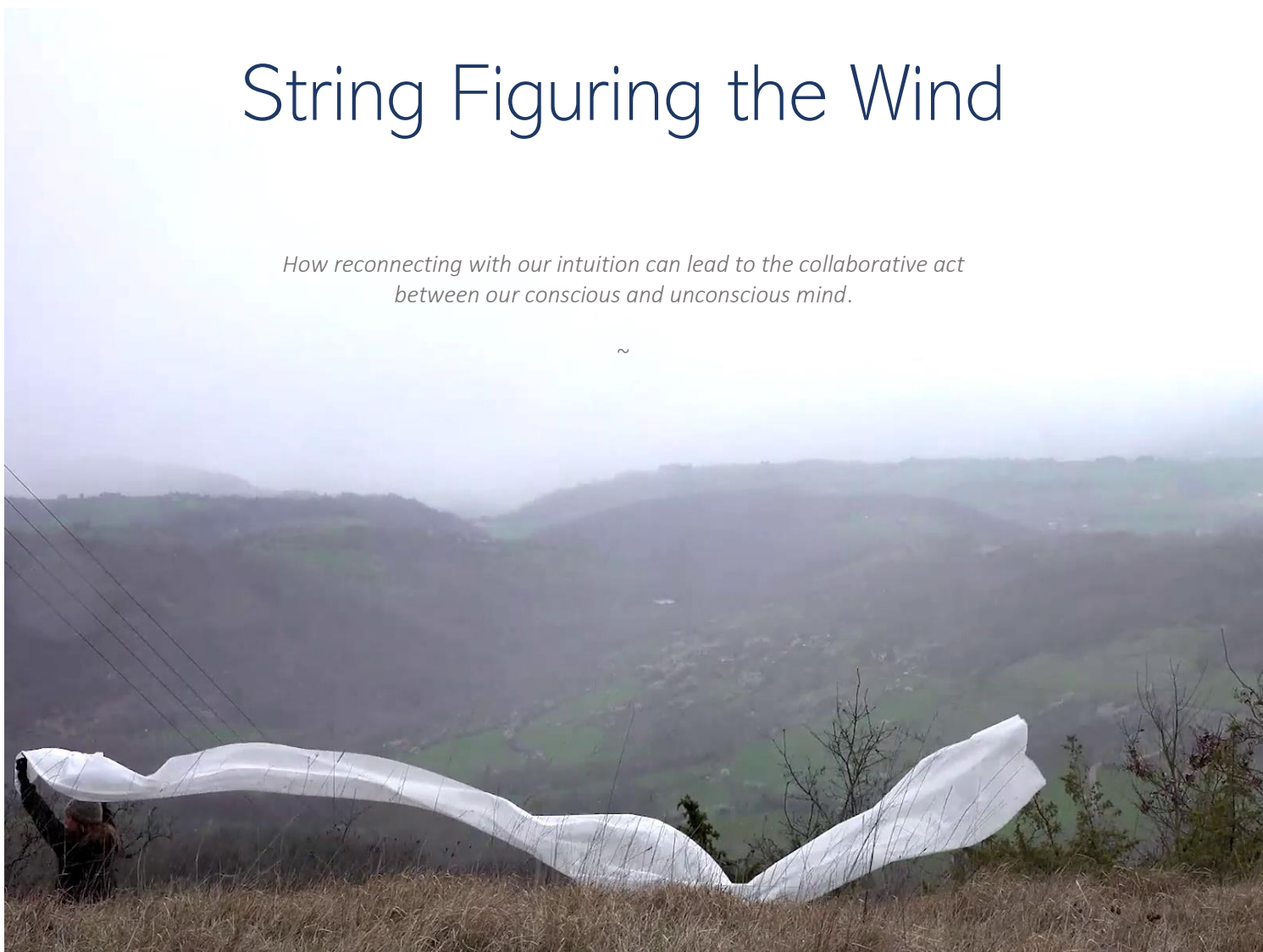


# String Figuring the Wind

*How reconnecting with our intuition can lead to the collaborative act  
between our conscious and unconscious mind.*

~



Berendine Venemans

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between our conscious and unconscious mind.*

Berendine Venemans

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Fine Art & Design

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## ABSTRACT

My starting point is the question “how to cope and act” in current turbulent times. I argue today’s problems are a result of human, ego-centric thinking, which separates conscious and unconscious. I use Donna Haraway’s need for her Chthulucene and “Tentacular Thinking” to place myself in the discourse. She offers a new perspective on the world as deeply intertwined and multi-specied, of which we are but one thread. A world that is embodied, in which we, humans, become able to act, because we are involved. She states to become “response-able” we first need to stay with the trouble.

Tentacular Thinking brings me to the need to unify conscious and unconscious. I argue that to unify, we need to re-discover what our unconsciousness is and its values. I’ll explore why it appears to be so difficult to connect with our unconscious, which speaks through our intuition, using emotions and feelings as her language. I go with a Jungian, but also a physiological approach. This leads me to my belief that in order to stay with *the* trouble, we need to learn how to stay with *our own* trouble, first.

I proceed by exploring what the unconscious is, by studying Robert Sandford’s book on a Jungian approach into collaborating with the ego and the source of our creativity. I learn how to meet the unconscious on its own terms and transform it into my work methodology. This results in a mixed media installation. It’s an effluence from the collaboration between conscious and unconscious, and created through the language of intuition to speak about this collaboration.

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## Introduction

I believe good things happen when we dare to connect with our inner selves. I see many bodiless people around me. I was one of them too, always living in the mind and seeking distraction whenever threatened to be confronted with myself. It's also so easy, isn't it?

These times of environmental, economic, pandemic issues. Mental distress such as depression, loneliness, feelings of meaninglessness and burn-outs are on the rise. How do we cope and act in this era? I believe that when we dare to listen to our intuition, our inner compass or, in other words, our gut feeling and integrate this into our daily life, we make healthier choices that have a positive impact on ourselves and our environment. I position myself together with other voices, scientists, philosophers, and artists, in the belief we have been living too long in a historically Eurocentric human-centric mindset.

In short: I will use Donna Haraway's need for her Chthulucene and "Tentacular Thinking" to place myself in the discourse. She offers a new perspective of the world as deeply intertwined and multi-specied, of which we are but one thread. A world which is embodied, in which we, humans, become able to act, because we care. She states to become "response-able" we first need to stay with the trouble. I will explore why I have come to believe to stay with *the* trouble, we need to learn how to stay with *our own* trouble.

This thesis is an artistic exploration that led towards this belief. A journey towards the unconscious, affective realm, uncovering its values and strengths. I explored how to engage with it by meeting it on its own terms. I found that Tentacular Thinking bears similarities with those terms. And why it appears to be so difficult to connect with our unconscious, which speaks through our intuition. Our inner compass that uses emotions and feelings as its language. And why I believe reconnecting with it offers a way to cope and act.

I partake in the hope that human-centrism becomes an unthinkable trope in the future. That the status-quo became to have our unconscious, our body, and the wisdom of our intuition, fully integrated and cooperating with our rational cognitive powers.

It's this type of revolt I believe Brad Werner was referring to: "Revolt needs other forms of action and other stories for solace, inspiration, and effectiveness." (Haraway, 2016, p.49)

## Today's problems

We currently live in precarious, turbulent times. Times reigned by environmental, economic, pandemic issues. Mental distress such as depression, loneliness, feelings of meaninglessness and burn-outs are on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Belgian clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst and Professor Paul Verhaeghe talks about anxiety, depression and burn-outs as one of the main results of our rapidly changed society since the last 20 years.<sup>2</sup> He states that our historical attraction to pure reason, and distrust in our animalistic urges has made us estranged from ourselves, making us ill.<sup>3</sup>

How do we cope? How do we act? As I've personally experienced a burnout, I relate to Verhaeghe's vision. I was the prime example of how living with an overvaluation of my rational, believing everything was makeable, and so disconnected from my intuition and emotions made me ill. The starting point of this artistic research is the question: how do we cope and how do we act in these immense problems we face today?

## Donna Haraway

Donna Haraway is an American biologist, philosopher, and prominent scholar in the field of science and technological studies, and feminist studies. She has numerous written about and criticized the historical Western approach in science, life and view of earth.

Donna Haraway discusses in her book *Staying With The Trouble* (2016) a way to deal with the issues of today. She notices we're reigned by "apocalyptic panics and disengaged denunciations" which the Anthropocene and capitalism has brought us (Haraway, 2016, p.55). She states they evoke a discourse in which it is already too late to change the world, rendering us cynical and defeated, but most of all, gives us a feeling that we are incapable of doing anything about it. Furthermore, a dominating faith in the rescuing power of technology renders us feeling irresponsible to do something.

Although the Anthropocene acknowledges the need for a new story of looking at humans in relation to the world, its root thoughts are still based upon the historical Eurocentric human-exceptionalist mindset. In her essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988) she iterates on the historically male-dominated Eurocentric way of perceiving and judging the world in a purely 'objective' way. A highly individualistic and human-exceptionalistic way. In the search for understanding the world, this 'objective' gaze ultimately leads to reductionism, for it leads to only one equation counting as the universal truth. (1988, p.580) The problem with this gaze is that it sets humans apart from earth and life.

## The importance of stories

The fatalism sprouting from the Anthropocene seems to Haraway a way to surrender the capacity to think. It reminds her of Hannah Arendt's analysis of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, who's thoughtlessness was the root of the "banality of evil". (Haraway, 2016, p.36) To not see beyond his own job, he made himself think to not be part of the whole system of genocide. Haraway states by looking away, he could not make himself truly present in the actuality of his doing. He was just doing his job. He could not "cultivate response-ability, could not live in nor with consequence" (Haraway, 2016). To abandon thinking is to abandon the world as a "matter of care" (Haraway, 2016). Why would you care for something you don't (wish to) see or know about?

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<sup>1</sup> Oorzaken, Gevolgen en Risicogroepen van burn-out. Eindrapport (TNO, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Verhaeghe - de maatschappelijke oorzaken van burnout [Video]

<sup>3</sup> Bron: *Intieme Vreemden* – Paul Verhaeghe, 2022

Thinking matters, as can be seen in this example where it can lead to. Consequently, it “also saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds” (Haraway, 2016, p.50) or perspectives to look at our current world. It matters what ideas are based on, according to Haraway. It does matter which stories are being told, and what thoughts and knowledge found them.

### Chthulucene

In order to create an attitude/aptitude in which we can cope and feel capable to act, or in her terms, to be “response-able”, she proposes another story with a new starting point:

“What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism become unthinkable?” (Haraway, 2016, p.30)

Such a world she calls the *Chthulucene*. This is not a distant or imaginary world; it is a response to the Anthropocene, a name for an epoch of the present. She offers a view of life and everything it entails (humans, society, science, nature, etc.) as being part of a web. A multi-specied, sympoietic web, without beginning or end. A web in which no element, or organism, or system is individually operating, independent from everything else. Sympoietic meaning “partnered all the way down” or “making-with” (Haraway, 2016, p.33, p.58). A response to the current linear thinking that reduces the earth to an abstract system in which everything operates self-organized and independently of each other. It is not abstract; it is entangled, and everything is at stake with each other. Just like a spiderweb, every knot is connected through threads. Each thread is holding the other thread through knots, each thread supports and needs the other in order to create a spiderweb or a “string figure”, or SF. Haraway speaks of ‘tentacularity’ and the concept of “Tentacular Thinking” to this way of thinking. Fungi are an example of this tentacularity. Their mycelium network is a sympoietic web, as their survival depends on the trees they feed, and vice versa. (*Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake, 2020).

Understanding this interconnectedness and inter-relatedness is what I understand as important notions for becoming able to think tentacularly or get entangled in “SF” – making string figures – to becoming part of the Chthulucene.

How to make string figures? In my understanding, it is about being able to adopt a certain attitude. Haraway’s example to understand the attitude of SF is the act of playing the Cat’s Cradle Game.

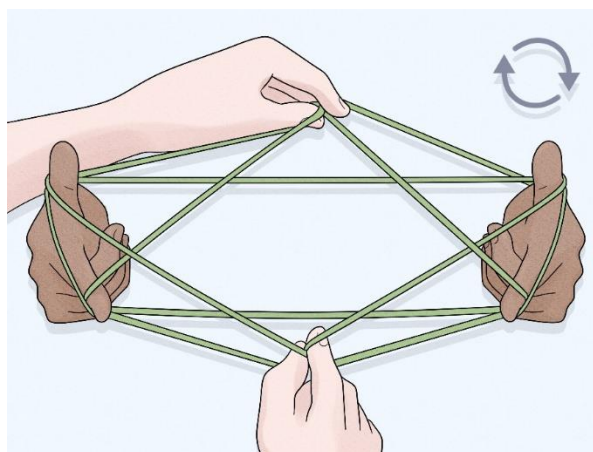


Figure 1: How to Play the Cat’s Cradle Game. Copyright 2022 by WikiHow<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wikihow. (2022). *How to Play the Cat’s Cradle Game* <https://www.wikihow.com/Play-The-Cat%27s-Cradle-Game>

In this game, at least two people are involved. A circular string is wrapped around the wrists of the first player, the next player grabs the strings at specific intersections. The first player needs to let go, in order for the other to pull and create a new figure. The actions repeat, continuously forming new string entanglements for the other to react on. In this relaying, neither player is fully in charge of the course of the game. The only thing to do is to answer the held-out hand, then let go of the strings and to trust what it will do next.

The Cat's Cradle game teaches us all actors in the game are responsible but cannot control the full course of the game. Letting go of your string entanglement and trusting the other pair of hands to act on it and relay back is an imperative mindset to becoming "response-able", adopting Tentacular Thinking. I would argue these are inherently different values and mentalities than what has been dominating in what Haraway mentions as the Post-Modern human-centric need to cognitively understand and reduce the earth to abstract, controllable systems.

The attitude of becoming-with and notions of [letting go of total controllability](#) and [trusting uncertainty](#), is for me what Haraway means when she talks about "cultivating the conditions of ongoingness" (Haraway, 2016, p.38). Living in the Chthulucene means letting go of the whole human-centric way of viewing the world. It's about embracing tentacular thinking, along lines, being connected through a web. It makes us become involved, which ultimately makes us become response-able.

## Mourning

Haraway proposes grieving as a way to become response-able. She uses ecological philosopher and multispecies ethnographer Thom van Dooren's proposal that mourning is intrinsic to learning to stay with the trouble. For me, mourning is an active stance, not merely a mode of dwelling. Mourning gives understanding to what has been lost, it creates awareness of its values and meanings, and transforms this into an attitude of care and involvement. Or how van Dooren puts it "This work is not opposed to practical action, rather it is the foundation of any sustainable and informed response." (Haraway, 2016, p.39)

In my view, mourning is an embodied matter. One cannot mourn by only thinking about it. In Paul Looman's book *Goed Gevoel: Emoties als Medicijn* (2019), loosely translated as "Emotions as Medicine", is explored how mourning is the physical processing of emotions. He does so by approaching it through his own Zen practice and by partnering with biologist Maartje Leenders, adviser at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Physiologically speaking, emotions can be seen as waves; they rise, climax, and fade out. Like every animal, we are capable of processing events that trigger any type of emotion. Through feeling it and following the wave until it fades out. But, he says, when an event is so traumatic, it can trigger a resistance to feeling the created emotions. They then remain stored in the mind and the body, creating stress, anxiety, and physical tension.

Having lived through my burnout, I have personally experienced how much this is true. I was almost perpetually stressed, influencing my behaviour immensely. I was too scared to feel all the anxious feelings and applied many coping mechanisms to just not feel, such as distracting myself a lot. In my path to recovery, developing the ability to process my bottled-up emotions, proved to be a crucial skill to learn. I needed to cultivate the courage to refuse to look away, but to affront and process them. As a result, I could use Haraway's terminology and say I am more able to be-with myself, have become response-able to stay with my trouble. I believe in the saying "How can you take care of someone else if you can't even take care of yourself?".



I see mourning as a collaboration between the body and the mind. To refuse to look away and affront the situation as it is, is simultaneously a cognitive and physical processing. One cannot only think about it, but one can also not solely feel it. One needs to be able to put the 'trouble' in a context, but also emotionally, therefore physically, affront the gravity of the situation. Individually and globally. It's about acknowledging and accepting the way our human-centric way of thinking is part of the root-problems that torment the times we live in today.

My burn-out and my whole process of recovery fuels my urgency to join Haraway's proposal of the Chthulucene. These lived experiences make me take a specific position in her discourse, by stating that to learn to stay with the trouble, we need to learn to stay with our own trouble, first. This might sound paradoxical to erasing human-centric thinking. My reply; how can we expect to acknowledge us being at stake with each other in the Chthulucene, if we look away? In my view, cultivating this ability is imperative in becoming response-able.

De attitudes that mourning teaches us, of [surrendering to the unknown](#), letting go of total control, become response-able by acknowledging and staying with the trouble, are all that I use as my inspiration in my art. The empirical, experiential, embodied experiences form the basis of my research how to transform them into works of art.

How do you do all of that, how do I become embodied as to collaborate from my unconscious with my conscious mind? Or in another question; how do I string figure?

## Jungian Approach to Creativity

In my view, string figuring is a cooperative act between body and mind. Being embodied connects us to our unconscious. Such a collaboration makes me think of the creative process. Robert Sandford, an American scholar and Professor of Jungian psychology, explicates in his book *A Jungian Approach to Engaging our Creative Nature: Imagining the Source of Our Creativity* (2019) that the creative act is the fruit of a collaboration between the ego and the unconscious. He states, “creation is the relationship.” (Sandford, 2019, p. 1)

He uses notions of ego and the unconscious in a Jungian manner. The ego, meaning the “I” that creates our conscious awareness. The unconscious, in Jungian terms, a psychological concept covering all psychic processes imperceptible to the ego<sup>5</sup>. Operating autonomously, it can be seen as the source of our creativity. The ego becomes the agent of the source. The creative act springs from a mutual and simultaneous relationship. Both need each other. I will unwrap this later.

Similar to Haraway’s problem with human-centrism and Verhaeghe’s claim this causes us to become collectively ill, Sandford also seeks to heal this collective ailment. He states the ego has dominated the Western collective imagination. That ego-centrism created an imbalance, a “dis-order” (Sandford, 2019, p.8), dominating and overshadowing the values of our unconscious, creating alienation from ourselves.

### The ego

The ego embraces linear narrative thinking. Making choices, analysing, sorting, value judgments, categorizing and simplifying. It tries to understand and explain everything, including mysterious things, as a linear and singular causality. This way, everything becomes rationally explicable and concrete. It’s efficient in doing so and sees everything as objective truth. It emphasizes the literal over the metaphorical, appointing more truth status to it, to the point it takes the imaginal literally.

“Literal refers to ‘factual’, the actual, what is free from subjective bias and without inaccuracy or exaggeration.” (Sandford, 2019, p.14) Just like Haraway mentions in her essay on situated knowledges, this is very helpful in the Eurocentric quest for an objective, measurable, reproducible truth in the development of science. There is nothing else truer, and therefore existing, than the literal. It creates opposition to everything else, devaluing imagination, rendering it inferior. It opposes fact versus fiction, actual versus imagined, objective versus subjective, mind versus body, conscious versus unconscious, rational versus emotive, etc.

With creative expression, the literal is very useful as it can synthesize concrete coherence from different ideas. It constructs meaning and assembles a world in which the “I” is in relation to the other. But if dominating over the creative psyche, it restricts its desire for complexity, imaginal, and connectivity into one singular and causal meaning. Thus, limiting imagination and innovating creativity.

But, seeing – rather remembering, Sandford says – the literal as an act of imagination, as an imagined construct, or a metaphor at its origin, it frees us from this idea of objective truth. From there, it becomes possible to work with it as a metaphor. Enabling to learn what it is, learn to work with it and creatively rethink the concept. It lays the foundation between the ego and the unconscious and their mutual relationship.

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<sup>5</sup> Laughlin, K. Q., PhD (n.d.) *The Unconscious According to Jung*.

## The relationship

Sandford adopts Jung's assumption that even in conscious, intentional creative acts, the unconscious influences the process. For Jung, the unconscious works as an autonomous complex. (Sandford, 2019, p.3) Meaning it's not subject to the control of the conscious. That it works in its own specific way, with its own will. Just as it applies to the ego.

This notion of autonomy is the fundament of Sandford's need to meet the source on its own terms. Working with the ego and unconscious as metaphorical images with their distinct intrinsic autonomy, paves the path to imagining the creative process as a dialogue.

The rational without the emotive is lifeless. A world consisting of pure singularity and causality is a predictable, detached and dead one, says Sandford. The ego needs the unconscious. Honouring it, valuing it on its own terms, makes us open up and love everything about humanity and the world. For me, this is also what Haraway is speaking about when she invites us into her SF. Reconfiguring our relationship away from literalism, but into becoming-with. Embodied, all-encompassing and interconnected. This founds an opening in the paradigm shift towards the Chthulucene.

This is not a plea to only listen and adhere to the workings of the unconscious within the creative act. It's about the relationship. The ego has crucial skills which, if not employed, will likely lead to a never-ending, never-concretized creative work. Developing techniques, mastering the medium do help to elevate the quality of the craft. Having a bigger pallet of techniques leads to a bigger pallet of creative choices.

## The unconscious' own terms

The unconscious, the autonomous complex outside the ego's awareness. For Sandford, a way into understanding the subconscious 'mind' is through working with dreams, just like Jung did. The unconscious operates similarly in dreams as in creativity. Images presented in dreams are not a literal translation of what haunts our unconscious. They operate as a container of invented shapes formed by experiences or everything else stored in the unconscious. Sandford uses dreamwork as his guide to engage with the unconscious.

Dream images are **emotional**, are **sensual** and **visceral**. They move our emotions and senses, and by experiencing them, by physically feeling them, our wondering mind opens to their meaning. Dreams are **simultaneous** and **superimposed**. There is no causality, nor hierarchy in importance. They are intertwined, **interrelated** and **interdependent**. Their meaning is **contextual**. It seems to me dreams are a fitting metaphor for Tentacularity.

To engage with a dream from the unconscious' perspective, is for Sandford like engaging with the creative act. When a creative impulse strikes, one must ask what it wants, not what it means. "Opening to its **intention** honours its otherness by putting us in the stance of **listening**, where we are receptive, waiting, respectful, hospitable and willing to be surprised." (Sandford, 2019, p.26) Sandford calls this attitude of listening to adopt a "**poetic presence**". Poetic in the sense of experiencing the world as rich and complex.

## Intuition

Our creative source operates through emotions, bodily sensations, with the **intuition** as its voice. Through sudden flashes of insights, unknown of its origin, intuition 'speaks', according to Sandford. Intuition is not magical, rather a faculty in which the unconscious generates these insights, by quickly sift through the accumulated knowledge derived by past experiences.<sup>6</sup> I use this notion as the "inner

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<sup>6</sup> *Intuition* (n.d.) Psychology Today.

compass". I mean with this that the intuition 'speaks' embodied, through feelings of something being 'right' or 'wrong'. Or how Japanese tidying-up guru Marie Kondo would say in her globally appraised KonMari method; does keeping this object spark joy?<sup>7</sup>

Within the creative act, the intuition will resonate with the creative impulse. What will resonate, through desires, inspiration, flashes, intuition, will be the guide, not the result. Connecting with my intuition is my own gateway into meeting the source in its own terms. By embodying and nurturing the relationship with my intuition, by taking its signals seriously, I cultivate the quality of my ability to creatively listen. It is a practice, just like meditation is considered to be one.

#### Artistic references on actively listening

Jung mentions to take subjective experiences as objective phenomena. (Sandford, 2019, p.15) Taking your sensations seriously can become a way to gather information and artistically work with them.

This poetic presence reminds me of an artistic working method from German Performance Artist BBB Johannes Deimling. He is co-founder of the (PAS) Performance Art Studies, and we have been keeping in touch ever since I followed a class. His method is called "[responsive listening](#)". In a conversation with him (personal communication, May 6, 2022), he states that responsive listening is a non-verbal behavioural tool which can be used in an artistic practice. Responsive listening is the behaviour of listening, acting, reacting, and interacting with a situation we are in. As an example, when entering a fully occupied tram, you find a space to stand. This automatically influences everyone else in the tram, who responds accordingly to the situation, shifting seats and position. In an artistic context it can be seen as a non-verbal dialogue between each actor and the space. For me, this is a sort of relaying Haraway referred to in string figuring. I see this as an illustration of the cooperative act between ego and unconscious: where rational analysing meets embodied and intuitive analysis.

for Dutch Mime and Theatermaker Boukje Schweigman also uses a similar form of working. Having participated in one of her workshops, (Schweigman&, Winterschool, 2019) she made us acquainted with this method she calls "[the body says yes, the body says no.](#)" How to listen to the body for information? For example, she would have us, participants, secretly choose for ourselves one of three colours: pink, black, yellow. We would then have to silently find other people of your colour and form groups. We had to open our bodily senses and let our intuition guide us. The first time it went a little rough, but the second round (assigning new colours), almost everyone but ~5% was right.

Or when Dutch poet and visual artist Arnoud Rigter talked to me about (personal communication, April, 2022) his decade-long experience in the Turkish Dervish Dance. Becoming able to get into the trans-like state needed to endlessly keep turning is a paradoxical state. As soon as the ego starts overtaking with any thoughts, such as self-judgements or thinking about something else, he loses focus and instantly becomes dizzy. But, if he loses himself too much in his embodied experience, he also loses focus. It's an active stance of simultaneously being present inwards and outwards.

The simultaneousness is for me a translation of the creative relationship between ego and unconscious. It's to illustrate why a simultaneous and nurturing bond is needed.

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<sup>7</sup> Kondo, M. (2014) *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, Ten Speed Press.

## Handles for the ego

To start opening the dominating ego into being creative, Sanford suggest a few handles to use.

**Actively imagining** an alternative scenario of something, exploring a possible 'what if' is one of those. The ego understands this is an imagined construct, which suggests the idea of an unknown. **Metaphor** and **symbol** act similarly to the ego. They are a container for something imagined, they stand for something other. Metaphor is a great meeting ground for the conscious and unconscious to start cooperating from. I think this works reciprocally for the audience too; a metaphor guides the audience into the work. Lastly, **empathy** also activates the bond between conscious and unconscious. Imagining another possible perspective, evokes feelings as well as rational understanding.

## Vulnerability.

Listening to the creative impulse's intentions, engages us into creativity, Sanford states, but also more vulnerable. Becoming fully aware means being at risk of emerging matters that are ugly, depressing, oppressive, and so on. It's the other side of the coin. But we must risk hearing them out, we must practice staying vulnerable. For there might be value in negativity for it is information that can be used. But refusing to look away will allow the full spectrum of creativity.

For Jung, the unconscious is intrinsically creative and in large part unknowable. That's difficult for the ego to fathom and be comfortable with. Our understanding will always fall short, for we will never be able to understand everything. Trying to do so, creates a paradox in which the ego is taking over. In my view, accepting the mysterious, the unknown, and the uncontrollability and become able to deal with its existence is imperative in being creative. And to become able to string figure and adopt tentacular thinking, for that matter.

## How to creatively engage with you unconscious

*a cheeky TO DO list, to be immediately forgotten once it has been read.*

- Become grounded into your own body: embodied
  - o Mindfulness – quiet down the busy mind
  - o Become present – simultaneously inwards and outwards
- Adopt a poetic presence towards the creative impulse
  - o Attitudes:
    - Vulnerable: be open to *all*
    - Empathy
    - Curious
    - Letting go of the total controllability
    - Trusting the uncertainty
    - Surrendering to the unknown
    - Have faith in the process: what will unfold
  - o Responsive listening
  - o Listen to the intentions – what does it want?
  - o Body says yes & body says no
- Pay attention to the:
  - o Emotional
  - o Senses
  - o Viscera – intuition
  - o Associations
  - o Anything resonating with it: thoughts/ideas/visions
- Think of:
  - o Active Imagination: what-if?
  - o Invite the mysterious
  - o Metaphors & Symbols as gateway in
- String Figuring: react to the outreaching hand

This list supported me whilst creating the project *String Figuring the Wind*. However, it was imperative to not fall into the ego-trap and think that merely following this list, ticking all the boxes, would result in a perfect project. Doing so would exactly contradict the purpose of this thesis research. I would not engage in my creative nature and not cultivate a relationship between my agent and source. Or in other words; I would not String Figure. I needed to adopt a poetic presence to the list itself.

Within this thesis, however, I will use this list as a guideline to illustrate how these notions were naturally featured in the creative journey of the project.

## String Figuring the Wind



Figure 2. Still from my graduation work – “String Figuring the Wind” 2022

The multimedia installation called *String Figuring the Wind* is an effluence of my research question “How to create from and about the collaboration between body and mind”. It is a culmination of associative, nonparallel, affectively driven, intuition-guided collaboration. The attitude of poetic presence of being fully aware, simultaneously directed inwards and outwards, guided the creative process from string figuring with the wind and manifested itself in the resulting installation. The wind became a metaphor for the uncontrollable autonomous unconscious, myself as the ego. The cloth as our translator in our interaction of a continuous responsive relaying between controllability and uncontrollability. I was string figuring with the wind.

Let me tell this as a story, for it matters what stories tell stories, for this is my only way to convey how the engagement came to be.

### The Start

It all began with me going to France, to my grandmother’s. In going to a place which harbours a special place in my heart where I always felt closely connected to myself, I adhere to Sandford’s notion of the importance of the physical space when creating. This needs to feel right because it feeds and affects our unconsciousness’ ability to ‘speak’ freely. I had no other starting point than going to her, and a vague notion to confront myself with the silence. Beforehand I’d imagined an open field as being the metaphor for silence and a large roll of paper to be my medium to work on. I bought raw cotton textile and decided that an off-white dress would be visually pleasing. I went there with a film camera in order to record my performance research on the paper, for personal study. My goal was to lay the foundation for a live performance as graduation work.

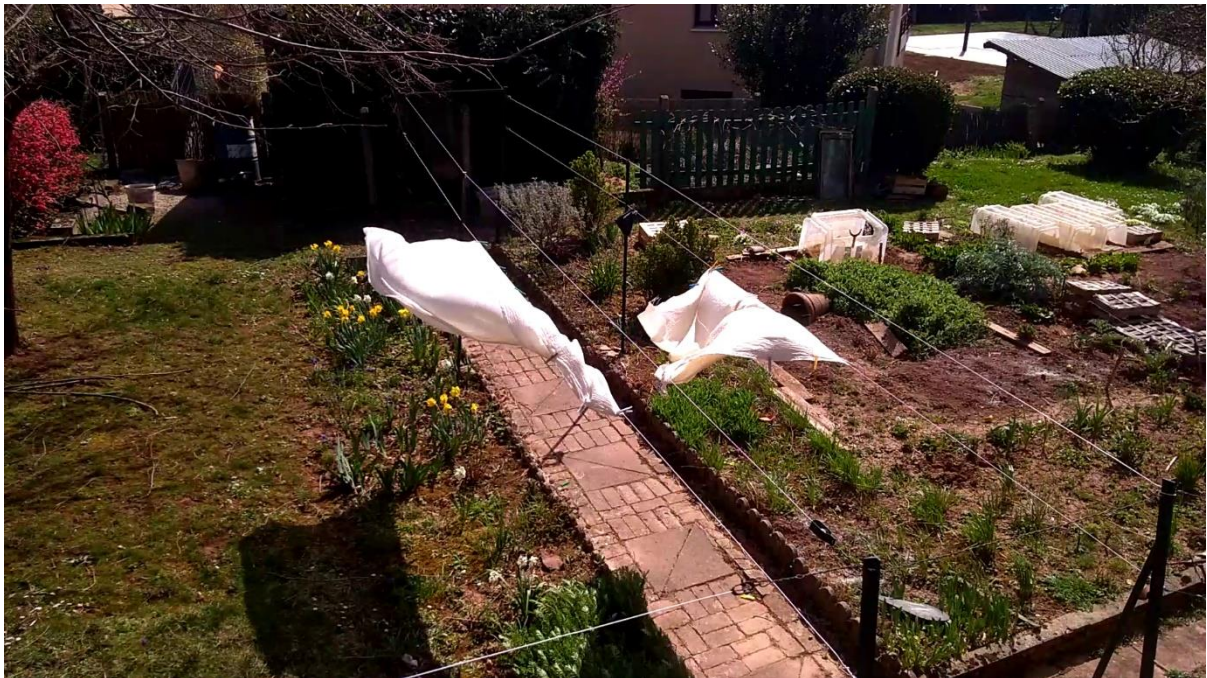
Upon arriving there, I searched endlessly for a good field, before the place resonated with my wishes. Working in that field, I often felt quickly demotivated when unrolling 11m long paper and try to acquaint myself with it in relation to the space around me and myself. Somehow it didn’t click in and I didn’t have the feeling I was working with my unconscious. I also had started to make a try-out dress, but this didn’t spark inner joy either.





*Figure 3 Paper research in France, April 2022*

When I casually looked at raw cotton fabric that was drying in the wind in my grandmother's backyard, I felt completely captivated by the beauty of it. The movement of the wind in the cloth, the reflecting sunlight, the shadows... I luckily decided to film it.



*Figure 4. Still from captured video, France 2022*

The more I tried to continue in the fields, the more this image wouldn't let me go. I got hooked emotionally and sensuously by it, it made me sing from the inside. Being so acquainted with the surrounding area, my unconscious quickly connected some dots and sent me a flash to an inspiring location: "The Rougier" or translated as "The Red". I brought my paper, camera and casually also the cloth, because I my ego urged me that I'd never know what could happen. Arriving there, I gave myself time to not give into my inner pressure to immediately start producing performative research. This decision already led me away from my dominating ego and opened the door for the creative source to operate. I immersed myself for a while in the environment, circled around and through it. Ate an apple sitting on a branch of a tree. These moments brought a stillness of mind, let me become grounded in my body and opened up my awareness of my senses. It was again very windy, that day.

It reminded me of the cloth I had and became curious what it would look like if I held it in the wind. What the scale of a tiny human and a white fluttering cloth would do in such an oddly place. The recorded result confirmed my lived experience of doing so; this direction resonated with my creativity.





*Figure 5. Still from captured video - performance research, France 2022*



*Figures 6,7. Still from captured video - performance research, France 2022*



### The Middle

It quickly unravelled a series of short durational performative researches, in which I responsively listened to the wind and the cloth. To get acquainted with the materiality of the cloth, the whims of the wind and my body within this whole environment. The recording proved to be an excellent tool for my ego's analysing gifts. This way I could cross-examine my empirical lived experience to the recorded outcome, determining both from the embodied inwards knowledge and the outside perspective of "what works and what doesn't", meaning what resonates with the creative impulse. My ego became the agent to the source, enabling me to continue.

What followed was an iterative process in which I continuously refined my ability to responsively listen to the wind. I needed time to cultivate this poetic presence, to get grounded in my body and to be able to listen clearly to the intuition. By trying out different environments, I continued to research the human body in relation to its surroundings. Small within the elements, but not lost. I understood this to be the relation of the human in the Tentacularly living world of Haraway. I decided not to make a white dress for myself, as this would bring too much attention to me, the performer, or the symbol of the ego. To retain the ego-unconscious balance, I decided to dress in my regular clothes which put more attention to the white fabric. The cloth was the visual translator between me and the wind, its movement as language, its colour symbolic of neutrality. This fuelled my decision to use a longer fabric, to make more movement possible.



Figures 8,9,10. Stills from video performance – “String Figuring the Wind”, France 2022



Figure 11. Video still performance - "String Figuring the Wind". France, 2022

I gradually understood more clearly what it was that I was doing. I was string figuring with the wind. An excerpt of my artistic diary to illustrate this process:

April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022, St. Christophe-Vallon, France

"When the wind picks up, I can try to move myself or the cloth to see how it animates the cloth. However, I cannot do the same. I cannot *make* the wind do anything. I need to learn how to move *with* the wind. Through trial and error while moving my body and the cloth, I understand what works and what doesn't. I learn how my attitude sometimes work and often doesn't. If I think beforehand how I want to move and in what way the wind should capture the cloth to create an appealing image, I experience it often fails. There, the distinction starts to form; if I try too much to make things happen through my sheer will, it fails. The wind doesn't care if I want to hold my cloth with one hand instead of two. The tiny variation of angle and height when moving my hand away makes the cloth fall down. I need to adapt."

It is about the attitude I adopt. I place myself right at the intersection between what I can control and the uncontrollable. I learn to be with the uncontrollable. To accept I cannot control nor manipulate everything, that I am vulnerable. I am present at everything happening in the moment, inwards and outwards. I learn to trust I can simultaneously respond to the extended hand of the wind, without losing my grip. This makes me able to relay back to the wind and react time and time again to what it presents back to me.

I stay with the trouble.





Figure 12. Video still performance - "String Figuring the Wind". France, 2022

### The End

So far this has been quite an inward, visceral process. The next chapter in this story is how these recordings and my lived experience were translated outwardly to the audience.

For that, I refer to Laure Prouvost, French multi-media and installation artist, winner of the 2013 Turner Prize, one of many artists that I feel artistically connected to. Having visited the exhibition *Deep See Blue Surrounding You / Vois Ce Bleu Profond Te Fondre* at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, I was struck with the immediate otherness I felt when walking in. As if I walked into a dream (I think back to Sandford's dreamwork). Interconnected, non-linear, sensate and most of all charged with emotions. Her work spoke directly to my 'gut'. In the introduction video<sup>8</sup>, she talks about how she plays on the visitor's expectations of interacting within the exhibition. By letting her audience become part of the art, making them walk on water or going through a dark funnel of soft curtains, she immediately makes them part of her narrative. With such elements, she invites the audience to enter an affective realm. Her dream-like sculptures and overall stage setting of the exhibition, she hopes to disrupt the audience's cognitive understanding. She states, "It doesn't matter, you don't need to get it. Just let yourself being carried in the way of being swallowed into that place." (Bonnefanten, 2021)

Laure's starting point is often to discover how a medium can transform emotions or sensations. This is the starting point I needed for my installation-work. Thinking of Sandford's description of how the unconscious operates, I brought these elements into my installation. By having multiple screens and projections, also on fabric, I create an interconnected narrative with no hierarchical priority. By playing with the way the audience enters my space, I break their expectations and create an opening for the unconscious mind to start taking over. By creating separate soundscapes, I immerse the audience in

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<sup>8</sup> Bonnefanten. (2021, December 23). *Laure Prouvost: Deep See Blue Surrounding You - Artist Portrait - Bonnefanten, Maastricht – NL* [Video].

the space. By hanging the fabric through the space, I let them manoeuvre around them, somewhat making them string figure with the space.

By letting form follow meaning, which gradually revealed itself by continuously taking up the poetic presence to listen to my creative impulses' intentions, I nurtured the relationship with my ego and unconscious throughout the whole development of this project. The result is the transcended manifestation of this relationship.

## Conclusion

I started out this journey with the question how to cope and act with the turbulent times we live in. Especially, since I have lived through a burn-out myself. Through exploring Haraway's proposed mindset of tentacular thinking, I came to explore how to cope by becoming response-able. Refusing to look away, by way of mourning made me realise this was an embodied matter. What followed was the exploration how to reconnect to the intuition, by engaging in the unconscious' own terms. The result led me through a creative journey in France in which I later understood that my project was exactly what my research question became to be: "How to create work *from* and *about* the collaborative relations between the ego and the unconscious?" Resulting in string figuring with the wind.

It took me a very long time to synthesize all these sources and their implications on a cognitive level, to see the interrelated connections. How to talk about matters that are of an experiential nature? However, on an affective level I already understood what I was doing. It was only in the making of the work that I became able to connect the two worlds of ego and source.

At present, I feel this research has brought me a solid foundation for my discourse and art practice. I purposefully didn't approach this topic through spiritualism or esoterica, for fear of falling into the trap of romanticism. I don't want to glorify the affective realm; I aim for revaluation and re-integration of our unconscious.

From here, I can continue to explore a myriad of themes and knowledges to enlarge my discourse and art practice, such as meditation, indigenous knowledge, rituals, shamanism, Zen, etc.

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