantic clichés and other conventions; experimented with the form of poetry: in his works, lowercase and capital letters, spaces, punctuation marks, and auxiliary parts of speech often do not obey the rules of grammar and punctuation, appearing in unexpected places in the text, giving it a kind of visual expressiveness. His simple and expressive language, sense of humor and exploitation of themes such as sex and war earned him enormous popularity, especially among young people. It is not just his vices and exaggerations, the defects of his qualities, that make a writer popular.

### Amores (III)

there is a  
moon sole  
in the blue  
night  
amorous of waters  
tremulous,  
blinded with silence the  
undulous heaven yearns where  
in tense starlessness  
anoint with ardor  
the yellow lover  
stands in the dumb dark  
svelte  
and  
urgent  
(again  
love i slowly  
gather  
of thy languorous mouth the  
thrilling  
flower)

**Robert Frost** (1874 – 1963), is one of the most celebrated figures in American poetry, the author of numerous poetry collections on universal themes infused with psychological complexity and layers of ambiguity and irony. His poetry, characterized by its accessible language and deceptively simple style, explores themes of nature, rural life, and the human condition. Frost's writing is rooted in the pastoral tradition, drawing inspiration from the landscapes and people of New England. However, he transcends mere regionalism by imbuing his work with universal themes of loss, choice, and the search for meaning. While seemingly straightforward, his poems often contain layers of meaning that invite multiple interpretations. This depth, combined with his masterful use of imagery and symbolism, contributes to his lasting appeal.

### Moon Compasses

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause  
Between two downpours to see what there was  
And a masked moon had spread down compass rays  
To a cone mountain in the midnight haze  
As if the final estimate were hers,  
As if the final estimate were hers,  
And as it measured in her calipers,  
The mountain stood exalted in its place.  
So love will take between the hands a face...

**David Bowie** (1947-2016), was an English singer, songwriter, musician, and actor. He is regarded as one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. The song, "Moonage Daydream," with his music and lyrics, originally recorded as a single in 1971, was later re-recorded with his new band "The Spiders from Mars," especially for the upcoming album "The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars." As the years have passed, "Moonage Daydream" has achieved its status as one of the greatest compositions in Bowie's discography. The imagery that space alien Ziggy Stardust uses in this song reinforces the "erotic fantasy" of the chorus, associated with the tradition of "muse poetry" which was associated with "ancient cults that worshiped the moon as the goddess of magic, the subconscious, poetic inspiration for accessing imagination without using the intellect."

### Moonage Daydream

I'm an alligator  
I'm a mama-papa comin' for you  
I'm the space invader  
I'll be a rock 'n' rollin' bitch for you  
Keep your mouth shut  
you're squawking like a pink monkey bird  
And I'm bustin' up my brains for the words  
Keep your 'lectric eye on me, babe  
Put your ray gun to my head  
Press your space face close to mine, love  
Freak out in a moonage daydream, oh yeah!  
Don't fake it baby, lay the real thing on me  
The church of man, love  
Is such a holy place to be  
Make me baby, make me know you really care  
Make me jump into the air  
Keep your 'lectric eye on me, babe  
Put your ray gun to my head  
Press your space face close to mine, love  
Freak out in a moonage daydream, oh yeah!  
Keep your 'lectric eye on me, babe  
Put your ray gun to my head  
Press your space face close to mine, love  
Freak out in a moonage daydream, oh yeah!  
Keep your 'lectric eye on me, babe  
Put your ray gun to my head  
Press your space face close to mine, love  
Freak out in a moonage daydream, oh yeah!  
Freak out, far out, in out



## Section

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# In resonance with the earth

We are pleased to introduce a new section of our journal, "In Resonance with the Earth." We see poiesis as providing the basis for human beings' creative responses to the world of nature. The arts in particular offer forms that crystallize these responses in ways that touch and move us. "In Resonance with the Earth" contains poetry, artworks, photography and essays relevant to this theme. In this issue of the journal, this section includes an essay by Vadim Ryabikov and a poem by Alexander Kopytin (recitation by Alexandra Kirillova).



# ONE DAY IN A FLOCK WITH WOLVES. LESSONS OF WILDLIFE



## VADIM Ryabikov

*psychologist, anthropologist, musician, leader of the Splash of Eternity expedition, author and leader of One Day in a Flock of Wolves, the retreat project; associated partner of the Wolf Project and Flow Project companies (France), former head of the cultural and natural heritage sector of the White Sea and the Solovetsky archipelago of the Russian Research Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage named after. D.S. Likhachev (Russian Federation)*

*In this essay I describe a meditative retreat in contact with a flock of wolves kept in an enclosure. The retreat was conducted by me several times a year in the Leningrad region for 12 years. The principles on which the meditation practice was built are explained, and a description of the experiences of the retreat participants is given.*

## Bruce

During the 12 years of his life, small groups of people sometimes appeared on the territory of the enclosure. 7–10 people, no more. This did not happen often, mainly in autumn and early winter. Their appearance caused Bruce a natural desire to go further into the forest and hide. Instinct dictated that bipeds were the most dangerous creatures on earth and that you should stay away from them. Bruce wisely led the entire flock as far away as the enclosure would allow, but people behaved very peacefully. As if showing respect, they sat on an island of land in the middle of the swamp not far from the enclosure, between old spruce trees, and froze in motionless poses. They sat with their eyes closed, their legs folded, their backs straight, and intently listening to something. After some time, a special silence arose around them, which seemed to invite, or at least allow, to approach.

Bruce allowed himself to close the distance. It was interesting. Some of the guests smelled like dogs. It's interesting how these once wild dogs live together with bipeds. What is it like to be domesticated? Some smelled like cats, and sometimes, some smelled like unknown birds. Some smelled

of sex and the bodies of others, probably people close to them. Some smelled like children, and some were just expecting a baby. Interestingly, bipeds most often carried one cub at a time. And someone had their period, which means the baby didn't happen this time. And some people smelled only of themselves. And this caused a painful feeling of loneliness and melancholy. Someone smelled of anxiety and fuss. Someone smelled of good strength and great fatigue. Some smelled of blossoming, some of withering, and some of mortal disease. It also happened that someone smelled of deceit and meanness.

It was a whole universe of worlds-smells unfamiliar to Bruce, each of which evoked deep feelings. There was some kind of fantastic, bewitching novelty related to bipeds, which seemed very dangerous to Bruce, and some kind of pain, which was a consequence of the tragic discrepancy between bipeds and the basic tone of life. It was as if they had lost their responsiveness to the Call, which seemed to be perceived by all living beings in this world, except, perhaps, domesticated ones. Birds, beetles, frogs, squirrels, hedgehogs, deer, fish snails, and snakes — everyone felt this Call, but bipeds and domesticated ones did not. And this deafness gave the impression of deep misfortune.



It was difficult to shake off the anxiety that this situation caused. Bruce wanted to retreat into the thicket again, so that the trees, birds, grass, sky, wind, earth, moisture, the whole symphony of life, would again awaken in the soul a sacred awe, which was a sign of readiness to hear this Call. But Bruce still lingered, feeling the need to either understand or change something. He understood that no one and nothing was holding him back, and he could always go back into the thicket of the forest, and therefore he allowed himself to linger. And it was his choice.



Photo 1. Bruce

## Subjects or objects?

I conducted meditative practices and therapeutic sessions in contact with wolves for 12 years, while the wolf leader Bruce and his she-wolf Sylvia were alive.

After spending time with wolves, I find it difficult to treat them as objects in the same way as it is difficult to treat other animals, plants, as well as eco- and geosystems, and our planet as objects. Of course, I can try to perceive them as objects, but I will not leave the feeling that I am deceiving myself and that I lose understanding of what is happening in this world. Questions regarding the very essence of life remain unanswered while I build subject-object relationships with nature. While I perceive wolves as biological objects, it is difficult for me to understand why participants in a meditative retreat experience very deep feelings and cry during contact with them. Fur, paws, eyes,

mouth, fangs, the smell of the beast. What's special about this? Basically, the same dogs, only wild ones. The behavior is different, of course, from that of a dog. So what? What are these sad tears about? The answer to this question is important, because the crying that happens to people, surrounded by wolves at dusk, is one of the signs of a crying person reacting to some very deep experiences. This did not happen to everyone and not always, but there were many such cases.

## History of the retreats "One Day in a Flock of Wolves"

During the same years that I led the "One Day in a Flock of Wolves" retreat, I led the "Splash of Eternity" expeditions to explore the symbolic potential of landscape. Together with the participants of these expeditions who had undergone preliminary training, we meditated in the mountains, forests, on the shores of various seas, in swamps, in caves, in tropical jungles, in the tundra. I have witnessed very deep and powerful experiences that my companions have encountered during meditations as they tune into the landscape. The range of these experiences was wide: from delight and tenderness to mystical horror. But I saw tears and sobs only during meditative contact with a wolf pack. This happened at dusk, not earlier than after 3–4 hours of meditation (with breaks) in the enclosure where wild wolves or their hybrids live, born in captivity, but still wild.

Before contacting wolves, the retreat participants underwent training for 4 hours, the purpose of which was:

- creating an atmosphere of trust and psychological safety in the group;
- mastering the practice of entering a state of meditative trance;
- activation of the ability to perceive one's own experiences and express them verbally without interrupting the meditative trance;
- achieving a special concentration of attention, when the contemplator perceives not only external objects of contemplation, but also their own state of mind;
- focusing attention on the relationship between one's internal states of mind and

the states of the environment and natural objects.

Out of a group of 7–10 people, a good result in terms of concentration, voluntary immersion in a state of meditative trance and accurate interpretation of various states of mind was usually demonstrated by 2–3 people. Usually, they already had extensive experience in meditation and working with trance states. This was enough for the group to form a mood favorable for the further development of meditative practice and the study of experiences that arise during contact with a wolf pack.

An enclosure built in the forest together with a flock of wolves can be considered as a natural landscape modified by humans, as a geographical location with its own systemic properties, boundaries, “entrance” and “exit”.

The practice of meditation in the context of contact with a wolf pack activated in the retreat participants those experiences that did not arise in other contexts. The most important thing was the experience of unconditional love, the source of which was the environment and the animals. The experience was unexpected and intense. No one expected to feel love while being in close proximity to large predators. At the same time, this love was perceived as something very familiar, but for some reason forgotten and lost.

The feeling of the irreversibility of this loss caused the experience of grief and, at the same time, the need to return to a sense of unity and love with all living beings. Along with the tears of grief came cleansing and liberation from something false, which had become habitual for a long time and was built into the feeling of “normal well-being.” It was difficult to explain what all this meant to the retreat participants.

Human contact with wolves in a normal state of consciousness is not accompanied by such experiences. In order to discover the presence of this love when interacting with the natural landscape, it was necessary to enter a state of meditation. But meditation alone was not enough. To arrive at such an experience, mediators were needed. In our case, these intermediaries turned out to be wild wolves, albeit born in captivity.

## Environment

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The context in which wolves find themselves is essential. It is unlikely that wolves would have

helped people experience this love if they themselves were in a laboratory, or in a cage surrounded by a large number of curious visitors. They need an environment with which they can build relationships based on natural laws, establishing direct and mutual connections with all living beings that form the “web of life.”

The environment, as a geographical system, in addition to the geological foundation, relief, climate and microclimate, ground and surface waters, soils, includes many living organisms living in it, the results of their activities (if any) and participants of the retreats, themselves.

The environment is one of the sources of human imagination. As a result of a confluence of various kinds of circumstances, some areas of geographic space have special properties that favor the activation of the exchange of information between the consciousness of the contemplator included in the geographical system and the archaic psyche associated with the collective (ecological, according to T. Roszak) unconscious. All this contributes to the attunement of mental processes with the processes of biotic regulation.

Expeditions to study the symbolic potential of the landscape (“Splash of Eternity”) were carried out in different places on the planet and in different climatic zones, from the Arctic to subequatorial regions. To train experts for exploring remote areas of the Earth, I organized small training trips in the Leningrad region (Ladoga skerries, Korrelsky Isthmus, parks and architectural ensembles of Pushkino, Pavlovsk, Sablinsky caves, etc.). In the process of searching for places to conduct these practices, we met Yulia Ivanovich, who kept a pack of wolves, the leader of which was Bruce. Yulia Ivanovich was an animal sculptor and kept wolves mostly out of love for them and in the hope that she would be able to breed wolf-dogs with outstanding search abilities, and thus justify the costs associated with their maintenance. The place where the wolves were kept was rarely visited by people. Working in this place and including the interaction of people with wolves in the retreat program, we saw that the effect encountered during the first meeting with a wolf pack has a strong tendency to be repeated.

It was also found that the potential for psychological impact of contact with an imaginary and a real wolf differed significantly. I would especially like to note this circumstance, since it allows us not to overestimate the influence of stereotypes

and expectations associated with meditative contact with the flock. The wolf that people dream about at night, the imaginary wolf and the wolf that people met in the enclosure in reality are perceived differently by people.

## Contact

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The approach of the retreat participants to the enclosure was accompanied by understandable excitement. They waited with trepidation to meet large predators. None of the participants had met them closely before. However, excitement gave way to disappointment, when people saw wolves quickly moving away from them and hiding in shelters. Most participants were unaware that these animals have innate anthro- and neophobia. For them, wolves were symbols of courage, so this behavior caused a violation of their expectations and bewilderment. During the first four years of retreats in the enclosure, the wolves could not go out to people for a long time. They could sit in their hiding places until strangers left their territory. People tried not to “put pressure” on them with their presence, politely left the enclosure and went to meditate in a swamp or to a large stone in the forest, only to resume the attempt at contact after some time.

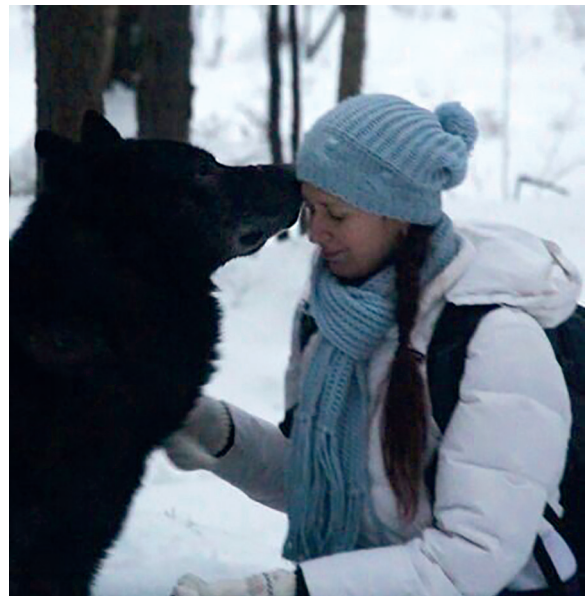


**Photo 2.** *Meditation in the swamp next to the enclosure*

The animals gradually began to get used to the guests, but they never fully got used to it. If Bruce

and Sylvia, in their old age, demonstrated fairly confident behavior among people, then the youth, following their innate instinct, still preferred to stay away from people. For the first four years of the retreat, the animals seemed to expect guests to maintain internal silence and be completely attuned to nature. The bustle of thoughts in the head is accompanied by certain biochemical effects. The wolves probably caught the “smell of fuss.” And only when the biochemistry of the guests became more “calm” and “not fussy” could the curiosity of the wolves overcome fear, and they dared to approach the guests.

The first to appear was Bruce, who very carefully began to introduce himself to the arriving people. It was as if he forbade the flock to leave the shelter until he was sure that the situation was safe. Bruce met everyone in turn.



**Photo 3.** *Getting to know each other*

At the same time, Bruce’s behavior, with which he expressed different attitudes towards the guests, triggered certain group dynamics. It was discovered that retreat participants, to varying degrees, wanted personal contact with Bruce. And if Bruce ignored someone, or stayed away from someone, contact did not happen, and the person, deprived of the attention of the status leader of the pack, most often experienced frustration, and felt that something was wrong. Women felt especially acutely ignored by Bruce. The thirst for this contact, when it did not occur due to the cautious behavior of the leader, interrupted the

meditation. But if a person who had been denied attention managed to regain a state of meditative concentration and dispassion, then, as a rule, Bruce began to develop a cautious interest in this person, and tried to close the distance. Bruce began to work as an instrument of human feedback from the environment, encouraging in people a state of clarity, peace, independence and dispassion associated with meditative immersion in the environment.



**Photo 4.** *The flock*

When Bruce believed that there was no danger, he gave a signal to the entire flock. If the wolves decided to approach, they were still very careful, and the slightest movement was enough to scare them off. After four years of communication (that is, upon reaching the age of 8 years), the wolves began to allow themselves to get close to people and even sometimes have physical contact with them. They could not only sniff the guests with curiosity, but also taste them (lick them). Some wolves, most often she-wolves, sometimes tried to exchange scent with one of the people by rubbing against their body. At the same time, one-year-old wolves demonstrated their inherited model of behavior of anthropo- and neophobes, at first avoiding contact with people, but gradually overcoming this stereotype. This may indicate that wolves can overcome the hereditary conditioning of their reactions to “aliens” and modify their behavior pattern. But this happened in very different ways, and each wolf revealed its own individuality. All wolves were very different in character. Some were playful, some curious, some affectionate, some anxious, some stubborn. I was amazed by the diversity of their natures and the very fact that their features were very understandable to people.

In the vast majority of cases, people were drawn to participate in the retreat because of some idealization of the wolf. They were attracted to these creatures because they unconsciously endowed their images with special properties that could be perceived by them as resourceful or attractive. In the process of contact with wolves, everyone, without exception, experienced a complex dynamic, which included the stage of experiencing a gap between their idealized ideas about wolves and reality. The behavior of the wolves almost never coincided with the expectations of the guests.

Most participants saw wolves as fearless, free, courageous, formidable, noble masters of the wild. In reality, they turned out to be very careful and delicate. Some wolves could behave absurdly, funny, strangely. They could sit down and “pile up”, scratch behind the ear with their hind paw, gnaw on a bone, etc. In reality, people could also observe wolves in a state of anxiety that was incompatible with idealization. It was noticeable that many participants avoided disappointment and tried not to notice the behavior of wolves that did not correspond to their expectations and fantasies. This led to interruption of meditation. To restore it, it was necessary to recognize disappointment, abandon idealization and practice calm acceptance of what really is.

The bustle of animals was transmitted to people who tried to meditate in their presence, which could also be accompanied by an interruption of the state of meditation. However, the very fact of “infecting” people with the state of wolves indicated the presence of empathy between them and meant the possibility of penetration into their state.

At dusk everything changed. The world around me became more contrasting, alive and meaningful. The wolves calmed down, stopped playing and fussing, but did not fall into sleep, but remained calmly awake, actively perceiving what was happening around them. They could sit next to people or nearby. A special mysterious silence spread in the forest. The wolves became part of this silence, and in order to maintain contact with them, people needed to maintain this silence within themselves.

After some time, continuing to meditate, people began to more clearly sense the presence of other living beings nearby (plants, worms, insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles, rodents, etc.), which

previously might not have been noticed or understood. Each creature in this silence seemed to radiate its animation and was perceived as a manifestation of a single, ancient natural essence. This essence was turned simultaneously to the bright sources of life and to the darkness of decay and death. But at both poles the presence of unconditional love was clearly visible. Life began to be perceived as a blessed gift, and death as a mercy. The unity of these two principles serves as the basis of wisdom, without which existence turns into a series of external events, weakly related to the innermost needs and experiences of humans and other living beings. The love that began to fill the meditators was familiar to them, although for some reason it turned out to be forgotten by them. The realization of the loss of this love and its return caused a cathartic effect, accompanied by tears.

### Some participants' reports

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“In an unexpected way, encountering wolves helped me relive my childhood trauma. I found myself there again, but I was no longer there alone. At some point, a feeling of pain and loneliness overwhelmed me, and I began to cry. It seems to me that the wolves felt my pain and joined me. They started howling. And I cried... It was an absolutely amazing and extraordinary moment!

I didn't notice how the hour flew by! I just wanted to be with them! I felt a huge sense of gratitude at that moment!” (Maria)

“The first thing that happened to me was the activation of my inner child. It became easy and care-free. I felt that my subtle body took on the shape of a small wolf. Then, in the process of further communication with wolves, my subtle body began to grow, I became wiser. I felt as strong and wise as possible as an adult wolf and I liked this state. The leader passed this state on to me without asking for anything in return. He did it simply and naturally. I sincerely thanked him for such training” (Sergey).

“In the last two hours there has been a penetration into the world of original meanings. Suddenly, after Bruce sat opposite me for one and a half to two minutes, I feel the depth of meaning contained in the silence, in the breeze in the tree branches, in the smells, in the night sky, in the clouds. I understand that everything that happens tells me about very great love. A very deep and strong feeling. Tears... I regret that the person has lost touch with this love. It feels like in order to be in contact with people, you need to break the connection with this love” (Irina)

“Heart-warming kindness. The question arises whether any of the participants are experiencing something similar. I open my eyes. I see tears flowing down Olga's cheeks. Joy and gratitude. It's hard to say... Much that is connected with social

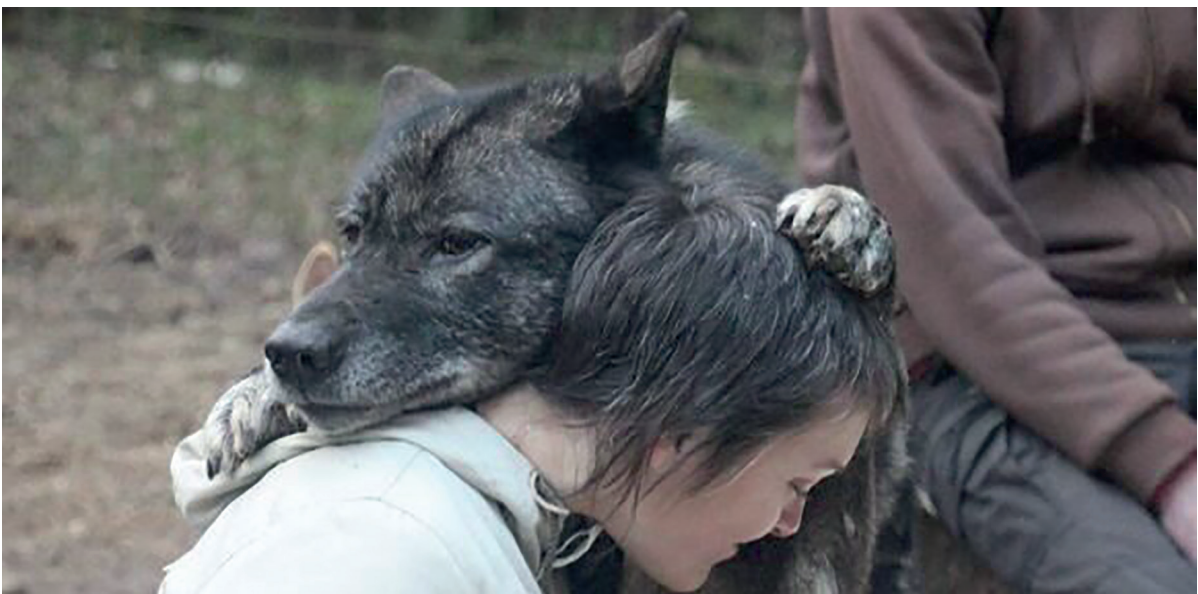


Photo 5. Sylvia. Exchange of smells.

communications does not coincide with this love. The feeling is very strong. Gradually, I gain consolation and the ability to accept what does not depend on me. I gain the ability to contain, that is, interact, withstand and transform some types of malignant aggression into something safe. I begin to interact with social energies. The memory of the original is strong. While I'm trying to understand the energies that control me. I need sincere communication and processing of the experience gained" (Irina)

"What wolves teach me helps me live and act in society. It helps to work with people, and I work a lot, and mostly with mentally ill people. Intuitive perception was developed before the meeting with the wolves, but after this meeting it became deeper and more focused. Before the meeting, I could rationally explain what I "anticipated," now I seem to know, but my mind is not able to integrate all the initial data" (Tatiana)

"I went to the retreat to gain experience for work, but I found something more — I fell in love! I saw how you can be free even in an enclosure, how simply to be yourself... And the more a person allows himself to be himself, to be honest, to be natural, the greater opportunities open up for us. I'll definitely go back there! Learn to be human" (Irina)

"They licked my whole face, danced a jig on my back and stuck my furry muzzle in my hands. The first thing that flared up inside was the feeling of my family, correctness and childish sparkling joy. It was as if they called me sister and invited me to play. Then a couple of walls collapsed inside with a ringing sound, and a warm light rushed out from the depths, reviving and restoring broken connections. It was as if the drought had ended, and water ran merrily along the dry riverbeds. Light burst from the depths. We ran skipping towards him, after all, they really called me. The she-wolves showed new connections, paths and spaces: the spaces of the wolf Spirit and the friendly space of the Forest, the space of the Feminine, the space of life..." (Olga).

## Conclusion

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In 2012, the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness signaled the scientific consensus that humans are not the only conscious creatures, and that animals, including all mammals and birds,

as well as many other forms of life, have neurological substrates sufficiently complex to support consciousness. In April 2024, the New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness was released. Such declarations can contribute to the expansion of research into the question of the presence of subjective experience in different species of animals, and to a change in ethical standards in relation to animals,

Italian humanists of the 15th century argued that one of the most important conditions for the education of a humanist, in addition to the study of classical texts, moral and ethical improvement, is communication with educated people. An intersubjective environment of communication is needed in which the student has the opportunity to directly assimilate a humane attitude towards people, towards oneself and the world. That environment in which people experience moments of empathy and participation in community with others.

To form true humanism, eco-humanism, communication with people must be supplemented by communication with other forms of life as subjects, non-human carriers of consciousness, including wild animals such as wolves.

Wolves need wild nature. Their life is organized around the entire network of complex interactions that occur in the wild. Wildlife gives them meaning and motivation to live. Wolves have a "reward system" that encourages them to behave in a manner consistent with the "successful hunter" model, as well as behavior that helps stabilize the ecological niche. To be a successful hunter, a wolf needs to be able to "read the landscape." The ability of wolves to perceive the landscape as something living and unified, helps them satisfy their sensory hunger. They can enjoy the wild-life while being well fed. And the entire biota of which they are a part is interpreted in their minds as a source of unconditional love. They feel it.

If you meditate next to wolves, then their attitude towards nature is transmitted to people. By meditating next to wolves, people learn a very important lesson related to the processes of biotic self-regulation, participation in the "web of life." Long-term observation of wolves in their natural environment and empathic reflection of their states helps to restore connection with the "web of life." In a state of meditative trance, a person becomes more responsive to the state of wolves, to the state of nature, of which they are a part.

## SHE-WOLF (BOZ KURD)

**ALEXANDER Kopytin**

*Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Petersburg Academy of Postgraduate Pedagogical Studies (St.-Petersburg, Russian Federation).*

I am a woman from the kind of wolf that knows no fear  
 Singing at sunset, celebrating the fog creeping,  
 The expanse of the steppes and the life-long rut,  
 Truth and power of fate untamed.  
 The strength and speed of my slender legs.  
 Boz Kurd is my name, and if you catch me and make a drum out of my skin,  
 You know: when it sounds, then all the other drums will burst.  
 And if you stretch my skin over your bow and pull the string,  
 Then the stretched string of all other arrows will break.  
 My teeth are carnivorous  
 Skillfully hold the fabric of earthly life.  
 Oh woman, stand by my side  
 Piercing with a wolf's gaze into the distance of the lunar limits,  
 And smelling this world as our sovereign home,  
 In which you and I and our whole flock  
 Will pass, pierce, and fly mountains and valleys,  
 And, uttering our battle cry,  
 Will glorify the beauty of our earthly abode  
 With a genius of our place - a star named Canis Lupus.

Recitation by Alexandra Kirillova:

<https://disk.yandex.ru/d/yqK4v1-CMFS05g>