

- collaboration is airborne -

((Dear Pollen: I am lonely. I need more yellow, please write to me. — CH))

One scientific journal describes pollen as an “airmail service.” Desiccated and secured in its almost impenetrable origami-armour of sporopollenin (the “diamond of plantlife”), pollen sends itself out, hopefully, into the world. Upon arrival it swells and unfolds: a soft opening to another body. We might understand pollen as both messenger and message, but this noun-grammar fits poorly; pollen is a doing, a collaborating—a process ontology. Pollen *is* its travel, its moving in-between. This is very different than claiming pollen’s meaning is in *pollination*, or even *pollinating*, where its purpose would be tethered to a reproductive teleology and a “good result,” its only value bound to what it can make for the sake of carrying on (bloodline, country, grand narrative —we’ve all heard this tired story before.) No, it is more like saying pollen is risk, and anticipation, and maybe trust, suspended somewhere between send and receive.

((Fire turning into stone.
A solid, hard hunger))

It sometimes goes to the wrong address. Like pollen, we send pieces of ourselves—a poem, a drawing, a question, a note—across oceans or around the corner, in hopes of finding a willing stigma on which to land. We project (in various ways). Our artwork is both an attempt to converse with pollen, as well as a record of how our interhuman conversations guide, shape and gestate conversations at this interspecies level.

((Between moisten and dry, something commutes. The *n* was lost, a pebble dropped))

And while it makes for a good hero tale, pollen doesn’t travel alone. Wind, water, insects and other animals are fellow actants in these pollen vicissitudes. Collaborations, we are nothing without them. All matter is these co-labourings, these material socialities—what Karen Barad would call “intra-actions” or Donna Haraway the entanglements of “companion species.” To collaborate is a doing-in-common, more than a being-in-common. If it is a being at all, it is only thanks to the doing-in-common that a body can hold onto itself long enough to acquire a name, to be a “minimal subject.” Collaborations are conversations, conversions.

Our ((pollen)) collaborations repeat the labours of pollen, differently. If, as sociologist Vicki Kirby suggests, there is no nature/culture split, but rather nature just writing itself, all the way down, then we, as human scribes, trace the patterns, movements and lineaments of pollen adventures. We utilize elemental and animal carriers for our messages, but new delivery services, too, though webcams and fibre optic cables. We variously search for a pollen font, wonder what pollen would say, produce a pollen abécédaire, and send pollen love letters off upon the wind. One could assess these human scribbles as just another anthropomorphisation, another human colonization of a species-space and alien-tongue that stubbornly refuses us access. We choose rather to see our repetitions as an anemophilous tutelage: we learn from these more-than-human postal ecologies about personal dispersal, unnatural becomings, relinquishment, failures to meet well. We examine palynological records, learn how pollen modelling reconstructs lost landscapes, analyze resonances between cymatic patternings and pollen architectures, and research how the pollen count is weathering in a fluctuating climate—all this not in an attempt to master, but in a movement toward getting on together in this multispecies world with whatever grace we can muster.

It is hardly worth stating that creativity does not belong only to artists. We are artists, and also poets and writers, farmers, filmmakers, biologists, teachers. Cross-pollination [kraws-pol-uh-ney-shuh n, kros-], is [*botany*]: *the transfer of pollen from the flower of one plant to the flower of another having a different genetic constitution*; but it is also *a sharing or interchange of knowledge, ideas, etc., as for mutual enrichment*. Begun as one artist and an invitation, it became two and then many. The words, the keystrokes, the plant dust and feet in the field—all of these little palynological collaborators. Our doings-in-common cross-hatch the spaces between us, and the times as well. Fall is also spring, and the verdant plant-sex of a Canadian summer folds also into a sleepy Antipodean cool. Yellow blurs the seasonal distance between canola and ragweed, Acacia and goldenrod.

((I set off in June. Maybe it was June; this means little.
I learned to tell time by scratch, sun, bursting-at-the-seams))

Where all mattering is collaboration, the important question is no longer: is this a collaboration? but rather: what does this collaboration do? What is at stake? What proliferates, and what disappears? Within the flips and the folds, pollen collaborations also insist that difference still matters. GMO Canola fields do not mean the same as their non-GMO neighbours. The pollen dust of feral weeds accrues a curious moral burden. And, in this new era some call the Anthropocene, the effects of human-pollen collaborations reticulate outwards, with no guarantees. Allergy medications enter watersheds, and antihistamines degrade slowly. Collaborations reverberate, sometimes misheard. Collaboration is also contamination, and fugitive germination. Danger as near, but not imminent, is another meaning of yellow. We anticipate.

((Failure to thrive, failure to know.
Florescent yellow. Pollen, Yellow vest, Canola, warning sign & acrid note))

Our collaborations continue, into and beyond inConversation. The mail is still coming in.