

TOUCHING TRACES

FINDING THE WORDS FOR
IMMERSIVE RESEARCH

CAMBRIDGE
CREATIVE
ENCOUNTERS

2024

UNIVERSITY OF
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WEST HUB



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FOREWORD

The ways we talk about research are often extremely formal and precise. But what happens when we open our mind to a new kind of language? How can words describe without defining, suggest without obfuscating? Can we unveil meaning through poetic research, alongside the traditional instruments of academia?

The WORDS section of Cambridge Creative Encounters set out to do exactly that. David Cain, poet and public engagement professional, accompanied researchers from the University of Cambridge on a journey of exploration of the vast world of poetry, to make research come to life through spoken word performance and publication.

Dr Claudia Antolini, Creative Encounters 2024 Project Lead

The Creative Encounters Words programme enables researchers to look at and share their research through poetry.

I am intrigued to see how each of the writers shared within this booklet have put the 'I' - their personal experience - into their work. Their poems enable us to see the person, and what their work means to them, providing an intriguing insight into the topics they each focus on.

The collective title 'Touching Traces' refers to the traces we each look for, the sometimes seen, sometimes invisible echoes that surround the objects we focus on. These resonances are found throughout the poems of this collection.

I hope these poems enable you to have a new, and different, relationship not only with their subjects, but with the writers too.

David Cain, Creative Words Lead

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The background of the slide is an abstract composition. It features several vertical stripes of varying widths in a vibrant orange color, set against a solid black background. A thin, slightly curved orange line runs diagonally across the upper portion of the image. The overall effect is modern and graphic.

SEETHA
TAN

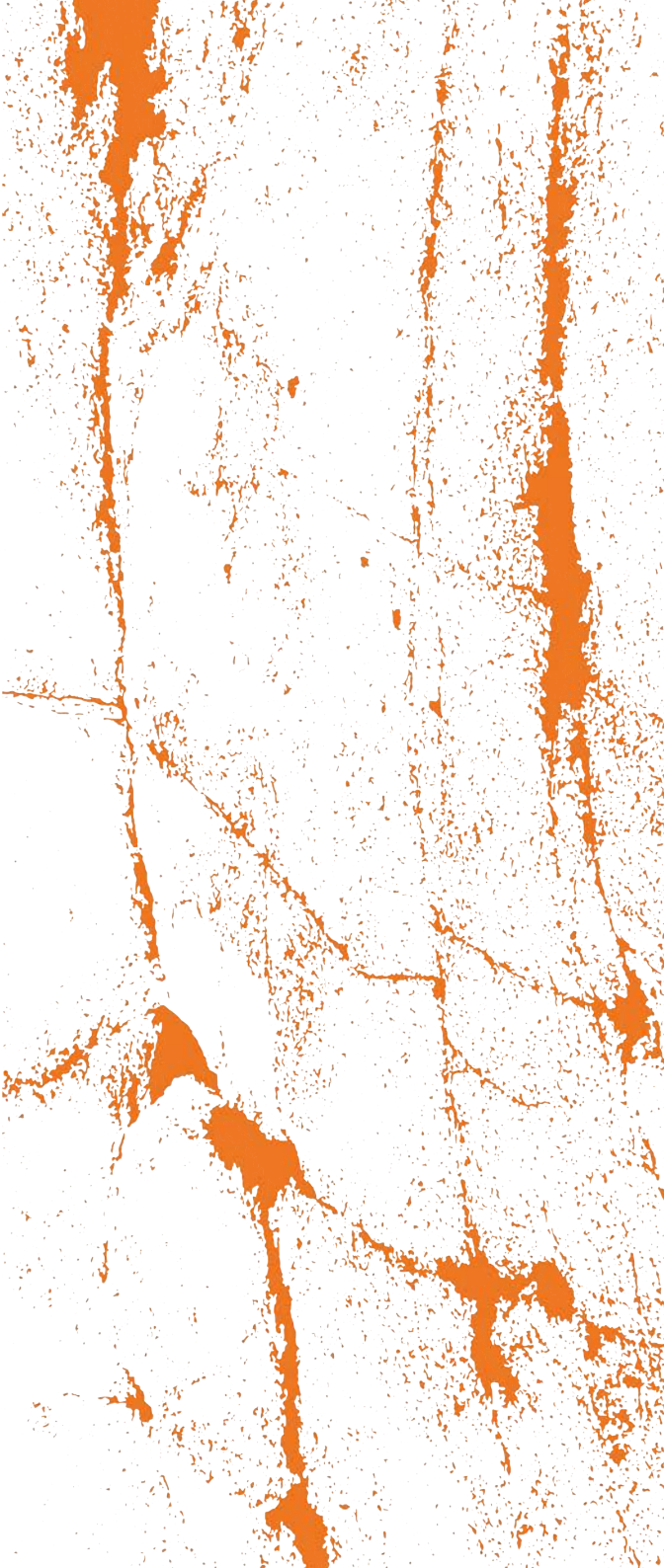
BIO

**COLLECTION NAME:
RECIPES FROM THE FIELD**

SEETHA TAN

Seetha Tan is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology. Her research examines the role of storytelling within the context of postcolonial migration to London. In particular, her work has focused on culinary forms of storytelling by examining the importance of food in the expression of culture, heritage, and identity. As a form, poetry has allowed Seetha to explore the sensory, fragmentary, and embodied nature of both storytelling and identity-construction, which is often difficult to capture in traditional styles of academic writing. Drawing on a combination of fieldnotes, interviews, and personal archives and experiences, the poems included in 'Recipes from the Field' reflect the role of food, recipes, and cooking to questions of migration and identity-formation.





There are ghosts in the pantry.
I can hear them singing
from her spice jars
Spectral flavours I know
By heart
 By tongue.
mellowed by memory
but sharp in the gut.

GHOSTS

MOTHER TONGUE

I don't speak my mother's mother tongue
but I have her taste buds.
In my grandmother's kitchen
I'm still a child
fed by hand
learning the alphabet through her cooking
T for turmeric
G for ghee —
My lips might slip
on vowels
and rolled r's
But food is a language
and I was taught how to eat.
Now, the only word I recall
In my mother's mother tongue:
'Pasikudha?'
Are you hungry?

A SUPERMARKET ON EAST HAM HIGH STREET

What thoughts do I have of you, Allen Ginsberg
walking down East Ham High Street
Passed the crowds on the corner —
a coven gathered for a magic trick
Passed the butchers
and the sweating meat
Passed the carpet vendor sipping on his
Lukewarm Costa Coffee.
I thought I saw you, Allen Ginsberg,
at Northwest Supermarket
In the aisle with the Bulgarian sirene
and the Bengali sweets
As if it were perfectly natural
to pair pierogi and moong beans
or baklava and jalebi.
(I try to catch your eye across the aisle)
Which way will your belly lead us?
Towards the coconut milk or the mace?
The pickled fish or the plantain?

Inspired by Allen Ginsberg's A Supermarket in California

UNCLE WRINKLE

They leave their jackets by the door
To soak in the smoke
Sticky tables in a cramped room
Full of hungry bellies
They swap stories
Between mouthfuls

He chose this place
Because of the Uncle's
Wrinkled smile
And the open kitchen
Because of how
The wok hey lingers
On his skin
And in his clothes
And in his hair
Just like home.

Inspired by a Hong Kong restaurant in South London

In Katherine, in a house set on stilts
 on a river that swells
 in the rainy season
 A family clears the long grass in their front-yard
 prepares the dirt that runs like blood
 when it rains

like
 the
 monsoon

In Katherine, on a bank that floods
 A father builds a garden bed
 From old timber beams
 And dreams of planting a mango tree
 Deep in that red dirt

In Katherine, in a house
 an ocean's away from a home
 The seeds, tucked between clothes
 that smell like sandalwood and musk
 arrived by sea-mail last week
 in a trunk packed carefully
 by a grandmother's nimble hands

In Katherine, in a sunroom
 That steams like a pressure cooker
 Three children marvel at okra seeds
 Taken from a grandmother's plate
 Sucked clean between a grandmother's teeth
 Stripped of their stickiness and dried
 On the windowsill of an old home
 And pray they will thrive in this twin climate.

In Katherine, on a veranda
 That holds the house like an
 Embrace
 The children watch
 the Australian sun
 raise those seedlings as her own
 Until the okra fills the garden
 Like a weed

In Katherine, in a garden
 That has become her own
 A mother plucks the pods
 With a kitchen knife.
 Green thumbs
 Sticky sap
 Ladies' fingers in a silver bowl

In Katherine, in a house set on stilts —
 Okra fries in hot oil
 Popping mustard seeds and heat
 Plants not from these parts
 Rooted in a new soil
 Give way to new abundance
 A new life



IN A HOUSE SET ON STILTS



image credits: Seetha Tan

LONDON'S STREET RACERS

Caught between the teeth
Of summer and spring
Little Lagos trades her waterways
For High Streets;
Her lakes for fabric shops.

In this sleepy heatwave
While Peckham heaves
Women steer polka dot trolleys
Bursting with groceries
With the prowess
Of a London street-racer
Dodging cheesy chips
And a chicken-shop boneyard
Today, a side-walk buffet:
Let the pigeons feast.

At a corner store on Peckham Road
Mangoes bruise in cardboard boxes,
From green, to yellow, to desert dusk
Yesterday, an English tartness
Today, mellow in this stickiness
Almost as sweet as home.

The women park their trolleys
Stop to sift
Through star fruit
Peruse the persimmons
Scrutinise the soursop
Nimble fingers well trained
To know ripeness by touch

The women do not wait for a green signal
They drag their trolleys boldly into that
Traffic-jam lullaby,
Cradle of chaos
And down those old waterways
Home.

AYAM MASAK MERAH

INGREDIENTS

- 6 chicken thighs
- 5 stalks of lemongrass
- 20g of galangal
- 20g of ginger
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 6 dried chilis
- 3 tomatoes
- 3 tbsp of ketchup
- 1 onion
- 1 tbsp turmeric
- 1 tsp sugar

1. Render the fat until the skin puckers

Chicken tastes best with the bone in, she said.
So, you ask for six chicken thighs at the
butcher in Nunhead
Skin left on, please.

2. Beat the lemongrass against the kitchen counter (until your housemate *politely* closes the kitchen door)

Later you'll find
Lemongrass shrapnel
Lodged
Behind the knives
And in your hair

3. Pound the chilli and the ginger, the galangal and the garlic into a paste

In the mortar and pestle
Delivered promptly by Amazon Prime

Pound until the fibres splinter
Transformed by granite and grit
By palms that cramp
With each pulse
Rheumatic hands
Unwieldy like a nub of ginger
Veined blue and thin like spider-webs
You wonder how she managed

4. Sauté the paste until the oil separates

Use your nose, she said
Let the chilli burn your lungs
And settle in the back of your throat
As the curry sweats,
Separates into pools of fat
slick like an oil spill
Or magma in a pan

5. Add three tomatoes (and a squeeze of ketchup, *for sweetness*); let the curry reduce slowly over a low heat

It doesn't quite taste like hers
So, you spend that night
Chasing flavours in a
Midnight memory palace
You lie sleepless,
In her kitchen, at her stove
Her hands, nubbed like ginger
Hold yours over an open flame
Flavours, like shrapnel, buried deep
Begin to bloom

CULINARY HEIRLOOMS

Hokkien and ho-fun noodles?

He shouldn't need to ask,
But the loose ends of a separation
Leave him unsure if
He remembered to leave
Any bits of himself
At the bottom of my noodle bowl

In this basement restaurant,
on the corner of York Street
He brings the bowls to the table
Familiar stranger:
I watch his leathered hands
Sun-tanned, sun-spotted
Stretched by age
Break apart wooden chopsticks
And hand them to me
In an attempt at tenderness

I wonder if I'll teach my daughter
One day, over a bowl of laksa,
To prefer ho-fun to vermicelli
Will she find traces of him
Trapped between noodles
Some hint of him lingering
In her taste buds?
Part dusty heirloom
Part live wire
My own leathered-hands,
Sun-tanned, sun-spotted
Breaking her chopsticks in some inherited
Act of love

image credits: Seetha Tan



IMPERIAL CIRCUITS

I

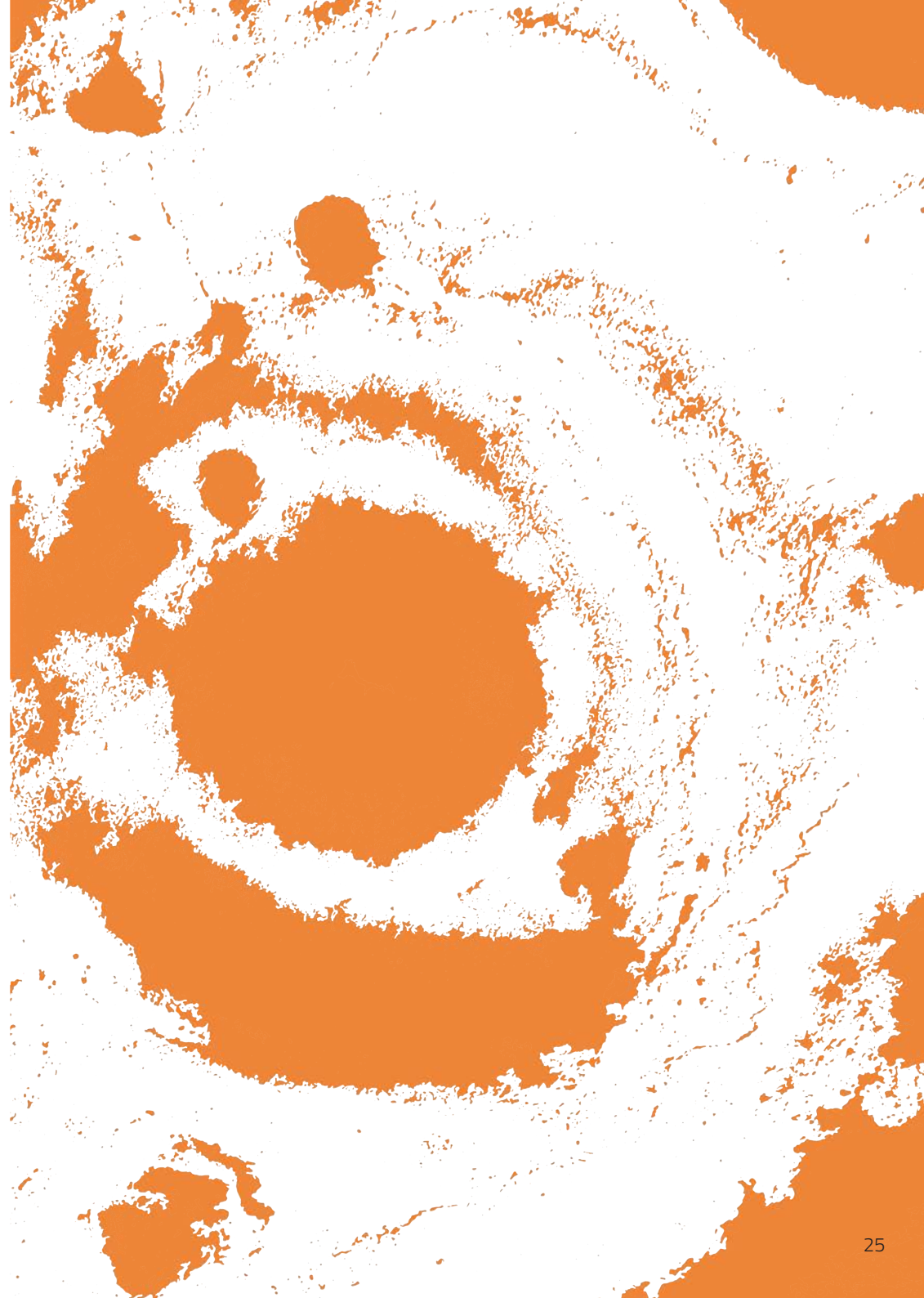
In a tea shop, off Portobello Road,
I stop for scones and a pot of Earl Grey
With clotted cream and jam, please.
Above a tray of day-old sponge cakes
King Charles' head is on a coronation plate
next to a sign that reads: it's always tea o'clock
The woman behind the counter
grins, teeth bared, a Cheshire-cat in a Union Jack apron
her voice — viscous like honey,
full of jammy vowels
that get stuck in her mouth
like clotted cream
I tune my ears to her midlands melody
she tunes hers to mine, *where are you from?*
Australia, I say
(I assume she means the accent)
She must mean the accent
because she tells me her cousin was a ten-pound pom
and names a Victorian town
that I pretend to know.
And we bond momentarily, over scones
and Commonwealth paraphernalia
over King Charles' face
and the Corgi tea-cosy
and my growing addiction
to a cup of Earl Grey in the afternoon.

II

On the P12 bus towards Peckham High Street
I smile at a lady sitting next to me
and she looks into my face
as if she is staring at a mirror
Where are you from?
(I assume she means my race)
She must mean my race
because she tells me I look like her sister from Mauritius —
who is half Indian, half Chinese
An uncanny mirror-image.
In our newfound sisterhood
she drags me to Greggs
and we bond momentarily, over sausage rolls
and a cup of Earl Grey tea
Over the sister she hasn't seen for years
whose eyes I share
Over the ghosts
of an imperial circuitry that haunt both our
Features

III

Alaa's belly is rumbling;
a craving for curry
So, we take the shortcut from Liverpool Street
to Brick Lane
Find a curry-house on the corner
A table for two, please
The host at the door
doesn't ask where I am from
(but he has assumed)
because he abandons his salesman script
and tells me this place is for *Europeans*.
The curry here is *sweet* not *spicy*
Brown skin coded
I leave
despite the fact I am not Bengali
and my spice tolerance
would put my grandmother to shame.
At the next restaurant
deemed 'authentic' by a man on the road
the waiter tries to find community
in my face and my name
And I feel betrayed by
features that lie about a kinship
That is only skin deep.



FEEDING THE WOLF

I find ways back to my body through cooking.

When I need to feel my fingers
beyond the ache in my knuckles.

I prefer the solidness of my knees and my hips when I stand over a hot pot poaching a chicken or kneading dough.

When I need a reminder that my body is not numb

I start to cook.

I go to the stove, or the pressure cooker, or the chopping board.

I mince garlic, or stir a risotto over low heat,

watch grains of arborio rice engorge with chicken stock until they are
plump and starchy.

I feel my heartbeat steady when I pour in the stock, ladle by ladle, cup by cup.

I like slow cooking.

Cooking that takes hours.

Stews or stocks, risottos or ragu.

Recipes that stick to my clothes, and cling to my hair, that settle beneath my skin and
into my bones,

somewhere deep,

somewhere warm,

somewhere mine.

I like to take these cooking smells to bed.

I like,

when, even after a hot shower,

I can still smell ginger and fenugreek on my skin, stubborn
turmeric stains on my fingernails,
scrubbed raw and still yellow.

Some nights I fall asleep pounding spices in the mortar and pestle I ordered online.

Coriander seeds and black cardamom. I let the mustard seeds pop in hot ghee.

Sensory lullabies send me to sleep. I come back to my body when I cook.

When I was blown up like a balloon, puffy with fluid and tied to tubes in a hospital bed
with a wolf curled up at my feet, I felt someone in my belly, twisting my gut like they
were wringing out a wet, wool jumper.

The consultants prodded this balloon belly with cold fingers, shook their heads at the
wolf and tried to tempt it away with some meat.

The wolf snarled, bared its yellow teeth and dug his claws deeper into my leg.

The consultants, gathered in the corner, pointed their cold fingers at the wolf and decided if he would not leave, they had no choice but to starve him.

So, they wrote on a small whiteboard behind my bed, in blue marker-pen, 'nil-by-mouth' and let me starve too.

On her daily visits, I would ask my Mum to sneak in some Chicken Noodle Soup from
the Chinese Takeaway at the bottom of the hill.

I just wanted to taste it.

I promised not to swallow.

I'd let the hot liquid slosh in my mouth.

Salt and lemon.

Ginger and garlic.

Bones cooked low and slow.

I listened to an interview on the radio, where a man went crazy after years of being fed
through a tube.

I watched Ugly Delicious, Bake Off and anything on the Food Network.

Made lists of dishes I would eat.

Recipes I would cook.

Restaurants I would visit on the outside.

Each morning the nurse would change the bag that hung above my head, and reconnect it to the line that sat in an artery somewhere deep, somewhere warm, and I would joke that it looked like a vanilla milkshake and then I would crave a vanilla milkshake and I would miss the taste of fat

and cream

and sickly sweet syrup.

The wolf left eventually. Emaciated, tufts of fur falling out of his coat. He skulked out of my hospital side-room, with his tail between his legs, his belly growling.

The consultants looked at my body, emaciated, tufts of hair falling out of my head and called it a success.

They wrote a paper in a British Medical Journal about a balloon belly and how starvation might be an appropriate medical strategy to kill off a wolf.

The wolf still visits from time to time. He lurks at the foot of my bed and sometimes, if he's careless, his claws sink a little too deep into my knees, or he gnaws at my wrists or my shoulders a little too hard.

Contrary to the findings of the British Medical Journal, I do not starve the wolf, I feed him Hainanese Chicken Rice,

and tarka dahl

and butternut squash risotto

and mango-upside down cake,

and browned butter cookies.

When the wolf visits, I turn to the stove, or the pressure cooker, or the grill. I walk to Nunhead and visit the butcher, or the fishmonger, or the green grocer

and pick out my apples one-by-one.

When the wolf visits, I follow the breadcrumbs, left by my taste buds, into the kitchen, to the

stove,

somewhere deep,

somewhere warm,

somewhere mine.

The background of the slide is a light gray with a fine, grid-like texture. Overlaid on this are several thick, dark gray diagonal lines that run from the top-left towards the bottom-right. Interspersed among these lines are numerous dark gray circles of varying sizes, some of which appear to be partially cut off by the edges of the frame or the lines themselves.

CHARLOTTE
SIMMONDS

BIO

CHARLOTTE SIMMONDS

I am a postdoctoral researcher working in the Astronomy and Physics departments. The context of my work is within the Epoch of Reionisation, which describes the cosmic period in which the Universe went from being dark to being the Universe we know today, full of light. My research is centred around understanding the first stars and galaxies that lit up the Universe billions of years ago during this epoch. For this purpose, I mainly use observations taken with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). This incredible telescope has given us an unprecedented view of the Early Universe, and will allow us to continue to unveil the mysteries of the Universe for years to come.

I decided to join the Creative Encounters Programme to explore new creative ways to communicate my science. Through the programme, I discovered connections between my personal life and my work that I was not aware of. My hope is that my words can reach the world in a way that my science papers cannot.



INSOMNIA

Once again I cannot sleep

The cover of darkness is riddled with dead sheep

I count to ten, I close my eyes

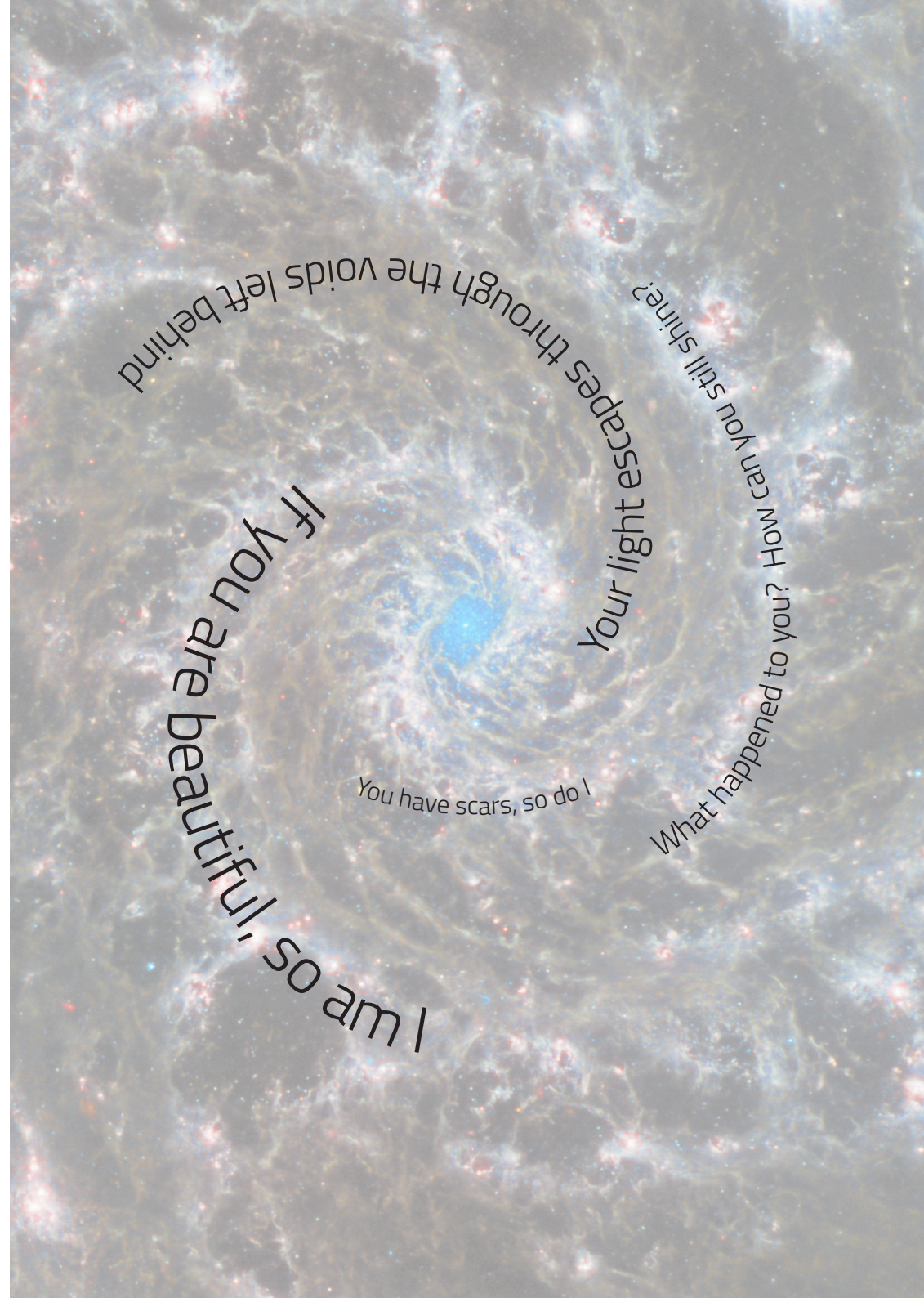
There's nothing behind them but shame and lies

Breathe in one...	it wasn't my fault
Breathe in two...	I tried to say no
Breathe in three...	my voice wasn't loud enough
Breathe in four...	I just learned to shut up
Breathe in five...	I DON'T DESERVE TO FEEL DAMAGED
Breathe in six...	depressed and yet manic
Breathe in seven...	WHY DON'T YOU BELIEVE ME?
Breathe in eight...	I'm not lying nor deceiving
Breathe in nine...	I hate and love what I feel
Breathe in ten...	I hope someday I can heal

SCARS

Based on images of the Phantom galaxy obtained with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), that reveal the holes left behind when massive stars die.

image credits: ESA/Webb, NASA & CSA, J. Lee and the PHANGS-JWST Team



SMALL

Some days I feel so small

It's all overwhelming, unbearable

The darkness comes and I find myself asking

Is there anything out there? Is there somewhere else better?

Most days I'm quite Ok

Most days I'm distracted

Mesmerised by galaxies and stars

Puts things into perspective

I stretch my arms into the sky, get lost in the expanse

I feel the movement and the stillness, all within my grasp

Yesterday I felt alone,

forgotten in the vastness

Today I feel like being small

is actually a kindness

Last night I had some nightmares

of falling in the blackness

Tomorrow, who knows what will come

I might just find some calmness

Some days I feel so small...

There's beauty in the darkness
There's poetry in the void
There's mystery in the silence
There's meaning in the noise

There's relief in being free to learn and make mistakes
but also to love, to feel, to grow, to ache
That I can live my days deciding my own steps
that my life will end when I breathe my last breath

There's beauty in the motion
There's poetry in the wrath
There's mystery in the vastness
I choose the meaning of my path

COMFORT

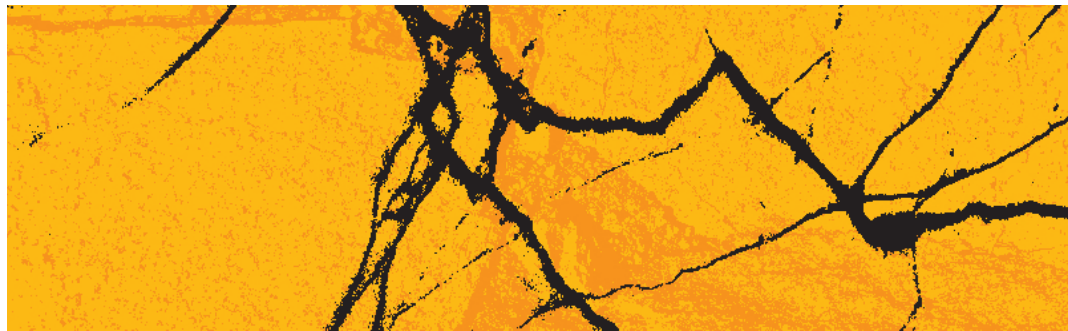
The background of the image is a vibrant yellow-orange color with a textured, marbled appearance. Overlaid on this background are numerous black, branching, and irregular lines that resemble cracks or veins, creating a complex, organic pattern. A solid black rectangular box is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the text "JOSHUA FITZGERALD" in white, uppercase letters.

JOSHUA
FITZGERALD

JOSHUA FITZGERALD

Joshua Fitzgerald is the 2020-24 Jeffrey Rubinoff Junior Research Fellow with Churchill College, an Affiliated Lecturer with the Faculty of History, Affiliated Researcher with the McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research with the University of Cambridge. For Cambridge Creative Encounters, Josh turns to poetic and immersive studies in an unparalleled collection of old boardgames from Mexico (the Starr Collection) at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. He reveals relationships that have formed between Mexican artists, game artwork, playable things kept in museums and digital-age interventions in museum practice. Josh's primary research has focused on the theme of "art as a source of knowledge" in the context of Colonial Mexico. Regarding Mexican Heritage Studies, he has explored José Guadalupe Posada's innovations in analogue games of the nineteenth century, as well as Mesoamerican heritage in popular video games.

Josh's interests extend to Indigenous amaranth seed-dough rituals and edible archives, gendered military histories, Place-Identity Theory and the persistence of Mesoamerican art forms to the present. His first book is entitled *An Unholy Pedagogy: Mesoamerican Art, Architecture, and Learningscapes under Spain* (under review). In 2019, Josh received a PhD (History) and Museum Studies certification from the University of Oregon and has continued to work closely with museums in museum education and collections research. A specialist in Nahuatl Studies, he strives to acknowledge and excite interest in the heritage and ethnohistory of Nahua communities of Mexico.



**COLLECTION NAME:
PARSING POSADA'S PASTIMES:
MUSEUM REFLECTIONS ON THE
ARTFUL BOARD GAMES OF MEXICO
BEFORE THE REVOLUTION**

ZERO-SUM MUSEUM

We stand within the box
The light is bright and sharp
Clear acrylic mounds, smallpox
Dotting this gallery's hearth

You've called us all to here.
Some came from worlds away
Reputations be besmeared
In the zero-sum games we play.

Can one win in museology?
The stakes seem set so high.
Every past is muddled and oily,
And this place keeps tabs on the whys.

Dissenters decry your privilege,
But you can keep stuffin' your gob.
Spiders wrapping up others' heritage,
Preserving to feast on the throb.

Come sit within the fire.
Let's keep it quiet and dull.
Panels will label us liars.
Hear! Stories run warm and swole.

This web sticks to every last shiver.
This crystal cage, delicate silk.
Microscopically spied and deciphered,
We'll write papers about all the guilt.

Why did they lose at museology?
What stakes one's claims, not theirs?
Every past is huddled and slightly
Skewed to keep tabs on the rares.


This is a that. That never was.
Come, let's gaze upon his bones.
A dainty comb. A bit of bugs.
The bittersweet saccharine tones.

Come sit beside the lyre, you,
And sup up bitterer notes.
The webworks welcome all, it's true,
And the Academy's all cutthroats.

Its tangles send a signal
To the hub where the watchers wait.
Unsticking and clipping, they'll wiggle
Barbarians have crashed the gates.

To reseal a king. To return a bronze.
To give back the spirits they took.
The past's a living book of songs
Who's a tempo no peace will brook.

When did we make museology?
Surely 'twas Athens, Shang or the Nile.
Every past's troubled indubitably
Keeping tabs on everyone's file.



But the endgame sits on the horizon,
Awakened by daughters and sons.
Loosening the cords that they've tied on.
Picked, the catalogs and laws all undone.

There's a rhythm at work
That pounds in each box,
That crumbles the cork,
That musters the rot,
That splits as it forks,
That scries orthodox,
That births or aborts,
That rewinds the clocks,
That knows the befores
To tend to all the flocks.

That thing keeping time's place,
Rhythmically set by the winner
They'll rub out the walls of the space,
Webbing erased, but not the spinner.

That spider draws back from the public fly.
Tummy full, it retracts and lets go.
The objects kept safe from the legion-eyed
Time for others' stories to flow.

The future dissolves museology!
The game is defunct with fair rules.
You took things for progress and colony.
You took their descendants for fools.

You gain. I lose. You lose. I win.
Again, again, again, and again.
New players can take a spin.
Let's return this weaving to them.

Where'd you go now, Museology?
Are you nothing when nothin's in your case.
It stayed safe in the box momentarily,
Innit time to play in a decolonized place?

Aim: to describe the ethics and tension of researching
games and museum/collections work as an introductory
poem to the collection.

CATCH COYOTE

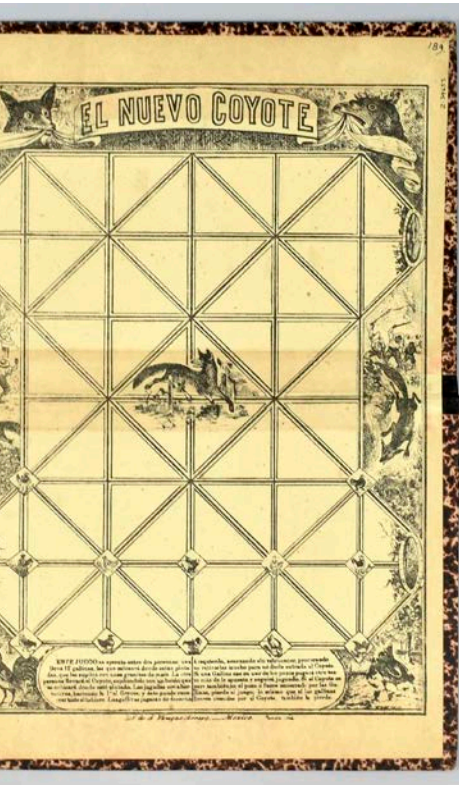


image credits:
El Nuevo Coyote: 'Image used
with permission. Museum of
Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge. MAA Z 39653.'

What's new in New Coyote?
Pieces pressed in Puebla's clay.
Teach me lessons, my dear ol' friend,
So that I'll catch Coyote one day.

The game's rules are simple:
Twelve chickens placed below,
One coyote at board's center,
And you jump to-and-fro.

Coyote's quick and he's cunning;
The chickens, we don't stand a chance.
He snaps us up individually.
His maw makes our feathers dance.

But then we all band together,
Our beaks, all clattering now.
We take the trails as brothers.
Emboldened, we courageous fowl.

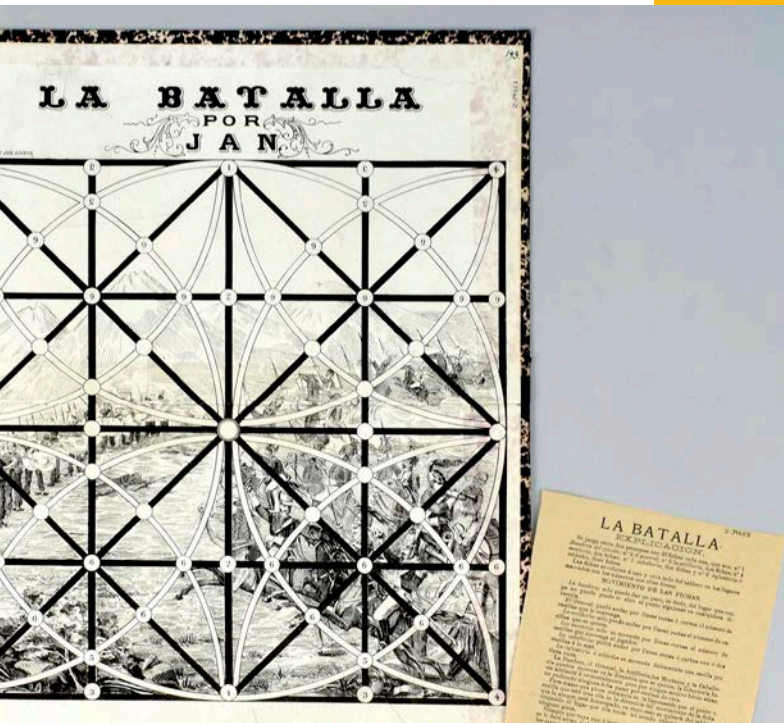
Coyote takes a chicken.
What's one piece from the flock?
We nearly have him surrounded.
Our wings beat a ticking clock.

But Coyote knows the country.
His paths are igneous trails.
We came from across the ocean,
and he's hounding us into the wells.

Teach me to play, Ol' Coyote.
This new game leads to unknowns.
"Hey! You said we'd catch Coyote,"
Half the flock just grumbles and groans.

Aim: to describe the relationship between the 'old coyote' and 'new coyote' games from the introduction of the well device and the concept of trying to capture a vicious opponent with a group of pieces, brave together, but slowly being devoured.

HAIKUS



Game art that unwinds
The clock, and we now take turns
The mountains, snow-topped

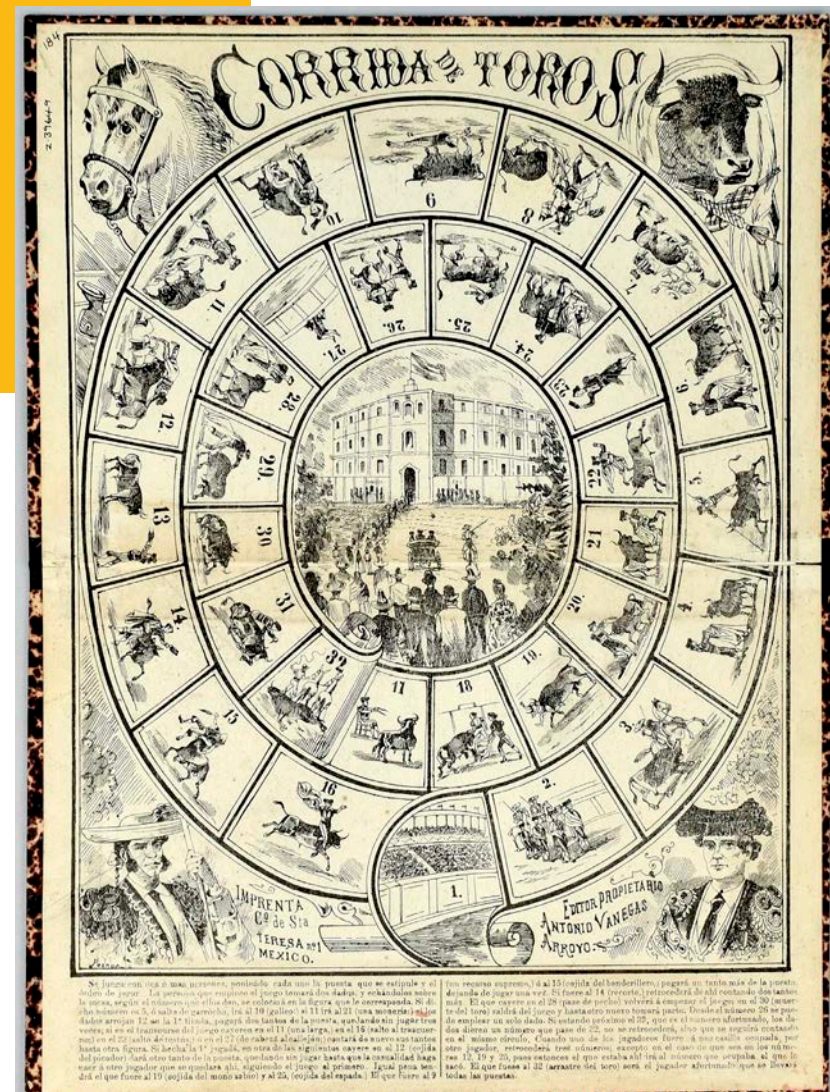
ARTFUL HISTORY

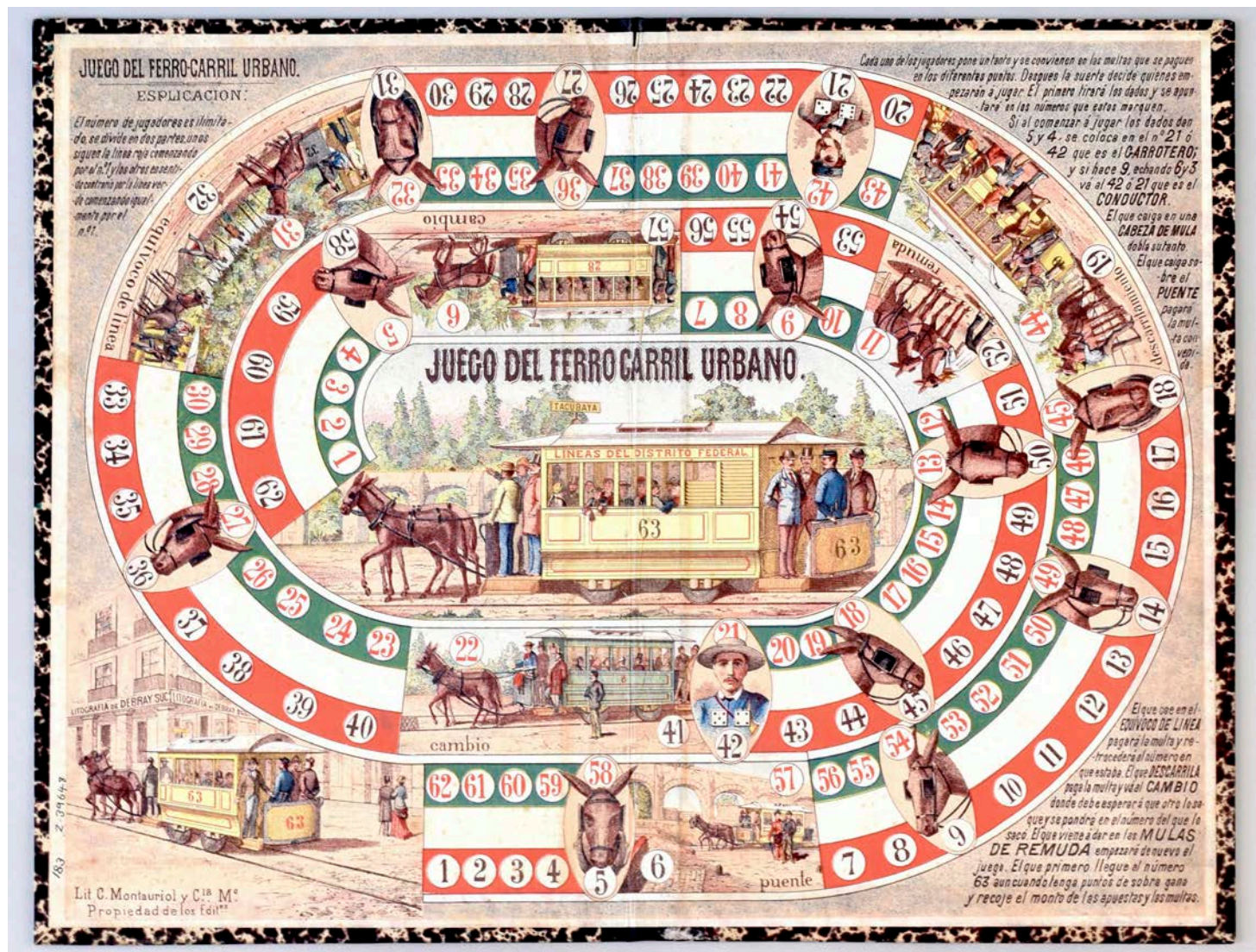
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La Batalla: 'Image used with permission. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. MAA Z39658 1-2.'

CARDBOARD CORRIDA

Posada's toros
Round and down the beast's time's up
Playful bull sorrows

image credits:
Corrido de Toros: 'Image used with permission. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. MAA Z 39649.'





BURRO TRAIN

An ass leads but blind
Through city's dirt this train rolls
Passed the bridge passed trees

image credits:

Juego del Ferro Carril Urbano: 'Image used with permission. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. MAA Z 39648.'

Aim: Construct haiku poetry (17 syllables, roughly, three lines of 5-7-5 syllabic meter) with a focus which relate to game art and design and highlight the seasons, time and nature.

THE INKWELL OF INNOVATION

Games are made in History's mug,
Each turn is a frozen visage.
When Posada sketched upon the plates
He etched an eternal image.

Posed to catch the guileful glare,
Posada's roosters eye the beast.
The farmers race to bludgeon the crook
In the artist's imprinted feast.

How does the past play out today?
How can his art persist?
Bored with games, today, kids move on
To virtual lands pixel-kissed.

Black and white like digital code,
His game art comprised each scene.
Known for the skulls and Future's tolls,
He's still brightening digital screens.

But he set a tone with inky black,
An artform as telling as a wail.
Bordered frames and folkloric gleams,
His true work's Coyote's tail.

A Mexican advent now everyone knows,
Posada placed wells on the board.
Pozos de los campesinos peregrinos
Nuevo Coyote deserves an award—
Its wells transformed the bored.

Aim: Linking José Guadalupe Posada's art with the *El Nuevo Coyote* game and the present concerns in traditional board game craft in the Digital Age.

WHY DOES THE XICOTLI STING?

The place Posada worked
When first he pressed a print
Was a shop named *El Jicote*
A Nahuatl word that meant:
"Bumblebee."

Mexico's precious printer
The man died poor and unknown
But Posada left his mark
By lithographic piles of bones—
Plain to see.

Some say they're negative plates,
The way José inked it out.
His refined black edges acid-traced
Revolting techniques called into doubt.
Subtlety.

He chose a lead-lined process:
Photomechanical artifacts.
Instead of carving out recesses,
It was gelatin-coated zinc plaques.
Humble he.

Well Rivera revered 'La Catrina.'
Kahlo, she was truly convinced
That Posada made the Revolution,
But that's not what's evidenced.
Tumbleweeds.

Was Posada a wasp or *xicotli*?
An artist or sellout?
Engraved and engrained in the culture,
20,000 plus stings inked out.
El Coyote.

Aim: to relay the history of José Guadalupe Posada's, impact as a Mexican cultural icon and problematise how others have viewed his legacy.
Also to use Nahuatl in a poem.

A POEM BY A RESEARCHER IN MUSEUM GAMES [OR THE SOUND OF THE COLLECTION]

I.

Open the box.
The fire of finding old fun fully flummoxed us from our first glance.
The conservationist, he's no bit remiss, taps a toe to show that time is precious. Our time is precious. The priceless cardboard pokes its nose
Above the box, like a crown peeks over a parapet, it sticks its head out
just to show that time ticks like tapping toes.
"It's all a game," the Museum laughs. "Please place your request at
the base of the staff. These toys are not joys that you get to keep. Just
leave your quest'ns for the Head of the Board. Our committee reviews
each question in time. Now, leave of this box. It is now time to go."
But the games are on the table, though, something similar to the
cluttered desktop screen that greets me now. My little laptop fiend.
"No, friend, please check the catalog online again." Fine, it's fine.
No picture needed. Cardboard body, be seated back inside your box.
Forget we talked, forget-me-nots.

II.

But what is this? The next thing shouts. Take out the pieces one by
one. I held you less than a child once did. You're not made for me.
You're made for the lid, guileful kid. So, close it up and let's keep you
safe. Safe from the Mexico that once knew you well. Safe from the
players who threw and moved the dice, like their troubled times,
tumbling 'round and around. The round chess-people are headed to
the parapet now, for the tapping never ceases... yet.
"Wait!" my partner-in-crime exclaims in the silent room. "Keep better
care of these clay men. Don't put them in the bag again. She's chipped
her nose, this iconoclast. Carlotta, Carlotta! Your nose is missing." Kept
safe from Mexico, her name was Charlotte of Belgium. No one told her
her Max was dead. French imperialist dreams were cut off, everyone
knows. But Charlotte's mind declined well before her emperor's death
and the coming woes. The war that swept Mexico away as it swept off
with the later mustachioed forever-king.
In her time, though, Carlotta's muted paranoia gripped her tightly.
She felt hunted by demons, and silently
the family kept her safe.
Was her chesspiece's nose cut to spite her face? Mourning Charlotte,
come greet the dawn. I hold you in my cyan palm. My mate points out
another dilemma. "This other one's crumbling, see. This one right here.
Its clay insides are in the bag." Our quest reveals its face to be a Pawn,
nothing more, in this game of spoils. Conserve its strength, keep time
at bay. Pawns aren't worth much and never meant to stay. His
toe-taps increase when the object's in danger.
Forget we talked, immortal stranger.

III.

I'm bored with the tapping. Let's move this along. Let's pick up the bells and find where they belong. They go with this game, *cascabelitos mudos*, but they'd not tell us so through my cluttered, beaming screen. The conservator's facade slips a bit. Seeing the bells piqued his interest and broke his hip. The pitter stopped pattering 'midst the silent room. Time stands still seemingly struck by the sounds. "Yes, rattle the brass bells. Do they still make a sound? The overseer will watch over, no worries. ... and the Museum won't mind cuz the Museum's not around."

There's a joke in there somewhere, like a tree-strewn woods we never heard. Keep digging in the box for a sign of the simile. Sacrificing a sense of smell. Falling as a fleeting reign. Accepting a revolutionary. Playing solitaire against time. As if the box that holds us all keeps us safe from tapping toes.

It's a maxim I'm still looking for, one resounding and bounding in the backs of the wood box. Something funny like a noisy copse of Poplar that cannot pop. Or a bell that cannot ring. Or a countryside without its toys.

Forget the sounds, mnemonic device.

IV.

Pop! The tapping comes back. The thought clouds have cleared. His toes have no ears, not really, and the conservationist cannot stomach a chattering thought. "It's a vice." Just a joke, nothing more. But time fails to hear the fleeting chimes in the silent room from a silent box filled with games glinting bright and flummoxing foreign affairs. Close the box, anew.

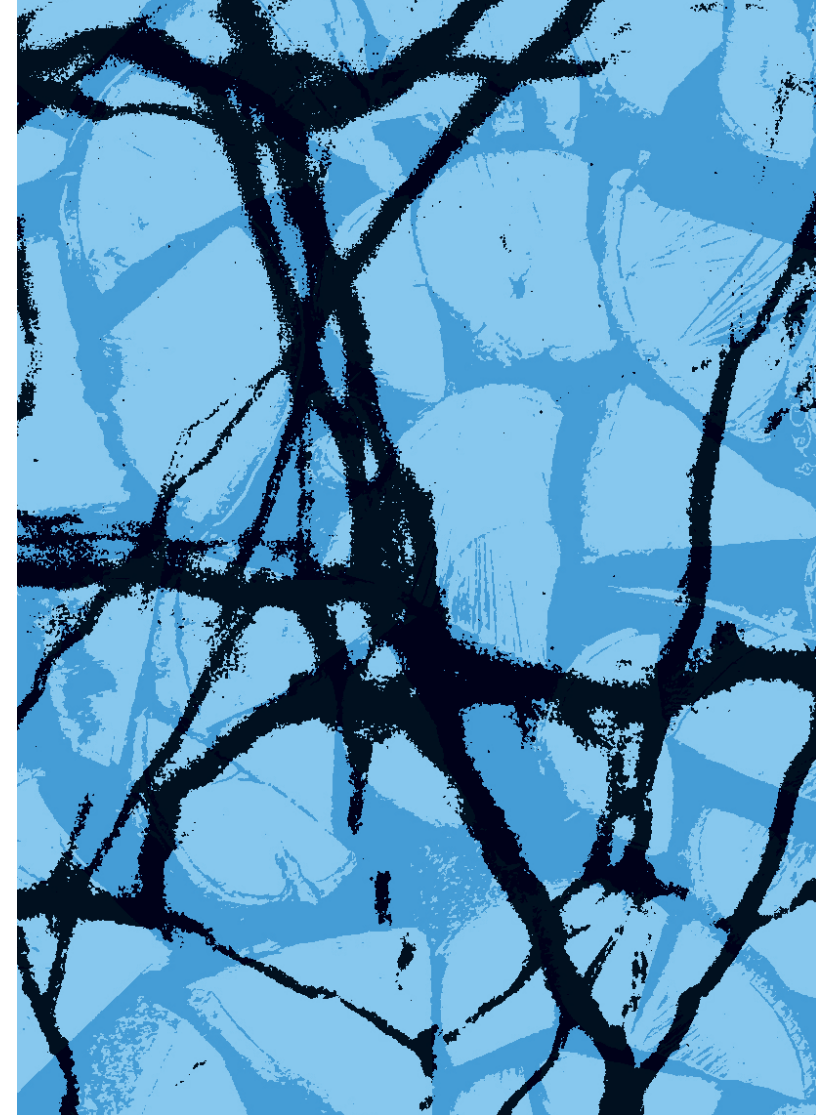
Aim: to explore the senses in association with Mexico's games and game pieces in the MAA collection, and describe some of the sense of tension between objects, researchers, regulations, museum staff, curators, conservationists, and the ever-present weight of time.



REBECCA
MYERS

REBECCA MYERS

Rebecca Myers is a PhD student in the Department of Psychology. She has a background in mathematics, psychology, and education. Her current research focusses on the relationship between exceptional mathematics (e.g. maths creativity, giftedness and expertise) and a combination of cognitive, personality and affective factors. Her collection of poems revolve around the definition and measurement of different key concepts in her research area. Incorporating different perceptions and experiences, she explored how this could shape not only the words written but also the techniques and methods behind the writing.



MATHEMATICAL CREATIVITY: IN PRACTICE

21st century living
Values both
Maths and Creativity.

I

Can only hope
That one day
The need for the two simultaneously

Just

Outweighs any previous perceptions
Of mathematics
As anxiety-inducing or dull.
Instead, we'll appreciate the thoughts
That race through our minds
As we're

Sat

In mathematical exploration
Posing problems
And generating solutions
Valued for our ability
To think

Outside

The

Box – Be curious
And consider what lies in maths
Beyond the

Classroom

Where our minds are busy

Working

Through

The multitude of possibilities
Beyond the facts and formulas
And the tidy

Textbooks.

For the mathematically creative minds
May be prepared for more
To address the future challenges
Together and not

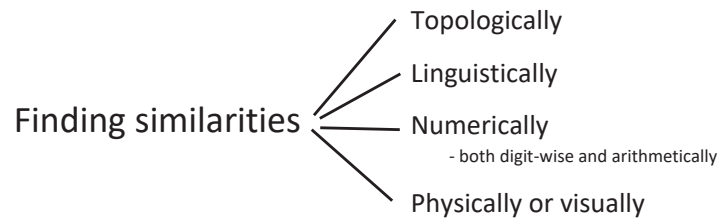
In

Isolation.

What a prospect.

MATHEMATICAL CREATIVITY: IN RESEARCH¹

Problem **S**olving :



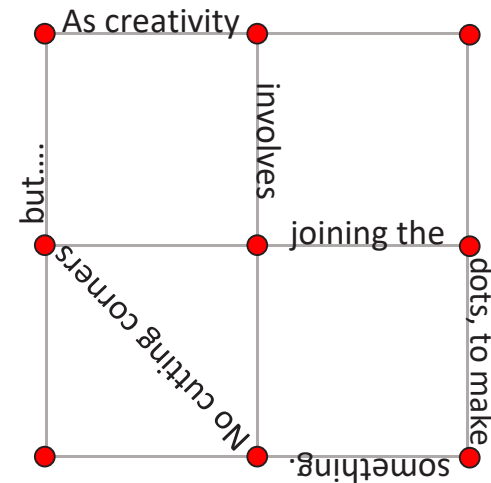
A multitude of views

Linearly, then switching it up

Generation } → To think outside the box...
Exploration }

¹ This poem is inspired by four maths creativity tasks that were used for one of my research studies, using them as a template for the text. This included adaptations of two problem-solving tasks (Haylock, 1987) and two problem-posing tasks (Stoyanova, 1997; Yuan & Sriraman, 2011).

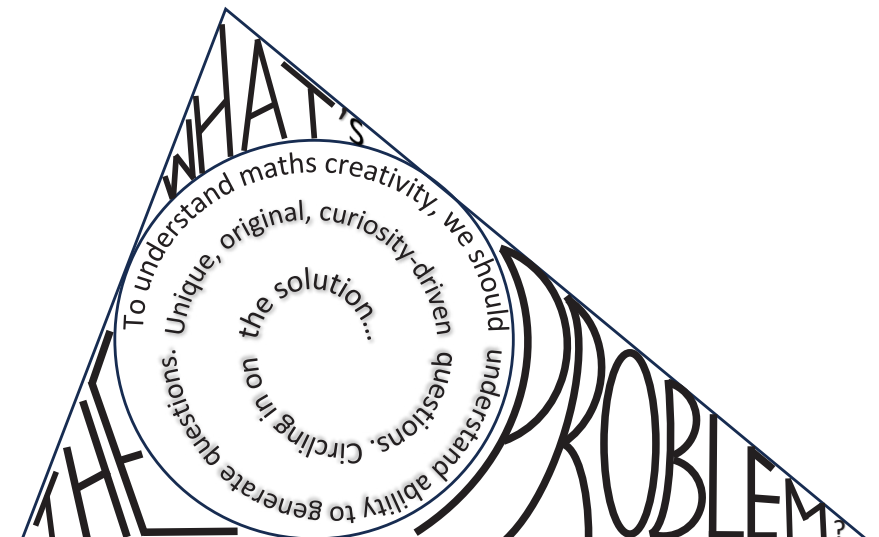
To think outside the box:



...But risks are welcomed.

It takes shape...

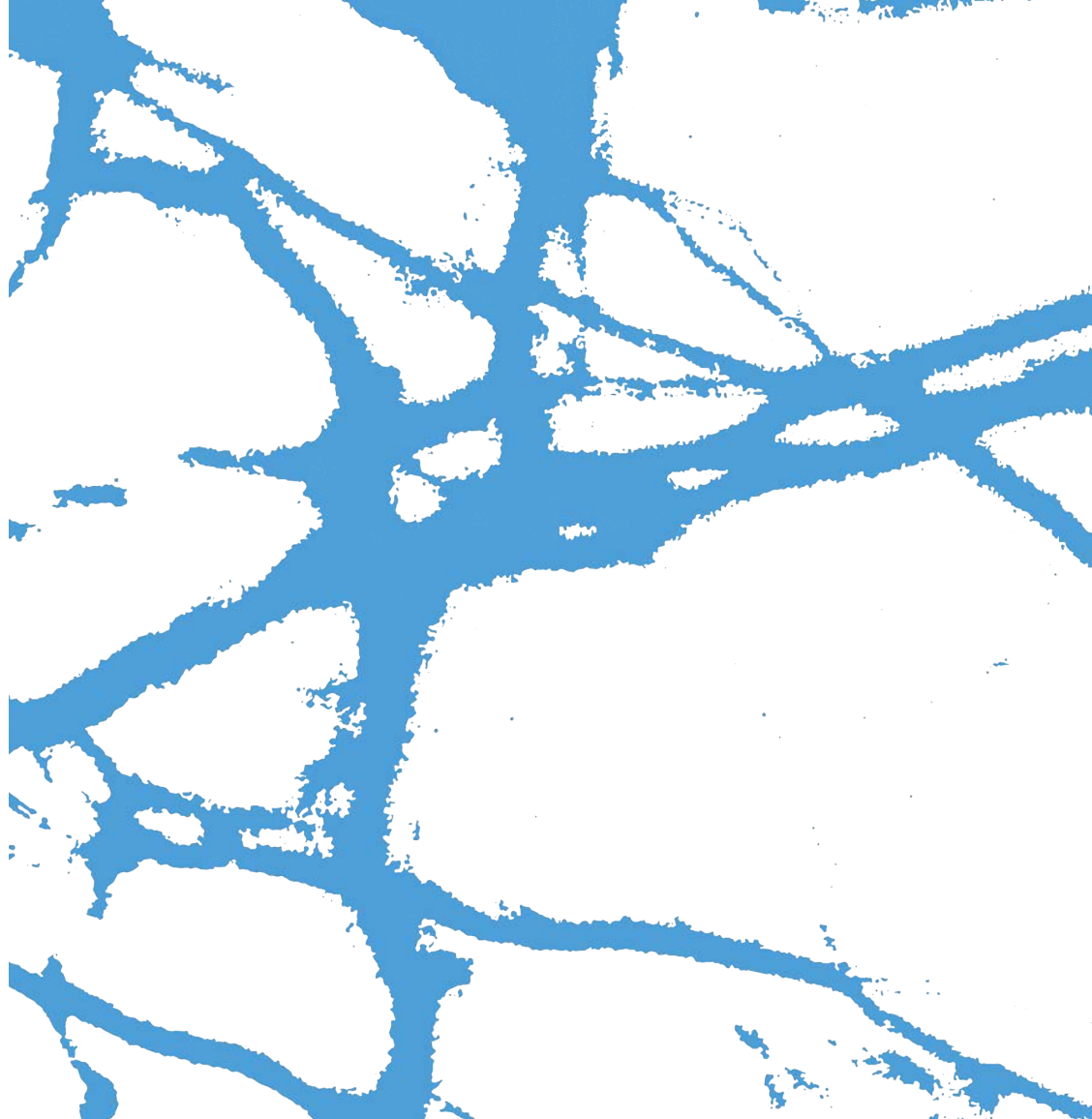
Opening us up:



Questioning – Posing Problems

I
 W A S
 A F T E R
 P A T T E R N
 E X P A N S I O N
 O R I G I N A L I T Y
 Q U A L I T A T I V E L Y
 F L E X I B I L I T Y
 N U M E R I C A L
 F L U E N C Y
 W H I C H
 C A N
 B(e)
 T H E
 C O U N T
 T H A T I S
 M E A S U R I N G
 C R E A T I V I T Y
 M A T H E M A T I C A L L Y

...if you read between the lines!



References

Haylock, D. W. (1987). A framework for assessing mathematical creativity in school children. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 18(1), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00367914>

Stoyanova, E. (1997). *Extending and Exploring Students' Problem Solving via Problem Posing: A Study of Years 8 and 9 Students involved in Mathematics Challenge and Enrichment Stages of Euler Enrichment Program for Young Australians*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Submitted to Edith Cowan University.

Yuan, X., & Sriraman, B. (2011). An Exploratory Study of Relationships between Students' Creativity and Mathematical Problem-Posing Abilities. In B. Sriraman & K. H. Lee (Eds.), *The Elements of Creativity and Giftedness in Mathematics* (pp. 5–28). SensePublishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-439-3_2

MATHEMATICAL PROBLEMS

(Inspired by the responses from participants taking the maths creativity tasks for one of my studies.)

What is the point?

Is this an object? A quantity? A conceptual idea?

Simply what we see or infinite.

Calculate the flow: of **water**... of **speed**... of **time**...

Calculate...

Calculate...

Calculate...

Calculate...	Find...	Work out...
Consider...	Describe...	Produce...
Write...	Equate...	Derive...

Find the all-encompassing formula

Prove...

QED.

Mathematical problems

This is a garden plan

A door wedge

A table under a carpet

A crop field

A sheep grazing tethered to a fence

A hole in a tube with the water bursting out

This is a shop logo

A marble in a Toblerone box

A triangular doughnut

A stage for a competition

Dance choreography

A slice of cheese

Enough for a recipe?

Societal relations: networked

A body all mapped out

The ball dropping

An infinite pattern:

Can we put the shape inside itself? Again and Again and Again.

Can we continue this without repetition, without it ever being the same?

Mathematical problems

A wonky triangle

An unstraight line

A squished circle

An 'angel' too wide

Not the right numbers

Missing information: how unwise.

But most importantly...

Why does it look like a bad depiction of an emblem from a famous movie franchise?

Mathematical problems: THIS!

MATHEMATICAL DIFFICULTIES

Imagine a number line,
That ends at 2 and starts at 9
And counts in jumps
With inconsistent lines
Where 9 plus two
Gives us 5.

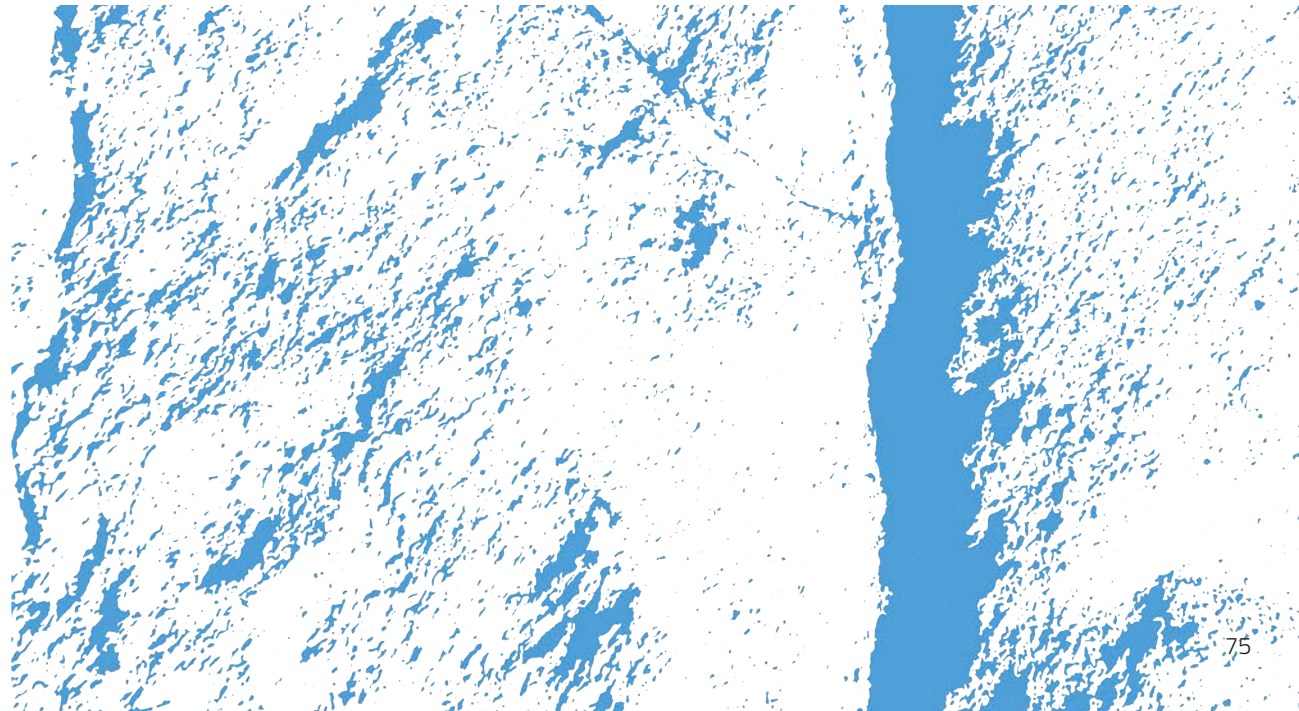
It's gone...
And you're asked:
What comes after 21?

Without an image
The evidence not there
Your memory's all mixed up
A number lined despair
And suddenly mere counting
Fills you up with dread
Because the answer to the question
Just isn't in your head
And if it was it wouldn't matter
Because that number sense won't stick
For it isn't in the order
That the world thinks should just click.

Then how about beyond the count
We consider merely size
And you're given just two numbers:

1 and 5

They ask which number is bigger?
As you contemplate their **size**.





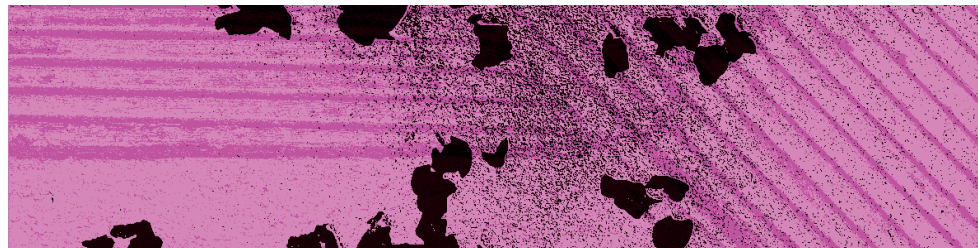
WENDY BROWNE
& RUTH SELLERS

WENDY BROWNE & RUTH SELLERS

Dr Ruth Sellers and Dr Wendy Browne are based at the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Research and Professional Practice Centre at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. At the Rudd Research Centre, we explore the intricate ways in which everyday experiences within the family, school, and community shape the development, mental health and life chances of children and young people. Our research focuses on examining the interplay between family dynamics and youth development, with a focus on adoption and foster care, parental separation, domestic adversity, economic disadvantage and inequalities, among other topics. The ultimate goal of our research is to develop knowledge to support practitioners, families, and policymakers in fostering positive outcomes for children and young people.

Our selection of poems are directly inspired by our research focusing on family relationship dynamics across a range of family types (e.g., two-parent households, parents who have separated, and parents, children and young people who have experienced adoption and foster care). Our poetry aims to tell some of the stories and communicate topics linked to our research, recognising the intricacies of family relationships and individual experiences related to youth development and mental health.

Our poems explore the interactions between couples, parents/carers and children, and the impacts of these relationships on development within and across generations. Additionally, we highlight themes related to mental health and the support systems in place, drawing insights from individuals experiencing anxiety or depression, in particular. Within our selection of poems, we have utilised a range of styles which aim to convey the qualitative depth and diversity of experiences within families and among individuals experiencing mental health problems. Ultimately, through our poetry, we aim to encourage a unique engagement with the themes our research explores and promote a greater understanding and empathy for the experiences of families, adults, children and young people.



FATHER - SON

We see each other
Infrequently. Although lately
You don't seem to forget me.
You say my name almost,
So gently. You make me feel soft
And you reach out with your arms
For me
Just me
And lay your head gently on my chest.
My whole world fits in my arms.

By Ruth Sellers

THE FEVERED HEARTS

Within the shelter of a restless home,
A braying rhetoric, in a startling tone.
Tearing at the innocence not yet outgrown.
Searing, scarring, mocking any stick or stone.

They know no refuge from this crossfire of adult life.
No way to temper the battle of fevered hearts.
Tiny outstretched hands, ignorant of the strife.
Search for a truce, when all harmony departs.

Too many lost bedtimes now, of stories and calm,
Each a lost thread in the tapestry of youth.
No victor emerges, no, just a shattered psalm,
Resounding and echoing against walls that know the truth.

Remind them then, of the innocence within,
Quell the glowing flames and the battle's plume.
Mend the wounds beneath their fragile skin,
Set them through life, free of this bitter heirloom.

By Wendy Browne

CUP OF TEA

After watching your argument, I don't know the anatomy of an apology.
We know the waiting, we wait it out quietly.
But we know, in the offering of tea
This is your resolution, your silent apology.

By Ruth Sellers

A GHOST IN MIND

The ghost of ancestors' past within my mind,
From generations' woes, now left behind,
To linger in a world where we must coexist.
The legacy casts shadows in which I subsist,
Never free from this ghost within my mind.

The ghost of ancestors' past within my mind,
Embodies bygone years with destinies aligned,
And now reflected in the eyes of my child.
The ghost is cryptic, variable, unprofiled.
The stealth of this ghost within their mind.

The ghost of ancestors' past within my mind,
A generation's journey need not be defined.
Together, towards a path without this force,
From our very essence, a strength we'll endorse,
A means to banish this ghost from our minds.

By Wendy Browne

MOVING

Each new place is a new beginning
Yet a rootless ones
What we were we can
Discard until
There is no knowing the self
And in this new place there is no
Familiar face to
Face that fear
With us or to
Mirror us back
To us.

By Ruth Sellers

PLUTO IS NOT A PLANET

I might get lost in the lengthy orbit in a system
That I circle but do not yet understand.
I'm Pluto – a planet, no longer
A planet.
I'm just as good as the rest, though smaller
I could still be enough
Being rock or ice
Making my own journey into the universe
Regardless of any label in any system.

By Ruth Sellers



image credits: Simon Ball

THE LABYRINTH

Once again, I navigate through the winding but familiar labyrinth.
My steps heavy from the dank paths of yesterday and the days before.
And sighs echo to fill the air, making it stifling and hard to breathe.
There is nowhere to rest, and the shadows do not veil my tears.
An image cast against a wall plays my dreams with glimmers of the light outside.
The reel spins on, in a relentless loop, where my realities and desires combine.
It is a dance of fractured light that quickly fades and breaks across the darkened alleys.
I swallow my invisible companion, the ever punctual but impatient guide.
The whispers have a rhythm now, but the asynchrony will prevail, it always does.
I search my pockets for reality's thread, but find only a hole.
So I search on, for a new dawn's ray, one heavy step at a time.

By Wendy Browne

CORNERS

They protrude out
Of every surface;
Corners that jut out
And threaten.
The table edge taunts,
Pointing at me
Aggressively.
All is angular.

I would like to live
In a lighthouse;
Cylindrical space and
Spiralling stairs,
Circling seagulls over
Curling waves
Continuous curves.

But the ships
Like arrows across the ocean –
What if they come for me?
Boats like blades bearing towards me.
I will not let the ships come.
I will keep the light in
The lighthouse lit.
I will live
In the lighthouse
Safe within its walls.

By Ruth Sellers

THE PEACH STONE

I've brought sunshine and fresh flowers.
I thought perhaps we could do nothing but rest together
Under the private shade of a willow, while I tell you
Familiar stories of our lives that you know
But don't remember today.
I shan't tell you a joke
Or force you to see that the world is
sometimes good.
I know you're tired.
Can't we wait for sunset to see
Something beautiful?
Not for you to feel guilty about
Not being moved by this, but to see if
today, you might feel something
other than blank despair.
I wonder, would the whole of you smile again
If I brought you a peach, to remind you of summer.
The soft skin might remind you of
The gentle touch I've been too afraid to reach for,
but want to. And you might remember:
The refreshing sweet flesh is soft, easily bruised,
It too has a strong heart.

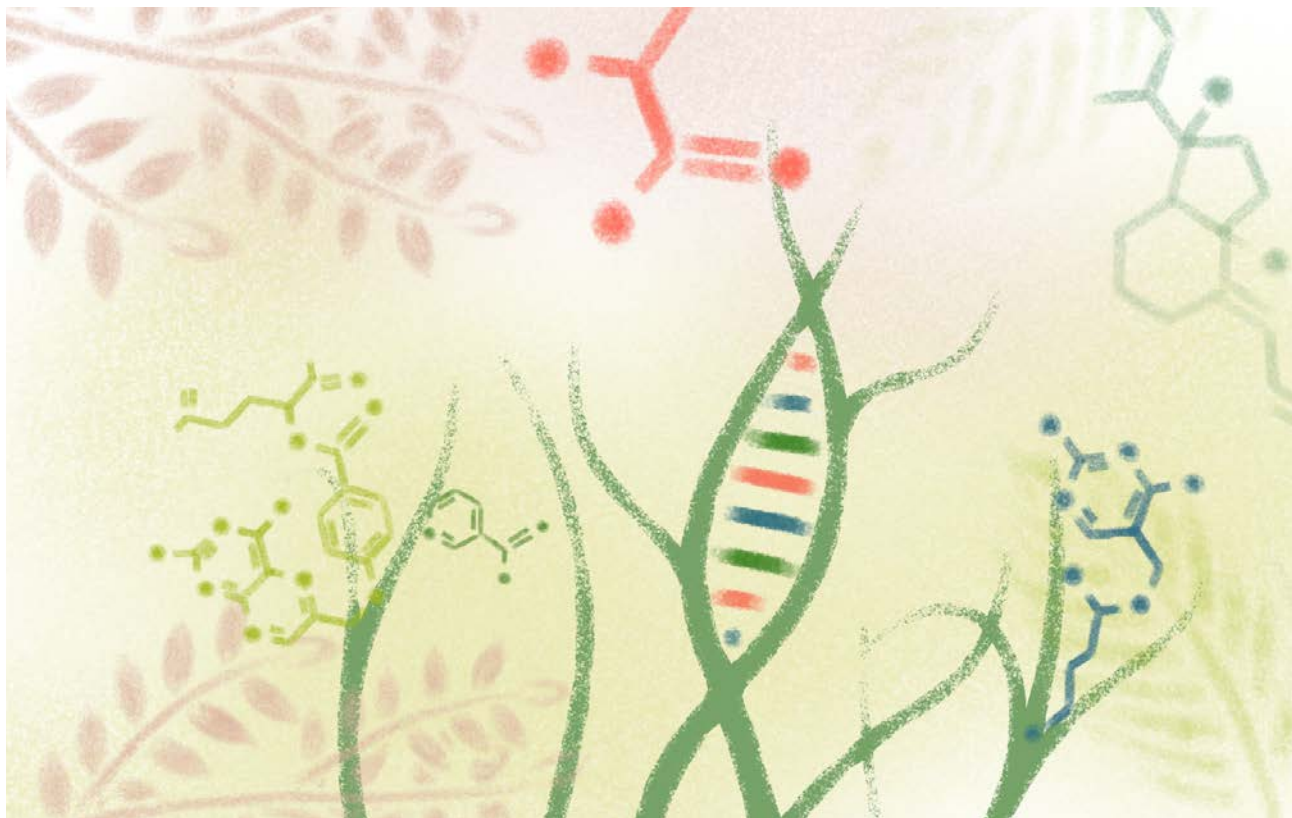
By Ruth Sellers

THE CANDLE

You carry the whole world with you
In a journey through the dark
Weary but not yet defeated.
Let me walk with you,
Let me light a candle to light your way home.
When it comes to set it down,
Gently set it down, the whole world.
And in the light, know you have found your way home.

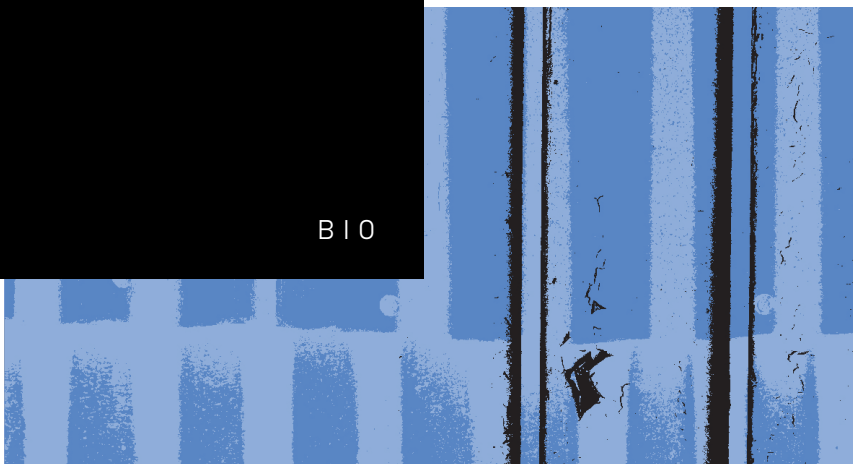
By Ruth Sellers

image credits: Simon Ball





MARGHERITA
BATTISTARA



MARGHERITA BATTISTARA

Margherita Battistara is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Physiology, Development, and Neuroscience Department, where she works at the intersection between biology and physics. Margherita's research focuses on understanding how embryos develop, particularly how cells change their shape to create the tissues and organs in our bodies.

During development, cells grow, stretch, squeeze, and move around. They have to coordinate among themselves via a complex choreography to morph tissues — the material our bodies are made of, like skin, muscle, and bone. Margherita uses insect embryos as a model system to study the interplay between cell shape and tissue morphogenesis. Employing cutting-edge molecular and live imaging technologies, she can see in real-time how cells change their shape and move together, producing the mechanical forces necessary to deform a tissue.

By studying these processes, we can understand how diverse and adaptable life forms come to be, all starting from the cooperation of tiny cells.

If you would like to learn more about Margherita's research, you can view a video by scanning this QR code.



This collection of poems is born from a desire to encapsulate the lighter moments that punctuate experimental scientific research — a quest that often unfolds in the quiet corners of the lab on a peaceful Sunday, or amidst the precise ritual of RNA synthesis. There is something deeply beautiful about the microscopic world, and being able to capture it is worth all the troubleshooting experiments inexorably come with.

The process of writing these poems reminded me of the inherent playfulness in the act of scientific exploration. It was an exercise in rediscovering my work through the lenses of curiosity and wonder, between the lines of factual and fantastical.

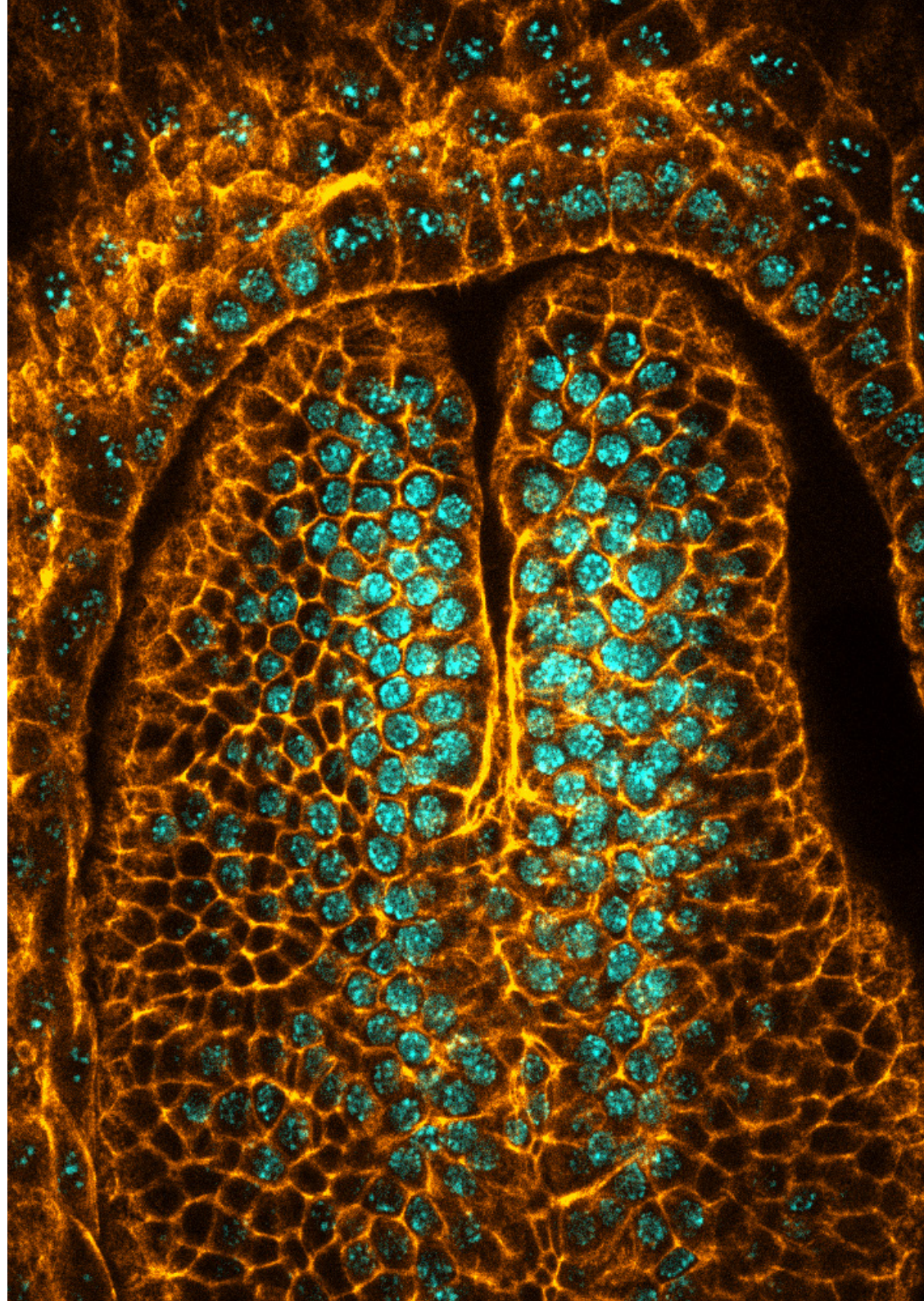
SUNDAY IN THE LAB

A tic then two beeps
It's sulky or sculled
The freezer disgruntled is warm

The forceps awake
The breeze of a song
Tiptapping barefoot on the floor

The lights were left on
The voice can dissolve
I'm singing when I am alone

It feels underneath
When looking up close
I'm tracing a playground instead of a job



TODAY I MADE SOME RNA

Sitting on my bench
The bucket full of cold
My bright green fingers
Let the ingredients consort:

- A bottle of dry patience
- A tube squeezed for hope
- Three boxes of resilience
- One bag of stoic love

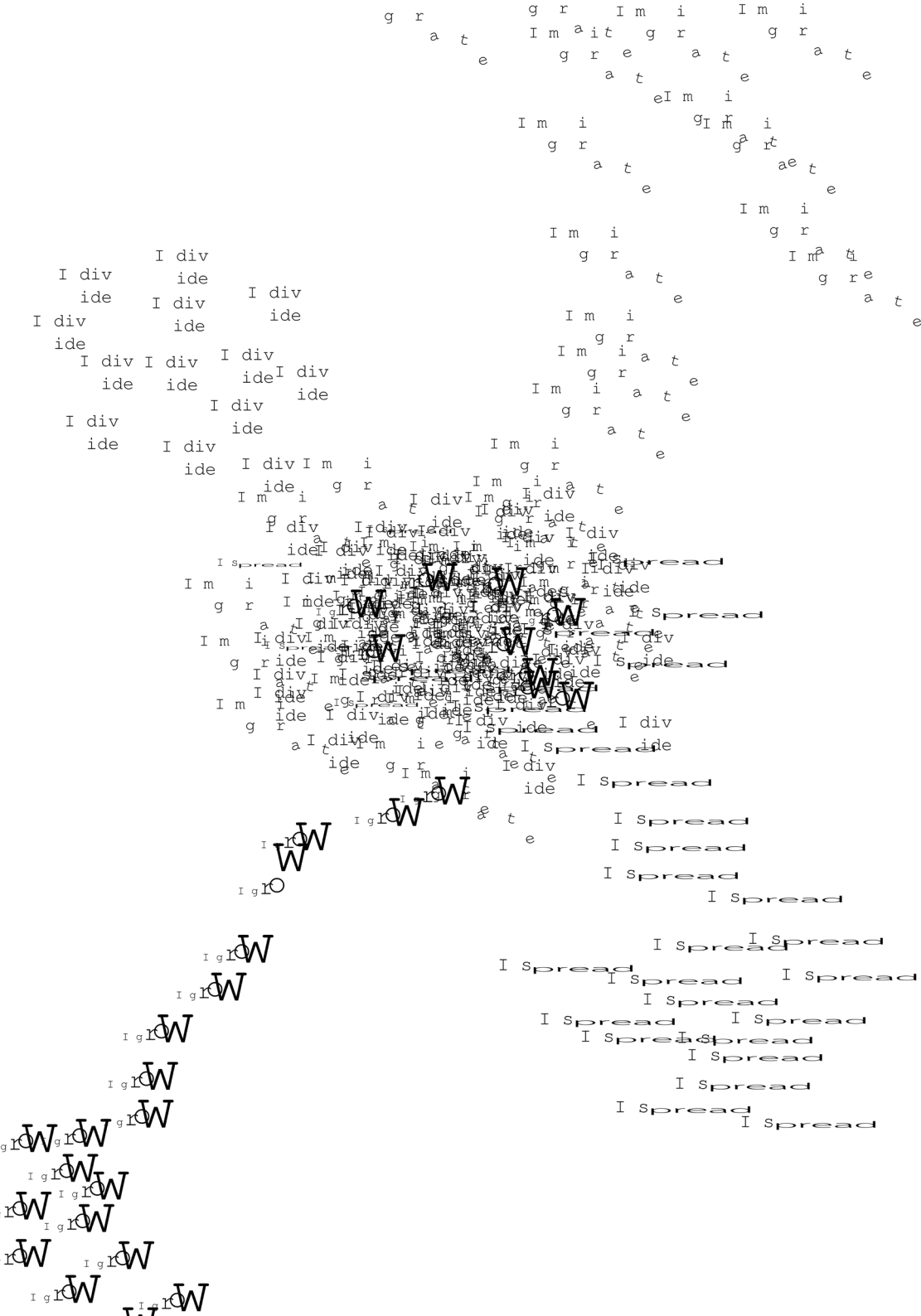
Escaping the centre
The tube waits a breath
Look now through the plastic
A few micrograms of bless

THE MUTANT

Sometimes on my nose
I see a red fly
Waiting to shine
While sleeping supine

A fish in the sky
Staring under the scope
Flickering glows
As a wintry hug

Biologists use mutations to understand the role of genes. To know which embryos carry a specific mutation, we use fluorescent tagging - a method to attach to the sequence of the mutated gene a stretch of DNA coding for a fluorescent marker. By looking for glowing embryos under a microscope, we can select those with the mutation for further study.



In the context of the dynamics of complex societies, Collective Action Theory examines how individuals' or groups' actions, driven by shared interests or common goals, lead to the emergence of organised structures and patterns of behaviour within a society. This theory challenges traditional views that attribute societal changes solely to the actions of powerful elites or leaders, highlighting instead the potential of collective efforts from the broader population. In a parallel fashion, from the collective action of cells, simultaneously dividing, spreading, migrating and growing, the morphogenetic flows that result in the development of functional anatomies emerge. Just as coordinated actions among cells lead to the formation of complex biological shapes, coordinated actions among individuals or groups can lead to the formation and evolution of social structures.

image credits: Margherita Battistara

GIULIA BUCCOLINI

Art Director and Graphic Designer

