Uncanny Justness: objects, metaphors and stories that re-imagine learning, activism and justice through suitably strange creative practice

A manifesto by Dylan McGarry in conversation with Saskia Vermeylen

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Introduction

I (Dylan) need something that is more than justice, something that is able to work proactively before rights are breached, before laws are broken, before harm is inflicted. We are now more than ever, witnessing horrific violations of human, environmental and animal rights. It is a time of deep pain, trauma, existentialism, grief and loss – yet in these very dark troubling times we are also witnessing an emergence of something new, something strange, yet kind, uncanny, yet warm, and somehow suitably so. To begin, and please bear with me, it’s best to conjure the suitably strange through a series of vignettes that aim to hold and embody what are thickly described dense experiences of engaging transdisciplinary, transformative and transgressive creative practices that encourage ecological citizenship for environmental justice.

Vignette 1: “Suitable Strange”

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2 Illustrations by Dylan McGarry
A bank note that holds no material wealth, surety that I’ll catch you in sickness or health.

A bow and arrow tied together with string, the masculine, the feminine, become two wings.

A compass needle always pointing within, your intuition steers as a dolphin’s dorsal fin.

The double-sided axe chops into logical parts, can also cut backwards and injures your heart.
These uncanny objects exist mostly in my mind (although some of them I have made). I like to think of them as what anthropologist Alfred Gell (1998) might call artifacts of agency. Timothy Morton (2014) inspires me here too, his explorations into “realist magic” where objects are independently intertwined with world, and in them contain their own sense of being, and relational capacity, or what Harman (2010) coined as “object oriented ontology”. My uncanny objects are also metaphors that represent a series of concepts that I have been working in collaboration with others. These objects also have their own relationships with others (human and more than human), and are collectively developing through encounters and exchanges that have emerged over the past decade. They speak to the power of the suitably strange, the uncanny, and its capacity to optimally disrupt (Wals et al, 2009; Macintyre & Chaves, 2017), warm up (Bueys, 1977; McGarry, 2013) and wedge open new ways of thinking, being and doing in these uncertain times we find ourselves in – for me personally working in uncertain times in the fields of learning, activism and justice.

Indirectly I use here image and prose to reveal a nuanced embodied picture of something I am struggling to articulate in words, in writing. To help me, I also call on my friend and collaborator Saskia Vermeylen a legal anthropologist and performance artist to enter this chapter in dialogue. She is in many ways helping me articulate, locate and apply the concept of Uncanny Justness. Her voice can be identified with the “¿” symbol and is in a smaller italics font.

While writing this, I feel huge pressure, the stakes feel so high, what if I write it wrong, what if I don’t capture the true essence of these thoughts, these ideas, these stories that belong to the many incredible people and creatures I have met and connected with over the years in this work, in this praxis? What if the reference I use doesn’t legitimize my experience? What if the language I use fails the reality of the situation, the personality of the situation? Despite my anxiety, existentialism and constant doubts I write anyway, taking inspiration from my favorite poet Fernando Pessoa puts it in his Book of Disquiet: “I write to calm the fever of feeling” and my fever is running high, I’m burning up, and need to get it out.

So, to begin these artifacts aid me in setting the stage for what Uncanny Justness could be. Each image/artifact is connected to a body of work that has inspired by work, or I have lead or been involved with in some way, and forms the theoretical landscape that helps us understand what Uncanny Justness is and why it is so important in learning, activism and justice, and in particular could play a significant role in earth jurisprudence and in transgressive and transformative learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al, 2015; 2016). Each of these could be fleshed out more, for the sake of this chapter, I will then go on to share four other digestible vignettes, with references for further immersion, to further aid me in this perilous act of story-telling and meaning making.

The uncanny objects explored

- **The spade with two handles** (inspired by an artwork developed by Joseph Beuys, 1965) speaks to solidarity and co-defining 'matters of concern' (Lotz-Sisitka et al, 2015; 2016) together as fundamental aspect of how we should approach sustainability, environmental justice, transformation and
development. ‘Co-defining matters of concern comes from Bruno Latour (2004) it speaks to the need to listen, to empathise, to create spaces to immerse ourselves in each other’s contexts, to unearth together, digging with two handles into the muck. To stay with the trouble as Donna Haraway (2016) puts it, the hot stinky trouble of our moment, of our place, of our situation. To hear and listen to what is there, what is of most concern to people, to a place, to the more-than-human community in this context. We can’t move forward in any direction until we can quilt together the patches of concern, together.

- **The three eyed double spectacles** represent the careful active attentiveness and focus we must maintain in our empathy. To look and feel into what is not there, and what still needs to come. Through the lenses we can see with our eyes, but the metaphor of a third lens, a lens that feels into the personality of the situation (Biko: 1978, 48) to thickly imagine and describe that which is not obvious at first sight. Here empathy is active, and engaged (McGarry, 2013), we deepen our capacities for empathy using new ways of seeing, and new ways of representing how we empathize. I made these spectacles and created a social sculpture with performance artist Sizo Mahlangu. We called the project “III” and it aims to allow two people to sit with each other intimately holding each other in their minds eye, through their mutual 30 min gaze. The process is profound, and is a phenomenological exploration of empathy³ and experience into how much we can come to know of another through actively ‘being with’ each other, and communicating without words.

³ III - the face of the ‘Other’ and paralysis

The Three eyes double spectacles object is a visual representation of a Levinasian ethics. The work of Emmanuel Levinas has helped me to mobilise justness in my own academic practice. Justness resides in the rejection of the liberal-individualist notion of private property. I criticise the liberal meaning and associated social power of property through the eyes of those who have been dispossessed from their land, environment, culture, language and ways of being. The social construction of the Other – as an uncivilized stranger - has led to the dispossession of peoples of a different gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. I explore how to reformulate law and property as ethics through the phenomenological encounter with the stranger. In Levinasian terms, only by directly facing the dispossessed a radical ethical turn can be initiated in Western property theory and legal praxis.

As I reflect in my work on ethics and Levinas, ‘the vulnerability experienced in the face of the Other commands a response from the Self, but not to impose, possess or assimilate the Other’ (Vermeylen and Clark, 2016, p. x). It is the Other’s face that allows a self-discovery through their ‘pain’ (Mandersen, 2006). In Totality and Infinity (1961) Levinas stresses the strangeness of the stranger that results in the Self being questioned and questioning him/herself in the face of the stranger. In Otherwise than Being (1974) this relationship becomes more risky as the host (the Self) may become hostage: not all encounters with the Other are benign. For Levinas this danger is a necessity as ‘it is in the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity’ (Levinas 1974, p.117). This shift is achieved through changing the positioning of the Other who is now close to the Self – a neighbour now whom one should not avoid. Because of the Self’s infinite responsibility towards the Other, the Self hosts the demands of the Other but equally is

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³ For more working with empathy as a sculptural material see my collaborative work developing the Earth Forum social sculpture (McGarry, 2013) and the Climate Train project (McGarry, 2016)
held hostage by these demands. The feeling of being a hostage to the vulnerability of the Other is at the core of consciousness. The infinite demands of the Other cannot be anticipated, may surprise us, may not be welcome but they are inevitable and therefore unpredictably difficult (Manderson, 2006) or indeed suitably strange and uncanny. “Ill” calls me to attention, provokes a responsibility and paralyses me, I cannot but seek justness for the Other.

Figure 1: “Ill”: a social sculpture first performed by Sizo Mahlangu (right) and myself (left) in August 2018.

- **The ‘I-got-you-when-you-fall’ bank note** show the trust and conviviality needing for the kind of learning, being and doing in this work. The power of solidarity and solidarity building in responding to critical and difficult processes. They hyper-individualized perspective of the capitalistic west, has eroded traditions and processes that encourage and nourish solidarity – conviviality, for sharing the responsibility of the troubles we find ourselves in. Our obsession with financial wealth, capital wealth, has blinded us in a materialist tunnel-vision that forgets the profound wealth of the social. In my MSc research exploring vulnerable children along the wild coast of South Africa, navigating poverty, eroding family through HIV/AIDS and socio-political shifts, I discovered the incredible richness and power of solidarity and conviviality (McGarry and Shackleton, 2009). Solidarity is a vital facet of the piecing the puzzle of Justness.

- **The bow and the arrow tied with string**, speaks to equality and shared responsibility and reward. That we rely on each other to progress; as Dr. Martin Luther King put it: “…none of us are free until all of us are free”. Essentially, we need to work deeper into solidarity, and to achieve this what is needed is to look deeper into what encourages and supports solidarity building. Parity, is essential. Participative parity⁴ (Fraser, 2003) is vital, which is difficult to create, but is aided profoundly through the use of connective aesthetics and new forms of facilitation and social learning (McGarry, 2013, 2014, 2016). The

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⁴ Participative parity, Fraser (2003) explained is the ability to create social arrangements that allow all members of society the ability to interact and communicate as peers, and on an equal footing.
image also speaks to our obsession with moving forward at speed, and how often we leave people and animals behind in our pictures of progress. We forget the bow that helped the arrow fly. Here we need to shift our image of progress of launching the bow away from the world it came from, but rather tying these two together. Aiming for progress that is inclusive and transforming the image of bow/arrow to that of a bird. Flying in its entirety.

- **The inner compass speaks to intuition** and the value of other ways of knowing - of becoming apprentice to one’s own inner moral compass (see my work on the Empathetic Apprentice, McGarry (2014)) as a means to listen to our internal conversation⁵ (Archer, 2007), but also to be more attentive to other knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2015). This is as vital as logical and rational thinking and requires a constant reflexive rigor to steer us forward, like the dolphin’s dorsal fin. The dorsal fin is what keeps the dolphin balanced, it allows her to pivot and roll with the shifting currents and to surf the turbulent sea. Intuition is a powerful capacity we have to help us pivot and guide our response-ability to worlds, cultures, ecosystems, societies that are in flux. Intuition also teaches us, it is our mentor and can help us develop a reflexive approach to development that keeps us grounded to the matters of concern we are hearing and listening as we dig with our two-handled spade.

- **The double-sided axe** inspired by Ben Okri and by my mentor Heila Lotz-Sisika reminds us that while we analyze and dissect the world, we must not be blind to the reality that we also dissect and analyze ourselves. I have always been an artist, but was trained as a zoologist and environmental scientist, and experienced first hand my analytical reification of the world would also dissect and transform my being, and my capacity to engage with the world.

These are just some examples of familiar objects made strange to disrupt and open up ways of exploring what Uncanny Justness is to me and my work in sustainable development, learning and environmental justice. The images hold concepts, but also hold something deeper, a feeling of the elements of surfacing justness and the just-so of things. I have found suitably strange practice a useful instrument in the orchestral improvisation of researching transformation, engaging with sustainable development, facilitating social learning and expanding our understanding of learning in times of climate change into transgressive learning (Which I will elaborate on more soon). Perfecting the art of suitably strange practice is essentially perfecting the art of creating space for invisible or unrecognized knowledge(s) to enter into the realm of learning, and learning as activism, or at least that is one way of explaining it.

Suitably strange speaks to the utilitarian need to make strange the familiar and normative paradigms that are holding us back from real and meaningful transformation and change. In this paper, I dwell and ruminate on the role of suitably strange creative practice as a vital social technology for transforming and

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⁵ Margaret Archer (2007) highlighted the importance of the internal conversation as a key aspect of reflexively making our way through the world. She considered the internal conversation as a key aspect of agency development.
re-imagining learning, activism and justice in the era of ecological apartheid and draw mainly from my PhD (McGarry, 2013) entitled: “Empathy in the time of ecological apartheid a social sculpture practice-led inquiry into developing pedagogies for ecological citizenship” which articulates a three year journey of developing creative pedagogical practices for transformative, transgressive learning in the context of environmental justice related struggles.

Within the public pedagogy landscape a suitably strange approach can contribute to expanding and opening up parity in public learning and agency, and in democratizing knowledge sharing. This I have explored in depth in previous publications, for example the “Listening Train” (McGarry, 2016,) which explores a personal iterative retrospective of a series of expansive social-learning processes that were collaboratively developed through practice-based enquiry across 17 South African towns/contexts. Which came in the form of a mobile social-learning platform, a train - that was conceived and created through a collaborative social movement of ‘cultural practitioners’ ranging from visual artists, poets, film-makers, theatre-makers, guerrilla-gardeners, musicians, facilitators, to educational researchers, among others, who created new ‘connective aesthetic’ social spaces for dialogue and exchange. Drawing from a variety of artistic genres, including but not limited to theatre and social sculpture (an expanded concept of public/participatory art), we explored the formative, foundational qualities of these approaches and share insights into social-learning praxis that emerged on what colloquially came to be known as the “Climate Train”.

On the train, I came to see that the suitably strange was a powerful tool in engaging empathy and enriching forms of imaginal thinking and reflexivity (McGarry, 2013, 2016). Encouraging the suitably strange relies on understanding and working with the transformative power of the uncanny. Which means enabling experiences that are simultaneously familiar and strange. I will also explore how working with the uncanny has lead me and my co-conspirers (a term I borrow from my friend and confidant Injairu Kulundu) to develop a new approach to reflexive justice, which aims to surface the potential for ‘Justness’ as an expanded alternative, or even the returning to pre-colonial forms of justice.

By now we can begin offering early definitions of Justness: Justness is an expanded concept of justice, that takes into account the ‘just-so’ experiences of humans and the more than human world - the word “just” with its multiple-meanings speak both to, that which is just, i.e. fair, to be fair minded, moral, virtuous, reasonable. As we as to the “just so”, that which just is, that which is utterly itself, altogether whole. Our concept of Justness encapsulates the important work still needed to meaningfully respond to inequality, misogyny, racism, speciesism, heteronormativity and various forms of injustice, as systems, structures and definitions of Justice as we know have unequal, oppressive, colonial, and patriarchal origins. Justice is not just for the experiences of those outside of the normative realm of western law and order.

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6 Justice is a loaded term, that of course has a rich and complex history and field of study underlying it. I am not a lawyer and do not claim to speak with authority about the law, in this paper I refer to justice as it is formally defined: as 1. the behavior or treatment: a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for people, 2. the quality of being fair and reasonable: the justice of his case. 3. the administration of the law or authority in maintaining this: i.e. a tragic miscarriage of justice. In my work and in the context of this paper I am referring to colonial forms of Justice built on property law and on capitalist driven justice – which often is skewed, informed by positivist science, and rationally driven.
therefore the concept "Justness" encapsulates transgressive and transformative interventions in policy, law, customs and global jurisprudence- as well as a phenomenological experience of the 'just-so-ness' of things."

Train, track, carriage a juxtaposition of movement and stillness
Justice and law are the gatekeepers of positivist law that protects the privileged position of an elite. It seeks order and unity by drawing boundaries that dichotomise and juxtapose those who belong and those who don’t. The suitably strange find themselves at the wrong side of the ‘track’. Justness as radical ethics requires a legal reform, multiple ways of being must destabilise universal positivist law, legal pluralism can shift the position of the Self to the Other, justness gives voice to the Other. Nomadic philosophic thoughts (Braidotti, Deleuze) challenge the representation of the white, masculine, heterosexual, urban-dwelling subject as the authorising force of justice. ‘Becoming nomad’ conceptualises on a theoretical level Dylan’s epiphany on the climate train. The Other - the suitably strange – with its radical alterity is the trickster changing justice from being a static, universal and monolithic concept to justness embodying a plural, contextualised and transformative praxis.

The Uncanny as a mechanism for creative transformative action

The term Uncanny has been helpful to describe the concept of ‘suitably strange’ practice. The use of uncanny in this context was inspired by reading Timothy Morton, who speaks of the uncanny in various contexts, most specifically the idea of uncanny ecology. Inspired also by Derida, Morton (2007; 2014) refers to the uncanny as the strange experience of encountering the more-than-humxn world, the uncanny-ness of ecology. How we are able to recognise that which is similar and strange to us, in our engagement with ecological communities. In Morton’s (2007) book “Ecology without Nature”, he warns that terms like ‘nature’ and ‘environment’ further our relationship with ecology. In response Morton offers the concept of ‘the mesh’, an inter-woven relationality to each other. This echoes Donna Haraway’s (2017) concept of ‘sympoesis’ of ‘making-with’ each other or Cormac Cullinan refers to as an ‘unbreakable kinship’. Our experiences of relationality are usually one that are uncanny, where we are able to simultaneously recognise ourselves and the other in the experience. Uncanny was a term that could hold so much of what I was doing as an artist posing as an educational sociologist – I found myself constantly invoking the uncanny as a means to see my own blind spots and the body blindness of the disciplines I found myself in.

Uncanny is typically defined as strange or mysterious experience, usually with ominous and negative overtones. It is defined traditionally as the perception of something unsettling. The recently popular term ‘Uncanny Valley’ is used to describe robots and artificial intelligence, specifically an empirical estimation of how people respond to humanoid robot faces that look too real but not real enough, they essentially become creepy (Marthur and Reichling, 2006). The concept suggests that human-like robotics which appear almost, but not exactly, like real human beings elicit uncanny, or strangely familiar, feelings of eeriness and revulsion in observers (MacDorman and Ishiguro, 2006).

Understanding (even simply) the power of uncanny to shift us away from a normative form of cognition and elicit feelings and responses (sometimes positive-sometimes creepy) – we could begin to explore what potential there is for using the uncanny in education, activism and in justice. In my practice-based collaborative research into transgressive social learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al, 2015), social sculpture
I began to understand the power of the uncanny long before I was working with the term, before I focused on making the familiar strange, and developing suitably strange processes in my doctoral practice-based research into developing pedagogies for ecological citizenship and responding to the inherent and deeply familiar experience of ecological apartheid (Cullinan, 2011; McGarry, 2013). The work of Joseph Beuys (1974, 1977) and Shelley Sacks (2011 a,b, 2012a, b) in particular inspired and nourished my understand and practice of ‘suitably strange’ work in learning, agency development and activism. Beuys was a master of the uncanny, and developed the concept of ‘Social Sculpture’ as a means to ‘warm-up’ cold and static normative structures that he would experience in the world (particularly Germany in the 60s, 70s and 80s). Surrounded by oppressive, incredibly painful and a grief laden society, Beuys developed his concept of ‘warmth work’ which essentially refers to the process of lubricating and insulating normative social structures in creative empathetic ways to allow for the emergence of alternatives and shifts in paradigms and thinking. Beuys used art, specially a form of what could be described as connective aesthetics to achieve this.

As he saw it, warmth work was the potential of each human being to enliven and transform conditions in their lives. Beuys (1977) also spoke of the “the warmth character of thought” which can be seen as the warmth that softens fat or wax, and does not refer to sentimental emotional warmth, but rather to the ability to enliven, transform and warm up cold formative forces or – through wilful action – distil chaotic disordered forces. From my perspective, and experience it would seem that this lends itself to how we approach learning in social settings, how we work with taken-for-granted normative unjust aspects of society/politics/economics and guide us towards the development of a pedagogy for ecological citizenship, as it is possible to surmise that the pedagogy required is one in which ‘warmth work’ (that is enabled through inner mobilisation) can be experienced and enabled into action (see my doctoral chapter 2, McGarry (2013).

**Vignette 2: Beuys’ 7000 oaks**

Between 1982 and 1987 in Kassel, Beuys created his last major work titled 7 000 Oaks. According to Barnum (2012) this social sculpture action was seen by many as an attempt to somehow approach the troubled psycho-social trauma left behind by the Third Reich and enable a citizen-led process to transform the conditions and consciousness that kept this trauma alive. Sacks (2012) however, clarified that it was actually intended as a deeper capacity development practice for citizenship, aiming

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7 The warmth work concept was explored through specific embodied artworks developed throughout Beuys’ life. Two examples of his ‘Fat Concept’: A) Fat chair. B) Fat in a corner, the darkness around the corner of fat is the fat seeping into the wall. The fat in this instance is made from margarine. Both embody Beuys’ theory of sculpture and the possibility for mobilising and ‘warming up’ solidified forms. These were not expected to be understood rationally, but instead were attempts at embodying and sensing the conceptual theory of social sculpture conceived by Beuys (Sacks, 2012).
to enable particular sensorial and reflective sensitivities of people in relation to their world (Sacks, 2012). In a square in the centre of the city of Kassel, Beuys assembled a mound of 7 000 irregular, human-sized basalt columns. The columns where laid in such a way that they had an uncanny resemblance to the thousands of bodies that where heaped in the square in the aftermath of the 1943 bombing of Kassel (Barnum, 2010). Over a period of about five years each stone was moved to a specific location in the city, decided through collaborative deliberation by the citizens, positioned upright and a young oak sapling planted next to each stone (Barnum, 2010): the stone equating death, the tree a symbol of life. The installation of the 7 000 oaks required a great deal of investment from the citizens of Kassel. Today the trees tower over the stones, and have transformed not only the form of Kassel's sidewalks and roads, but also the collective feelings and attitudes associated with these places, enabling many people to 'come to their senses' or become aware of other capacities (Barnum, 2010). Barnum (2010) suggests that Beuys, was not only working with the stones and trees, but he was working with the relationship of the people with their environments, and the prevailing set of attitudes associated with memories of places in Kassel. In essence, he used the physical sculpture of the ancient Druid practice of working with stones and trees, and promoted a new uncanny, and suitably strange way in which people could engage with their environment, in a collaborative communal and empathetic way. When considering the example of the 7000 oaks I see how citizen’s ideas and values were surfaced through a rich exchange that enlivened their imaginations and their consciousness beyond the monolithic and stuck nature of the square, towards a form of socially facilitated learning which enabled participants to approach their own inner values and expression of citizenship.

Figure 2: Joseph Beuys’ 7000 oaks. A) 7000 granite pillars before planting, B) and F) Beuys and other citizens planting the first tree. C) The Free International University flyer for 7000 oaks, E) A tree standing with pillar beside it. Pictures sourced from Tate Modern (2012)
Beuys’s vast body of work ranging from the 7000 Oaks (Scholz, 1986)) as well as the Honey pump in the workplace (Documenta VI in Kassel in 1977), I love America and America loves me (Tisdall, 2008) are profound examples of how suitably strange processes created social learning encounters for people to not only experience and come face to face with problematic norms that were alienating them from each other and the natural world, but with his suitably strange creative practice (social sculpture), he offered new ways of socially working with the uncanny feelings that these works developed. The use of the uncanny in this way, can in some cases be creepy or unsettling, but there is always an opportunity for the participant to engage with alternatives, new ways of looking and generative actions to move beyond that unsettling strangely familiar place. Similarly, Shelley Sacks – a student of Beuys - further expanded and developed Beuys’ warmth work concept. Her work “Exchange Values”, which made leather-like skins out of discarded banana peels, created new strange spaces for the Winward island banana cooperatives, and banana consumers to think critically and generatively around how strange it was not to know who grew the bananas that they ate, and what their lives were like. This social sculpture, over a period of almost a decade of continuous engagement with a wide demographic of society gave rise to the first discussions and work for the fair trade movement (Sacks, 2007).

What Beuys teaches us is the critical balance needed between familiar and strange processes in developing social transformation through creative means. It also refers to the need to see uncanny familiarity in humans and more than humans in our world, while also creating the space to respectfully recognise their uniqueness and their personal peculiarity. Also at the centre of this work is the primacy of care, and an ethics of care. Careful consideration of the aesthetic, and how it would awaken and shift people’s experiences was always paramount, and work was developed slowly and careful through ongoing reflexivity and ‘call-and-response’ with those experiencing it as well as Beuys’ intuitive engagement with it.

Learning that is strange

If we are to challenge and disrupt the customs and habits that keep us stuck in our old ways that no longer serve us, we need to find ways of learning that help us transform and transgress these oppressive norms. The illustrated poem that opens this chapter I created as part of a series of ‘Tiny Books’ that we (Transgressive Learning (t-learning) Research Network) developed in Colombia in June 2018. Transgressive learning refers to an ongoing global research process exploring the forms of learning that emerge through challenging norms and transgressing boundaries. Defining t-learning has become a fluid and constantly iterative process, currently our expanding ‘source book’ for transgressive learning exists as an ever expanding google-doc peppered with a technicolor patchwork of comments and insights from our network which spans nine countries (see www.transgressivelearning.org). However a definition would be helpful, the standing definition goes something like this (Lotz-Sisitka & McGarry, 2018):

Transgressive and transformative learning involves psycho-social and embodied processes of cognitive and emotional transformation within the context of social change. Sometimes this learning involves perspective change, or change in norms. Transgressive learning is a form of transformative learning that intentionally generates critical thinking, emotive resonances, connects individual and collective agency and changed practices. Transgressive learning explicitly
challenges that which is normalised to the extent that it has become unquestioned (e.g. colonial practices, greenwashing, eco-fascism, over-consumption, or environmental injustice). It foregrounds again uncovers areas that need transforming if sustainability transformations are to emerge (Lots Sisitka et al, 2015; 2016; Lotz-Sisitka, 2017). T-learning is also a transdisciplinary process that relies on crossing boundaries to deconstruct, co-create and affirm knowledges in iterative, generative and collaborative ways that can contribute to meaningful changes in action and practice. Here “disciplinary” in “transdisciplinary” refers to all forms of knowledge traditions and practices.

So what does Transgressive learning have to do with Uncanny Justness? Transgressive learning is in many ways a mechanism of establishing justness (which I have purposely not yet defined). We have come to understand the potential of t-learning to disrupt and engage with power in navel and exciting ways. A nine-country three-year global research network cannot be fully rendered here, but the role of transgressive learning in democratizing and surfacing knowledge is a vital facet of enabling Justness.

Vignette 3: Teeny-tiny books

The illustrated poem shared at the beginning of this chapter is one of the t-learning tiny books which forms part of the tiny library project. Imagine an entire hand-made library that could fit in a rucksack. A library that contained books made by all kinds of people. A book about the types of birds found in Filandia, Colombia by a group of six year olds. A book about water wise gardening by a grandmother from the rural Eastern Cape in South Africa. A book on how to dismantle power by an Ecological Economist and Environmental Justice Activist, and or a book about how to make a book, about books. These books are emerging out of our networks, and they are changing how we share, affirm, recognise and work with various ways of being, doing and knowing. The tiny books aim to democratize knowledge, and open up new ways of being and doing in the world, that are accessible to everyone. The “Tiny Books project” was birthed at our latest t-learning gathering and Living Aulas (or living classrooms) summer school, alongside our sister networks of ACKNOWL-EJ and Pathways. In June 2018, in Colombia, the tiny book project was launched by Simon Kuany and myself as a way to democratize complex knowledge systems across a diverse group of academic activists. The gathering included a collective of Knowledge Action Networks (funded by the International Social Science Council’s, ISSC Transformations to Sustainability project) to share our three-year intensive collective practice-based research into understanding transformations to sustainability. During this process, it became increasingly overwhelming to adequately hold and honour the complex, rich, and thickly described narratives that bubbled to the surface in the social learning space. The knowledge ranged from deeply intuitive embodied forms of
knowing to traditional academic theories. We needed to find a way to hold onto this richness and depth, without favouring one way of knowing over another, and to share these different ‘learnings’ in small digestible and relatable parts, again without diminishing, categorizing or losing their contexts. We found ways to simplify how we share these knowledges and perhaps a way to democratize how people could enter into the discussions and dialectic emerging in the space. Inspired by a suggestion from Prof. Heila Lotz-Sisika to “make something simple” of the bigger more complex narrative, we devised an intuitive process of creating tiny books that spoke to one aspect of our stories we were carrying. What inspired us the most was how complex, contextually nuanced and evolving knowledge(s) could be easily and simply explained and shared in these tiny books. Leah Temper in her tiny book manages in 16 pages to articulate power dimensions and offers a simple framework for engaging power through a series of thoughtful and satirical questions. Lena Weber in her tiny book poetically describes our collective new vision for a university that acknowledges embodied, erotic and intuitive knowledge, titled: “a Pluraversity for Stuck Humans”. Gibson Mphepho writes a tiny book from the perspective of the weeping women of Malawi, whose lake is drying up and they are having to navigate misogyny and drought simultaneously. His tiny book carefully and richly describes their plight in a fictional letter to the president of Malawi. Rebecca Shelton shares a poignantly and neat narrative on reflexivity and shifting ontological framing in her tiny book entitled “Reflect: where to turn the mirror". The Colombian team wrote a tiny book entitled “Cooking Chicha for cockroaches” which is a beautiful fable explore contemplative social practice and activism. On returning to South Africa we shared the Tiny Project with our larger team at the Environmental Learning Research Centre, at the University Currently known as Rhodes. Post Doc research Jess Cockburn wrote a profound illustrated narrative that presented the crux of her doctoral research on “patchwork” landscapes and collaborative social learning. Professor Eureta Roseburg wrote an illustrated tiny-book on Monitoring and Evaluation, using the allegory of road signs and reading omens. Tom Jeffery a PhD student with us, wrote a tiny book on how to decolonise stuffy old museums into living, breathing and vital places of learning. We were also lucky to have Sophie Mullins-Poole, a grade 11 student at a local high-school in our town join us for a short work experience programme. In that time, she created a politically powerful tiny-book that carefully and creatively explains intersectionality[1] through asking the question “how heavy is your backpack?”. Using a metaphor of a backpack filled with bricks, she tells the story of how layered and uneven prejudice and privledge is experienced. Even more recently we had a seed activist Claire Roussel visit us at the centre and she was able to express and share her work around seed/food sovereignty, her personal and professional longings and her future plans in a beautiful illustrated tiny book entitled “A path’s manifesto”. My first tiny book, spoke to a concept I have been carrying for over a decade but struggled to share simply, the idea of ‘suitably strange’ creative practice, and its role in transgressive learning and public pedagogy. I am speaking specifically here, of the kind of learning that is needed to push us beyond the norm, to transgress oppressive boundaries and ‘un-stuck’ ourselves from capitalistic individualism, positivistic tunnel vision and socio-cultural violence’s like misogyny, patriarchy, structural racism, ecological apartheid etc. The tiny book helped me clarify and articulate the varied and multifaceted connective aesthetics and pedagogical innovation that have been evolving in my day to day life. What makes these tiny books so powerful is that they all fit on a A4 double-sided single sheet of paper, that is easily folded three times into a tiny A7 pocket-sized, 16 page illustrated booklet. They are cheaply and easily reproduced, require little technical skill or equipment. They can be produced by children and adults, by tertiary educated and illiterate people alike (the latter are created by the use of demonstrative images)
What we (almost all of my work has been collaborative) came to realize quickly that we cannot push beyond these norms without care, without existential side effects and without understanding what constitutes ‘suitable’ transgression in this boundary crossing work. Disrupting the norm with ‘strangeness’ or the ‘uncanny’ could be ineffective, alienating and scary if it was done without a suitable level of care and caution, what Arjen Wals et al (2009) calls “optimal disruption”.

This being said it is hard to fully understand, or know optimal means, and how it translates in suitably strange and uncanny work? In my practice-based, collaborative and intuitive work (McGarry, 2013, 2014, 2016) I discovered that it was partly a process of pushing our imagination far enough beyond the existing ‘norm’ we are familiar with. In order to see new opportunities for transformation and change – on one hand; and then developing an attentiveness that one does not make the everyday so strange that you alienate or cause fear - on the other. Instead we came to learn that suitably strange creative practice aims to disrupt enough to carefully shake us awake and inspire new possibilities and new ways of thinking without dislocating or alienating ourselves with the reality at hand. It aims to evoke the imagination to dream beyond that which we think are our boundaries.

Activism as Empathetic Action

The suitably strange often requires a trickster to employ the uncanny in places that are stiff with a chronic case of normative social atrophy. This fourth vignette, is a short story capturing the work I have been involved in for the past four years, using a form of guerrilla, applied, invisible, and reflexive theatre in Durban South Africa to respond to injustice surrounding vulnerable young street level drug users. The vignette is comprised of experts from an article by Lloyd Gedye (2016) for the city press news paper8.

Vignette 4: Empatheatre in Durban South Africa

‘They died in front of my eyes,” says Phumlani Ngubane as we sit in the foyer of the Durban Playhouse’s Loft Theatre. “They were shot. They stole from a bad person who hunted them down. They were murdered right in front of my eyes ... My heart is pained, even now,” His colleague Zenzo Msomi nods solemnly as Ngubane speaks and then adds: “We were like family with them. They stole from the wrong house.”

Actors Ngubane and Msomi are part of a Durban theatre collective called The Big Brotherhood, and on the day we sat down to chat in mid-April, they were in the middle of a run of their play Ulwembu (Spider) at the Loft Theatre. The play’s focus is the scourge of whoonga – or wunga, or nyaope, as it is known in other parts of the country. The play is based on more than two years of deep research and the couple who were murdered were Ngubane’s landlady and her boyfriend, both whoonga users. “Some people in my community turned against me, as I was associated with the users,” says Ngubane. “They felt like I was defending them.” Ulwembu is a gritty urban nightmare, a place where characters mostly on the margins of society eke out

lives, rather than live them. It is a story about addiction, featuring drug users, runners and dealers, desperate mothers, absent fathers, helpless and vindictive police, overworked social workers, enraged communities, fearless xenophobes and foreign nationals living in fear. It effortlessly illustrates how everyone in a community is drawn into the web of whoonga ...

... Users and former users who have seen the play maintain that it is incredibly realistic in painting a picture of addiction. But Ulwembu is doing more than that. It is asking us to face up to the realities that this is a community problem, and that it is going to require smart minds and a group effort to fix. “Who do you blame?” asks actress Mpume Mthombeni, who plays a user’s mother in Ulwembu. “It’s so easy to wash your hands, but what do we do with all this blame? This problem is all of ours.” The story of Ulwembu goes back a few years, to May 2014 when award-winning Durban playwright Neil Coppen was heading a workshop with community-theatre participants from KwaZulu-Natal. He asked them to write lists of social issues that they felt young writers should be confronting in their work. The number one issue on everyone’s list was whoonga. “I had seen the whoonga problem mushrooming and taking over the city,” says Coppen. “I saw the way the media was reporting it, as a zombie apocalypse – people in rags around drums of fire – the nightmare of the suburbs ... We were dehumanising the users by creating these monster myths,” he told me.

Coppen invited The Big Brotherhood, a community-theatre group he had worked with before, as well as actress Mthombeni, to collaborate with him. At this time, sociologist Dylan McGarry entered Coppen’s life. McGarry had recently completed a sociology PhD with a focus on empathy and he was interested in using theatre in the sociology and education fields. He conducted workshops with the actors, where they were trained in ethical research. “The idea of listening,” says McGarry, and pauses ... “Listening is one of the most emancipatory things you can give. Listening is a gift. You are gifting someone your attention. But you also become a different type of listener – an active, empathetic listener. It’s all about them, not about you. Most people we worked with were so vulnerable. It had never been about them. That’s probably why they are users in the first place.”

After training, the actors decamped to their own neighbourhoods in Umlazi and KwaMashu, and returned two months later with notebooks laden with detailed research. “Dylan calls them intuitive sociologists,” says Coppen, “Nobody could have got that level of access.” “Before, I thought all whoonga addicts were just criminals – people who would mug you and steal your phone,” says Mthombeni. “So imagine,
now I had to approach these people and talk to them ... You need to think about how you approach the users in a respectful manner.” She says that, in a way, you are asking the user to undress in front of you in telling their story. “And then you realise these people have never been heard and are crying out for attention,” she says. “They are so relieved that they can pour out their problems to you.” Msomi says that the users respected that the actors came to them in a “neutral way”. “They want to stop smoking whoonga. They say they don’t know how,” he says. “They say the pain from the withdrawal, known as ‘arosta’, is so terrible they have to keep smoking.” It is most commonly the physically addictive opiate heroin, which is part of the whoonga “recipe”, that makes it so hard to kick. “These people have a problem that needs to be supported, not punished,” says Msomi.

Ngcobo Cele from The Big Brotherhood says that the more whoonga users are judged, the more they feel as though they’re on the outside of society. “One guy I met was being bullied at school and then an older boy stood up for him. The older boy was smoking whoonga, so the younger boy started to impress the older boy. He was thinking: if I have this guy on my side, I won’t be bullied at school. A lot of it is all wrapped up in trying to be a hard man in the township, someone who commands respect.” The theatre production of Ulwembu also functions as part of the research. “It takes in everything as it goes along and changes,” says Coppen. After every performance, the audience is encouraged to remain behind in a facilitated discussion. It is loaded with users, people from rehabilitation centres, police, social workers, the homeless, sex workers, family members and former addicts. The conversations are lively and poignant, and loaded with testimony and sharing. “The audience have a common reference point in the play,” says Coppen. “They mostly tend to refer to the characters, without having to use themselves or each other as direct examples. It’s a process we believe that allows for a deeper listening and engagement.” He tells of a previous performance where a senior police leader protested about a scene where the police make the users eat their drugs when they are caught. A whole group of users in the audience stood up and testified, one after the other, about how it had happened to them. After one performance, a 10-year-old street child speaks about how she is glad the mother character in the play did not give up on her son. The part that is implied, but remains unsaid about her own story, is heartbreaking for many...

... Professor Monique Marx from the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology says they are trying to show government that it is cost-effective to roll out opiate-replacement therapy, such as methadone. She believes this should be coupled with the decriminalisation of the drug, a far better option than pushing whoonga underground. “Support, don’t punish,” she says, summing up her approach. Dr Lochan Naidoo, a Durban-based addiction consultant in the audience, says that by the time public health facilities implement methadone treatment for users, it will be too late, as happened with the roll-out of antiretrovirals. A middle-aged woman a few weeks out of jail after a nine-year drug conviction warmly thanks the cast and tells Cele, who plays Andile, a whoonga runner and user in the play, that she saw herself in him. “I was in tears here,” she says. “I was in that story.” “Everyone has witnessed something together,” says McGarry. “And you have created a safe space for sharing.”

In its essence, theirs is a continuation of South Africa’s vibrant protest-theatre tradition. The difficulty of black life is unpacked on stage to prompt social change. At one point over the four days I spend with the cast of Ulwembu, I am sitting in The Playhouse foyer waiting for McGarry, who ran across the road to get some bean curries for lunch. He returned with the story of how a young guy from the street followed him into the takeaway joint and wanted to know more about the “whoonga play” that was on. McGarry told the young man he was involved and
could get him a ticket. As we sit eating our curries in the foyer, the young man approaches to confirm his seat and thank McGarry. It’s clear that whoonga is all around us. We are all caught up in its web.

Since this article was written, the play went on to contribute to establishing the first free pilot harm reduction programme and legal use zone in South Africa. We performed the play to parliament the following year, and contributed to the national drug policy forum, which led to significant policy changes some months later. This re-imaging of activism here was an active immersion into the life-worlds of everyone woven into the issue. It was activism that did not just challenge what was unjust, but aimed to reflect back the conflicting worlds that was keeping injustice alive. As Neil and I wrote in attempting to define Empatheatre (Coppen & McGarry, 2017):

“The Empatheatre approach steers clear of soap-box sermonizing or shock or scare tactics preferring to grant audiences the opportunity to walk in the shoes of misunderstood/marginalized others. By participating in such experiences, spectators and participants, oppressed and oppressor are able to, through carefully facilitated post-performance conversations centered around the “epiphanies” of the play, re-examine and reflect on their own realities, prejudices, perceptions/ misconceptions... The theatrical outcomes of Empatheatre’s projects do not presume or profess to offer a final word nor definitive solution, but within the confines of a compassionate attentive space, serve as a catalyst for emancipatory conversations and social transformations to gradually occur. As an academic research unit, our interest is in understanding the transformation and pedagogical impacts and shifts (Lotz-Sisitka et al 2015) that may occur with audience members and participants. In each process we track and consider our own learning and capacity to develop as empathetic, “responsible participants” (McGarry 2013).

One of the major lessons we learned through Ulwembu was how to listen deeply to the ‘justness’ of each personal experience and relate that to the ‘justness’ of each activity system – the layered/scaled realities of justness. As we did this we began to understand nuances and feelings embedded in these stories and in turn were able to find ways to reveal the justness of the situation to others. Incrementally and iteratively absenting blind-spots through guerrilla theatre monologues from our research in community policing forums, in actors embodying users in situations users would usually not have access to. This was a process of actively slipping the uncanny into normalised spaces (using carefully crafted theatrical devices) that often-revealed facets of the bigger story that were overlooked or ignored in decision making and policy processes. It was the work of the trickster, the fool – revealing the hard realities in new forms that were accessible, sincere and playful.

**Beyond Justice into Justness**

I hope by now you are getting a sense of what I am meaning by the concept of Justness, and why I need this word to explain something we don’t yet have a language for. Traditional conceptions of Justice, are by my reading, usually thought of as ensuring fairness, equality, righting what has been wronged. Yet the standards, structures, baselines that draw the line between right and wrong are skewed by power, by normative blindness, by structural racism, by speciesism, and are usually developed after some harm has been inflicted, after a boundary has been transgressed, after a right has been taken away.
When reflecting on the decade of learning I have experienced being the trickster of the uncanny – I have been captivated by the word “just” – its multiple-meanings that speak to that which is just, i.e. fair, to be fair minded, moral, virtuous, reasonable – and then “just” as in “just so”, that which just is, that which is utterly itself, altogether whole. I think of the animals in my life, that are precisely themselves, my little dog Pearl who is just so utterly herself. I think about the different indigenous communities I work with, how they express themselves, reveal their lore in a grounded, self-justified, sincere way. The just-so-ness of queer identity, of indigenous land rights, or the sentience of a whale, an elephant, the curious gaze of an octopus and the feeling I have when exercising suitably strange creative practice. Then there is the just, as in just now, immediate, close up-present. The third layer of defining and acknowledging justness requires an immediacy of experience, the presence that Scharmer (2007; 2009) speaks of, the phenomenological becoming of the moment in the way that Goethe (1952) and Merleau-Ponty (1968) delicately understood phenomena. The intuitive sensitivity of being (McGarry, 2013) in the inevitable moment that is just now.

Deconstruction is justice.
Movingly, the legal theorist, Austin Sarat, opens up in his presidential address to the annual meeting of the Law and Society Association (1999) about the fear of losing a child and reflects how “the law is dramatic in inadequacy in forestalling or responding to the loss of a child”. He uses this anxiety to show how the law is ‘mythologised through its metaphorical association with fatherhood’. This mythology is also connected to the violent foundation of the law. Freud enquires in Totem and Taboo the origin of law, religion, morality, social institutions. The foundation resides in the killing of the father by the brothers in the Oedipus and the subsequent guilt that the brothers feel leading to the introduction of totemism and the prohibition of murder and incest. For many, including Derrida, as long as the (hidden) authority of law resides with paternalism, justice will not be achieved. For Derrida, deconstruction is justice. Often, deconstruction is misunderstood and falsely accused of being nihilistic. In an interview with Paul Cilliers for the South African Journal of Philosophy, Derrida is questioned about the meaning of deconstruction and its relationship with justice. Derrida reflects: “[D]econstruction is quite simply what happens. It is not simply the theoretical analyses of concepts, the speculative desedimentation of a conceptual tradition, of semantics. It is something which does something, which tries to do something, to intervene and to welcome what happens, to be attentive to the event, the singularity of the event. That is why deconstruction happens as soon as something happens. [...] Deconstruction] displaces and opens a structure, a set of actions, to singularity, to something other, to some alterity, to some unpredictable future. Derrida emphasises the performative element of deconstruction. It is an activity, deconstruction produces a new goal, a way of making and doing something.” Dylan’s art practices rupture business as usual; they reflect the responsibility that Derrida calls for to make the familiar unsuitably strange; to deconstruct justice to just-ness. Derrida is clear that “justice requires some interruptions, [...] it has an energy, or a pulse, a drive.” The drive for deconstruction for Dylan is the embodiment of justness in his art performances.

Vignette 5: the River that has rights.
The uncanny can sometimes merely be an act of re-framing, of transforming a held hold conception from something familiar and static into something unfamiliar and loaded with potential. In Aotearoa New Zealand an extraordinary ‘re-naming’ process saved a river from unsustainable extractive industries, when the indigenous Te Awa Tupu Maori community not only reclaimed the indigenous name of a river (The
Whanganui River), but they re-named the river a ‘person’ in legal terms. In the Treaty of Waitangi the community used a reframing and renaming to recognise the rights of a river to be a river, and recognising the river’s rights to own itself, and be precisely itself. In other words it was a process of recognising the river’s justness. In this case they made our framing of rights, uncanny – strangely familiar – we understand and are familiar with rights for humans and companies, but the rights of a river is strange and loaded with paradigmatic shifting potential. There is a kind of magic that happens when we use language to re-frame and re-narrate the world, and the case of Whanganui river real tangible changes were made in the legal rights of a river. This case could have massive transformative effects on the global movement for the rights of nature and the 2010 Cochabamba declaration for the rights of Mother Earth as this ‘renaming’ process sets a precedent for other communities around the world to express their sovereignty, and re-claim not only the name and language of the river, but the rivers’ personal identity and capacity to own itself. It could also have global effects in transforming international earth jurisprudence.

Whether the court case and the new legal status will protect the river remains to be seen, but what is significant is that legally affirming the river’s justness creates a socio-cultural wedge that opens up the potential for paradigms to shift. In order for dogma or paradigms to shift, we first need to de-familiarise them, remove the ‘taken-for-granted’ element. Noel Gough (2009: 74) describes ‘defamiliarisation’ as ‘making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar’ in his rhizomatic curriculum inquiry. Gough (2009: 75) described the tactic of surprise as useful in diminishing distortions and helping us recognise our own preconceptions, a ‘learning-as-forgetting’ that enables the potential for new intellectual breakthrough. In Empatheatre, an indeed in other projects where I was the trickster of the suitably strange I was primarily helping others (and myself) learn how to forget and re-imagine, and reframe reality.

For me Uncanny Justness encapsulates the important work still needed to meaningfully respond to inequality, misogyny, racism, speciesism, heteronormativity and various forms of injustice. Justness encapsulates transgressive and transformative interventions in policy, law, customs and global jurisprudence.

**Justness as transparent being**

Uncanny Justness has also emerged from something significant my Godmother taught me. My Godmother Reza De Wet was a playwright and theatre director. She had an intuitive and robust understanding of Heidegger, and in her cancer-free days she guided me carefully through Heidegger’s ontology of being (1927), and Steiner’s ‘I’ sense (1894), not through reading or exploring these concepts in text, but through direct experience in our relationship, and how I found myself in her presence, in the immediacy of her justness. She considered it incredibly significant for me to truly experience and come to know what she called the ‘transparent

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nature of being’ (although not articulated directly to me in these words, until a mysterious incident described below). This specific page (from her masters thesis) fell out of her writing desk the day after she died, while her daughter Nina and I were tidying up her room. She died after a six month battle with Acute Myelogenous Leukaemia – I had nursed her the three months prior. It reads (de Wet, 1978):

“This concept of freedom is echoed by Herbert Marcuse when he writes in ‘Eros and Civilisation’ that ‘the true mode of freedom’ is not related to the incessant activity of conquest’, but to ‘the coming to rest in the transparent knowledge and gratification of being’ (her emphasis). Elaborating on this idea of freedom as a state of being, Aldus Huxley determines the nature of this ‘gratification of being’ when he relates freedom to an awareness of cosmic otherness, and enslavement to a denial of the mysterious life-forces:

‘The greater non-human world, which exists simultaneously within and without is governed by its own laws – laws which we are free to obey or disobey: Obedience leads to freedom; disobedience to a deeper enslavement (16).

If, as I have illustrated, freedom can be related to a passive state of ‘transparent being’, as opposed to the masculine sphere of doing and ‘incessant activity’ then freedom must, by my definition, be seen as a feminine mode of existence. In Huxley’s terms, this feminine condition of freedom, of psychic equilibrium, is achieved by obeying the organic laws of the cosmos.”

I have read this piece of text hundreds of times, and I have held it in my being, contemplating it constantly. For me it has many facets, and has been a guiding force in how I have subsequently understood past experiences with her, understand my own transparent being, my own justness, and of indeed what has helped me shape my transformative, transgressive and transdisciplinary creative praxis, that is caring and empathetic to the transparent nature of being, to freedom. For is it not freedom we seek when we seek justice, or when we deconstruct justice in search of justness?

Either way, it is certainly uncanny that this exact piece of text, in her own words, fell into our hands on such a difficult day. It helped me reframe and rearticulate my world, and understanding of what justness could mean. This incident is a powerful personal example of a ‘mysterious life-force’ or ‘cosmic otherness’ that is ‘just-so’.

The Institute of Uncanny Justness

My mentor and friend Heila Lotz-Sisika helped me coin the term Uncanny Justness, understanding my collaborative work over the years she helped me formulate this concept. She said: “Sometimes Dylan, we need a concept to helps us land, to situate ourselves back into the world”. I am so grateful for her in guiding me through this sometimes clumsy alchemical journey. Moving
forward Saskia and I, with the help of Heila, and many others are incubating THE INSTITUTE OF UNCONNY JUSTNESS\textsuperscript{10}, which we see as a trans-disciplinary practice-based social learning collaboration between journalists, researchers, educational practitioners, artists, social sculptors, filmmakers, poets, mediafolk, social development practitioners and educational theorists. It is a school for ecological citizens - a mobile social learning community for re-imagining activism and justice. It is a re-imagined and decolonial institution. The Institute of Uncanny Justness is a conceptual framework, a social sculpture, a re-framing and queering of what an institute is. We see it as a collaborative-commons for innovation within a climate changing and capitalist crumbling society. It works with expanded conceptions of art and creative practice. It strikes a balance between intuitive and logical thinking, and works at the interface between empathy and anger. We see the Uncanny Justness as commons project profoundly committed to transformative and the transgressive means that we need to take to realise meaningful cultural change in an era of social and ecological crisis.

\textit{\& Dancing for justness}

I empathise with Sarat’s fear that the law does not respond to the need for justness. My anxiety is not about losing a child but a fear for losing our empathy towards the ‘Other’ be it a river, an indigenous warrior, an environmental activist, an elephant, or another planet. My fear paralyses me in the Levinasian sense that it calls me to act. I seek to rupture through dance. Inspired, moved and in awe of the San’s healing capacity though the trance dance, which connects them relationally to the land, their culture, their sense of community and responsibility, I look for ecstasy through the 5rhythms movement. Healing happens for the San through the boiling of n|um, the prolonged rhythmic dancing throughout the night makes the body boil, it starts in the stomach and allows the healer to connect to the ancestors, to identify the problems in the community and to cure the ill. My boiling is a natural phenomenon and symbolises a hormone ‘reduced’ rite of passage into a new chapter in my life. It has almost broken me: both mentally and physically. Sleep deprived, aching muscles, boiling and surviving in a body that I no longer recognise, I have been burning up. It was Dylan who reminded me that I was becoming a sage trickster, a warrior. So I am an apprentice, hoping to heal, to connect and to fight for justness. And I dance through the 5 movements, from flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical to stillness. My mind and body connect most to anger, to the ecstasy of the fast beats, the sweat, the heavy breathing, the jerky movements eventually synchronising; I jump, higher, close to being high; the release of the primeval scream. Exhausted, empty of anger, body cooling down on the wooden floor, my spine connects to the world, the pain in my body embodies the trauma of the world, fire has been blushed, hot flushes gone. As a dancing warrior I try to hold the space together with my pals, we move, dance and transcend; we reach out to the ‘Other.

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