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I received an email out the blue from DD. Hi! With an invitation to talk to about some past projects on my website. I was a bit hesitant about speaking to my 'old stuff' when my 'new stuff' feels more exciting and relevant. Revisiting this material was more generative than I thought it would be. I was inspired enough to add some things and take some out, but most importantly felt myself move away from 'but that's not as good as...' to 'look where you started'. There's something deeply reassuring about seeing the embers of your passions in their infancy still glowing, and burning questions tempered into ongoing lines of inquiry that just keep going.

So here's some stuff to read and listen to. Not many people heard the birth metal song, so I'm pretty excited to hear what you'll make of it all. I hope the context helps it make sense. I'm also interested to know if anyone has heard of this as a genre before? Birth Metal. I understand it might be a bit much for some, a bit out there for others, but I trust you to push whatever buttons you need to, to turn it up, down or off. If you find you can't make it through. I'd love to hear about that.

Maybe we can ease in with this sound offering first:

20min of birds just doing their thing.

It's listed on my website as a 'sound bath' stop. It's a collection of bird sounds from Queensland. The Sunshine Coast specifically, where I lived for a few years. I've

grown to love birds which I feared a bit as a child. Sharp beak, claws and a small brain made for a way too unpredictable creature. We were also told they weren't smart back then (eg bird brained), which we know now is way off the mark if you know anything about corvids. My relationship to them is deep and personal in ways I don't care to share right now, but I do weave into my practice.

I notice a lot of interest in mindfulness and techniques for breathing showing up in therapy. Sometimes it sounds like another thing to master, practice or fail at. A task of concentration and will that result in positive outcomes if you do it right. As a means of scaffolding up to such fetes, I wonder about starting with an opportunity for a kind of time out. I imagine this as a floating rest stop in a digital sea. Creating a little portal into nature where you can rest or roam around in your mind, rendering the scene in as much or as little detail as you wish.

Instead of wrangling your thoughts, what happens if you
let them lose in a new landscape?

What do they get up to? Do you have to ask them to be
quiet so you can hear the birds properly? Or do your
thoughts blend in quite happily to the lovely cacophony?

Is there a conversation you can hear you might be part
of, even in silence?

Ecology has been a great source of inspiration over the last couple of years. I love the way those folks see and describe complex systems and relationships. They provide powerful metaphors to work with. I love Sophie Strand's writings on nature and reflections on chronic illness and disability justice. Cosmo Sheldrake is a musician that incorporates animal sounds, and has used his considerable resources to capture

and study expressions of harmony and discord across habitats as a reflection of health.

When I meet with people in person I'm mindful of the placement of clocks in the space. I can't help but notice when and where a professional's eyes dart up or sideways to check the time during a consult. I decided to dispense with this myself and instead be guided by a soundtrack of bird song that fades out about 5 minutes before we are due to end. In the bird track I'm currently working with, if you listen carefully you can hear the sound of traffic slowly building about 15 min before the end of our time, as a cue for us both to start bringing things to a close. The birds support spaciousness in the conversations, filling the pauses. Listening, thinking and not knowing what to say, sound very similar and can take as long as they need to be.

Waiting for Aura A Birth Metal Song: Pushing back on preferred birth sounds

In 2018 I attended a birth. It was my first invitation to such an important event for our family. My timing was great having arrived from Canada only a few days before. Kyra brought Aura Jade into the world in a birthing centre in the hills near Adelaide, South Australia.

Kyra is having her first child, with my brother Pablo and his son Mason. I knew Kyra had hopes she held dear for the process to take place naturally, with as much support and as little intervention as possible. We came with our own hopes for ways we might play a role in that support and share in this miraculous event as a family. As two families coming together. Which wasn't how things turned out.

We gathered in the morning at the pleasant looking facility, where we would remain together well into the night. There are lot's of things I miss about Australia when I'm away, sounds among them. Birdsong and people's voices in particular. I often bring a small recorder with me when I visit. I pull it out sometimes when my Dad is sharing stories about growing up in Naples, or when the rainbow lorikeets are squawking up a storm. Birds in Canada it seems are also prone to politeness. I have the recorder with me at the birthing centre, but soon learn the environment isn't conducive to story telling or recording. It has a library vibe.

Pablo & Kyra's families had only met briefly once before today. Our families are quite different from each other, in terms of size, age range and origin. There were almost ten of us gathered at one point, all excited to meet each other and share in this day. We got the impression quite quickly we were taking up too much space. Or not taking it up in the right way somehow. My restless young nephew inventing ways to play with my partner outside on the lawn, garnered some frowns from the staff. We all did our best to wriggle, fidget and pace less obviously as the hours rolled on. I didn't see or hear a peep from any other families that day. My brother was the only person allowed to be with Kyra, he spent pretty much all the long hours at her side. Her Mother lapped the corridor helplessly, her Grandmother swayed softly in her seat. I fussed about making cups of tea and fashioning sandwiches awkwardly with a plastic knife. We had fallen into speaking sparsely in hushed tones. We could hear

Kyra moan and strain in cycles. When we thought she might be close, we would quickly huddle in a semi-circle around the door to her suite door with our heads bowed. We chewed our lips, and shook our heads gently, wondering how she was doing after all this time? Her Doctor eventually bristled purposefully past us. No update, just shake of the head (of a different quality), and a muttered admonishment, "Your'e putting that little girl under an awful lot of pressure" he said. She was the furthest thing from a little girl I could imagine right now. And I don't think she knew we were there, we hadn't made a peep outside the closed door.

No one knew how to respond to your pain Kyra. All we could do was listen intently and hold you in our hearts. The sounds you made were extraordinary to me. Sounds I would actually never have imagined you could make. I heard strength, power, courage, frustration and determination, and PAIN. I heard sounds that rivalled the intensity of the voices in the heavy metal music Pablo would play for me in his car sometimes. He loves metal. I love messing with things (experimenting). A nurse appeared a few minutes after the doctor to shoo us away from the door. We moved out in to the car park and smoked, even those of us who didn't smoke took a cigarette as we formed another loose circle, and shuffled our weight from foot to foot nervously. Our disappointments began working on us in different ways. Some folks left, some let their frustrations lose in their imaginations, some blew them out in clouds of smoke. Pablo eventually came out to update us as it grew dark. Kyra's hopes for a low intervention birth were becoming less possible as she and the baby grew fatigued. She would give it one more go, before taking advice to move to a C-section delivery. I gave Pablo the recorder and the bones of the idea for a new genre 'birth metal' as he ventured back to be with Kyra.

As she heaved and strained we heard a long FUUUUUUCK!!!! Before things fell quiet. We later learned she had received the instruction “Less noise. More push” Self consciousness and shame now squished the sounds against a tight jaw and gritted teeth. We caught a glimpse of her as they wheeled her into surgery. We broke the quiet rule once more to cheer and encourage her, waving our arms at her like her biggest fans ever. Aura Jade was born healthy and well a short while (comparatively) later.

Once back in Canada my brother sent over some guitar noodles, (that’s a technical term for improvised musical fits and spurts), and my partner began the extraordinary task of sifting through the disparate contributions and shaping them into something, before adding live drums and letting me have a crack at some additional vocals. We’re all musical, but this is the first time we’ve worked on anything together, and the first time working at such distances apart. It’s six minutes, epic and resolves sweetly. Like the day. Kyra was delighted and a little taken aback (as you might imagine) with the finished piece. I am very grateful for her permission to share all this with you.

Children don’t feature much in my life, and I will admit to having been ignorant of the kinds of pressure people face around preferred ways of bringing a human into the world. I’ve explored this in conversation since then and heard a number of stories speaking to this pressure. I’m also pleased to report there are exceptions! A beloved colleague, Cora Bilsker, shared how important voicing freely through the process was, connecting with an inner strength that wasn’t entirely familiar to her previously, along with an appreciation of a setting that didn’t have her siloed away. She was able to hear other parents working through labour and join in chorus, in solidarity with them, at this most human of times, finding it very comforting.

Here's the song in its 6 and half minutes of glory. Play it loud!!!

So let's keep going, there's more, more all the time I'm not sure what do with, where to share, or to monetize... (which is the other consistent 'feedback' I receive). My website could really use an overhaul, but it's a pretty low priority for me. It's a kind of placeholder. It's not how most people find me, or find out about how I work. A human web is largely responsible for those connections.

A lot has happened in the world since these three projects. There's been an awful lot to respond to, and I've learned that resting, starting things and not finishing them, or just keeping them alive in our imagination (or a journal) are equally meaningful responses. The ability to dream up anything in the future that feels good, feels like big hard radical work at this time. This ability is probably the closest thing I have to a 'diagnostic tool', for how people are doing. People aren't exactly thriving right now.

As I take this opportunity to reflect on the past, things are starting to feel less random, and more like a body of work. Maybe more octopus than human. A many tentacled, multi-coloured shapeshifter, organized around a central idea generator.

The Walk-shop project was one of the first things I did when I settled in Canada as a means of preserving my own sanity during a very difficult transition period. It came before Narrative Therapy did into my life when I was a newly minted Art Therapist without a space to practice, or money for materials. It's interesting to think about what I might have done differently. It was inspired by arts practices that

encourage different ways of seeing, which in turn I believe leads to different ways of being and engaging with the environment. I wanted to focus on the ways of seeing, without the pressure to reproduce the seeing as artwork. We would make stuff from found objects and leave them there, and do stuff.

Ok so I thought about it, and the honest answer is it wouldn't be that different. The invitations wouldn't have changed dramatically, though the context and significance of the actions have. There was one invitation to perform a slow motion procession of sorts along a short dirt road section of the park, where ten people moved in a very deliberate spaced out way that reminds me of social distancing practices now. The radical slowness seemed to genuinely perplex passersby as they came to a stand still themselves, creating a kind of ripple effect. The call to slow down and resist being swept up and carried along by things we might not actually support feels more pressing than ever, as does the importance of reconsidering our relationship to nature. I'd want to add an invitation that finds a way to challenge our ideas of human supremacy, I think. I have no idea what that would look like as I write this. It's one of those things I'll have to carry around for a while. Bring to work, take for a walk, take home, sleep on or with and see what comes in it's own sweet time.

Thank you for your time and attention so far. I'm looking forward to meeting you!