**Large Print**

**Transcript**

**Alaya Ang & Hussein Mitha**

***plotting (against) the garden***

***in***

**ESW Summer Programme 2021**

**Please also see online, zoomable and screen reader friendly resources, including publications for Alaya Ang & Hussein Mitha’s projects.**

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**Alaya Ang & Hussein Mitha**

***plotting (against) the garden***

In the Beacon Tower

Open every day, 10am-5pm

**I: Cosmic Radio**   
10am to 12.30pm – Duration 26:10 min

**II: The Imprint of the Sun**   
12.30pm to 3pm –  Duration 34:06min

**III: Dreaming the End of Dreaming**   
3pm to 5pm – Duration 28:16 min

**I: Cosmic Radio**

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*“nothing more beautiful under the sun than being under the sun.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

condemned to toil the land so i stepped back inside of eden, into the garden-city, back to the heliopolis, source of all my woe, to find a new life.

the sun was like a police helicopter overhead, a blot in the sky, casting high shadows above the tall gate around me and imprinting shadow bars across my red-brown body.

*seeing the imprint of the sun on the back of my eyelids,   
holy*

I crawled back into paradise, picked up my tools, and started my work. i found a tiny patch of land guarded by possums squabbling over some wool threads and spools. Among them, in the land of the sad oranges, I rooted myself; we set up a little radio station and began broadcasting words and stories and songs of rebellion. We hoped our cosmic radio would reach the future generations.

*“nothing more beautiful under the sun than being under the sun.”1*

*\**

*avanti avanti,*

*Awaken*

*(repeated).*

*leaving the city limits in my car, leaving behind the botanical gardens, the orientalist pagodas, the neoclassical landscapes, the floral stone nouveau architectural adornments, the mazes, to drive the motorway all night, my soul in the sodium-lit highway, my dibiotic life-cycle, my plant soul at home in the looping stems of the roads. plantlife: the journey away from the root that is not an exile but recurrence, and leap. my head will bloom in colour somewhere like a flower in the northernmost tip of this landmass, at the coast, the furthest corner of the page. petals despatching perfume down into the sea.*

Ingeborg Bachmann, ‘To the Sun’

*written in marienbad and crystal palace, in a series of interlocking neoclassical gardens-prisons.*

*written in the labyrinth within Babylon, no space here to dawdle.*

\*

*asphalt, toxins, concrete,*

*The earth of Jerusalem is revealed to those returning, from the directions of crossing a multiply bordered land. the checkpoints at the border from Jordan are dismantled and destroyed. as they cross the border the people are running to the land, to joy’s root, to the pre-imperial geography.*

mohamed el-kurd, poet and Sheikh Jarrah resident reflected that the most notable thing about the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood are its edenic gardens

*“The house has a large garden dotted with lemon, loquat, and pomelo trees, named after Dajani’s parents, aunts and uncles”*

cucumbers and plums (the smell of these in the morning) the plants so dense you can barely move among them. *haifa, the lost city, city of plants etched in the heart*

The teaching in deuteronomy is beautiful, that it is forbidden to destroy a tree.

*the uprooted olive trees*

*grief*

*(repeated)*

*for the olive trees which take 8 years to produce fruit, which take 60 years to yield, burned by colonial settlers - imperial, intergenerational violence.*

*the olive trees,*

*grief*

*You placed your hand on my face,*

*“If the olive trees knew the hands that planted them,*

*their oil would have become tears …” [[2]](#footnote-2)*

*patience*

*prickly pear cactus,*

*patience*

*a sign of a home*

*its once existence*

*These plants show us where the paths were….*

*the path of thorns and roses*

*red roses you place on his shirt every day*

*on a tomb a rose is placed every day*

*against death*

*against sorrow*

*against being forgotten*

*devotion is a singular act that claims*

*an eternity right now*

*grief*

*is like a seatbelt across your chest*

*fastened to your world*

*with your speckled face in mind*

*you took a handful of forget-me-nots*

*tiny blue flowers you say that look like mouse ears*

*i plant a seed, a shrine of our shared love*

*fastened to your world where there are always flowers*

*always cared for in a special way*

*a verdant garden i kiss, i touch, i smell, i feel*

*the first meal that i eat without you*

*grief*

*is a sense of abandonment,*

*a sense of time that is unbearable*

*always fixed*

*always permanent*

*always experienced*

*in unmeasurable pain*

*externally painted*

*eternally sealed*

*Sir Roger the Elephant,*

*painted with hands*

*a grey that covers my body over and over*

*the minutes of my senses made into years*

*muted into object*

*becomes a monument*

*the behaviour of elephants in a time of death,*

*The ritual of touching the bones gently with their trunks*

*while remaining very quiet,*

*covering the body with leaves and grass,*

*they stay with the body for days or weeks at a time.*

*the Giant Horsetail*

*that once stood as trees,*

*oh ancient fern,*

*now they call you a nightmare!*

*i till the soil*

*i breath, i let air in*

*into these soil of pillage, into the long years of dreams tucked into this soil bed*

*this compost filled with rotten fruit and pieces of my birthday cake decomposing*

*i admire this decay, metaphorically unliving*

*a site of time that continues dying*

*… And the scent of mock orange*

*drifts through the window.*

*How can I rest?*

*How can I be content*

*when there is still*

*that odor in the world? [[3]](#footnote-3)*

*As flowers turn toward the sun, the dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward the sun which is rising in the sky of history[[4]](#footnote-4)*

*\**

Tourist, there is no sun in the prisons of israel.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The colonised subjects remain cast out of the Euro-Christian garden of earthly delights, even if it is precisely through their knowledge and labour that the actual garden that feeds and sustains this symbolic garden – notably, the plantation system – is cultivated.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*the glossy gardening magazines which gloss over the labourers of the gardens (paradise transplanted)*

*Out of the enclosure, into the commons,  
The true paradises are the paradises lost[[7]](#footnote-7),*

*a “Digger” once said:*

All this falling out or quarrelling among humankind, is about the earth who shall, and who shall not enjoy it, when indeed it is the portion of every one and ought not be striven for, nor bought nor sold, Whereby some are hedged in, and others hedged out; for better not to have had a body, then to be debarred the fruit of the Earth to feed and cloth it.[[8]](#footnote-8)

*better not to have had a body than to be in this perennial garden-city.*

They would like to keep the notion of labour out of the scene of the garden. Every night, we are cast out of the garden, and every day we work there, separated from the dreams of the sleeping plants: the fronds, the petals we cherish so well. Their plantsong at night sings for us.

*Their plantsong at night sings for us.*

*Day came to the hills before the sun rose.*

*I was under some old olive trees I knew well.*

*We were inventing songs as if they had been forgotten.*

*A composer lets me hear a song that has been shut up silent within me.[[9]](#footnote-9)*

We put them out on the cosmic radio.

*Where your eyes are of roses, leap, break*

**Part 2 - The Imprint of the Sun**

\*

Dibiotic life cycle

Photoreceptors

photoperiodism

Plant life cannot be subsumed under the zoocentric.

Plant senses exceed a zoocentric language.

Without a single fire within a single calyx[[10]](#footnote-10)

‘Plants are the weeds of metaphysics: devalued, unwanted in its carefully cultivated garden.’[[11]](#footnote-11)

\*

*Weather moves, scars, imprints*

*Our armpits dampen in response to the heat;*

*Our jaws and our tongues stiffen in the biting cold*

*Our bodies bear the impression of the weather-world*

*Weather has a verbal form[[12]](#footnote-12) -*

*Wet earth, stone fruit, seized by the heat of the day*

*i study the city that feels more heat than i try to feel*

*as my skin lies sticky from perspiration*

*The taste of nectarines drip, dripping*

*feeling, a feeling, felt in the bones*

*She complains about pain*

*she feels it before,*

*i have felt this pain before*

*and i know, the rain*

*Wet earth, stone fruit*

*the heaviness in the air*

*the scurrying ants*

*darkened skies emerging, growing, engulfing*

*the scent of wet earth, the woody scent of Angsana*

*we bring the bamboo poles in*

*before it rains,*

*before the hanging clothes become*

*they becomes too heavy,*

*too heavy from the water*

*before they could pull you*

*down, down the other way round*

*Wet earth, strange truth*

*the colour of green pearls,*

*the leaves of sundew*

*The Carnian Pluvial episode*

*Cold frame, detached and grown on*

*The rain flows, flows off like syrup*

*Drip tips, surface runoff*

*As the wetness seeps through the pores into my body*

*I touch the nape of my neck like there is a leak*

*Handkerchief tree*

*You offer on your sugar palm*

*Wet earth, strange truth*

*When the sound of the rain*

*Hits the covered walkways*

*The thunder as loud*

*Footsteps quickening*

*Knowing the rain is coming*

*Makes our minds do too*

*Pitter patter, pat on the back*

*You put your hand on my shoulder*

*Always to make a point, to give me your opinion*

*In case your words disappear*

*Wet earth, sweet breath*

*the smell of your words blooming in the dampness of air*

*the dampness of air,*

*the breathing hot sidewalks*

*The weeping tea-tree*

*I find fortune under its bending branches,*

*hanging leaves*

*you brought me the gift of rain*

*\**

A dream from a rose-petal sleep in madrid, under the influence of quince:

*I am living in a beautiful sun-lit modernist house in a pine forest somewhere in scotland. you arrive at my door with chamomile flowers, we swim in a beautiful concrete swimming pool. I look down into your depths, your face is beneath a western classical mask, then an oxygen one. all my friendships had stemmed from you, but we hardly knew each other. we drench our roots there in the water, a transparent soil filled with sun. after we emerge, we are drying, you turn to me and tell me that the fruit forbidden in eden was the quince. within my dream there flowered an instant memory of the quince with its bright fruit breaking out of the stone work of the inner courtyard of Canterbury cathedral, in 2017. it was a new kind of sovereignty. I imagined a repetition: the church are destroying this quince tree, they keep destroying trees. the serpent’s veins are olive and quince roots. after the expulsion of the muslims and jews from spain in 1492, the flowering quince de-corporated into a number of anti-colonial remedies. closeted muslim and jewish women under the new imperial regime would make quince potions to give to young new imperial men who would come to be told their fortune and leave believing their bodies to be made of glass - imperial fragility. patriarchy is fragile. the intifada against 1492 is an ecological one, the cause of the plants is the part of an anticolonial struggle. we spoke about the lost “convivencia” of muslim spain and then you are once again unreachable to me in the dream, your masked face is crestfallen, you walk away from me. when i wake up i am not the same.*

*apothecary’s rose, preparing rose-water. relieve my anxiety, roses cleft: semi-double flowers - the zero hour of joy’s root*

*Frantz Fanon used a form of anti-colonial gardening therapy in his time working at the Bida Joinville Hospital in Algiers. Fanon recognised that colonialism sought to make the colonised subject lose their minds by ‘plucking their humanity from the root.’ the hospital garden became a site for re-rooting and resistance. colonialism alienates the colonised from the land, so much so that the language of gardening even mirrors and eclipses and obscures the language of colonialism.*

*Fanon and his patients treated the garden a site that directly exposed colonial mechanisms, not simply a protected space from colonial danger but also a site that was suited to the logic of colonialism, could directly forment an anti-colonial plotting from within its own rubric, and from this, the ultimate overturning of the colonial world, a return to the land.*

*The work of Fanon’s patient Mohamed Bouarlem was transplanted into a community garden in Toxteth, Liverpool, adjoining a school, by the artist Mohammed Bourouissa in 2018. Children of the diaspora created structures out of white wooden sticks, compartmentalising a psychic space within the shared space of the garden.*

*A dream of the energy of the decolonial transforming every city. steam arises from a vat of mint tea. Bright lemons under a Mersey sky. A liverpool intifada. This garden is called ‘Resilience garden’.*

*Here, in the garden, we become real. We connect with each other and nature through the process of self liberation.*

*Look at the rocks on the garden boundary, they are witnesses.*

OK, so [@hilaryduff](https://www.instagram.com/hilaryduff/)'s kids did this ... I think it's way cool 🤩🤩🤩 !!!! I always collected crystals 🔮 as a small child and my parents honestly thought it was weird that I’d disappear and they'd find me looking for rocks and crystals in people's driveways 🪨🪨🪨 !!!! I have a beautiful collection now …

but only about 10 ... I give them a lot of attention !!!! I almost feel a sort of protection when I see rocks now ... they are so strong and solid 💪🏼 ... I like holding them !!!! I used to take the small ones with me when I was younger and hide them in my pockets ... and if I was around anyone who gave me bad vibes I would hold it very tight 😳😳😳 !!!! It would give me more confidence and awareness in moments I wasn't so sure about ... I did this in a lot of interviews up until I was around 24 or so !!!! So … I saw this picture of this rock display and immediately thought of my rocks ... they have a lot of intellect we don't even know about 🧠🧠🧠 !!!!! If you ever find yourself alone and have an urge to find a connection to the universe, hold on to one of your favorite rocks … look up … and let it guide your spirit 💫💫💫 !!!! And remember - you can't mess with Mother Nature ... she's very powerful … after all she is responsible for the beauty in spring and summer 🌼🌷🍃🌻🌸... the white, glistening snow in the winter ❄️❄️❄️ ... and yes, she is a beast ... volcanoes … hurricanes … tornadoes 🌋🌋🌋🌀🌀🌀🌪️🌪️🌪️… so please pick up a piece of her today and smile 😊😊😊 !!!!! There are so many religions but the “worship of nature" is the only phenomenon ... so go pick up a fucking rock 😂😂😂 !!!!![[13]](#footnote-13)

*Ecology without class struggle is just gardening." [[14]](#footnote-14)*

\*

“I only have one conscience, which awakens my memories of 1492.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

1492: the source of all my woe. I dream of going back in time and soliciting a refusal from a lost ancestor, i dream of a return to the past to stir them to rebel.

eden diary:

sitting with an ancestor on camp-chairs,

a fair day in eden, under the flight path, watching and counting the planes traverse the paradisiacal sky

eden diary, fragment from a mind inside babylon:

palestine united

babylon broken

london - false root,

liverpool, all humdrum and happy by the docks, with my love,

- source of rebellion

haifa - *city of plants etched in the heart*

jerusalem -

*this wretched falling earth*

here is the rose, leap

i gaze at the lustrous growth of moss, moss green / a wash of soft green / the radiant green / withered green / the crappy green screen / get rid of all the green crap he didn’t wanna admit saying kinda green / the soft fuzzy powdery green mould Cladosporium, Aspergillus, Penicillium / i swim in them with the prospect of drowning / the prospect of being unstoppable / that we can set our own agenda / to be tender, brutally tender / like Cecil Taylor on the piano / unstoppable, wild, abandoned /

“Rhythm is the life of space of time danced through.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

and somewhere the rivers are overflowing / in that water rushing in / spirals gushing / i take a deep breath before plunging and hear in the river bed my mother’s voice / in this dream you taught me everything/ to swim the oceans / climb the mountains / tie knots and spell emancipation / i believe / like dreams they don’t really have a beginning, you’re just sort of in there / it’s all in the timing / there is no miscalculations in the rhythm / that i will return to that same place over and over in my dreams / can we over-dream a world /

what is a place in the world you’ll like to revisit?

*my body understands*

*what my tongue does not understand*

*our lives are at points*

*a line*

*resisting a point*

**Part 3 - Dreaming the end of dreaming**

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Alhambra

*in the quietest recesses of my mind i am in the interior of an old stone building in andalusia in winter at night; a room surrounded by lots of people. I am wrapped up, very warm, melancholy, joyful. The building is at the edge of the old city, which is a garden, the Alhambra.*

*there is a steel scaffold structure functioning as a series of raised platforms towards the high ceiling, creating a new transparent level to the main space which intersects with the room in several simultaneous ways. it is a sort of staircase and bookshelf too.*

*at the highest level is a large bedding-area filled with plants; small lamps hang from the ceiling interspersed like tendrils; adjoined to it are aluminium ladders, two ivy plants trail down.*

*on the far side of the room are long clothes-rails with prayer mats, coloured shirts, coats, skirts, shawls, scarves, blankets. steam is emerging from a vat of soup from a stove; people go back and forth ladling soup into bowls. one of the walls is set up for a continuous projection of plant shapes, life is growth, is morphological development, and leap. Light floods layer upon layer of life.*

*\**

*The rain has closed its curtains against the cheek of the fields*

*I do not know if it is the city or the nice weather,*

*But all things come together and congratulate*

*Exchange vows of beautiful love.*

*I know you who are bank and beyond it mystery.*

*The rain,*

*Having scolded just as at the moment of the curtain,*

*Begins its dialogue with earth, of water.*

*(excerpt from Movement, far from shore, Edouard Glissant)*

*\**

*on the palm of an open hand…*

*as open as the colour of light*

*a seed floats away*

*to the far side of the moon*

*cotton seeds become the first plants to germinate on the moon*

*on a lunar night, a first green leaf sprouting*

*an empire of cotton*

*a story with the same old characters*

*yet you say 'this time it's different'*

*you can tell time differently*

*you show me how by blowing on a dandelion*

*through transitions*

*through departures*

*through a thousand prayers*

*through dwelling on death*

*blow till the seed is all blown away*

*count each of the puffs*

*an hour to each puff*

*the breath of space*

*held by an apology*

*The Yew Tree*

*Eternal life, that lies beyond the grave*

a glimpse of one's own exile  
radiating across green lawns  
passing geometric laughter  
someone had painted the oak yellow[[17]](#footnote-17)

to think the non-Euclidian, the stones mark the boundaries of the garden: intellectual witnesses, to the catastrophe.

\*

*“In Arabic art, seeing is an analytical and thoughtful process. This impression is the experience of a visual language which reflects the symmetry of growth in nature.” [[18]](#footnote-18)*

*A refusal of the garden*

refusal of the trees planted against their volition, as borders to enclose and steal communal land,

planted as imperial agents,

a refusal of the european plants planted in palestine,

refusal of the current contours, the garden borders of my subjectification, my ‘nationality’

refusal to be hedged-in

refusal of the imperial geography  
refusal to performatively grieve the deaths of the powerful, refusal to leave floral tributes to them,

refusal of the regime of imperial rights[[19]](#footnote-19)

rejection of the names the colonialists gave to plants

refusal to acknowledge a foreclosed past in which imperial violence is completed and is not enacted in this moment

refusal to enact a foreclosure of the catastrophe since eden, 1492, the invention of photography, nakba, 1948.

refusal of the garden that signals capital’s expansion,

a refusal of the bouquet of apologia given to me by an agent of empire,

a stirring up the ancestors’ refusals to submit to empire,  
a stirring up to go on strike

a stirring up of the intellectuality of rocks, witnesses to the catastrophe,

a stirring up to go on strike indefinitely, until total liberation-in-grief

*from the funeral march to the mass uprising, the rebellion.*

In paradise, as in all “happy” places, there is no history. Just an eerie time that anticipates nothing. But if I look closely enough, microscopically among the tiny tendrils at the intersection of the soil with the growths, I notice signs of nature in revolt. These moments disappear quickly in the clear blue breeze of the sky in paradise, as the tendrils uncoil towards a sun,

It is difficult being in the daylight of history / broad daylight, / the sun overhead a stadium light / the warring angels like helicopters / my face is a sun-flower, baked-face/ night is our second work, the plants / sleep is plant-life, sunken, diurnal / what is put forth by plant life nothing less than wholly dream, labour of life-art.

our return will be like sunrise after a long night

*the rebellion continues*

*i smell the stargazer lilies, reaching across the night*

*in a time when the stars fell*

*they brought us the strange gift of dreams*

*\*\*\*\**

Night is a performer, a body, a dance with the gardens as it traces landscapes,

as it mourns spaces lost in conflict.

Night is self. Night is reinvention.

Night performs to the tune of the ghazal (the wail of a wounded deer),

a love song, a poetic expression through its dance,

the pain of loss and separation and beauty of love in spite.

*this is a story about night*

*the sun departs as the curtain of ivy tendrils part*

*mystery is felt as night enters*

*among the faceless rocks*

*among the deepening moss*

*among the garden growing wild with brambles, weeds and nettles*

*Dancing, i slide, i collapse, i stop here,*

*i know you yet i have found nothing*

*as i pass through this space,*

*Like sorrow songs.*

*Like freedom dreams.*

*Like erotic.*

*Like flying cheek-bones.[[20]](#footnote-20)*

*this land is secret in my body*

*in quiet premonition*

*as the evening slug moves*

*as it is painting stones*

*i remember you*

*you are a stubborn presence*

*night's perspiration falls to the ground,*

*paints it with desire*

*scents of roses, redder and redder*

*a scent heavier than air*

*i am heartbroken,*

*singing into the great nothing*

*I remember waiting*

*the old landscape arose like an apparition: village houses, mosques, school buildings, paths, stone hedges marking plot boundaries, limekilns, threshing floors, holy tombs, sacred oak trees, springs and cisterns, caves, fruit trees, patches of cultivation. And each plot and every prominent feature with its name marked on the map appeared….[[21]](#footnote-21)*

*they cannot erase you*

*the rebellion continues*

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mahmoud Darwish [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Louise Glück [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Walter Benjamin [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is a re-writing of a poster made in the 70s by Belgian group, Christian Movement for Peace, to encourage boycotting of Spain as a holiday destination to raise awareness of political prisoners held in spanish prisons: “Tourist, there is no sun in the prisons of Spain.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shela Sheikh, Ros Gray [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Marcel Proust [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gerard Witstanley, a “Digger” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Jean Genet, Prisoner of Love [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Edouard Glissant [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Michael Marder, Vegetal Philosophy [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Arline T. Geronimus [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Britney Spears [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Chico Mendes [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Houria Bouteldja [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cecil Taylor [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Derek Jarman [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Samia Halaby [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This is following from thinking with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s methodology of stirring up of historical refusal, from *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Katherine McKittrick, M. Nourbese Philip [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ahmad Barclay, Mapping and “Truth”: Communicating the Erasure of Palestine [↑](#footnote-ref-21)