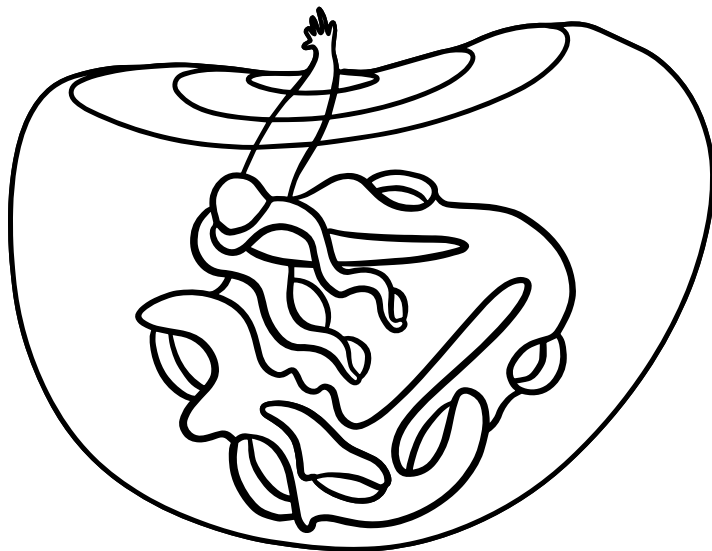


LIVING IN THE TIME OF TECH GIANTS

Marie LeBlanc Flanagan



CREEK There is a creek next to the house.

We are crouching at the edge of the pussy willow creek. Poking frog eggs, cupping tadpoles, holding friendly frogs. Tiny white flowers became tiny sour wild strawberries.

We wade in rubber boots through the darkness of echoing metal culverts, singing unrepeatable words.

TECH IS A GARDEN

Our tech can be local, relational.

We harvest seeds and share them. We germinate seeds on damp cotton towels. Some of our seeds are duds.

Our tech runs in cycles of nurture, birth, growth, harvest, and decay. We delight in rot and fermentation. We listen to the Elders: the three sisters support each other, each different, each with a role to play.

TECH IS NOT A GARDEN

Big tech is not a garden.

And if it is, we're sharecropping in a tiny sandbox. Pesticides and herbicides blow in on the wind. We're working with patented seeds and prefab soil under artificial lights.

Infrastructure is an ecosystem that cannot sustain itself, that cannot regenerate without our hands.

Big tech is not a garden, it's extractive from the start.

OUR GIANTS

Airbnb, Alibaba, Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Dropbox, Meta, Google, Microsoft, Netflix, Nintendo, Samsung, Spotify, Tencent, Uber, WeChat, Zoom. Little critters creep onto the stage and are consumed.

GIFTS FROM THE GIANTS

Power, convenience, reliability, predictability, less bugs, affordability, accessibility features, ease of use. And all our friends and family are here.

THESE MONSTERS

Why growing forever and ever? Why sucking up all the information? Why selling our data? Why quantifying everything? Why permanence? Why surveillance? Why secrecy? Why one size fits all? Why presumed ubiquity but actual exclusion? Why pushing and squeezing our behaviour? Why agitating, radicalizing? Why trash-making, why environmental devastation? Why weird bro meritocracy?

FOSSILS We gather tiny fossils on the beach of Lake Huron. Jars and jars of little grey stones. When they are wet you can see the intricate shapes of ancient coral, sea creatures, and plants.

We smell the lake from far away. We have swimsuits wrapped in rolled up towels. There is a fight about the towels, no one wants the raggedy ones. We know it is embarrassing to have a faded and ripped old towel on the beach, but we don't know why.

We go swimming, build sandcastles, then we gather tiny rocks. Grandma says they are beautiful. They are fossils, etched into the stones a million years ago.

TRANSFORMATION

Once a year the caterpillars come. Some years they blanket the trees. We are always in the trees. We pet the hairy ones. We love them, the way they curl up. May you never become a butterfly, you glorious hairy creature. We bring one to Mimi and she howls **GET THAT DISGUSTING THING AWAY FROM ME.**



Floating towards a world where there is **NO UNDO.** Every version of everything we have ever made is on a server somewhere. No deleting or forgetting. Everything is there always, in some form that we can't know or understand but that we are somehow beholden to and responsible for.

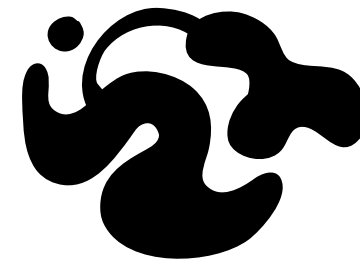
EMBODIMENT Our own bodies are organic containers that process information. Sometimes we are the recording. We shape a body of knowledge and shape ourselves. Manifested histories allow for flexibility, embodied remembering. We build an archive thoughtfully, intentionally, in our hands and bellies and hair:

WHAT IS TECH? We chatter about tech as if it's only our computers and our phones. As if real tech is made by machines, out of metal and mysterious rare earth minerals. As if bread is the same thing as a stalk of wheat. As if books grow in the garden. (Find Ursula K. Le Guin)

PLAY is resistance. Play as a verb, a state, something that pours out of us as a birthright. We tinker, we skip and trip, we make mayhem.

GLITCH is resistance, as possibility space. Failure as resistance. We fail to even start. We fail into a joyful pile. (Find Legacy Russell).

LOVING TRASH is resistance. We will become trash ourselves, compost. Our bodies are transforming into the rot juice that nourishes all things.



WHITE VAN

We make joyful messes with the man who lives in his white van in our driveway. We play with trash. Broken is better; broken is the site of creation. Everything is an art supply. We make adjustable frames and hold them up to the world. Shifting around, we discover how to change things by moving our position in space.

MODELING FUTURES

We need models, we need metaphors. It's hard to build towards something we can't imagine. We follow each other with little steps, little movements, that we share and mimic and adapt and hold.

TURTLES

One spring morning three prehistorically enormous turtles come crawling up from the creek. Each reptilian head held high, clawed feet pressing deep into the earth soft and dragging their ancient bellies through the long grass. Their shells are gnarled geometries.

We never saw any turtles here before and we never see any here again.

WISHES

We read old stories about the dangers of wishing. When people make wishes they come true in the worst ways. Wishing is dangerous. Praying is good. We don't understand.

We learn to wish for the things we have.

A wish is a form of travel. We wish towards a million possible futures. (Find Sophia Al-Maria and Leila Dear)

CHANGE IS COMING

We wonder if the tech executives lie awake at night worrying that they've taken it too far. That one day we'll just snap out of it. We'll look up from these glowing portals and say in a quiet voice 'that was nice but that's enough' and drop our phones into our junk drawers and go sit in a sunbeam with a friend.

ARCHITECTS

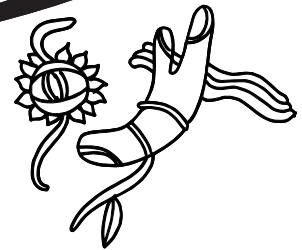
The technofetishist egotism to think that we are ready to architect anything when we can't even steward ourselves as a species.

DIGITAL DOULAS

Digital spaces are threaded with deep pain. Digital doulas emerge, helping people process data trauma through data healing. (Find Neema Githere and Olivia McKayla Ross)

WATCHES

We try so hard, but we can't tell time. Every watch we touch eventually stops working. We open them up, poke around, put them back together and delight as they mysteriously come back to life. Time only works when we are staring at a clock. Look away and long stretches of time scrunch up and hide inside little ticks of time. Look away and little ticks will stretch out unfathomably. It's not real.



CARE

The internet is not designed for care. It's military technology. The infrastructure is designed to cultivate our worst impulses. We find the cracks. We grow care while the system tries to pull us apart.

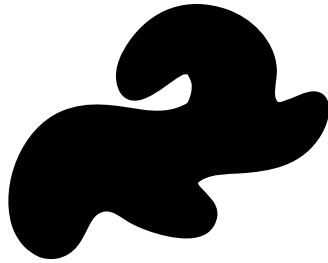


NOT ENOUGH

We fail each other and ourselves. We fail to heal. We fail to reach out enough, to hold each other in the ways we need for healing. We find patience for ourselves and each other as we care for the wounds the tech giants have given us. (Find Neema Githere and Dorothy R. Santos)

SEEDS

We stare at the seeds we planted yesterday and wait for them to sprout. Brambles, vines. Garden clippings. The underground network. There are manifestations above ground, but you have to dig to reveal what is happening down there.



PAIN Divestment can feel like forcing pain on ourselves for reasons that feel abstract, disembodied, disconnected from our lived realities. We divest, and suddenly everything is harder. Why choose pain when everything is so hard already?

CYCLES Just like all things, quitting isn't immediate. We find ways to create intimate platforms by repurposing tools. We cycle in and out. We take dopamine detoxes. We depart over and over and over through the seasons.

DOING THE WORK We make small changes. We detangle. We are squeezed tighter and tighter, forced into compromises so we can support ourselves. We fall back in. We channel patient urgency. These things take time. We do the work. We show up.

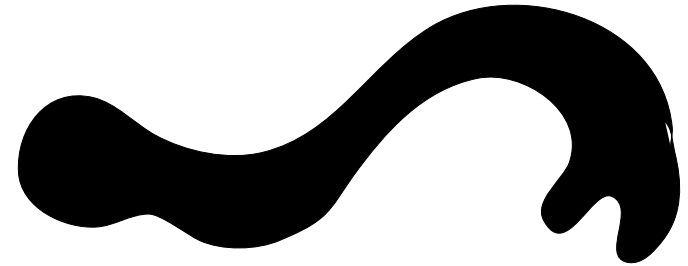
All that we touch, we change (Find Octavia Butler)

Everything starts as **DREAMING**. We find courage. We unleash our radical daydreams. We have been holding our breath.

WHOSE DREAM Whose dream is this? Who is the dreamer here? This is not our dream. We're living in a well-meaning, meditation retreat attending, fair-trade coffee drinking, San Francisco tech worker's recreation of Elon Musk's dream. What needs to happen to shift this to our dreams? How do we shift?

WAKING

We have power. We are waking up. And we are hungry.



SNIFFING OUT THE JOY

One night we find that we are suddenly able to dance. We haven't danced in years. But we feel moved to move.

We are sniffing out the joy. We are keeping our noses on the joy trail. (Find Buffy Sainte Marie)

