

landing in the garden

From the shifting grounds of Stolzenhagen, ghost swamps of Berlin, and pines of Zernsdorf; Between the still Baltic sea of Helsinki and forests of Hangist; Underneath the former monastery, land growing into landing in Saint-Erme; Between the resting place of Galicia, peninsula of Crimea and carob of Ein Deiran, Zarnuqa/Rehovot, cacti of Barqa/Yavne, Bitzaron, tell of Ruba al-Nasra/Mizra; Along the muddy river and blue hills of Totaunt, Massachusetts, Neponset land

Place one hand wherever it lands on the earth, place the other hand wherever it lands on your body. Feel the relationship between these two places at the same time in this moment, this body, this time and this place. Allow connection between these places of touch. Allow them to shift, crumble, grow, open, close, change. Allow yourself to be moved inside. Let your visual attention land where it lands and invite a sense of the land looking back, returning to meet you. Seeing and being seen. Send gratitude. Send gratitude. Send gratitude.

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To begin with, take a backwards walk in your mind's eye through all the places that have informed your way to be here. Invite these places starting from where you are right now, in the moment of reading. Then, the place where you were before arriving here. And the place that brought you there. Perhaps images come up, or sensations, or memories. Perhaps there are details; a scent, a texture, actions, colors or shapes. Perhaps there are particular events or general feelings that appear as you move through these places. Eventually, let go of linear sequence and allow any places that come up to be included.

Travel at the pace that feels right for you, stretching further and further back. Perhaps passing through places where you have visited briefly, places you have lived in for long periods of time, the place where you were born. Reach back towards the places that your people come from. Blood family, chosen family, wherever you orient towards on this backwards tumble. Include the places you know and the places you don't know, even places before memory. Invite these all to be present in this reading.

How can you include those places as a living repertory of lands carried within you? Coming back around through this passage, return to this place, where you find yourself here and now, at this time, on this page.

This migration that you just travelled through imaginally¹ is also a tangible, physical movement. Bodies of all kinds have been moving over land, propelled by various impulses. Many realities continue to shape these movements; from desire to diaspora, exile to conquest, nomadism to the many rhythms of migration. We are continually landing, again and again, in every moment, with every cell. The land is not a static terrain, presumed and enduring while all others move upon it. All life moves continuously with many rhythms; by tectonic shifts, through seeds and spores, from roots to fungi, across seasons, cycles and changes. The land is landing all the time.

When the noun of land shifts into the verb form landing, I sense it as a movement, even if subtle or invisible. Landing might take shape through attention arriving and departing, shifting, rearranging, decomposing and recomposing in multitudes. Landing defies the ability to point a finger and say land is 'there'; locatable, identifiable, outside of me. Landing is felt as a process rather than a territory.

The importance of continually attuning to landing as movement emerges personally in part as an unfolding process of ancestral healing. I feel my ancestors in, through, and as the plant world. I come from plant people whose connections, intimacies and knowledges were entangled with persecution, a legacy of unbelonging and disidentification. Their diasporic anticipation to finally return, to be a 'landed people', that desire for a reliable sense of rootedness and safety also displaced into another cycle of traumatising and reiteration of occupation. Edward Said calls exile a "discontinuous state of being."² Does the 'dis' point to a place where bodies and land are cut off from one another? How would a continuous state of being feel? A mutual moving towards, onwards, outwards? How might I practice a presence in place that touches deeply without gripping? How might you?

There is something quite understandable about the tempting desire to fully 'be' in and of a place completely. The bump of an airplane hitting the ground, the weight of a building, the relief of staying put. I want to feel the different angles of that longing, to sift through its underbelly and learn to discern that place of contact just before it turns into attachment and ownership. The presence of encounter before the pattern of imposition; when roots become stakes, when the shape of arrival morphs into fences, borders, territory. This rhythm can also give rise to an illusive draw towards the next projection, the next horizon, the better place. Landing, as an orientation towards a way of living, wants to dance through, around, and beyond fixed bodily and geopolitically states.

I have gardens to thank for teaching me this sense of landing. Although gardens are rooted in place, the continuity of tracking changes while gardening invites me into an ever-shifting state of

¹ "The imaginal's figures and landscapes are experienced as alive and independent of the dreamer. They speak with their own voices; move about at will. They possess an intelligence and an inner knowing... We must redefine the imagination not as a marginal nonreality nor as an altered state but, rather, as another type of reality" (Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, 2015).

² 'Reflections on Exile', 1984

association. Gardens are containers that allow for our participation in a field of forces. The garden is a sphere of influences, a world of worlds, a place of porosity. The plants point inwards and outwards at the same time, reflecting the unseen through their bodies. I come to the garden as a school, a studio, a partner, a graveyard, a sanctuary, a hospital, a portal. Through an evolving practice of gardening I invite the undoing of subtle patterns of territory that are imprinted within me and within the land.

In the neverending navigation of gardening, I try to witness, support, and participate in this collective of beings. The process is informed by the intention of a particular garden and our particular relationship. I learn and hone this through deep relationship with the Ponderosa garden which has been tended by many hands in the community over time. An unruly choir, a source of sustenance, a place that continues to garden me while allowing me to carry this mode of approach to other gardens, learning from them too.

What if the work of intending was a kind of reaching and receding, like tides? ‘Intention’ shares a root system with ‘tendon’; those connective tissues that stretch and slack as our bodies locomote. These fibres can sometimes draw too tightly, turning into tension and immobility. ‘Tendon’ is composed by the term ‘tendere’ (also found in tenderness, attention, to tend towards.) In medical language, ‘intention’ refers to the movement of the skin rejoining itself over an open wound. The skin which, even in rupture, knows itself as a whole and reaches back across this opening, this in-between borderland, towards itself again.

I have learned that the plants convey their medicine through paradoxes³, embodying dynamics as part of their healing capacities. Full of contradictions and resolutions, they live like puzzles undoing and remaking themselves, not needing to be singular in their depth and might. Each still with particular qualities, signatures, material and invisible properties. Yarrow’s ability of contracting blood cells to mend a wound site or promoting flow and circulation, responding as needed. Comfrey’s capacity for integrating fractures, knitting them whole while recognizing the autonomy of parts. Pine’s acidification of the soil it grows in while also supporting a balanced sense of responsibility. Placing myself as one vector inside that ever-morphing garden, how is it possible to practice stewardship and disownership at once?

Making space for continual perception and receptivity opens possibilities for communication, devotion, and action. Again and again. Whether physically or imaginally, the movement of landing embodies a conundrum; the deeper you arrive, the more that opens and shifts. Recognising something allows it to become unknown in the next moment. Gratitude can serve as a consistent pulse of acknowledgement within that journey.

“Touch us without wanting to know how we will meet” they say “and we will walk with you.”

³ “Every healing plant, mineral, or animal is the embodiment of a conflict in the environment that has been reconciled.” (Matthew Wood, *Seven Herbs: Plants as Teachers*, 1986)