

WISDOM CATCHER: LISTENING IN A PARTICULAR WAY.

The day began with birds.

As we stopped, took a moment to breathe, to be here, to be with each other, what we heard from outside was the sound of birdsong.

It took me back to an email my eldest son had sent me telling me what he intended to speak about in a talk he was giving in Brazil – about birding. Thinking he might try to touch on:

- Inter-connectedness – thinking about birds as migrants, crossers of borders and boundaries, creators of trans-national alliances, witnesses of stories, seekers of food, water, shelter.
- Exploitation – and how much we have done. How much indigenous knowledge and learning we have destroyed and lost and having to re-learn. How much destruction we have caused to land, to sources of water, life and livelihoods through appropriation. Through our empire building, through our sense of superiority and privilege. How much learning and unlearning we need to do.
- The importance of seeking out unusual allies e.g. hunters who know about the terrain
- Community – and our need for it. Our need to listen and watch and being with each other. Seeking for the symbolic, models, exemplars and paradigms
- The necessity of intergenerational sharing of knowledge and skills
- The (often unacknowledged) importance of women in conservation, in storytelling, in creating new forms of leadership, new ways of being together
- Sharing of knowledge across borders, across sectors - commoning as a social practice
- The criticality of long-term commitment
- The hope in the future - young people in Brazil committed, through birding, to political action – driven by proximity to emancipatory practices

And recognising the parallels between this world and ours. And once again hearing the sound of birdsong.

And within this some pivotal references, questions and quotes:

- Ailbhe – we are in freefall and losing our points of reference
- Jonas – and the Utopian Boot Camp and the archaeology of the future the importance of who commissions the work. Emancipatory politics and the role of narratives – the fictional past presented as the common future.
- Larry – the impact of class and the lost testimony of those who didn't have voices – while others made product about their lives, questioning where the real power is, who has agency, where is the place for empathy?
- Heather – the artist losing control and power through collaboration. Are we as artists deluded that we are different? How do we count the emotional labour of the work?
- Gemma, Jane and Lani speaking of complexity and intersectionality, and the importance of recognising our own privilege and power, asking how and when the oppressed become the oppressors and what happens when there is not enough depth in the movement?
- Brian – listening to the past can transform our futures
- Jeanne – Rise, Claim, Root, Repair = Future

AND

- The on-going silence of certain voices

- The need to challenge normative approaches and the white male middle class power system. The anarchistic women's communities in Kurdistan. What does it mean that 80% of the people here are women?
- Living in a so-called post-colonial nation but where Brexit has unleashed these notions again.
- Having Power With not Power Over
- Revealing inequality is not enough

Continuing to ask the questions

- Who is commissioning the work?
- Who is making the work?
- Who is placing the work?
- Who is viewing the work?

P.S. And a memory of a lesson from an artist from Egypt (Abdullah al Kafri) I had met the day before on the role the artists had played in the Arab Spring.

- Artists with the people as people – legitimate standard bearers (Tool)
- Creating the Midan as a public space through their art (Access and Agency)
- Then, when the revolution didn't work, being seen as counter-revolutionaries and being the first to be cut (Obsolete)

Pleasures

*The first look out of the window in the morning,
 the old book found again,
 enthusiastic faces,
 snow, the change of the seasons,
 the newspaper,
 the dog,
 dialectics,
 taking showers, swimming,
 old music,
 comfortable shoes,
 taking things in,
 new music,
 writing, planting,
 traveling,
 singing,
 being friendly.*