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### **Collaborative Writing on SPIRALS during the Covid-19 lockdown**

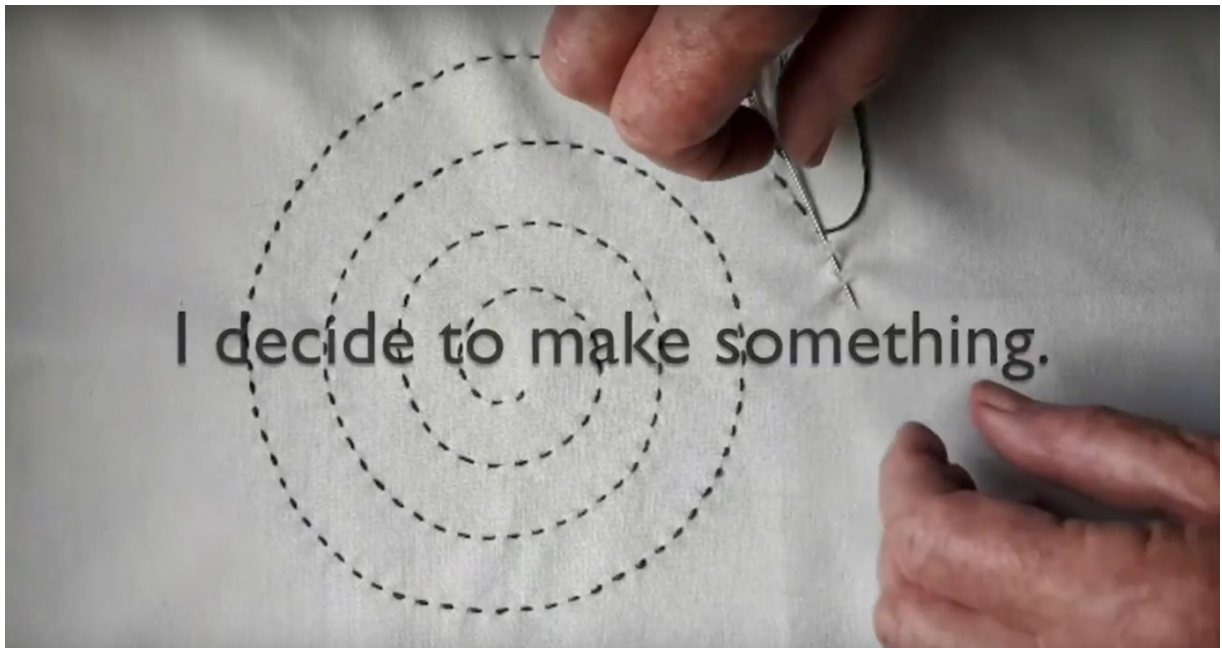
Barbara Bridger, Noelia Diaz Vicedo, Georgia Kalogeropoulou, Hari Marini members of PartSuspended group ([www.partsuspended.com](http://www.partsuspended.com)) write a collaborative paper in which they reflect on the process of writing collaboratively during the first lockdown period. They examine different aspects of 'being together' and writing within the project *Spirals*, and how creative processes within the framework of lockdown formed, informed and challenged their writing practices.

A few words about PartSuspended and the *Spirals* project:

PartSuspended ([www.partsuspended.com](http://www.partsuspended.com)) is an artist collective who are working in a variety of art forms and disciplines. *Spirals* (2013-ongoing) is a poetic journey that crosses geographical borders and unites female voices in an exchange of languages, cultures, personal narratives and modes of expression. The *Spirals* project consists of a series of performances, poetry, exhibitions, workshops, videography, recorded material, music and movement. The group seeks to articulate the female experience of time, movement, memory, migration, thresholds, home and sense of belonging in a poetic and innovative way. The project lets us imagine spaces, time, texts otherwise, and opens a common space for dialogue and sharing. The spiral acts as a sign of becoming, transforming and awareness. The *Spirals* project employs leftover spaces in Europe where interventions and spatial performative gestures based on the symbol of the spiral are filmed; work has been filmed in London, Broadstairs, Barcelona, Belgrade, Coventry, Agost, Devon and Athens.

For further information about the project, please visit:

<http://www.partsuspended.com/productions/current/spirals/>



*A thread is a filament of some kind, which may be entangled with other threads or suspended between points in three-dimensional space. (Ingold 2007: 41)*

The human hand works in precision. It holds the pen. It holds the needle. Between the thumb and forefinger. It goes from left to right. From the centre to the periphery. From inside to outside.

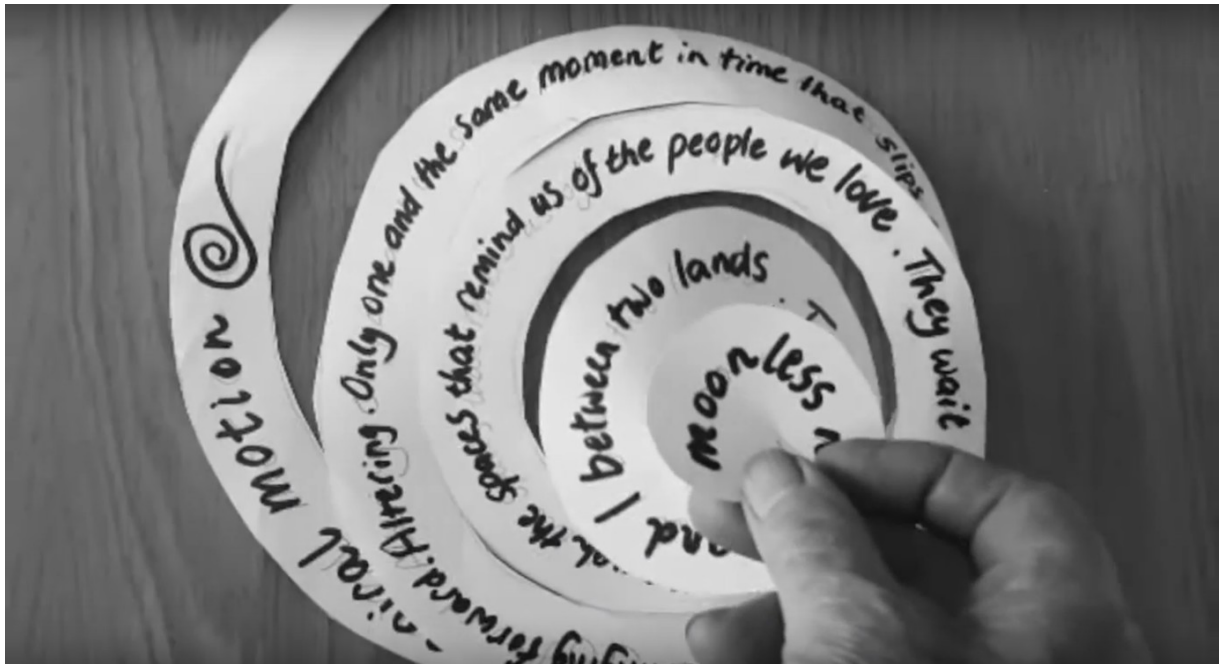
Veins of spiralling energy is marked by the needle.

Veins of spiralling thought is marked by the pen.

The movement of the hand writing inscribes a trace upon the surface of the page. The movement of the hand embroidering inscribes a trace upon the textile. Both needle and pen are tools for hiding parts, hiding thoughts, hiding secrets. Unseen thoughts. Unseen threads. Associations, feelings, memories, imagination exist behind the words. Half of the thread spirals underneath the textile.

Leaving a trace.

moonless nights and between two lands travelling again through the spaces that remind us of the people we love they wait postponing altering bringing forward altering only one and the same moment in time that splits out of their hand and falls in a spiral motion



*To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination, or to point out new features on a familiar route. To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide [...] I have often wished that my sentences could be written out as a single line running into the distance so that it would be clear that a sentence is likewise a road and reading is travelling. (Solnit 2001: 72)*

What happens when pathways cannot connect us physically anymore? How can this unprecedented situation of isolation be described, shared and reversed? What kind of creative paths can be carved and how they are shaped and affected by the isolation state we all experience? Writing as a mode of communication across cultures, nations, ages and places, has become a way to travel and meet one another; it opened up pathways for our group to meet and guide others to everyday, familiar as well as hidden, or unfamiliar terrains. Pathways that follow a spiralling route starting from our own rooms, escaping the house

walls, crossing neighbourhoods' streets, travelling through borders and expanding in our imagination.

Open-ended spiralling paths shaped by writing. Writing as a form of being together. Writing as a form of accessing each other's worlds. Writing as a form of resisting. Writing as a form of confessing. Writing as an embodied act. Writing as a line of endless fragments. Writing as a paper spiral that can be touched, lifted, extended. Writing as a reflection, a question, a sharing of our anxieties and fears. Writing as being lost. The feeling of being lost. Writing as joyful place. Writing as the smell of the fresh air. Writing as the brightness of the sun that warm our skin. Writing as belonging. The feeling of belonging.

During the lockdown, writing has not always been 'creative', linear, coherent, focused, significant, but it included short texts, memos, emails, provocations, questions, messages, notes. However, in some cases, these, rather mundane texts and tasks have contained seeds of ideas that left the paper (or the screen of our laptops) and made us discover objects that had gone unnoticed; the poetic repetition of ordinary actions; the recording of body parts; the movement in a restricted area; the pleasure of constructing, painting, singing, planting, digging, dreaming.

*...It's late afternoon. We walked around looking for somewhere to eat | We were on top of a mountain near the sea | We combine food that we have and eat all together | I feel vulnerable like my little angel | Touching her | She had lovely hands | I decide to make something. I'm not sure what to make. It's not real | Stitching patches of skin on my leg. I was bleeding a bit but I wasn't in pain. A necessary transformation | I was hoping to find some inspiration there. Share 'what do you see?' | Don't stop now is time to sing for the dead. We were trusting her to lead us through this pain. | I pick up my phone it falls apart. I try to put the two halves of the phone back together | The dispossessed are on the road. While towers and doors are killing. And only the woman reads | Then everyone realised that the birthday girl is missing. Somehow I've lost the key...*

***Spirals: A Diary of Quarantine Dreams*** by PartSuspended. Barbara Bridger, Noelia Diaz-Vicedo, Erdem Tuna, Seda Ergul, Georgia Kalogeropoulou, Hari Marini, Nisha Ramayya, April

2020



This is an image of the shadow of my friend Hari, talking a walk during the first lockdown in a hill near her house in Athens. The words come from a dream I had, on the 27/04/2020.

Here is the transcription of the dream as I shared it when I woke up that morning with the PartSuspended group of friends:

*I was on a very high rocky top of a mountain. I was there with many women, and **we were marching on a dangerous path** at the edge of the cliff, carrying with us some clothes, and Patti Smith was leading the way. I was just behind her, and behind me were following a company of women friends, and we were all tired and sad, but Patti Smith was encouraging us, turning her head and shouting from time to time: come on, let's go! and we were marching in this dangerous path, in order to get somewhere and do a ritual of mourning, and Patti Smith was telling us go on! don't stop, now is the time to sing for the dead. So I was gathering all my strength to move on and we started singing a kind of a mourning song all together. In the dream I was excited and felt lucky to be led by this rock star poet archetype, I was looking at her face and long grey hair and I was thinking, oh god it's so good she's here, she knows what should be done, let her lead the way. She was kind and strong and beautiful, with a sense of purpose, and we were all trusting her to lead us through this pain.*

In attempting to reflect on this dream exactly one year after I saw it and shared it, I realise how it condenses the experience of shock and trauma the lockdown inflicted on all of us.

Being confined in the house, I was often dreaming of open spaces and wild nature; indeed, images of nature, sea, huge or deserted spaces were common in our dreams.

In this dream I felt I was part of a group on a pilgrimage journey, going somewhere in order to perform a ritual of mourning. It is very clear to me that the women in the dream represented my fellow artists of the PartSuspended group, and the mourning process concerns all the things we felt we had lost when the Covid situation started: the freedom to move, the ability to gather freely and celebrate life, the possibility to perform and move with our physical bodies without being constrained.

In the dream we were all sad and tired; but we were moving on with a sense of purpose that my unconscious chose to personify in the face of Patti Smith, a strong female figure that I had the chance to see live that summer in a huge open air concert in London, where I felt free and inspired.

Playing music with other people was such an important part of my everyday life that just vanished when Covid started. So in this dream I am probably reflecting on my own mourning for what I've lost. But there is also a more general dimension to this mourning that we were all feeling: every day a very real death count seemed to unite the whole planet in constant updates reminding us of our mortality. Everywhere there was an invisible threat, touching each other was dangerous, so we all were turning our senses and our action inwards in what seemed a heavy loneliness.

Sharing these feelings and thoughts with the PartSuspended group of friends was life saving; it kept us going through the pain and the uncertainty and gave us new energy and inspiration to try and reflect on new ways of communicating through writing and creating art. Sharing our dreams was an especially powerful experience, as it helped us transcend the preliminary, mundane levels of communication and get into the substantial sphere of sincere connection where real things can happen. Even though it was not possible to be together in the physical space, the stability and rhythm of our weekly meetings gained more and more degrees of reality as we were sharing our dreams and discussing our struggles with everyday life and our urge to keep being creative and conscious.

On 12/4/2020 I wrote in our collective archive:

*Dream life takes its material from waking life, but what happens now that our space is limited, and the ontology of virtual life seems to grow in power and have more effects on our real life? How to bear the circularity of time, when there is no going out and coming in at home? do dreams get more real, or less real in this situation? does waking life become more dreamlike?*

As with every traumatic event, what is being called in question is the very nature of reality. We were all feeling that we were witnessing a paradigm shift in its beginning: suddenly the virtual space where we could all meet and be together felt a lot more real than before. Also, we were all obliged to acknowledge the importance of the moral dimension of our artistic practice: this was clearly an entirely new situation where all presuppositions should be reexamined. In a political level it was clear that once again the privileged were safer in the face of the pandemic, whereas “key workers” were still running up and down the city streets delivering packages and exposing themselves to the virus like nothing had changed. What was the meaning of our work in this context? How should we use our tools, which were but words and images, in order to contribute in a meaningful way to what was happening?

Barbara had a dream addressing these issues about creativity and its meaning in the new conditions on 20/4/2020:



*In my dream we're still in lock down and I'm getting very bored, so I decide to make something. I'm not sure what it is that I make, but when I've finished it, I'm not satisfied, because I can see that what I've made is just 'a simulation' i.e. it's not real. So I decide to make something real. As soon as I've made this 'real' thing I realise that because it's organic it can reproduce itself. I watch as it begins to do this and I'm so horrified by what I've done that I wake up.*

And Hari shared the following dream on the 21/4/2020

*The other day (Friday night 17/4/2020) I saw in my dream that I was looking for something (don't know what) and suddenly I saw a shiny small gun..I was wondering who gave this to me, why, and how it was found within my things.. it was full -stuffed with bullets, ready to be used.. I have never touched a gun in my life -only as a prop in theatre, in my 20s when I was performing L. Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. It was a very disturbing dream and still I have the image in my head and I wonder what it might mean/why it was there.*

I commented on both dreams on 21/4/2020:

*the organic self reproducing thing -what a captivating image! but also frightening. And the gun in Hari's dream -it seems to me like both dreams reflect on the possibility of action, maybe the morality of our action? could this be a metaphor for reflecting on our potential, the means we have to create while realising the dangers that every act of creation entails? maybe a reflection on the power we hold? a fear of violence too?*

Noelia commented on Hari's dream:

Noelia 21/4/2020

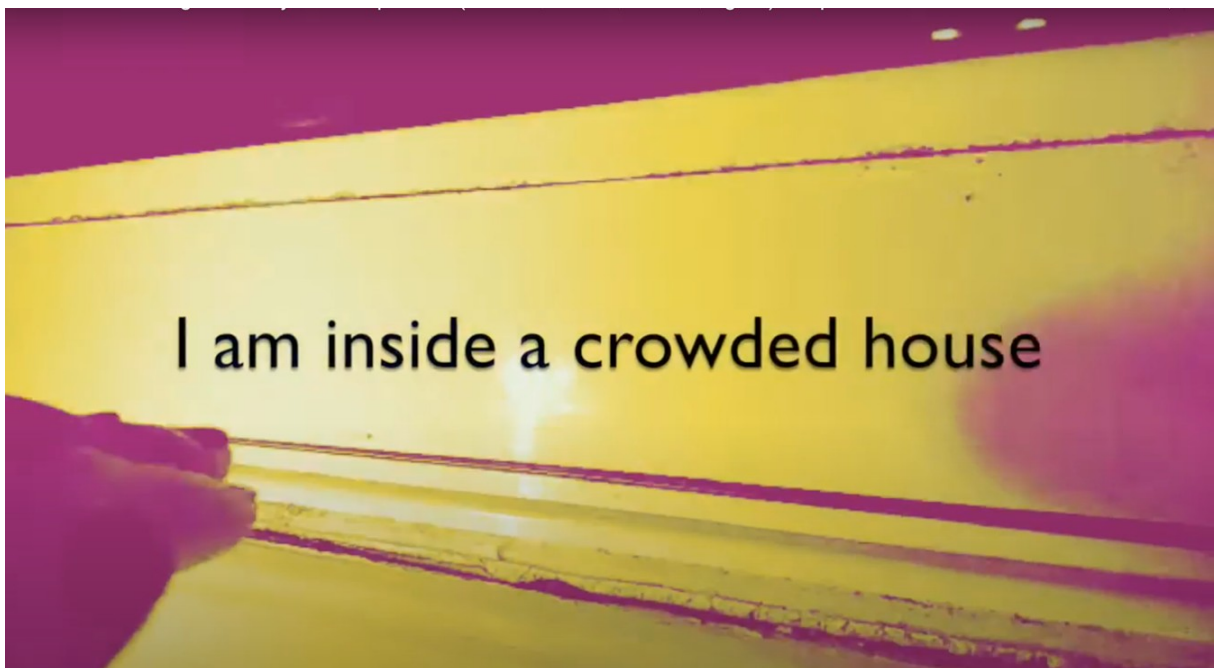
I find them very revealing and i think that they do show the state in which we find ourselves now. I must see a way of surpassing this block because either I forget about the dream I had before waking up or I am not dreaming at all. I do hope I can contribute soon.

and she wrote in the archive a quote by South African poet Breyten Breytenbach:



*I thought this quote is very much related to the situation we are experiencing at the moment with society and politics in relation to the act of creation:*

*I believe we writers, word-makers rooted in civil society, need not be the clowns and the fools of those in power —not even the “whites” among us who suffer from being excluded from the “black” world. In fact, I believe we should think of freedom of the mind as a conscious and constant attempt to unthink order and authority. To think against hegemony of any variety, including the liberationist and the nativist and the iconic —particularly the insidious, moralistic mawkishness of political correctness expressed as a sightless idolization of our “leaders.” To think against the dictates, the values, and the property of consumerist societies. To think against the laziness of narcissism.*



*She danced until she was dead,  
a subterranean figure,  
her tongue flicking in and out  
like a gas jacket.*

Anne Sexton.

### 1. The fairy-tale:

Once upon a time there was a woman who wanted to write. She was dreaming of a world of her own, a world where time would freeze so she could respond to the questions she was asked: endless words and infinite rhymes! 'why do you write?' She was craving for a space that only she could inhabit. Sounds of life arranged in circles- it was early in the morning and she was still walking along the lines. Only a body:eyes, open your eyes... You are sleeping... wake up! She heard a voice whispering in her ear: *this is the end of the world, as you, we knew it.* The woman writer stopped writing. What was she still a woman? Words were piling up in her throat. No voice, no words. She was trapped between two lands. 'Am I dreaming? She wondered. She could only cry.

*I am rooted buy I flow*

Virginia Wolf

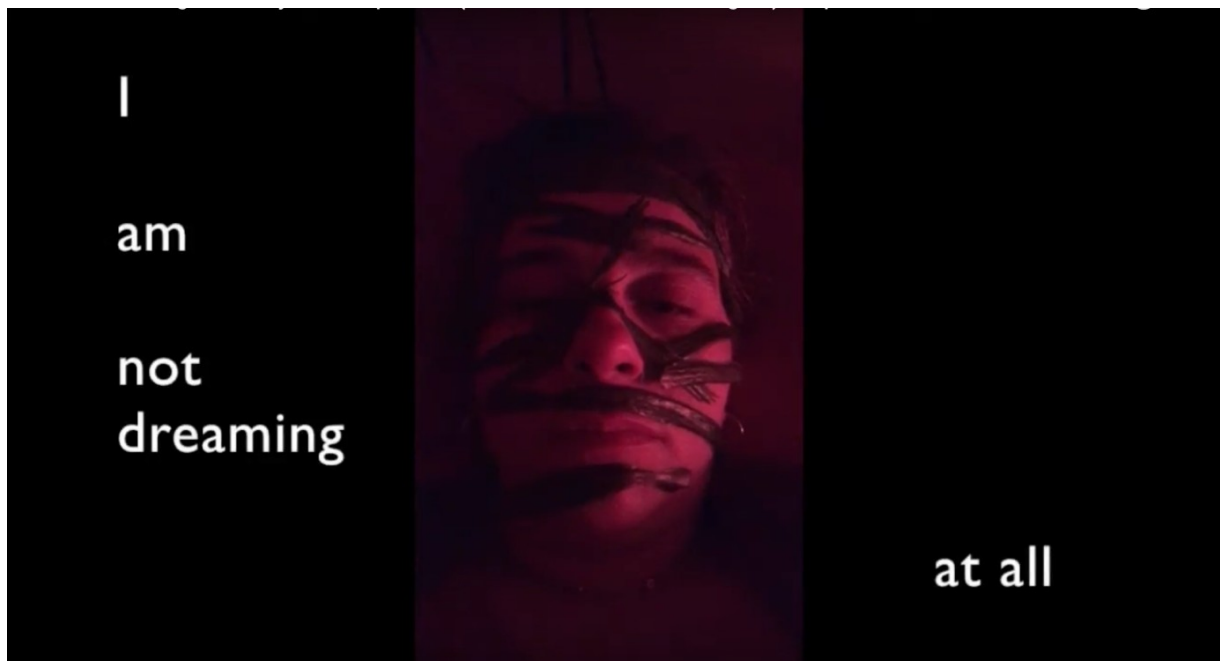
### 2. Reality:

The world was collapsing and she could only stay still in a flat. Lock yourself in. Protect yourself! Do not let anyone in! Bleach, bleach, bleach. 'Am I dirty?' The invisible danger. You cannot see it but it is lethal. If it penetrates your body, you die!' Death was around, suffering invaded the streets. She panicked. Trapped in an island, appart from her family, a foreign, an inmigrant, a stranger in a strange land. What could she do? But... she was so comfortably hiding in her London flat... She was suffocating- slowly- ancient snakes around her neck.

### 3. Dreams:

There was a spiral in the middle of the room and it was swallowing my feet. A strong, vibrating force was dragging me along the floor towards the centre. My fellow women artists from our group PartSuspended saved me from the abyss. My body was precipitated towards the edge: the only way out. But then they said, Barbara said: we have to do something. This is the power of creation: to turn destruction into construction. This is the power of the spiral: the capacity to summon the four winds and turn them into galaxies. They were the galaxies, their smiles navigating in circles on the screen, they opened my eyes, and the limited space become a platform to jump. My sense of loss and lack became a possibility for abundance and creation. We were faces on screen, plain images isolated in little squares. Images, music, words, painting, became our bread and blood. The question was: how to keep spiralling without

bodies? What was the meaning of ‘together’? We started composing our diary of quarantine dreams but I was not dreaming at all.



When you're aware that you're dreaming, you can have some impact on the narrative of that dream. When you're lucid dreaming, you can influence outcomes, direct the drama, stop at will.

To many this pandemic and its consequences have felt like the opposite of lucid dreaming. It has been more like a nightmare where the parameters are entirely unknown and over which we have no control.

Our group decision to record our dreams and bring them into our conscious waking minds may have been a way of regaining some of that control. If awake we didn't know what to make of the situation we found ourselves in, then perhaps our unconscious minds could shed some light. So we brought our non-lucid dreams into focus, we shared them with others and were shocked and sometimes amused by the absurdity of the images and scenarios that our unconscious minds had created.

The text on this image came from an email sent by Noelia Diaz-Vicedo. She was unable to contribute to our collections of dreams and explained why, 'Thank you for sharing your dreams. I find them very revealing and I think that they do show the state in which we find

ourselves now. I must see a way of surpassing this block because either I forget about the dream I had before waking up or I am not dreaming at all.'

In some ways it was all too easy to link our dreams to those emotions we were dealing with in our daily lives. The menacing shadow in this one, for instance, the panic to warn others....

I was walking by a wide river and there had been some event there, some festival and coloured balls were floating on the surface. Several young people were in boats collecting them up and as I watched suddenly there was a huge shadow moving under the water and a fish like creature took hold of one of their legs and pulled them down into the river. As it did so, I could see that it had a head like a very large dog. Later, still by the river, I was passing a shallow area where children were playing and I saw the shadow approaching again, so I screamed to the parents to get their children out of the water. They were shocked and told me to stop shouting.

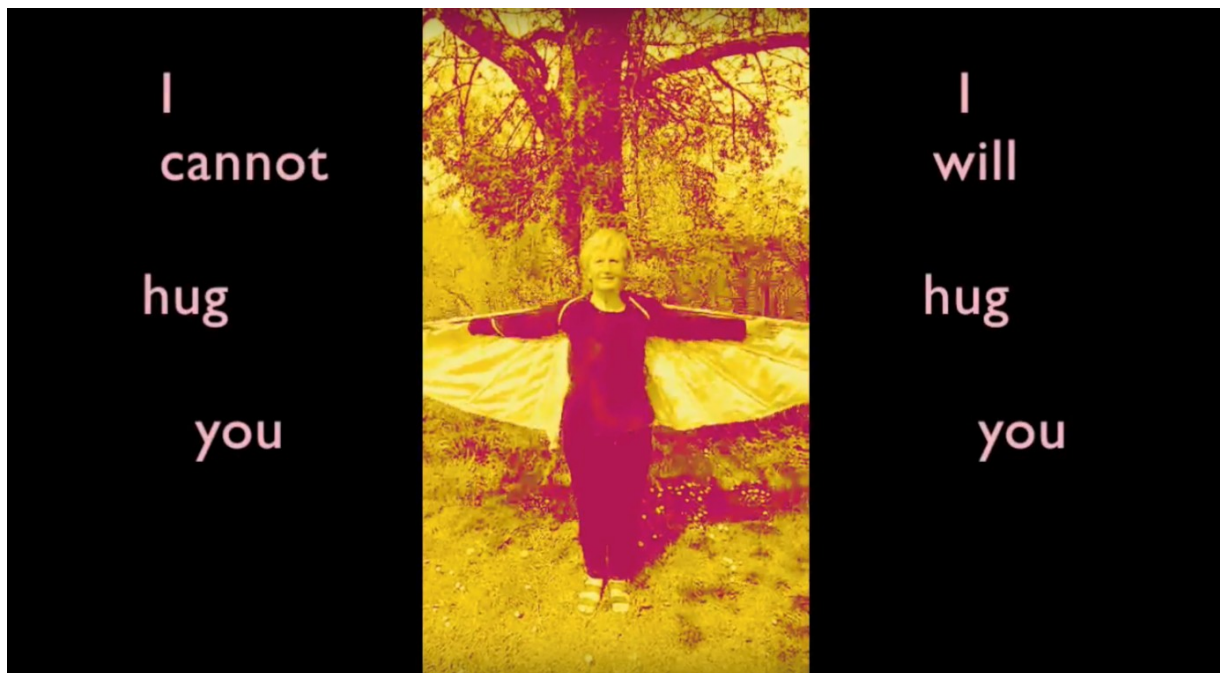
...but the members of PartSuspended were not alone in identifying a COVID surge of dream activity. In October 2020 Tor Nielson, Director of the Dream and Nightmare Laboratory at the University of Montreal, wrote in Scientific American

COVID-19 has altered our dream worlds, too: how much we dream, how many of our dreams we remember and the nature of our dreams themselves. Early this year, when stay-at-home directives were put in place widely, society quite unexpectedly experienced what I am calling a dream surge: a global increase in the reporting of vivid, bizarre dreams, many of which are concerned with coronavirus and social distancing.

Terms such as coronavirus dreams, lockdown dreams and COVID nightmares emerged on social media. By early April, social and mainstream media outlets had begun broadcasting the message: the world is dreaming about COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Sharing our dreams was just one of the ways we communicated and supported each other and it also fed our collective practice. Dreams have long been seen as a source of artistic inspiration - just think of the Surrealists - but maybe later, on reflection, we will see that they had a more important, complex and fundamental role during the COVID pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-covid-19-pandemic-is-changing-our-dreams/> accessed 07/04/2021



I'm wearing wings.

At the beginning of the first lockdown we made resolutions and the wings were found in a garage clear out. I made them for the wonderful Dani D'Emilia<sup>2</sup> who performed my monologue 'The True Aerialist'<sup>3</sup> in 2006.

In the script I was trying to expose the various difficulties faced by women when they perform before an audience. The play was commenting on a range of theories that discuss women as 'recipients of the gaze' (Mulvey, 1989) and it did this by revealing and subverting various performance conventions.

But when I look at this image, my attention is drawn to my feet. Despite waving my arms and wings about, my feet are planted firmly on the grass and as I look at them, I'm conscious of how long we've been grounded and confined.

During the first lockdown, members of PartSuspended became aware that we were dreaming more often and more vividly and on waking we often remembered these dreams. The group began to keep a diary.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://danidemilia.com>

<sup>3</sup> Performed 2006, Studio One, Dartington College of Arts. Prose version published in Feminist Review, Issue 84, 2006, Post Colonial Theatres. Script and critical commentary, doctoral thesis, 'Speaking of Gender, Language and Identity: Writing the Personal', <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/2227> pp166-217.

As I keep looking at this image, I remember a recurring dream that I've often had in the past. In it I'm flying, but I don't get up very high, I have to concentrate hard to stay a foot or two above the ground, but during lockdown I couldn't even achieve this minor levitation. During lockdown I didn't fly, in my dreams or otherwise.

The True Aerialist is proud of her wings, 'They are my own wings. There is no artifice in them, some glue perhaps, but I will not deny them for a moment.' However, throughout the monologue they fail her, 'Ah shit – it's like one of those dreams – you're flying quite happily, superiorly in fact, and then you suddenly realise...'.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, the True Aerialist does fly, but in order to do so, she returns to the more spectacular conventions of performance: music, song, lights, costume, a flying hoist (thank you Hiske Buddingh<sup>4</sup>) and comic gesture. She embraces deceit and invites the audience to work with her. She sings to them and asks them to lift her up.

Through the words of popular song, 'Only You' she explains how crucial they are to her flying enterprise.

Only you can make this change in me. For it's true, you are my destiny. When you hold my hand I understand the magic that you do. You're my dream come true, my one and only you.

Performance is generally described as a collaborative activity, but writers are often described as solitary. I would challenge this. The international community of writers and artists that make up PartSuspended have kept me connected and productive. At those times when the unpredictability of both the virus and political and individual responses to it, threatened to remove my sense of myself as a practising artist (my ability to fly) they provided the positive and inspiring context that I so needed.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/hiskebuddingh>



Going back to the first dream:

The power of words

The power of community

The power of us getting together and connecting our voices

The power of ritual

Turning our rage into a powerful signal

Having trust and faith to each other

Keep going

Don't stop now

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