

Questions between j/j hastain and Lark Fox

“directive pearls before plums”-Arielle Guy

j/j: I have always felt that in your writing/ spiritual work and life there is an extreme emphasis on ceremony. How do you see ceremony in the context of pages? I am thinking now of various incubation processes and procedures, wondering if you might want to speak to any of those?

Lark: When I come to the page to write it is an act of ceremony. Ceremony in the getting there and then the actual physicality of writing itself. There is really no separation between myself and the page/ceremony. If one thinks of writing as a ritual it would affirm this--and mainly, not so much as a ‘practice’ but as a way of affecting both alchemical change and as a marker of the complexities of life and beauty and all its edges and in-betweens. The ceremony of applying words to a page is age old. Think grimoires and papyrus. Think language as a transmuter and transmitter of mysteries, secrets and time (namely magic). However, writing is not a ceremony of time in the traditional form. For me the page is a space of infinite desire, sensuality and yes. It is a place of possibility. Time moves in ways that make living in and through and with and before and after all possible at the same time. So the symbols that make up the words are an altar. Writing has the capacity to be a shape shifter in this way.

j/j: A question from so long ago resurfaces (“My desire to become wild again has resurfaced. I ache to sleep in fur. To have it wrapped around me always as I deeply winter”)—so, what is it to *winter* as a verb?

Lark: To winter: this is a place I have been learning about. A place where everything slows to the pace of a breath. For example: just now gently picking up a dead bee and examining its wings, each separate and tissue-like cell. Each incandescent portion. You see, there is the actual element (of winter) itself which in this case, is fear--which is my own trembling hand. What is it to ease my breath into the hollows of my own bones, where fear or memory has vacated? Winter is never an absence, rather an always cascading fullness. This has a lot to do with my idea of the wild. Of the unknown in myself. Can I get still enough to observe the way it moves (as a pattern or as cave art--the way the landscape unfurls internally--or as painful menstrual blood on the bone white sheepskin)?

Winter historically has been a place of ever curving forms, and of my own form curling into itself. Wrapping itself in fleece and dreams. In ice and slide. There are times when I slip away from myself, without the usual outward markers the world can be confusing, and loud. Demanding in a way that on the surface excludes my sensuality.

Conversely, I am learning, that if I collect the dead bees, in fall, as the season crisps, that I can preserve my own capacity, I can look forward to winter because it means I will wrap myself in the Irish wool, light candles in the dark afternoons and seek warmth buried beneath pine needles. To 'winter' is a pressure, is a push, that is unforgiving. Winter challenges my idea of safety but in this exists the possibility that a miracle, of bodies, of breath and bee's wings, (that are ice crystals), may occur.

j/j: You recently got an amazing article (that you wrote about working and living with the plants) published. Do you feel that there are connections for you between your love of being with plants, and your writing life? Obviously the pages of your journal are the offspring or derivatives of trees, but beyond that fact of touch (drags dry and cracked hand across small notebook page) are there content or praxis-based connections between your writing and your love for and work with plants?

Lark: For me, coming back to the plants over and over again is a place of nourishment as well as a place of connection. It may be too simplistic to call them a source of inspiration, but it is true that they are. If my writing is also a healing practice, a healing ceremony then the plants are an extension of that. Their colors and textures, their smells and medicinal properties are all a part of the way I touch the world. They give so much. If I understand how they create change in my body, then somehow I can understand how they create change also in my work. In some ways they are the bridge to the wild, for me. This idea of wilderness. The constant desire for me is to understand and contact the wild in me and therefore in my writing. The why, is a question that can be answered by the plants--so can the how.

j/j: In the past we have talked about how you feel like you might have a gender-non-conforming identity. We have also spoken at length about your relationship to wildness; about your need to configure yourself within a wildness/ non-domestication that is sustainable for you. Are there aspects of these (your gender identity and wildness) that overlap?

Lark: There is absolutely an overlap for me between my gender identity and this idea of wildness. My utmost wish is to feel free, and the spaces I feel the freest are often on the edges of things, the places of imperfect beauties and rust. Nettles growing on a ruin, ivy crumbling the walls down. Long ago you talked to me about the importance of rust for your own identity. This is perhaps one of the many reasons for our connection: the morning light on a truck full of tires, a mouse flattened on the running trail and the feet that have walked and run over this tiny creature without knowing, the deep twilight that rises up from the earth, just before night, mountain lion tracks on the muddy path just behind my house. There is bareness, danger, great beauty in the wild, so there is within me.

I can't be caged. If so, I feel stifled, I begin to feel as if I am dying. How does this relate to my gender identity? It's about exploration and mystery and finding my own crevasses. What type of pelt am I wearing when we meet? What plants are on my

breath, what type of fire? Sometimes it is difficult, expression, as there are often places that need and want to emerge but there is not yet a language for them, no discernible alphabet. Also, there is the problem of taking others into a landscape that they are nervous about. I think discussions about non-conforming identity can be anxiety producing for some, can be intensely charged.

The wild is also about fullness, and to some extent preparation and willingness. Let's be realistic, there are certain things one needs to survive in the wilderness, my notebook is fuel for my fire, so we can eat, and so we can travel into the dark cave full of beasts, it's a point that touches, a trance, a well-worn stone, another type of bridge.

I am beginning to see that for me it is all a question of sustainability in terms of my physicality, this exploration of the wilderness within. Perhaps the new moon--or braided leather. A frog or a bird/ hare. Your favorite opera (that I listen to in the middle of winter). Bones that reach back for other bones. The word 'my'. A lip quiver. Electrical outlets and rain. Anything that hums. To sustain, to keep going, to expand ones capacity, is one of the most important ways to continue to access what is within, whether it be writing, gender-identity, or map making.

Lark: In your writing, there are many places where I feel you, intentionally (or not) upend the reader's preconceived notions or sensibilities. How does gender/non gender/gender identity or gender as an enactment/ gender as a 'social norm' inform your praxis? Is it/why is it important?

j/j: I would say that there are never intentional upendings or destabilizations on my part, but the nature of the way I work with sound, image, hinges, poetics of merge, intent to generate new worlds based on particulate ethics, fragment and fusion, etc. do at times destabilize and upend. In other words the sensation you describe so aptly above is a sensation that I think is present in my work, but not so by way of mechanism as much as by reverberation based on varying, necessary events in the work—the work's own lifestyles.

Gender (as current-tense) is a place of intense somatic integrity for me as well as a place capable (based on how I imbue it) of holding all future names for additional/additive, intense somatic realities. Gender to and for me is not socially relegated (though it can certainly benefit from social support eg: community). Gender is not mere term based on some faction of category's pre-determined impetuses (control/delineation). Gender for me is enactment-deifying—is awareness about there being continuing need to specify (which then requires renovations of names). Gender for me is relation between myself (oneself) and the physicalities of the body—regarding desires re those physicalities as well as what exceeds those physicalities. For example, if I am spectral to myself, why wouldn't my gender also be necessarily spectral? It is.

I would say that gender as embodiment (refinement) practice, as spiritual practice, is a heartwood of the pages (which themselves are mini heartwoods of projects). Therefore there is no way to separate the pages from their necessarily enacting centralities, their gritty, gurgling corpuscle (feeling-inducing) seams.

Lark: Tell me how the idea of the “original impetus” as devotion or a place of understanding biological/historical/primal memory, relates to your writing.

j/j: To me ‘original impetus’ is not the same as some perceived, singular origin. Origins going into the past, into history, are certainly not emancipating of the myriad (which is gender, embodiment, identity to me). Forcing complexities into linearities certainly does not nourish them. Now, ‘original impetus,’ some always previous (to a now) push or pull or draw, is the why for creating a how re working with poultice. In other words, why are poultices made? In response to need for poultice. So, to work with original impetus (that sensory tugging) is to draw (drag) forms into existence: forms capable of then holding future states, forms for the sake of_____.

Primal memory (in my experience with it) often works with feeling and image. Why do my legs feel so damn heavy this morning? Feels as if I were pulling tankards by way of increment? The sensation there and the specifying, are primal memory in the way that I am interested in working with it: by way of hint and hue, as magnifying capacity as well as impetus to magnify. I guess, for me, primal memory always starts with somatic fact and connects to a next-ing of that somatic; a next-ing that demands articulation.

Lark: In your work, the feeling I am often left with is that time and gender are inextricably linked, meaning time and gender(as related to the first question) are mutable and/or often confused with what we perceive as 'real ' or 'normal.' How are these terms "animating acts" within your writing? (and/or speak to me of gender/time/ relations or personal mythos).

j/j: Individual (but not private) mythos is really essential in my work. I see nothing more freeing than generating and nourishing emancipatory narratives, than making evermore queer (as opposed to evermore clear) mystical lyricisms that hold. Hold because as a continuously budding species (a myself is always a species and not a singular, when gauged by way of compulsory, lovely myopias) to have holding means to have place to progress, to intensify, to entice into growth. Enticements in growth are in some ways, guarantee that there is space vast enough to hold one authentically as one grows into and through (by way of) their many-ness.

I see nothing more assuring than having a land that I can live in/as because I am sure that it exists (because I had an inherent hand in its creation). So there is doula-hood in this. There is also a vigorous planting—pushing finger into earth and dropping already husked seeds into those holes as approximations of wholeness.

This is the strange, incremental procuring of new seasons by way of having struggled (metallurgically) and therefore created staminas toward production.

Yes, gender (described in part, above) and time do relate in my work, but as time feels to me like a slippery slope toward cliché and overly historicized terminology, I would say that where embodiment (gender included) and intimacy meet in/as moment, is a more accurate way to refer to the places that my work works with, works for. Graphic, gurgling lanterns can have acoustically unearthed themselves prior to them ever being used as light sources for others.

Lark: What does it mean to fill and be filled?

j/j: Both are psychic/psychical gifts. To fill is an ethics of extending. Is relating to body as prolonged activator. To fill is to have found ways to swallow reach into an ongoing range. Touches and rubs within a spectrum. To fill is to identify with offer as a form of genuine pride.

To be filled is elation that in order to have happen, requires an openness—the presenting of oneself in the shape/form of a bowl. A bowl in the hands will be filled with foam or petals, precisely because it can be filled. Because inherent to its shape is its ability to be filled.

To fill and be filled is to experience enlightenment (incision and release) now. I do believe that these two (fill and be filled) are cosmically hinged, but I do not believe that the experience of them as a simultaneity happens (a) without deep cultivation work and (b) necessarily each time at the same time. Therefore I think it is possible that those of us who pursue our bodies, our lovers, our futures and our pages by way of this hinge (hungry belief) necessarily know both parts of it at all moments. This is not to say that there is any cosmic polarity to it, but instead to point to the fact that what we look at with human eyes, is our moments, and without a configuring of Rumi's "other eye" we might see only one or another part of the hinge at any one moment.

Lark: Your work and life is also so much about intimacies--the way things press into each other and how hard. How does this relate to your idea of trans/gender/embodiment practice/praxis?

j/j: "the way things press into each other and how hard" is very important in my work and life, yes. Because I know that pressure (press in states of application) is an integral aspect to morphology and because I do not believe that I (or anyone who pursues the beloved in form) am meant to suffer in lonely states of waiting as my experience with form, I feel strongly that it is such applied states of press that are key to collaborative transmographies of many kinds. Trans as in transfer, transduction. Trans-map (moving script).

There is certainly desire/sex in the pressure with which we want to be touched. There is preference. What is it that makes us cream? What makes us feel less reserved and more like reservoirs? Yes, perhaps I understand press from the sense of a cosmic sexuality—a pungent, motile, identifying state wherein evolutions of many measures (and with differing scales) occur.

Lark: As we move through this conversation, I am feeling whispers of the shamanic, in the way language is pushing through 'ordinary' realities and intuitions, rituals and enactments. Perhaps you can speak to this idea of the 'hollow bone' (which is one term for a shaman), as it relates to your body which is also your writing.

j/j: As the notion of 'hollow bone' is one pursued and practiced in shamanism, but is also in Zen Buddhism and other native cultures in North America, I would say that it at least in some ways differs from entering the basic shamanist state of journeying. I find it useful to make the distinction between these two in ways that take nothing away from either 'hollow bone' states or more basic journeying states ("techniques of ecstasy"-Marcea Eliade). Both are important and I definitely think that there are aspects of both in the context of my body and my work.

Let's start with the latter (basic shamanist journeying: possibly as old as 20,000 years!): entering a state of altered consciousness, encountering spirit, while within the journey exercising conscious choices, engaging free will the returning with information that is intended for sharing. It is possible for a page to be an animate record: a bit of living path that quakes as it holds information that need be shared. There are different kinds of sharing, certainly (narrative is a form pre-determined for sharing stories but there are also other experimental page-forms which themselves provide interactive and non-typical space for shamanic journeying), but pages are pretty generally intended for illuminating engagement. How we conduct ourselves within them is our choice (just as we have free will that we can exercise while we are journeying). I find it most useful to treat my engagement with pages (mine and others') with an utmost respect and chosen prostrate. I have things to learn here: in me, in you.

Now let's engage the former ('hollow bone'): through which one works with an interiority-entirely; doing so in effort at freeing the content that is looped into us (sometimes referred to as 'velcroed' into us) due to certain triggers and impacts. I see the content of one's body, of one's writing in this area: what is needfully engaged for the sake of changing it, changing content into other forms of content as method for emancipation. Perhaps dream work, songlines and even possibly hypnosis, happen in this space too: the space that is entered in order for something seemingly inherent (though often recognized in the sense of it being imposition or illusion while doing the work) to be revealed as capable of being something else.

I have been writing a lot about what I call the divinatory maxilla lately. A bone which is an inherently 'irregularly shaped' connecting bone, a bone that not only enables speech to be possible but also enables mood to be expressed on the face. I guess

what I am back to (and what I always return back to in regard to my considerations re my body and my pages) is the importance of feeling. Feeling is the purpose for swinging the divinatory maxilla like a wand.



photo collaboration between j/j hastain and Lark Fox

Lark Fox is a writer, herbalist, intuitive energeticist, and photographer. She lives a life connected to the earth, makes her own yogurt, and is devoted to beauty in all its forms. Some of her recent writing can be found in Summer Stock 2012, Common Ground Magazine and The Lit Pub.

j/j hastain is the author of several cross-genre books including the trans-genre book *libertine monk* (Scrambler Press), anti-memoir *a vigorous* (Black Coffee Press/ Eight Ball Press) and *The Xyr Trilogy: a Metaphysical Romance*. j/j is a pomosexual, post-binary-genderqueer. j/j's writing has most recently appeared in *Caketrain*, *Trickhouse*, *The Collagist*, *Housefire*, *Bombay Gin* and *Aufgabe*. j/j has been a guest lecturer at Naropa University and University of Colorado.