



Coda
Stefanie R. Fishel

Rainer Maria Rilke once remarked that poetry can only emerge from within. You must write what is personal, of what you experience, of what you see, love, and lose:

[...] write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty—describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember. your sorrows, your wishes, your passing thoughts, your belief in anything beautiful. (Rilke 1984, 7)

Rilke (1984, 7-8, 8-9, 10) urges the young poet to begin this inward journey and that if “your everyday life appears poor” then complain not to life, but rather “admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches”. This “turning-within” and “immersion in your own world”, he writes, will create a work of art that “has arisen out of necessity”. The creator must be a world unto themselves and find everything within themselves and Nature.

With her *Kin* series of works, the artist Jahanne Pasco-White, creates a notion of pregnancy, birthing and mothering that is a quintessential “turning-within,” while also gently reorienting the viewer’s notion of “within.”

For this she uses colour, shape and texture rather than words. This inside is not entirely a private space, not just the mother and baby’s world, but rather one that is entangled with many others. The poet and the creator *are* also mother and world. The baby is poetry, art that emerges from within—literally.

The writers invited to respond to Pasco-White’s *Kin* project by her partner N.A.J. Taylor have all oriented themselves toward Pasco-White’s art from their own worlds—personally, conceptually and empirically—and each have situated themselves carefully, both geographically and theoretically. While formulating my response, I returned to Rilke’s book for comfort as the terrible fires ravaged my adopted home and to hide from the fear of losing my mother, who lay in a hospital a bed a world away from the burning coasts of Australia, in the cold and wet city of Portland, Oregon. I realized that the personal was in fact at the heart of the diverse responses you have read in this volume: we are all writing from our own places and experiences. We variously live in bodies as mothers, offspring, scholars, artists, and these bodies find their sustenance in our homes, families, and communities.

These places and experiences call to the provocations dried into the paint of these pieces to which we were asked to respond: the call to rethink our connections to family,

land, and history. In so doing we come to also reflect upon what and who we consume brings life, death, anguish and new ways to “make kin”. In an interview, Donna Haraway stresses that her notion of kin does not only include those to whom we are biogenetically related, but that “to be any kind of animal at all is to be within obligate mutualisms with a whole range of other plants, animals, and microbes” (Paulson, 2019 NP). In other words, we are never a single organism.

If we think beyond the biogenetic relation, Jahnne and I are both mothers—for instance—and we are both mothered. As I have written elsewhere, women’s work in the kitchen—and as mothers—is care work. It is often exhausting, but it must be done (Fishel, 2019). How do we think about creation, connection, love, loss, destruction and pain beyond the limits of how we were raised and taught? Even more importantly, how do we see these as aspects of our art that are just as important as the paints, pens, pencils, papers, canvases, and keyboards? Pasco-White gives us clues with her art. We remember and care for those that are with us, those who nurture and sustain us, our myriad connections to our material worlds.

I played with these myriad connections in my book, *The Microbial State: Global Thriving and the Body Politic*, where I took these obligate mutualisms and commensal relations in the human body’s microbial communities and stretched outward to posit a global view on communities built with these “lively vessels.” The poetry of Walt Whitman, along with bacteria and helminths, guided these reflections on how our messmates, like *bacteroides thetaioatamicron* (a bacteria living in the human intestine) aids us in breaking down polysaccharides that our human bodies cannot fully process without these critters who, along with trillions of microorganisms, outnumber human cells by 10 to 1. Whitman provided the necessary poetic counsel to able to create a body and its worlds with new guiding fictions and metaphors that can “imagine political structures that not only support many forms of life but also discover *new* ones that celebrate life in all its varied, magical forms to acknowledge the motley crew of influences at all levels of life and politics.” I wrote, echoing Ursula K. LeGuin that “the future demands poets and visionaries” (Fishel 2017, x; 2-3; 50; 98) ... and painters and mothers, too.

On being invited to review an earlier draft of this volume, the linear form that is somewhat necessitated by the ordering of printed pages is undone. Here I will instead draw out the insights that emerged for me personally, conceptually and empirically. As a practicing artist

and new mother, Helen Johnson plays with how a ‘body’ of artwork, as a “common collective noun for a group of artworks made together, is more than an ordered and distinct entity as it usually defined, but rather one that is filled with “multitudinous, ineffable, swirling entities and events”. The body intermingles with the fabrics, paints and “Pasco-White’s breath, and her skin cells, oils and sweat” to create something more than just a sum of its parts. Redi Koobak ruminated on her life as a feminist becoming a mother, reasoning that “[t]he artist is then actually more than a facilitator who is just enacting an idea of messmates in this artwork. She is “the vinegar” as she is *becoming-with* the messmates that allow the painting to emerge.” The countless others involved in mothering make it of interest to more than just other mothers. In moments of the “looming ecological threat” that we face, perhaps we need to “pose critical questions about motherhood” and think about what is in “need of updating, reviewing, reconsidering.”

Amelia Wallin dipped us into the materiality of childbirth and making art. Our bodies are indivisible with the world around us and she reminds us that “Pasco-White’s paintings exist in symbiosis with each other and their environment, an expanded state of becoming-with”. Indeed, Maya Hey further journeyed into the corporeal by reminding us that eating is an ethical “becoming-with” engaged with “countless messmates”. Hey highlighted, like many of the other writers, how Pasco-White’s use of organic materials like beetroot, turmeric, onions, and carrots brings texture and dimension to her artwork and to our relations with others. Motherhood and eating may help us respond to the myriad issues faced by human and nonhuman communities in the Anthropocene. Referring the site of housework, Jennifer Mae Hamilton contrasts the “cruddy” work in the home with that of the “spectacular” in visual art and finds that Pasco-White’s work exemplifies what she names “pretty dirty.” Hamilton stresses that the works are not labelled pretty to diminish them, but rather to evince all those messmates that make homes colourful, vital, and a place of more than just labour, as defined by Marxists and capitalists alike. Feminism is not just about women’s leadership in the boardroom, but even more importantly, how we imagine a “revised domestic ecosystem in which we can do the careful, slow and messy thinking” that needs to happen to create a new world not based on previous dichotomies of work/home.

On the topic of care and debt, Tara McDowell challenges us to imagine new worlds with “thought from

the outside.” This thought, emerging from motherhood, can discover new worlds in the ashes of what is left of the old one. Relationality, porosity, and contamination loom large in the vivid story she tells of her experiences of Pasco-White’s work in the studio and their conversations when our world, after the pandemic, became equal parts virtual and terrifyingly virtual. Abbra Kotlareczyk pondered mothering and labouring and its potential for offering and receiving care. How do we communicate our “worldly entanglements” and “evolving ethical responsibilities” to our youngest kin? There are important moments of “taking-notice” in the processes of mothering that we should be attentive to as we co-constitute our ties and make kin across blood ties and beyond the confines of the nuclear family. Katherine Wright further deepened our ideas of motherhood by challenging the reader to think about encounters with our children as parasites—she placed Pasco-White’s work in a conversation with “deep multispecies history” and pregnancy, parenting, childbirth and nurturing as part of symbiotic coevolution between and among species. Using symbiogenesis and the parasite as symbiotic partner to evolution, this focus can then be “an opening into understanding both children and parasites as profoundly intimate and vital gifts” and one of the many “ways of understanding energy exchange relations between living creatures”.

Engaging the artist’s first forays into painting in situ on the wall, Umut Ozguc travelled the farthest from the human body and its internal messmates to examine the theme of becoming-other and making kin with humanmade landscapes. For her, Pasco-White’s artworks conjured memories of the Separation Wall in Palestine and the agential and relational capacities of spaces that are often found in unlikely places, “messy and unlikely spaces” like border walls and graffiti. Ozguc challenges us to think through Spinoza: if no one knows what a body can do, then reflecting upon what multiple others can do together can stimulate political and personal change.

As Rilke penned to the young poet asking for advice, perhaps we must cling to the experiences that everyday life brings us. A poet must write of sorrows, wishes, your belief in beauty with a fervent and quiet humility. It is this that Pasco-White art brings to us: a reflection of the artist’s everyday life. Her joy in the many others who she counts as kin.

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