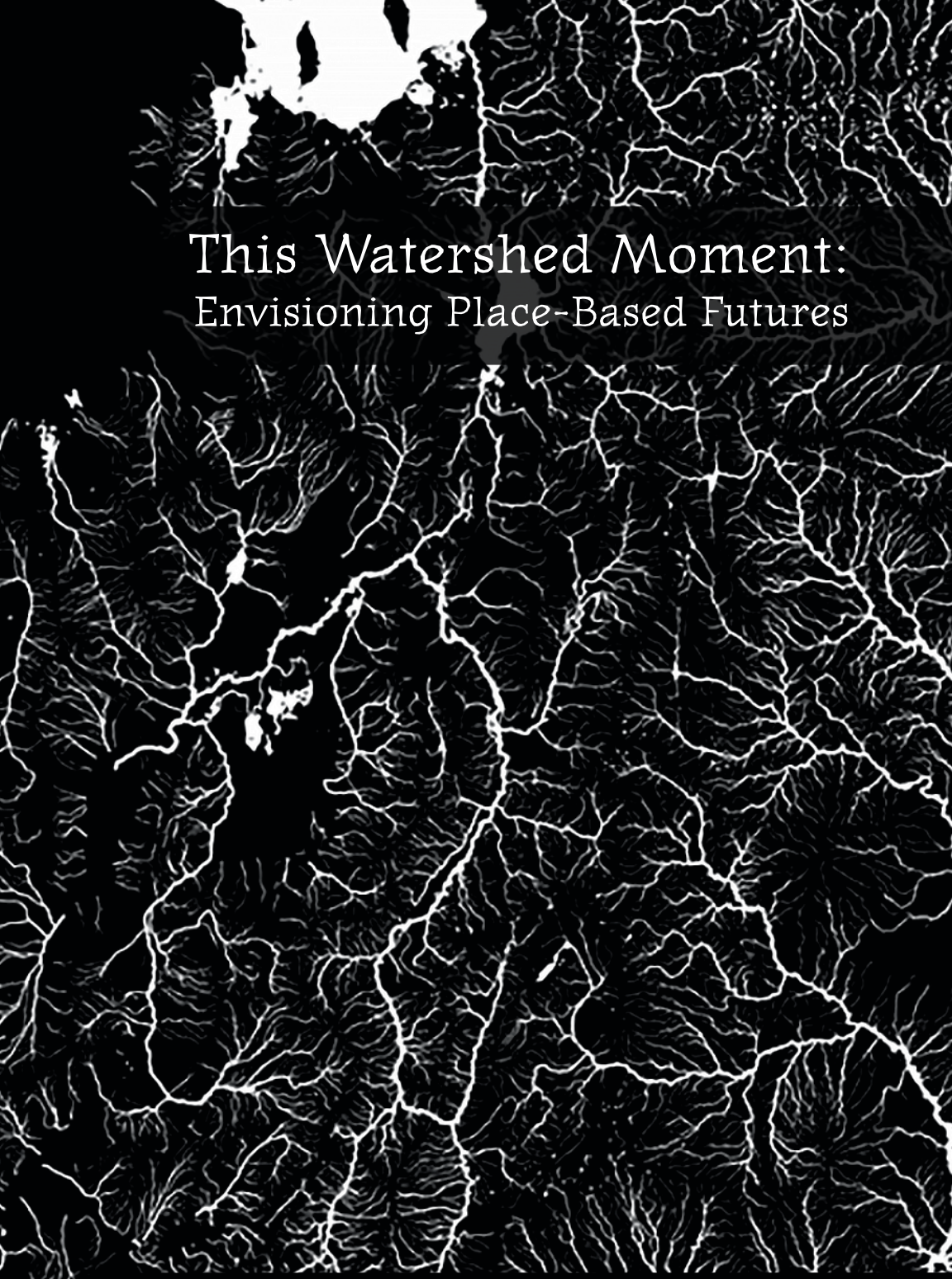
This Watershed Moment:
Envisioning Place-Based Futures



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SAVE OUR GREAT SALT LAKE

This Watershed Moment:
Envisioning Place-Based Futures

AN ANTHOLOGY

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SAVE OUR GREAT SALT LAKE

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INTRODUCTION

Watersheds have always been both a source of life and a source of ethics. Before we drew maps with rigid political boundaries and property lines, watersheds were the primary forces shaping our relationship to the land and to each other. The unique abundance that grew in a watershed influenced how people ate, how they built their homes, and even how they made music. Who and what you lived upstream from informed how you lived on the land, how much water you drew for yourself, and what you sent down the current.

As our worlds become more globalized and our technologies more efficient, we are outgrowing the natural and ethical bounds of our watersheds. Food, goods, materials, and ideas are now spread across the globe at breakneck speeds, and once-shared resources are so often dammed behind walls of privatization and self-interest. A grave divide is deepening: this new way of the world has the power to draw one's concern away from those downstream and the earth underfoot, favoring instead a glittering illusion of limitless growth.

It is a mirage with dire consequences. Utah's two major watersheds are under extreme pressure from climate change and increasing demands for water. The Great Salt Lake withers to new lows each season, devastating critical ecosystems and exposing growing communities to toxic dust. Meanwhile, every drop of Colorado River water is claimed before it reaches the ocean, leaving the vast settlements dependent on Lake Powell and Lake Mead flirting with deadpool scenarios. Species—including humans—reliant on these watersheds for millennia are facing realities where they must either flee or wither. Or change.

Modern media beats a steady pulse of doom. Natural disasters are normalized and swept to the bottom of the news feed, becoming an eerie, ever-present background din, while popular shows, movies, and books flood our attentions with apocalyptic narratives. We can name clearly the world we don't want to inhabit: the one full of uncertainty, scarcity, danger, dust. What is less described in the collective imagination and consciousness is a world in which we've let the moment transform us. One in which we've held the grief of environmental change and, in the process, have learned (or remembered) to respect, trust, and care for the ones downstream and the ecological communities that sustain us.

In the words of Lucille Clifton, we cannot create what we cannot imagine. We cannot orient ourselves and move toward livable futures in which social and ecological flourishing are possible if we don't first imagine what that future could feel like, look like, sound like, smell like, taste like. In order to stave off sure social and ecological collapse, a great shift is called for. We must remember or reimagine our connections to our watersheds so we may bring about resilient, sustainable, joyful futures. It is time to ask: How can I stay in a place? How can I live a good life in uncertain times? How can I give back, be a good neighbor, steward, community member, ancestor? Who gets to do this joyful work of imagining? Not only the people with legislative or financial powers. This task belongs to everyone in the watershed. This is our watershed moment.

THE PROJECT

Knowing this in our bones, Utah Humanities and Save Our Great Salt Lake came together to invite Utah communities to share their visions for the thriving, place-based futures they are dreaming for their descendents who get to stay in Utah's watersheds.

Utah Humanities strengthens Utah communities by cultivating connections, deepening understanding, and exploring our complex human experience. "The humanities" is the lofty name given to the collection of practices that we all employ to make meaning from our experience in the world. The humanities happen when we ask big questions about what is real or what is right (philosophy), when we study the past (history), or when we discuss stories (literature). The humanities—how we make meaning of our world and our place in it—determines how we relate to one another, how we relate to our environments, and the futures we build together.

Save Our Great Salt Lake, a community coalition dedicated to raising awareness and inspiring creative action for the lake's recovery, recognizes that its work extends far beyond the shoreline. At its heart, this is about remembering our relationship to water, and our place within the living body of the watershed—as a part of the larger whole. This is long work. While conserving water through technical and policy solutions is vital, Save Our Great Salt Lake seeks to illuminate the deeper cultural and spiritual roots of this crisis that asks of us not only *what will we do, but who will we become? What new ways of being can we dream into existence? What new stories will we tell?*

On May 30, 2024, at the Salt Lake City Public Library, Utah Humanities and Save Our Great Salt Lake convened a panel conversation to ground a call for submissions in some essential truths about the intersectionality of ecological and social thriving, the role of ethics, and the undeniable power of imagination. Panelists included Dr. Bonnie Baxter (biologist, professor, and director of the Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster University), Forrest S. Cuch (enrolled member of the Ute Indian Tribe), Olivia Juarez (co-host of the podcast Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories and the public lands director for GreenLatinos), and Dr. Thomas Bretz (Associate Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Ethics Fellow at the Center for the Study of Ethics at Utah Valley University).

Led by the wisdom of these experts, we opened the call: What is your vision of a flourishing, place-based future in 150 years if we get things right—if we respond to this moment swiftly and justly?

THE BOOKLET

The booklet you're holding is a compilation of the rich and brilliant submissions we received. These poems, stories, and prayers do not shy away from the struggle and grief inherent in massive sea change, but they all realize a glimmer of rootedness, cooperation, reciprocation, becoming themselves luminaries through uncertainty.

To enrich this project and weave contributors' voices into a broader dialogue, we've included excerpts from our May 2024 panel conversation and the *Stay Salty* podcast throughout this booklet.

We've organized this booklet into three sections:

Root grounds us where we are and where we've been: the extractive legacies we've been left with, the cultural mindsets that have shaped this place, and the relationships that must shift if we are to live differently.

Reckon meets us in the long dark. As author and soul activist Francis Weller says, this is an alchemical period—a time of necessary decay, collapse, endings and sheddings. Amidst the stakes, the grief, and the uncertainty of this moment, there is also power. "Hallowed be our hour of changing", contributing poet Claire Player writes in "Three Poems."

Replenish pulls us forward to the emerging future, where we've learned new ways of being—gentler, more attentive, rooted in care and reciprocity. Here, waterways flow, neighbors share garden meals, and the air is filled with birdsong. We understand ourselves as part of a living, breathing world.

We hope this project serves as both a ballast and a beacon—offering steadiness, hope, and spark as we navigate this crossroads of crisis and possibility. While we don't intend to shy away from the realities we face or the scale of the problems before us, we believe the best way through begins with imagination. Dreaming is not escapism; it's a legitimate strategy—a first step toward transformation. We need a vision to chart our course.

Stories will carry us through. We invite you to listen for the stories that want to be told – the ones that stitch your experience into the collective fabric of what's possible. Tell us: what does your world look like 150 years from now—your watershed, your community, your dreams—if we get things *right?*

root

Friendly Advice

Rachel White

a pal says, you can't cheat the reaper
meaning nothing comes for free—

there's always a cost even if only your time
some obligation you haven't repaid

but I suppose that isn't really true; the earth's wild gift
is offered up, even if you never say *Thank you*—

you wouldn't do that, would you—
think for a minute of the plenitude

what—and who—sustained you
how do you return the favor?

a poet of the people indigenous to this place*
reads her refrain— we aren't living right

can we turn it around—maybe today, begin
to ask— what can I give?

what can I make?
what can I share?

not just, *what can I take*—

*Laura Tohe, Poet Laureate of the Navajo Nation

"Great Salt Lake drying is terrifying. And as much as I would just love to relocate and live in the cleanest, most beautiful place with no pollution, I can't see myself fully leaving. I have built such a beautiful community, and a lot of my family, which is a pillar to my life, still live here. I just can't walk away from my home.

My family didn't come to the U.S. with a lot, but I've witnessed them build their own community and safety here. I don't want to see them have to forcefully leave yet another place they call home. There's a lot of trauma in immigrant households, and one of those anxieties that a lot of us have is, do I have to leave again?

So, how do we stay? I think building community and roots, no matter how small they are, in a place where you call home helps you want to fight for it and keep your ground. If you don't have that sense of belonging, it can be really easy and tempting to walk away."

Meisei Gonzalez
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "What It Means to Stay"

This is ecology but also healing care

Teri Harman

We traveled from all directions
to stand here on the shores of our saline lake.
Companions.

I traveled from the place I know best,
Utah Lake.
To be here at Great Salt Lake.
About 50 miles to the south,
connected by the intimacy of
Jordan River,
stands a body of fresh water.
Companion
to this body of salt water.

Snow-melt, river-guided water
leaves Utah Lake
to flow
north
to Great Salt Lake.
Rivers rarely flow north.
These are golden and magical
companions.
These are tributaries and siblings.
Connected, interwoven family.
This is ecology but also healing care.

Salt water craves the balance of fresh water.
From rivers, tributaries, creeks.
From all directions.
An oasis, an abundance.
This is ecology but also healing care.

Water travels from all directions.
Companionship is a compass.
Flow North
Flow South
Flow East
Flow West.

Water travels from all directions.
Companionship is a sphere.
Above,
snow and rain.
Underneath,
aquifers and springs.

A lake-saving people also flows
in all directions.
A lake-saving people walks the compass,
forward and backward.
A lake-saving people inhabits the sphere,
an embrace of curvature
a rejection of line.
This is ecology but also healing care.

Not a flat map, not a linear conundrum.
Not a broken binary or isolated occurrence.
This is round, wet companionship.
Water, human, more-than-human.
Companions.
This is ecology but also healing care.

A lake-saving people
flows in all directions.
To roll around the sphere
to break apart old ways
to tell fresh, briny stories
to be ecology and to be care.

A lake-saving people
is for the water.
is the water.
This is companionship, in all its dimensions.
This is ecology but also healing care.

"Our real problem is our culture. A lot of the people who came to this hemisphere came from places that were green and had lots of water and rain — plentiful rain — and they came to a climate that has very little rain, very dry. I've heard the comment, "We want to make the desert bloom." The desert already blooms.

They call us [Indigenous people] the caretakers and all this stuff. I used to think of my own people as backward because people used to say, "Oh you Indians are always getting in the way of progress." That used to make me feel bad until lately I sat back and said, "You know, some of the progress I see is not very good. In fact, it's destructive to the Earth. And maybe it's a good thing that we get in the way of progress. That. That might even be our purpose."

Forrest S. Cuch
This Watershed Moment: Envisioning Place-Based Futures panel

Our Great Salt Lady
S.K. Wenger

Of what shall I write
of our Great Salt Lady
to hold your gaze, turn your ear,
capture your wonder?

Shall we discuss her nuances
over a cup of tea, keeping our musings lignht
while whispers of wind
wick water from her surface?

The season doesn't matter.
We can chat in this wicking
atmosphere anytime.
It's happening now—
the season of wicking.
Today. Tomorrow.
Last month.

Even in winter.

Always.

Don't let the summer sun steal all that glory.
There's no need for blazing heat
to winnow her away.

Fingers point at global warming,
but this dance of wind and water alone
is not what leaves our maiden weeping
on folded knees.

With back bent, hands cupped, and
head bowed toward thirsty mountains,
she waits among thirstier valleys
caught in a frayed tapestry of
reservoirs, rivers, aquifers, and springs
being withdrawn too fast
for replenishing.

Of what else shall I write
of our keeper of secrets, while
the wind whistles, the wells gurgle,
the sprinklers flow?

In time, all that she hides,
what we thought was worth reaping,
what was given for safekeeping—
all the precious metals and salts
washed from land and settled in
her sediments will be peeled away,
carried on licks of air, and
swept to our doorsteps—
but without knocking,
without ringing.

With back bent and head bowed,
our Great Salt Lady,
now a weary witness,
lacks energy to do more
than watch forgotten toxins
slip through outstretched fingers.
Like dust, they'll land elsewhere.
And although unwanted, they'll find
new rivulets coursing through other
confined spaces…

…In some ways, we are all closed basins.

But unlike her, we cannot welcome
seasonal flocks. We cannot nourish
winter snow. We cannot absorb
summer heat.

Of course, we can always leave.

Find another table. Another tap. Surely,
there is one free-flowing somewhere
while our Great Salt Lady
gets trimmed.
Reordered.
Edited.

What shall we call her
when the waters are gone?

The Great Salt Basin?

No matter the name, the wind
will continue to peel back her layers.
The sun will continue to deliver its warmth.
The mountains will continue their upward thrust.
But where will her waters have gone?
Not to that trickling river.
Not to those drying slopes.
Not to these craggy peaks.

Yet, just as we are free to leave,
we are also free to stay
and save
our Great Salt Lady—
with rivers that reach her bays,
with clean waters that refresh her shores,
with a thunder of steps that rally around
sustainable action.

The season doesn't matter.
Choices of consequence
rooted deep in resolve
happen
all the time.
Choices that rebuild
reliable lifelines
happen
all the time.
Choices that make a difference
happen
all the time.

But time is ticking.
The wind is wicking.

Are you listening?

Of what shall I write?

"I was born here, and my mom was born here, and my grandparents came here in their young adulthood. Everything I know and everything that I love is here, and I can say it truly has been shaped by Great Salt Lake herself.

I think mostly what we hear in the popular discourse about Great Salt Lake is perhaps economic decisions that drive Great Salt Lake's future. Others will point to the legislative solutions, like a maximum salinity level or a minimum lake level of the water for us to be able to stay. And I think all of those things are crucial. We absolutely need these bare minimum requirements of getting water into the lake so that we can stay. But I don't think it's enough because our economic system, our cultural awareness, isn't set up to value Great Salt Lake for just existing.

I think for us to be able to stay here means for us to value and love and honor Great Salt Lake just for being, just because she's there. Not because of the things that she gives us. Not because of the ways that we benefit from her. But because we have almost like a heart connection. Because that's what your humanity is: respecting others."

Olivia Juarez
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "What It Means to Stay"

Paddling Pia Okwai

Erin O'Farrell

We're making our way downstream, two people in a canoe on a broiling summer day. Ahead of me, mentors paddle back and forth across the waterway, turning around occasionally to point out familiar landmarks hidden beyond the trees that line the banks. Friends flank me on either side, the spray from their paddles offering relief from the scorching sun as beads of water cover my hands, neck, and face. My partner, sitting astern, speaks commands as they steer us forward with confident direction and abundant patience for my lack of navigational skills.

According to the University of Utah's Shoshoni Talking Dictionary, Pia Okwai, which translates to "big flow" in English, is what the Newe people call this river — the one that snakes through the valley from Paa-Kateten (Utah Lake) to Piapaa (Great Salt Lake), connecting those two bodies through a singular vein. Today, we're paddling a section of the river that runs along the Soonkahni's (Salt Lake City) Rose Park neighborhood. We put our boats in near a community garden and will take them out a few miles down at a boat ramp.

"We'll make this desert blossom like a rose," the Mormon pioneers said when they first came to this valley. It was already a garden. A vast wetland with fish and mussels that sustained landlocked peoples. One of the first things the settlers did when they reached this place was give the river a new name: the Jordan River. An iteration of a place seven thousand miles away in another land colonized in the name of holiness. Settlers violently displaced, dispossessed, and killed many of the Indigenous people who once lived along the river's shores. They diverted and dammed the river, shrinking it to one fifth of its original size. And they introduced fish and flora that choked out endemic species like freshwater mussels.

This place is a palimpsest — a body of text that is written over with new words, but still shows traces of its earlier forms. Along with its material environment, this place's histories are (re)written and (re)shaped to inscribe different identities, narratives, and relations in a continual process across space and time. The Jordan River waterscape onto which Mormon settlers inscribed their stories is different from the Pia Okwai waterway stewarded by its Native inhabitants. Its size, flow, life, and meanings were changed as a new layer of the text was written by settler

colonial forces. In order to make the narrative about the desert blossoming true, the reality of the aquatic abundance that already existed needed to be forgotten in the stories that people in power told — continue to tell — about this place.

As we wind our way down Pia Okwai, familiar sights and sounds become alien to me. While I have birdwatched along the river's banks, strolled along the Jordan River Trail, and crossed the waterbody via bridge many times, it is my first time experiencing the river by floating atop it. My perspective here is different. Is that the rush of the water or the rumbling of cars on I-15? Is that a disc golf course beyond the reeds? I didn't know that was there! Paddling along the river, Pia Okwai prompts me to see the city from a new perspective, to relate to my surroundings in a different way than I am accustomed to on land.

My mentors at the Nature Center at Pia Okwai invited me on this canoe trip. The organization recently renamed their campus to recognize Pia Okwai. The renaming is one step of many in the Nature Center's aims to be a community-based green space that interrogates colonial relations to this place and notions of its conservation. What we name a place signifies what it means, how we remember it.

Recalling this name invokes a memory of the river's vast wetland ecosystems that once shaped the collective aquatic culture of this place. It also recognizes Indigenous people as an integral part of the landscape in the past, present, and future.

My ancestors have more in common with the settlers of this place than its Native folk. I am a visitor here in multiple ways. I am not Indigenous to this place and only moved here recently. I have worked with the Nature Center as a grad student over the past two years on a project fostering communication about their renaming. This work has challenged me to think critically about the actions I take and the relations I embody across this watershed. Using the Pia Okwai name is one step towards being a good guest.

I have come to understand that for all of us who are non-Indigenous to this place, being a good guest requires unsettling the notions of belonging we may have on these lands that don't — never did — belong to us. It requires a shift in perspective, becoming unfamiliar with our surroundings and seeing things from a different angle. It also means we should strive to learn from the first peoples of these lands and its once-vast waters. My mentors at the Nature Center have

guided me on this journey, reminding me that good guesthood requires, among other things, knowing your place, taking direction from your hosts, being humble, and bringing, sharing, and receiving gifts graciously.

Referring to the Pia Okwai name is a disruption to the pervasive settler mindset, a moment of inquiry into what other relations to this place exist. The name makes room for memories that run counter to the dominant settler narratives to resurface and be shared. Holding multiple narratives and memories at the same time, we can celebrate incommensurability – building an ethic of empathy across difference – to foster interdependence.

As I paddle the river, I envision a future Pia Okwai shaped by memory. Visitors say the Pia Okwai name along the whole river and Indigenous leadership shapes relations to land. A multiplicity of relations to place are honored, and inhabitants of this watershed understand that our liberation is intertwined. White settler people like myself learn to take a role of humble support and unwavering solidarity in the rematriation of land and lifeways to the watershed's Native inhabitants. We respect the sovereignty and wisdom of the elder knowledge of a place.

As the water holds me, I remember that the beginnings of this future exist today. It exists in visions like those my mentors at the Nature Center seek to bring to life. I remember that I am in community with those who listen to one another and find common values among our disparate backgrounds as we challenge dominant ways of relating to this place.

Phragmites stalks line the riverbank and plastic litter floats on the water's surface. We see the heron and are reminded of the beaver and the cutthroat trout. We remember that a way forward toward these enduring relations exists. Ahead, a kingfisher takes off from a half-submerged branch and looks back toward me as I paddle forward.

(Inspiration, love, and gratitude to: Friends, colleagues, and community at the Nature Center at Pia Okwai; Arcia Tecun; Marissa Beckstrom; Jared Farmer; Amanda Murphyao and Kelly Black; Diana Taylor; Charles Sepulveda; Michael Rothberg; Kyo Maclear, Pia Okwai)

Naming It: Great Salt Lake

Laura Stott

avocet coyote blood porcupine hands
brine shrimp wings a still life caught and swallowed float
and sun sky swallows everything float again
step and sleep small feet marsh and memory
scissors like wings hawk folded shrimp monkey
myth and long body cracked gold grass
sunset blooms out of a flower sliver wing again
heart from the air a marble butterfly
heart the size of grains dissolve chorus frogs
the size of the inside of your ears basin
magic orb-weaver saltgrass
plover more wings a gopher snake swallows
another snake gone into another world
wait brine fly what's left
gull fire thousands of trumpets can you hear
the tiger beetle dance seepweed too
drunk bumbles bison eagles catch what glimmers
swampfire story and shrike
wetland a heart the size of the earth
like a swarm flicker and firefly echolocate
pelicans thread the sky
bat a mirror moves with nematode
peregrine to the brim
crystalized heaven owl owl awake

"While this is absolutely a climate crisis and an ecological crisis, I see it primarily as a cultural crisis of how we relate to place. I find the most hope in thinking about a growing collective consciousness of the importance of this river and of the lake. What excites me is seeing that cultural consciousness shift so there is more value being given to those places.

Symbols are powerful. By reinstating Indigenous place names, we're not only reclaiming and remembering, but refusing to forget those names. We have resources to learn how to say them and pronounce them correctly. We can do a lot more, and we should do a lot more.

I've lived in Aotearoa, and I was there at a time when Te Reo Maori, or the Maori language, was written small underneath the English on public signs. Before I moved back, it was the main language, and English was in small print underneath. That's a very powerful symbol.

Iximulew, or Guatemala, where my family's from has a majority Indigenous population and an incredibly poor track record with Indigenous peoples, including recent acts of genocide. Even there, in that context, you see Maya names being reclaimed and being remembered. A lot of the communities still know those names and still use those names.

It's really about flipping the narrative. It's not that we can't shift culture, so why is it being refused? You have to intentionally refuse to do it. Putting it from that position helps me shape my political platform. If we want to not just survive, but find a way to live with dignity with all of our relations in this place, then we have to stop refusing to see the knowledge that is present.

One of the tragedies of modern life is not, how do we get here? But more importantly, how do we get stuck here? The planet has such a tremendous diversity and legacy of diversity: different ways of being, different ways of living, different ways of relating. To end up at this moment in time that is increasingly monolithic and homogenous — we have a global economic system — that is a tragedy when we consider the legacy of all of our ancestors on this planet. There are so many ways of living. There are so many societies that are possible, so many economic systems that are possible. It's not just one or two. And that's evidenced long before the few centuries of the recent history of our species on this planet."

Daniel Hernandez (Arcia Tecun)
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "Shifting Culture: Honoring Relationships at Pis Okwai"

reckon

Flight of the Gulls

MA Shelley

The way mama told it, the sky used to be halfway-clear during the summers. Said that, when the storms rolled out, she could almost see the mountains on the other side of the valley. "They're purpler," she claimed, "and… softer. not as jagged. Could only see the crests, you could, but God, I saw 'em."

Feels like a fairy-tale, to me. Or… maybe just a lie. On a good day, I can hardly see the birds in the sky—and that's *with* a mask built to see through the smog. Stuffs' a pain to look at, sure, but seeing it ain't half as bad as actually *breathin*g the shit. When it gets in your lungs, it stings like all hell. Burns your eyes and the back of your throat, rends you down to raw airways and chemical burns; I've seen it all. Treated it, with my own two hands, and suffered half of the worst of it myself. It's a miracle any of us manage to survive down here, let alone *work.*

But it's not a miracle, really. It's a machine. Ventilators aren't nearly as expensive as the military want us to believe, but they'll still lock you in for at least two years worth of your salary before you've even seen a dime. Kip bets that, if we could do the work without the machines, they wouldn't even give them to us til after we've paid them off. Lately, I've been more inclined to agree.

I get motion-sick on trains. Folks say that you've gotta keep your eyes on the windows when you move that fast. See things rush by, solve the incongruency. But there's nothing to see this late. Even when we rush by a tracklamp and get a bit of light, the only thing I see is fog. I try to imagine the city disappearing around us. Like if I think about it hard enough, I'll trick my brain into registering movement.

"Doin' okay?" Kip asks me. I don't look at him. Can't. I'm convinced I'll spew as soon as I take my eyes off the glass.

"Fine," I tell him, but that feels like a lie, so I try, "fantastic."

"You're a little green."

"And *you're* a little shit. Can it," I snap. Talking makes me nauseous in a head-high sort of way, like the feeling's living in my throat instead of my gut.

He scoffs. "Somethin' good to see, out there?"

"Sure there is." I try to peer into the distance. "Or, was."

Kip hums. I almost can't hear it, over the rush of the rails. "I don't think there's anything north of here," he decides. He's doing his best imitation of me, which is… *irritatingly* accurate.

My brows twitch. "Bet there is."

There's a moment of silence. I tear my eyes off the smog to look at him, just in time to see him snap his fingers. "Right. Canada."

I stare at him. "Idaho, dumbass."

"Oh. Shit," he starts to laugh. "Yeah. Idaho too, I guess."

"Whole state, man."

I try to settle back into the booth. My gut's still churning. Maybe the secret's in regulating my breathing? I keep my respiration slow, make sure that the inhales get all the way down into the bottoms of my ribs. *Clean air never hurts,* I reason. Even if it ain't what I need—what I need is two doses of Gravol, but they've been stingy with the meds lately. And chipping drugs is maybe the dumbest thing you can do, when you're trying to fly under the radar.

The train-car sways. The silence is sticky, like exhaust.

"You packmuled the water, right? It'll last us?"

"Yeah," he answers without thinking, "It's good to go."

"How long do you reckon we gotta stretch it?"

"According to Chey, it was a week on foot. Due west, outta Badger." He starts drawing a paper out of his pocket, but I catch his wrist quick enough to stop him.

"A week," I breathe, "Jesus. They couldn't've set up any closer?"

He's careful with his answer, like he knows I'm not gonna like it. I can't tell if it's arrogance or nerves. "Well, that's not to the lake, though." His fingers tap the bench in rhythm. "It's another twenty miles once we make it out of the valley, but that's the worst of it! Once we make it past the Stansburies–"

I don't let him finish. "Are you serious?" My leg won't keep still, bouncing from the heel.

"Didn't think you should have mentioned that ahead of time, dumbass?"

He looks caught. "Well!" He scoffs. "What? It was hard enough talking you into leaving anyways! Can you really blame me for leaving out some details?"

"'*Twenty miles through the flats*' is not a detail, Kip!" I don't realize how loud I'm talking until we hear someone complain through the walls.

I focus on the pulse in my ears, on making it slow down. It's no use, though. My lungs are already constricting, prickling at the very idea of that much strain. I might've been able to manage it a decade ago. But you get a lot of exposure, treating miasma. Broken vents. Emergency rescues. Burn after burn, breath after breath, incident after incident. It's worn me down.

He *knows* that.

"I took care of it. Cool your jets."

I can feel a cloying scratch in my throat. "That's a lot of walking."

"Walking through fresh air." He shrugs. "Besides, I'll be doing all the lugging for you."

Right.

God, the things I would do for fresh air.

He's been on about this since Chey disappeared. The Gulls tell us she got transferred, but Kip did too much digging. Says she made it to Badger but never showed down in Kennecott. He likes to wave papers in my face about it, got a telegram and everything, but I figure *anyone* could send a wire to Crossings Quarry.

When I clear my throat, I taste blood. Deep breaths. Oxygen. Fresh air.

"What if there's nothing out there?" I ask, when the quiet becomes too much to hold. He's heard this concern before. It's the main one. But I can't stand the facade. The sitting in silence, the pointed looks, the pretending like we ain't about to uproot everything we've ever known. I've gotta fill it with something. Empty space ticks my nerves.

"We been over this," he groans. "Ain't you ever heard'a faith?"

"I mean it, man. If we don't show up for transfer, we're out of a job." My ankle *clicks* when I roll it. My muscles feel pulled in all the wrong ways, tugged against the grain. "Good jobs! You'll make a decent soldier. Salary's double what they'll ever pay you in the mines."

"Good soldier. Shit. You ever seen a Gull *smile,* Liv? They're miserable bastards, all of 'em. It's why they're so goddamn mean, y'know." He picks at the exposed wiring under the seat. "Little guys with big heads. I don't wanna be like that, I *don't.*"

"Maybe just at the Quarry. Proper military's cushy," I say. My brain ticks through the list of amenities listed at the back of my paperwork. Extra notes, disposable syringes, fresh linens *weekly.* Sounded like heaven. "It's pay, is all I'm saying. Clean air. And field-medics are in short supply, up at the base; we'd do fine."

His lips press into a thin line. "Sure, we'd do fine. But we wouldn't be doing good." He hops across the car, settling on my side of the booth. "Besides. They've gotta treat their own like shit, if the way they act is anything to go by."

"Clean water," I remind him, "and air filtration on tap. You've got to pay your dues for that kinda luxury."

"Jesus, it's—" He slumps back in the seat, looking at me with this stupid, dumbfounded awe. "They manufacture the need, Liv. It's their biggest export. Silica, oil, and *smog."* He counts them off on his fingers. "We wouldn't need vents if they stopped pummeling out poison from the smokestacks."

"You don't know that," I start, but he steamrolls me.

"It lines their pockets, you know it does! You're a part of it! They make us sick as dogs, just to charge everything we're worth to get us better!" He takes a deep breath. Smooths back his hair. "They don't even pay you enough for treatment, and you can do it yourself. And they ain't gonna change what they do, how they do it. Not in the factories, not in the mines, not at the base. Poisoning our land keeps their lights on, and killin' us bumps their bottom line. Plain as that."

"We can't change the way things run, Kip."

"No, but we can short them out two bodies. This isn't the only option," he insists. "Places we can go. People with their heads on straight. You know—" He

scoots up closer to me, drops his voice real low. "They've started cleaning the soil, there at the outpost. Can you imagine? Food, right out of the ground. For free. You want clean water? Shit, it *falls out of the goddamn sky,* out there."

"Chey tell you all'a that?" I drone.

"Matter of fact, she did."

It's not a good argument. Chey said all sorts of things. Dangerous things. "You don't think that maybe, just… *maybe,* she got canned for dissent?" I reason. "C'mon, what's more likely? That she made off to some… perfect place, with magically clean air, or…?"

I shrug. I don't gotta say it: people get shot for less radical views than *we ought to overthrow the Gulls*. Kip scowls at me, and his eyes flicker down.

I can hear the rails. It's a solid minute before he decides what he wants to say.

"This place used to be a dream. Red rock. Rolling fields. Purple mountains." His lips twitch into a smile. "Four-hundred and sixty-nine species of birds in Utah alone. *That's* what Chey says."

"Sounds fake."

"Sure it does, *now.*" He pulls in a deep breath and shakes his head. He's right. It's hard to imagine anything living in this place, anymore. "It's all set, Liv. Don't get cold feet on me now."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. I can feel my heartbeat in the back of my skull, and it's getting difficult to organize my thoughts around it. "I—come on. You don't actually buy this, do you?"

"I don't want to *buy* anything. Know what I want?" Kip closes his eyes. It's like he can see it, just behind the lids. "People that try. People that care. Someone that worries more about their neighbor than their check." He grabs for my wrist. He's gentle, where his thumb hits skin. "Somewhere that ain't gonna kill me and my sister for profit. I'd pay anything to see that."

The train lurches to a stop, jostling us back. A tone sounds, and the intercom buzzes to life. *"Now arriving in Badger. The end of the line. The train will depressurize in ten minutes."*

It always feels like they give us too much time to vent up. Kip and I can do it in six minutes, flat, then we're left waiting around until the doors open. We spend the last four minutes adjusting his pack. I don't know how much a month of water weighs, but this feels too light.

I don't have time to scrutinize him. The timer *dings,* then the fog's rolling in. They take our names on the way out, and it's officially recorded in the system that Crispin and Olivia Hale made it into Badger. As far as they're concerned, we should show up ready for military service within the next three hours.

The wind on the flats flies unimpeded. It rushes at us from one side, presses Kip into my shoulder. He walks faster the closer we get to the end of the dock, where it splits to run north and south. It's like a fight, keeping us on the lighted path. "Keep walking." I barely hear it. He's got a scarf lain over the speaker on his chest. "Don't think. Just do. I've got you."

I don't have time to decide whether or not I really want to fight him on it. He grips my arm, yanks me forward, and makes the choice for me.

For what it's worth, I let him.

It's only a two foot drop onto the salt, but my stomach flips like it's a proper fall. There's a stumble, but we don't stop. Our boots crunch as we gain speed. By the time I look back at the station, we're already deep enough into the smog to have lost it.

"Keep on," he says again. "Due west. Eyes forward."

I dig my fingers into his wrist. I feel like I'm going to hurl. *Breathe. Oxygen. Movement.*

When the next gust blows, it almost feels like it blows away the smog. If I look up and focus, I can make out the western wall of the valley.

I like to imagine I see a little more purple on the mountains: if for nothing else, than to keep me going.

Three Poems

Claire Player

i.

being in motion
i am nowhere
now here
all this
chatter
gather
scatter
Hallowed be our
hour of changing.

bless the tender ache
this shifting shape.

future
otherwise
sacred
streams
again
reverence
future
plethora.

to be a part
return to life
beneath before beyond sink
deep.

i have never been alone in any of this.

we are the world
we want to change
heaven help us
move beyond.

ii.

And it came to pass, a great reckoning.
The wounds, many, weeping,
The ache we could not shake
Changed the shape of us.

And in recognition of
Oneness,
Life,
Sacred plenty,

So, too, did the
People become
Water bodied.

One and many,
Veined,
Freeflowing.

So, too, were the
Dams dismantled,
Mines decommissioned.

And it came to pass
That the rivers flowed freely,
The streams sang
The rains fell steady
Canyons sighed relief.

iii.

we are free because we remember.

we are free because we are bound to our relations.
we are free because we have digested our grief together.
we are free for the love of our bodies, resting, singing, dancing, dreaming.

we are free to dream beyond.

we are free in one another.

"Power and culture and story they're so intertwined. What is culture? What makes culture? Who says what culture is? It's in our power. It's in our hands. It's in our hearts. Culture is what we make of it, and so I think the opportunity moving forward is to tell ourselves, tell each other, and tell the world: this is who we are as a people, this is what we value as a people.

I truly believe, across the state, we all love and honor and cherish [nature] and want to make sure that nature is healthy and that it's well, and that we have a good relationship with it for all future generations.

Live here, be a person here, who says, "this is how my life and my health is impacted, [how] my kids' health is impacted," and make that your credentials. Make that your badge. That's where the power shift is going to come from – including so-called "non-experts" and really deputizing the expertise of community members' lived experiences."

Olivia Juarez
This Watershed Moment: Envisioning Place-Based Futures panel

Where Once the River Ran

Mo Russell Leed

They say this river used to run with rage. I can't imagine water running at all. I've only ever seen it move slow, lazy, trickling. My grandfather told me stories of when he was young, how he could take a trip down a river without walking at all. He told me about boats, rafts and canoes that could carry people over water. I've never seen one. No use for one anymore. The Colorado River flows through Moab ankle-deep. I can see it barely twinkling in the light of the sunrise, far below where Arabelle and I are perched. I look out at where the Green River used to meet the Colorado, the smaller Green dried up before I can remember.

Arabelle and I sit on a blanket, eating a small breakfast before she goes. She'll set out walking this morning, leaving this dusty town, walking toward a fantasy I don't think she'll ever find. She says the Northwest still has water. Read in one of her books that it was the wettest place in what used to be the United States.

"How can you risk your life to go somewhere that might be just as dry? You don't know what the hell you're walking into."

"I'm leaving, and you're scared," she says softly, turning away from me. "Don't make this goodbye harder than it already is."

I say nothing, just look down at the lines that show where the river was once strong enough to carve away the earth down in the canyon.

We've had this conversation before. She wants me to come with her, but I won't go. I won't leave the town I know, the community I'm fighting to keep alive. She's dreaming of what she might find, but I'm trying to hold onto what I already have. I wish she could see that, but you can only fight the same fight for so long.

So she leaves this morning, a bag on her back with as much water as we could find, the clothes she has, and all the cakes of cornbread I could spare for her. I stay up high on the cliffs after she headed down into the canyon to follow the path of the Green River as far north as she can. But the sun's high now, I should get to work. I follow the old roads back to town to the water plant. Even if I didn't know the path by heart, the smell would guide me there just fine. My work isn't pretty, but I get by. One of those jobs nobody wants but everybody

needs. I work water recycling, turning my neighbors piss into drinkable water. The rags I cover my face with don't stop the smell or keep out the sand when the winds come, but it's better than nothing.

"June, why are you late again?" my boss Loon snips at me.

I turn away, tie my rags tighter over my mouth. I know it's just the heat getting to him, I can see it in the red sheen washed across his forehead. He doesn't like covering his skin, but I've learned it's the only way to stay alive out here. I adjust my wraps again, pulling them tighter around my face. Loon insists on being the only one to touch the money. So when people come to sell their pee or buy clean water, they talk to his grouchy ass. Fine by me. It breaks my heart to see mothers weeping softly as they scrape their coffers for a sip of water for their child. I see in Loon's eyes the hard edge grown over too many years without softness. But I'm still young, still tender like new scrub oak leaves. I still cry for mothers and children, the elderly too dehydrated to move, the babies lost because a breast can't make milk without water. So I work my shift at the water plant, pour piss and collect the clean water evaporating out of it, and I save my tears for home.

But at home, in the big house by the library, I only cry sometimes. Sometimes the fear finds me, creeps out from the dark corners, scratches at me like thirst, impossible to escape from. But then my neighbors come. They light the lamps, put the beans on the stove, tend my garden, sit with me. We hold hands, and I remember that we have each other.

And when I am not afraid, when I am shining too bright for the shadows to find me, I take care of them. I make sure they've gotten something to eat, check they got their medicine. At the library, I teach little ones, the survivors, about the plants that grow from this dry land. At the community garden, I weed the crumbling soil and sit in the shade of the juniper trees, my namesake, and thank the sky I am still alive. That those of us who keep living have found a way to hold on, roots deep like the juniper.

I try not to think about how we got into this predicament. I try not to get too angry that I suffer for a problem that could have been solved generations ago. I try not to think about the greed that got us here. But those shadows creep into my mind like clouds overhead. As I look up at the sky today, the clouds are full of shadows. Darker than usual.

I love to watch the clouds. I've never seen them like this. Then again, I've only

been on this earth for 20 years, and there's so much I have never seen. I'm lucky to have a friend to ask when things like this come. Grim has been around so long she can't remember what year she was born or the name she was born with. But her face is etched with lines like canyons, and she remembers a very different world than I ever lived in. So I pick myself up off the ground and walk over to Grim's. She is sitting out on her front porch, watching the sky like I was, a blanket over her lap despite the heat.

"Well hello there, Juniper Grey," she says.

Grim is one of the only people in town who calls me by full name. She is elegant, stately, and doesn't believe in nicknames — funny considering she chose her own name. She told me once we should respect our creators and the names they gave us, but she is a self-made queen. I guess the rules don't apply when you're a bad bitch like Grim.

"Hi, Mama Grim. How're you feeling today?" I ask as I step up onto the porch and settle down on the earthen floor at her feet.

"Same shit, different day, baby bird. I'm still here."

"I'm grateful for that." I pat her on the shin and rest my head on her knee.

"Your heart alright, little one? Feeling okay?" She strokes her arthritic hand over my shorn head.

"Arabelle left this morning. Headed north. I just hope she gets there okay." I whisper that last part, scared to even admit that she might not.

Grim just lets out a soft hmmm and pats my head.

"Grim, why do the clouds look so dark today?" I ask, gazing out at the sky, darkening even more.

"I've been wondering about that all day, baby bird. They look like storm clouds, but you know we haven't had a storm in, oh goodness, maybe ten or fifteen years?"

"Like rain?" I sit up, turning to look at Grim. She doesn't meet my gaze, just continues looking out at the horizon.

"Rain, Juniper Grey. I think I can smell it now too."

I think she's finally lost it, but I sniff the air out of respect. I got so used to blocking my nose from smelling anything after years at the water recycling plant, but now that I'm paying attention, I notice it. She may not be totally senile yet. I didn't think weather could have a scent, but it smells good. Something I've never smelled before.

"What do we do, Grim? I don't know what to do." I ask with a shake in my voice. I'm so used to having a solution for every problem, always the first to act. "Is the rain good?"

"Oh sweet thing, the rain is not good or bad. The rain is just true. It will come, whether we're ready or not, and all we can do is survive it."

I feel my hands itching to shake, my stomach flooding with butterflies, but Grim's advice brings me back to myself. I know how to survive. I've had to learn, and it hasn't been easy, but I know how to keep myself alive through rough times.

Grim pushes herself up to standing, taller than me despite her aged slouch. "Guess we better be movin' now. Storm like that after all this drought, we'll be flooding quick. Bring my things inside for me, love, anything that's not secured. I got some old barrels in the garage, why don't you lash those to my fence posts, and we'll save some of this good water."

I spring to my feet and follow her directions as quickly and calmly as I can. I think about my own home, if I threw my bike down in the yard when I left it there yesterday. As I'm tying ropes around big blue barrels to keep them attached to the fence posts, I feel the first drop. It splashes down right between my eyes and I blink hard.

Water, falling from the sky.

My eyes fill with tears. I was always taught that crying was a waste of water. Never had enough water to let it get away from me that easy. But now, as rain begins to fall, first just a few drops, and then more, almost stinging how hard it falls now, I cry freely. I feel unleashed. My tears are barely a drop compared to what is falling from the sky. It is so beautiful. I never knew water so free, so joyful. A bolt of light cracks the sky, illuminating the darkness for just a moment. A bone-shaking rumble rolls through the valley. I run back to Grim,

who sits watching me from her porch.

"Let's watch the storm, love. Let's watch the water come." She pats the chair beside her.

I sit and rest my head on her shoulder as I let tears fall from my eyes. "It's so beautiful. I've never seen so much free water."

"It was once always so bountiful and free. It's been a long time, though." I can feel in the unsteady quiver of her shoulders that Grim is crying too now.

We sit there, leaning against each other for support, and watch water fill the streets. I can see it now. This is how rivers once looked — quick, powerful, steady. Water coursing like blood through veins.

I think of Arabelle and her path through the riverbed. I pray that she has found a safe place to wait out the storm. I think of all my neighbors and hope they are safe and dry. I can see branches and rubble rolling through the water, and I know that this storm will leave so much mess in its path. Despite the unknown, I can't help believing that this rain might mean something good is coming. That this could be the start of healing.

"The dominant world operates mainly out of the intellect. The Indian world operates more out of the heart. I used to ask the question, "how come we have ceremonies?" And it was explained to me that most of our ceremonies connect us with the Earth. If there's disconnect between the head and the heart, and if it continues to spiral out of control, it'll lead to neurosis and eventually psychosis. When you separate the head from the heart too much, that's when people start killing each other. So I figured out the key is to keep the connection with my head and heart in balance, and what keeps that going is connection to the Earth, to nature. I connect to nature, my heart, my mind, and then to the heavens, and it creates a holistic being."

Forrest S. Cuch
This Watershed Moment: Envisioning Place-Based Futures panel

All These Prophets Singing

Laura Stott

Where the snow melts
pines are limber.

Cold mineral smell
mixes with sticky pitch that bleeds

and drips thick
like honey. Earth receives

the water and fills
cup after cup

for birds, for the shrew
that is part seal,

for the fawn following Mother.
For every tadpole downstream

that is an eye inside an egg
that is clear as glass,

all the eyes watch the same dream
of water. The chorus

frogs sing and sing the old song
they've never forgotten

even as the kingfisher dives
and dives like a note dancing

on a sheet of music that is this pond,
it lifts something silver into the throat.

Swallows. Again. Minnow.

Water rolls off a blue feather

and isn't counted at all. Into the air.
Slow motion now. The frogs

are the size of a pebble.
Up river, at the top of the mountain,

the snow is still melting, ice gives way
to the tunnel of music beneath it—

a roar, open mouth waiting
for collapse,

or the surface to crack
under sunlight, an open

voice of waterfall, where rock splits
and forgives.

"We know that queer people, and queer people of color, will disproportionately be affected by any of the pollution that happens if there's a decline in Great Salt Lake. But it's very important for queer community to be connected to nature in a way that's celebratory, like being out there as your full self. Enjoying nature is something that people don't always have the opportunity to do. People don't always connect some of these fights to other things like environmental justice, to health, to food access. I think when it comes to queer liberation, it's thinking about the different ways that we are interconnected with each other and finding ways to celebrate how we all show up in the world in ways that challenge narratives that have been pushed on us.

Wildlife science or conservation science very much values biodiversity. But are these fields giving the same sort of value to diversity in the voices, experiences, and people who are in the room? I think the answer has not always been yes. Society is shifting and realizing we should also value human diversity as much as we might value diversity in the natural ecosystems. I think there's a lot of queer people who are at the forefront of saying, we have had relationships to nature and community in ways that enhance and take care of our ecosystems, and we should be paving the way for imagining new futures."

Frances Ngo
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "Recreation in the Face of Ecological Collapse"

i dream

Declan Adler-Greenwood

i'm in the willows.
the lake is full of brine shrimp, and mosquitos sprinkle the horizon.
as my great great granddaughter breathes a cleaner air.
her lungs soft and pink,
as they should be.

she runs along the shoreline,
salt tracing her footsteps—
the brackish waters lapping at her ankles.

she gags at the smell, but it's still clean air. an air I hope to breathe.

she plays with her brothers in the thick sand. my great grandson sits with his lover against the banks,
letting a cooler sun swallow them whole.

then they'll go home, and pluck tomatoes the size of fists. they invite the neighbors from the blue house next door over for dinner.

they'll bring bread and wine,
and cast one another's dreams against the walls of picture frames and bookshelves full of hope.

They Called It the Season of Sand

Melanie Martin

They called it the season of sand, but really, it was an era. It was the time of the dust dancers, the hour of windworkers.

Our pilgrimages, in those days, were endless. Circling the dwindling body of the lake in search of—what? An oversoul, a collective consciousness buried in sand and decaying brine. And when the last remnants of that pungent rot faded, how they infused our minds—warm, fecund, full of festering promise.

But is a lake, once etched into earth, ever really gone—or does it just grow dormant for a season, or a thousand?

If this were a fairytale, perhaps a hundred of us would've offered to plug up the lake with our own bodies, keep it whole with our sacrifice. But this is no fable, and nothing so simple, so singular, would save us.

The old ones yearned for marshes teeming with ibis, prophesying grebes and phalaropes sweeping down in droves, their long, elegant bills piercing calm waters. They called out as if beckoning them from silent skies.

But finally we forsake the remedies, spoke only homages, our tongues too heavy to sing—

too laden with the salt of a landless sea.

We were then burying the old songs, all of them—everything that had brought us to here. We'd throw ourselves at the mercy of the land, ask it to teach us new ones, carry on if it deemed us fit.

We borrowed other beginnings—every seed a star, fallen from the sky—finally asking permission. They smoldered like embers, all of them, hot in our pockets.

The last reeds around the lake became sacks to carry the children, who had said it was time to go. We were heeding their calls, at last.

We realized the children could only see to the North. Their voices rang out on salty breath, in dirges sounding of waves and undulating sand dunes, mapping the course.

And then all was left to the windworkers. In the great spiraling of dust, the rumble of trains fading to memory, they spent months—years?—in ceremony, weaving nests for native seeds, blessing them, singing them into being. They reached into pockets of fallen stars, hands burning with white-hot hope, and placed them in tiny shrines they'd crafted through sleepless nights. They asked for new songs, which finally emerged, wind-whispered, from parched earth.

It took all manner of wind wizardry to weave roots back into the silent shores.

At last, they learned the songs that birds can hear. Avocets and stilts, plovers and teals, alighted on the meandering edge of a reawakening world, bestowing eggs like small jewels—offerings clinging to tufted wings of small, slippery creatures that would burrow a muddy, liminal realm into being.

The children, too, heard the calls and looked to the South, able to see again in all directions. And then it was time to return—to learn the new songs. To build new houses of earth, rising like caves from the land where the scent of brine emanates from shallow waters, blood-orange and eternal, calling us home.

replenish

Recall that all is sacred

Rachel White

The time of dust is over
you remember who you are

endless possibility
aware and embodied light
power with humility
poem only you can write

between the notes the silence
current of your knowing heart
music of the universe
unity of whole and part

"The change we need is profound – it can't just be cosmetic. It can't just be that we keep doing the same kind of hierarchical, colonial thing, but now we do it with solar. The change has to be radical, but it can be very good too. This is all also a chance to build a better world, and I think if we want people to buy into it, it has to be just.

When we talk about ethics, it is not simply about individual change. I think individuals are important, but we need to talk about the structures that actually incentivize bad behavior. We need to build a society where what is good and what is enjoyable can be aligned with what is right. Most people want to be good. Most people want to do the right thing, but they also don't want to be miserable all the time. So we need to build a system that can do that.

We need to be outward looking. And we need to be inward looking. We need to cultivate virtues that actually enable us and habituate us to do the right thing, and that involves humility and respect for humans and non-humans. We can learn from water. Water is not just an inanimate thing. It's its own agent. We can learn that everything is related: what somebody does upstream will affect people downstream. It will go into the air, and it will come down again. This idea that we're all separate – water kind of belies that and says, "No, look, look at me. I'm telling you we're all connected." We need to look at how we relate to each other and that goes back to justice for future generations, justice for other humans, and justice for non-humans."

Dr. Thomas Bretz
This Watershed Moment: Envisioning Place-Based Futures panel

How to Be Gentle

Noelle Hendrickson

Fields ripple through heat,
  light curves the valley halfway
into entirety. We watch, measure
  mountains with our thumbs—
large things, lilac-covered and cool.
  We act as noise, as white space.
Floating on the river, the colorful,
  the dull, & the flesh-filled fish
slip against our skin; they search
  us for our scales. No statements.
Even so, the rocks beneath our
  naked backs. Hot and scathing.
All of it, everything, here around us.

"Respect not just the land, but also respect the water. Respect how you're using the water each day, but also what you're putting into the water. Respect the plants that we watch over, and don't use so much of the pesticides. Take the time to grow them, and take the time to make sure that the nutrients are going back naturally.

Also show respect to one another, because when we show that respect, we have an understanding that we have a difficult journey ahead of us to take care of an important landmark in the state here, the lake, and also an important way that we communicate with Mother Nature."

Rio Pacheco
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "'You Can't Erase Us': Shoshone and Ute Connections to Great Salt Lake

Walking With Water

Elizabeth Weight

She looks across Silver Sands Beach
A crystalline cool December day
Cloudless blue skies mirrored across the great lake
Whose shallow ripples massage a shoreline
And gently interrupt the quiet sands

Her boots sink into saturated oolite
Leaving a path the moisture will absorb
She will absorb the moments
of light and color and cold air

She wanders along the inland shoreline
Abandoned by waters that once washed over
Bringing pupae casings that cast art on the sand
Swirls and lines in variegated form

North are the Antelope Island and Promontory peaks
Distance covered with deep blue saline
Distant times recalled of the acts to save the Lake,
The value upheld, the people who cared

imagine the waters replenished

nan seymour

after the collapse, we restored ghostyards once called ports
with the help of brilliant mycelium, evolved to eat asphalt, fungi revivified
the freeways. they became endless ribbons which bloom and sigh and sway.
the prison on the shore is a palimpsest as we have long since learned better ways.
the limbs of the body are not severed.

the lake is whole again

rivers are free
waters are sovereign
dams are done

mountains, islands, & pelicans thrive.
stick nests are protected by waves on all sides. each spring, migrations
darken midday skies. millions of phalaropes glitter the sea air each summer
eared grebes confuse the radar when they lift on a late november night.
they are that large together.

wetlands are no longer paved
lake lungs breathe easily
the time of dust is behind us

the lake is whole again

in winter, elders retell the story of how the great heart nearly died.
when we recall the choking skies, those who were here then
breathe in deeply and close our eyes.

"Disabled communities are at the forefront of offering solutions to some of these issues that would help us move through this time in a way that centers care for everyone in a more equitable way. There's both the aspect of relying on one another and being really adamant that what you produce has no bearing on your value as a person. I think that is such an important ethic to bring to this crisis that we're in — the climate crisis, the Great Salt Lake crisis — that we can't leave people behind.

No matter who you are, you are important. If you really truly believe that every person has value outside of what they produce, then some of the core principles of capitalism, of extractive capitalism, of our healthcare system, just don't make sense anymore. So that, to me, feels like one really powerful sort of paradigm shift that we can use to resist and try to change the situation we're in.

There is this really long, beautiful legacy of disabled communities resisting and finding care-based and creative solutions to a world that wasn't built with them in mind, in a world that is often actively antagonistic to their needs. Care for your community and creative adaptation, that's the type of mentality that we need to bring to this crisis. We can tinker and hack and adapt what we have to make our systems work for the most number of people in the most equitable, ethical way possible, so that we're not leaving people behind and we're taking into account diverse needs and multiple intersections of marginalization. Disability justice can provide some powerful frameworks and maps to get us there."

Nat Slater
Stay Salty: Lakefacing Stories, "How to Stay: Disability Justice Lessons for Dust Bowl City

Garden Anarchy

Sav Pearson

Journal entry 179 (no idea what day it is or what time, but it still feels like summer)

Our community garden overgrew every plot this year. Rogue squashes crawl between cracks in the fencing, over into the neighbor's yard. Cherry tomatoes and sour grapes climb up into the branches of the plum tree, causing the plumbs to fall (plop!) into the creek below. Kiddos scoop them up on their way to school and take big purple bites. Sunflowers as tall as trees and wide as dinner plates create shade overhead, so the raspberries can breathe, and when you look up, you see happy bees and inch worms and spidery critters all fluffy with pollen. The butterflies are new and glittering turquoise. They must've brought them back this year. Last summer, when they brought the chipmunks back, everyone got way too excited. We had to hire a chipmunk crossing guard to shepherd them across 700 E. By winter we'd built miniature bridges across every major road. This year the gardens are so tangled that we have to gather just to figure out what's what. Whose cucumbers are these? Can I have one? Thanks! How about an onion in return? I mean we all know Lenny grows the sweetest pears, and Nina's are the yellow watermelon that taste like the sun, but most everyone else lacks specific identifiers. Unless you consider Jisoo's asparagus that grow thick as quarters, or Maude's kale, which she lets the aphids enjoy and have their way with. I guess I'm notorious for my gnarled carrots. And my brother gets flack because he only ever grows potatoes. He loves potatoes. Bob has the spiciest peppers, and he always hands them to you when you're not paying attention, so you put the whole thing in your mouth at once and chew and swallow before you even realize you're sweating. It's not funny. Anyway, the plants unravel all the way down the block, over our roof and into Liberty Park, so someone on 1300 will unearth a carrot shaped like an abstract sculpture and shake it at me accusatorily, but how can I really know if that is one of mine? They're all reseeding and re-planting themselves wherever they please. The birds are in on it. So are the squirrels and the ants. It's a whole operation. We've started having potlucks once or twice a week. We sit in someone's plot or by the creek, pick some goodies, and get cooking. A big pot on a hot plate in the

middle of the yard, kiddos giggling, stars overhead. Neighbors swapping seeds and sharing blueberries. Nina's set on turning blueberries yellow too. She's keen on yellow. Eventually we all want to experiment more, just see what likes to grow together, and who helps out who, and how to care for the soil to get tastier fruit. Bob wants to create the spiciest pepper the world has ever known, and no one is excited about that. The grasshoppers love my plot best. I can't convince them that my brother's plot is way better for them. If I move them over there, they come back. Most of the time I have a grasshopper on my shoulder or beanie cap, gazing out at the world. The little kids have learned a lot from starlings. They practice whistles and hoots together, weird little robot sounds, all perched in a row of the fence. These kids learned how to ruffle their feathers before they learned how to talk. Someone said there's no such thing as birding anymore because the birds are not hard to find. Bright red, shrill, and speckled, they preen and sing and play in the fruit trees. So many songs in the air…people humming to their string beans, the finches adding in a melody, and crickets whirring their praise. Everybody singing and sharing and praising the day. It's a happy time. The plants love growing free. The chipmunks and ermines do too. The city smells so flowery and delicious. The air feels fresh and clear. And every time you look into the sun for warmth you catch the flutter of wings and the outline of petals interacting in the light.

We and The Mountains Melt

Finn Ev

Swing me around in the everglow
of sundown exploding through clouds,
swallows dogfighting their dinner,
just enough sanctuary to trace our image
Moving unaware that we reflect forever on the ripples

Your teeth, your hair, your eyes, look at me
Find I'm twisting, jumping, laughing,
rolling, bending, falling, grinning
in stonewort and willows, in mud
and in your arms, the lake

You guide my bare feet through skinny leaves
Their veins glowing emerald in the quiet light
I find your whispers of blue buried beneath winter skin
rising from the backs of your hands as they lift me
up to a moment where I can count the sibling pools

Dancers as far as the wetlands bend
telling the dance we know
The dance we learned is a story
receding, weeping, and watching
The words, granulated by time

My mother humming a memory,
silken like sand, often she said we are stronger silent
So we twirl, nearer, taller the Wasatch
Each spring we breathe in, to the brim of our lungs, this beauty
And as the lakewinds whirl, we erupt pirouetting

We spin the Earth to honor the stars
then spin it some more to meet the sun
Who aims her light through the peaks
striking awake the beast hibernating in our hearts
Warmth after a long night dancing in the deep green

Waltz of water, we and the mountains melt

Blessings for my great-great-great-great-grandchild

Hanna Saltzman

May you run into the rain with arms stretched like branches, and welcome each safe drop onto the soft pad of your tongue, and feel how your limbs of trees are also wings, and

May you and the neighbor children hold each other's slippery wet hands while you giggle and sway, and may your parents join you in this dance, not because rain or joy or delight are rare, but because nothing is more serious than celebrating earthly gifts, and

May you thrust your hands into mountain-born soil made of clay and sand, microbes and mycelium, networks of invisible beings so woven into your culture that you've heard the song of their names since before you learned language, and

May your culture root in the common sense that the ancestor of humility is humus, language birthed from the earth whose sounds also echo in the word human, and

May you wander by the abundant creeks that weave through the city, waterways once hidden by cement until they rose up, and

May you find shelter in the shade of ash-leaved maples on a summer afternoon, smell mountain roses growing by the riverbank, and watch shadows of branches waltz over water, and

May you walk through canyons, place your palms on cool sandstone, and see how tans, oranges, and pinks blur like a sunrise on stone that came from sand and journeys back toward sand, and

May you feel the wind blow through your hair as you look up into the blue expanse and notice a piñon pine twisting from rock to sky, roots reaching from and into what seems impenetrable, and

May you walk along the shores of Great Salt Lake and hear the trills of birds that, you learned in story and school, almost vanished, but now flock in such masses that sometimes your vision goes black with birds, and

May you find a quiet spot by the lake, take off your clothes, and wade into the salty water, letting the sunset and waves wash you until your skin tingles with salt, and

May it seem nearly impossible to imagine a world without sanderlings, phalaropes and scarlet-eyed grebes, and

May it seem nearly impossible to imagine your grandparents' stories of their grandparents' stories of how for a time these waters were turning to sky as the salt crust beneath was turning to dust, and

May it seem nearly impossible to believe their stories of fire and drought from a time when humans thought we were separate from, better than, the more-than-human world, and

May these stories feel like mythology, distant but whose teachings quietly seeped into you, and

May you come to know how improbable it sometimes seems for humanity to persist, and

May you come to understand how when I think about this, I squeeze my young son and tremble; and I think of my ancestors, who also are yours, who were hurt and hunted for their languages and beliefs; and I wonder if perhaps they could not imagine my birth just as I cannot imagine yours, and

May you come to realize that I share this darkness not to scare you but to show you how you have emerged nonetheless, and

May you learn as your hands enfold challah dough, and your mother's hands enfold yours, that braiding bread braids you together with water, yeast, wheat, ancestors, and story, and

May you see that sharing bread braids you in community with your neighbors who carry their own ancestral stories, and

May you contemplate how if struggles burrow into the center of our cells and shape how our genes unfurl like ferns, then perhaps so too does resilience, so too does joy, and

May you wonder at it all: how crocuses rise through ice and how trees murmur to one another and how a snowy dawn makes the world feel new, and

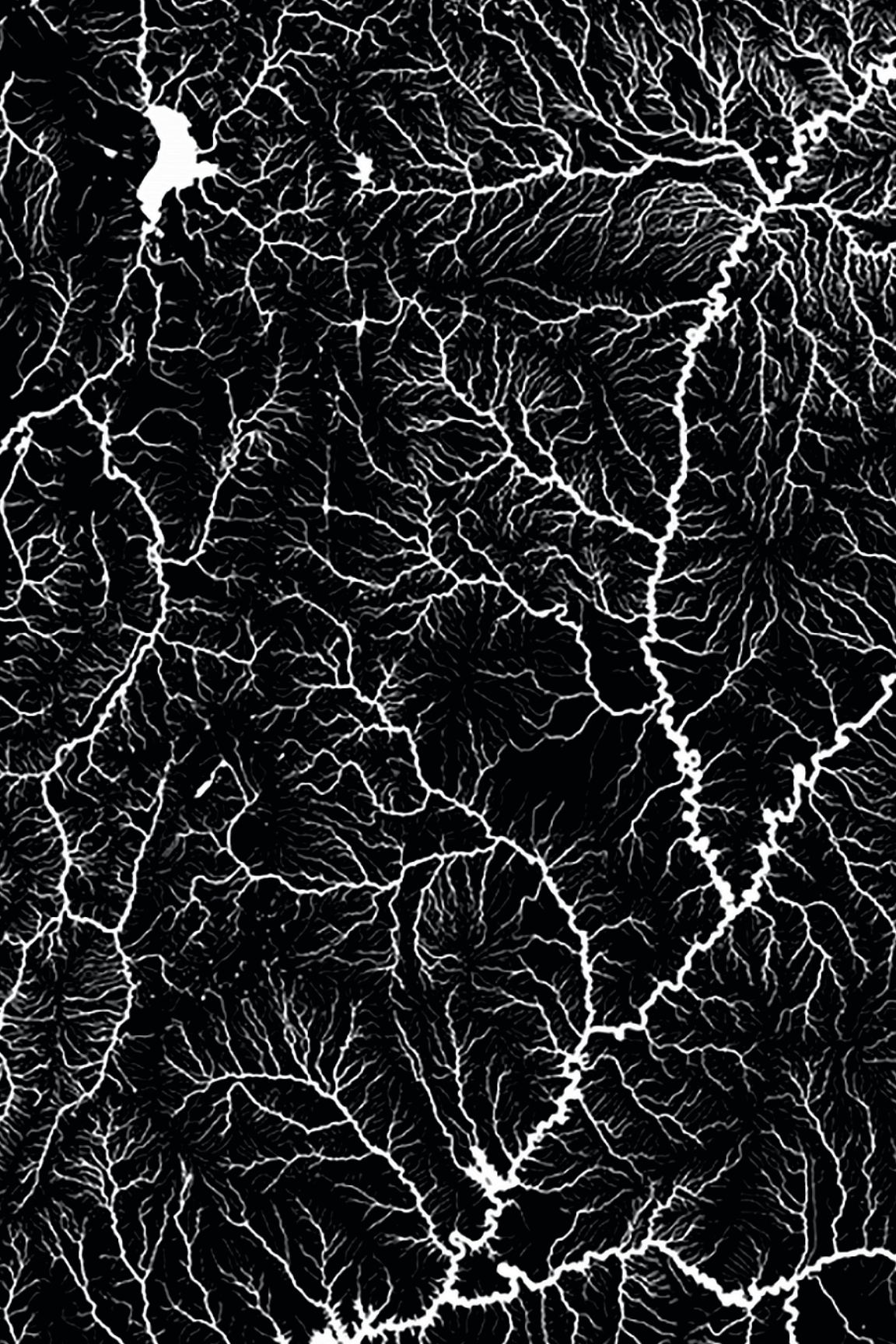
May you continue the tradition started by your great-great-great grandfather — my child — who, as a baby enchanted by song and candlelight, started our ritual of a daily shehecheyanu prayer, by which I mean the intention to stop waiting to say we are thankful, and

May your eyes and mouth open like moons as you — like my son, like me, like all of us — look up at the moon's gorgeous light, and

May you, when the dark sky is covered in clouds, curl your body into the trunk of your favorite tree, and feel your great-great-great-great-grandmother's arms wrapping around you, and the warm arms of my beloved, and my mother's and father's arms too, and back and back and back, and

May you come to understand how this beating, muscular, fleshy love is what births grief but also hope, and

May you know that if you are not my direct descendent, by which I mean if my DNA did not spiral into yours, these blessings are for you too: whoever you may be, I hold you as my child's child's child's child's child's child, for we inherit not only genetics, we inherit the Earth, and thereby we inherit each other.



UTAHHUMANITIES
Ideas in Action

SAVE OUR GREAT SALT LAKE