

The evolution of a thought about courage
in the Anthropocene

kin'd & kin'd



*What is the colour, form or shape of courage?
What is the future of courage in the Anthropocene?
How can we conceive of courage in the many-more-than-human?¹*

The cloak began.

The cloak walked in.

The cloak became.

We imagined it as shelter, as inspiration,
as beauty itself.

We wanted pockets inside the cloak,
we wanted amulets for the pockets:

we gathered shells, feathers, stones, seed pods, beech masts...
from the ground outside.

Courage will find itself with the cloak -
invisible and outside,
inside and visible.

Touch to touch our reversible flesh,
touching and being touched -

Proximity of courage, off and on courage -
putting it on, taking it off –
receive and give.

¹ We have in the past used the terms *non-human*, *other-than-human* and *more-than-human* but have experimentally settled on this formulation, for the moment. There's a helpful discussion of such terminology in 'Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Non-Human, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining idioms of animacy in an age of planetary unmaking', Catherine Price & Sophie Chao, *Exchanges*, 2023 10(2), pp.177-193 online. We also like botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer's idea of drawing on her Indigenous Potawatomi language, to construct the word 'ki' from the longer word 'Aakibmaadiziiwin', which means 'a being of the earth.' *Ki* can be used rather than the objectifying 'it' ('Ki is growing well over there'); and the plural, suggests Kimmerer, is *kin*. See RMK, *Orion Magazine*, 12 June 2017

I

[The speakers set out the principles behind the process through which the cloak became.]

Wanderings in a process of lateral thinking about courage,
a method of making.

Beauty: an organising principle,
embodying balance, a gentle handling, between people and all other things,
animate and inanimate.²

Makoto Fujimura says ‘Because it is gratuitous, beauty points beyond itself [...]’³

Elaine Scarry says ‘An encounter with beauty can open the door of perception [...]’.⁴

----Expansion-----Keats’ ‘negative capability’----allow failures of courage, hopelessness,
and above all----uncertainty.⁵

How to en-courage uncertainty?

Chant for courage
find / have give / lose keep / seek

Is courage visible or unseeable?
Is courage a victim or a product?
Is courage integrity for the depths of the challenges we face?

It takes courage to trust,
to wear your heart on your sleeve.

How to receive a gift of courage without conditions.

Star Wars courage, the dark cloak, the end of Narnia...
A dark cloak, a light cloak, a transparent cloak, opaque...
with pockets. Pockets with amulets placed inside.

What connects shelter, pockets, nests and courage?

We find we have forty-seven tea-infuser bags:

Infuse - early 15th century –
to pour in, introduce, soak, from Latin *infusus*, *in fundere*
to pour into, press in, mix, mingle - to pour, melt.
Infusion - a pouring in, a watering.
Other words : steep, impregnate, aspire, inspiration.
Inspiration - to breath into, to infuse,

² See Frances Weller on the Navajo ritual of *hozho* in *The Wild Edge of Sorrow, Rituals for Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*, p.72

³ Makoto Fujimura, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life*, p.51

⁴ Quoted in Fujimura, *ibid*, p.54

⁵ See John Keats, letter to Tom and George Keats, 21 Dec 1871

animate or influence thus affect, rouse,
imbue – cause to absorb
soak - to lie in
ward-guarding, a protection.⁶

Each found amulet lies on a calico pocket -



which becomes a *pocket of flourishing* through the imagination of word meanings.⁷

The word courage comes from the Latin *cor*, for heart.
Heart. A flourishing heart.

The cloak is a container

(cloaking, a gentle holding and a sealing up,
concealing, refuge...)

Who inhabits the cloak?

How do we want our wearers to feel?

Whoever is wearing the cloak will have the courage to ask the unanswerable.

Where is the cloak going?

(journey, gathering – the cloak moving through the landscape)

‘What makes this cloak restless?’ someone asks⁸

says, ‘sight not the main thing...courage is not seeable...’

says, ‘be careful not to ask too much of the cloak’.

Also, courage isn’t private.

Say, *Courage and—Love*.⁹

⁶ Online Dictionary of Etymology

⁷ ‘Pockets of flourishing’ is a phrase from Kathleen Dean Moore, *Great Tide Rising, Towards Clarity and Moral Courage in a time of Planetary Change*, p.142

⁸ Robert Newton asks this, and gives us the idea of a ‘story’ of the cloak

⁹ Our interest in the concept of courage developed from our earlier study of the work of Jorie Graham, an American eco-poet, whose most recent collection *To 2040* addresses an apocalyptic near-future, and for whom courage has superseded notions of hope: ‘What do you think your strength is for—’ the speaker asks in the poem ‘Day’. In recent years, we have also studied the work of Rebecca Solnit in *Hope in the Dark* (‘Hope is not happiness or confidence or

II

*[The speakers are working out the cloak as a ceremonial garment
for interconnection and kinship.]*

What is the feeling we want to inhabit for the story of the cloak?

What can be visible? What will always be invisible to us? The cloak of courage is the manifestation of a reaching towards – towards reciprocity, with what is beyond us, around us and, crucially, within us.

Here, in the cloak of courage, we are working with opaqueness rather than transparency – the fabric of the cloak (a fine mesh linen) does not conceal the person who wears the cloak, but places them *in relation* – in relation to the idea of courage, and in relation to the natural amulets that have been placed in the pockets traversing the cloak's panels.

These relationships are what matters – not courage itself – for who can perceive it until it is done – here is intention *in relation to*...

Someone says, 'Courage is staying in love with each other,
all others.'¹⁰

III

*[The speakers are thinking about weaving, lacing. Embroidering as
a vehicle for courage.]*

A giggle, a shared moment
started the opening of the heart and mind and vision
and touch that is the courage to cloak.
Oh gosh, a hidden part but yes, a cloak of invisibility because yes,
maybe possibly this, this out-rage we offer.
Courage is unseen, invisible, gathering in corners, rising up from the earth,
an unknown source, a source we have to un-know, to re-know,
we have to re-(k)new
what courage is that this age of rage is cor[e] to.

inner peace; it's a commitment to search for possibilities' (*The Guardian*); also Joanna Macy's *Active Hope*: 'Active hope is a practice [...] it is something we *do* rather than *have*.' (p.2-3).

Writing about the crushing of the Crow Nation in the late 19th century, Jonathan Lear, in *Radical Hope* [which perhaps could also be called *Radical Courage*] says of the Chief of the Crows that he, Plenty Coups, exhibited a form of courage in which radical hope is a key ingredient - the hope that something 'good' for the Crow is still possible in the future, manifesting 'a commitment to the idea that the goodness of the world transcends one's limited and vulnerable attempts to understand it.' (p.95). One of the ways this became possible was, according to Lear, due to Plenty Coups' dream life, his imaginative life (p.115).

Donna Haraway has used the term 'heart' or 'hearting' rather than hope: she says 'I don't so much have hope as what I call heart, because I try to cultivate a way of thinking that is not futurist but rather thinks of the present as a thick, complex tangle of times and places in which cultivating response-abilities, capacities to respond, matters.' (Haraway, 'Edge Effects', online)

Robin Wall Kimmerer, talking at Conway Hall on 30 May 2024, is also skeptical of the concept of hope. To paraphrase what she said: 'I don't 'get' hope. It is so vague – hope for what? For me, it is more about love, which is within my control. If your grand/child is ill, don't *hope* they will get better, *love them as hard as you can*. Love instead of hope.'

¹⁰ We asked 3 courage questions of our NSotA cohort: this is part of Hannah White's answer. See Appendix.

How to fold delicately around a foot like damp violets –
not like a damp violet, foot bare and permeable.
Air skinning breath, lungs singing hidden –
how to line the nerves with courage
as the veins in seaweed, trunk, plant, animal.
We are all mycelium-ed, cobwebbed, invincible but always vulnerable,
without which we are not stringing.
This constellation may be there, sometimes as scooped as sun,
as dark as lost night
but a lacing invisible through in over under through.
What if this lacing became expansive in places,
diminished in others, breathing? Do all things breathe?
Is this a practice, a re-ritual or re-imagining of the thread
that on-leads in the unknown?
Courage - to put on from within.
And what - to fumble with hope.
Resilience to re-peat, re-please, re-imagine,
re re re re a tiny song.
Or large, to offer all whether open or not.
A badge, a camellia of the heart,
the lotus of whole and many
and a tiny offering, each one a world to carry
for a moment consecrated, a vision linking
what maybe unsayable seeable voiceable soundable.
As the language is for embroidering through
all elements, materials: blood to earth, flesh to leaf, fur to plankton.

Is courage inbuilt in the snowdrop,
first visitor of the year,
in each opening (we are in spring now)
and in each closing - winter and death,
a cycle of brim-love,
a catch in-breath
to surmount ...

IV

*The speakers are gathering in the amulets and bringing them into close vision
for the writing*

A patterning of touches...

We both said a pattern, a patterning – the amulets are patterning our approach to the cloak; the cloak wears the wild amulets; the wild touches, touches us.

We said this would be a story – so what is our exposition, what our rising action, our rhythm of making, the fast or slow denouement? Our story starts with hope, a dissatisfaction with hope, its futurism, its nowhere-ness. It continues with heart and hearting – and it is an outward gesture rather than the upward gesture of hope. The gesture of courage is a through-motion, a swing, a moving-into-a-stance.

And the gathering of the amulets is a gentle gesture – a recognition, the first moment of relationship: I see you, I bring you, dear unknown thing, to my heart.

The laying out of the amulets, their placing on the calico pockets, bringing them into close vision for the writing, returning them to their now numbered places – here, a strange, quiet love in the act of attending, attending.

V

[The speakers are inhabiting the cloak and are changed, anchored.]

To inhabit, to habit, to wear a habit,
to nun, to monk, to put on a habit, a habit that we wish to become indelible.

What if it comes from outer in the form
of a patterning of living beings in a cycle?
Word-amulets on us, like weather,
an outer web, that ancestors us all.
The weather that is no longer a way to converse but
the anxious changing of all known, for human and all others -
all this is in the habit we put on with the cloak,
willingly and acknowledging that we are indivisible from all other,
but needing our own ‘consecration’,
this motion to envelop(e) and be clothed by beauty.¹¹

The dreamtime of others infiltrated
with our own worship-writing of and to them
into word-beauty and sense-beauty and care-beauty -
then to be awayed for a moment in this vessel
which once swirled on and off leaves us forever touched
and touched by its patterning,
its atoms of servings that bless-praise -
just for that moment.
But that moment can become a memory - a memento in the heart,
the opening heart, to re-visit and re-enter whenever the world shakes,
the outer world, the inner world - which all are there to expand without frontiers,
that are barriers, that are defences
but ways of going, way-paths
to vein out like yesterday’s words
to web-myceliate
like a hammock - at all times the earthing root.

So after a cloaking,
like many a ritual,
one is changed inwardly
with some small charge of beauty and courage.

¹¹ Thinking about our dedication to such an aesthetic, we have been challenged by Rachael Mathews’ radical thinking in her *Rag Manifesto: Making, Folklore and Community*, where she advocates ‘Love not Taste’ in mixing recycled materials and arguing that ‘Personal taste tends to propel you into the same areas over and over again, love is more random.’ p.60

To be anchors to ourselves and feel anchored by all others
so the anchor is both giver and receiver;
in even a tiny way
the delicate pillows of beauty can surround and enter us.

Wait still for a moment - how to prepare?
Or can it be in a sliver of lightning,
an unknown leaf on the shoulder,
deeply penetrated by thought or light brushed without knowing.

VI

*[Having inhabited the cloak, the speakers are drawn into the patient life and courage
of the amulets]*

Courage – is it purely human? What can we borrow from the natural world – from its is-ness, its waiting, its ancient communicating?

What the amulets have given us is a respectfulness, an acceptance of un-knowing. We can see the complexity of a minute stem, how a seedpod gathers at the top as if caught by thread; we can glory in an opaque silver or a bristling red, in the dry other-world texture of quartzite.

Listen, the seeds are calling, the moth is unfolding, the butterfly is rising into blue air, the hawthorn berries are fresh-roasting in spring air, the veins of the skeletal leaf are filling with life. Listen...

VII

*[The speakers call for us to learn courage from the many-more-than-human
in a time of upheaval]*

Fortitude – courage – perseverance.

To transform fear into courage
is a human transformation.
How is it manifesting in the many-more-than-human?

The daffodils shout even with torn lips,
the wood anemones cower thin petalled and advocate following the sun.

The primrose brims light yellow:
the colour of courage

Yet spring arrives in a disrupted climate.
Although all reappear, the cycle is violent,
weather and elements discombobulated.

A shake up.

All is shaken up.

All leads into unknowing.

We have asked to be transformed into unknowing
as a way of being.

Maybe this takes all the courage we can muster.
Maybe the example is in the many-more-than-human.

Adaptation -
which we all all all are doing,
fighting it, accepting it, going with the flow of it.
To bloom with uncertainty
needs a courage cloak
clock/cloak/clock/cloak/clock/cloak.
Time passing and also timeless
Can courage be timeless,
or is it as we have learnt in the re-view, in the hindsight?
What if we could put it on as preparation,
as leaf unfolds even in ash dieback.
Breathing into what is and re-sounding with it.
Lie on the wet earth and feel it courage through you
as if cloaked all the way through.

Open the door as you write.
Let sound, air, other, in
an opening heart
opening heart
opening
heart
cor.

Beholding uncertainty with courage.

VIII

Two cloaks - the visible and the invisible

[The speakers reflect on the visibility or invisibility of courage, and on how the wearer brings their own courage to the cloak.]

Reversibility, dimensions...

We want an exterior surface – which is seen by (belongs to) others, but can only be partially seen by the wearer *courage that can be seen by others*

and an interior surface - which touches, is felt by, the wearer, and is only partially seen by the wearer and is mostly unseen by others

courage that is felt but unseen by others

which symbolically (invisibly) and actually, covers, or cloaks, the wearer in ‘courage’

and leads the wearer towards the phenomenon of courage; a proximity of or to courage.

And there’s the question: what courage, human and the many-more-than-human, does the cloak embody, eg. in its conception, in its making, in its materiality?

As we began to conceive of the cloak as having two opaque layers, an outer layer with embroidered words, and an inner layer with pockets holding amulets of some kind, only just visible, we understood how important it was that the wearer is still discernible underneath the cloak. The wearer brings their courage to touch the cloak; the wearer can only make out the amulets. This double element of the almost-there causes a *cleaving towards*, both ways.^{12, 13}

IX

Pockets of flourishing: towards the many-more-than-human

This is the story of the amulets ...rich, material, vibrant, living beings¹⁴
where *kin'd* & *kin'd* attempt to amulet differently.

[The speakers recount how drawing courage from the many-more-than-human kin led them to the amulets]

¹² We were introduced to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'the body as chiasm or a crossing-over – which combines subjective experience and objective existence' in his unfinished, late essay 'The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining – The Chiasm'. Thomas Baldwin, in his introduction to the essay, paraphrases earlier writing in which Merleau-Ponty gives the example of 'touching one hand with the other hand [...which...]' reveals to us the two dimensions of our "flesh", that it is both a form of experience (tactile experience) and something that can be touched. It is both "touching" and "tangible". Crucially, the relationship is reversible: the hand that touches can be felt as touched, and vice versa, though never at the same time, and it is this 'reversibility' that Merleau-Ponty picks out as 'the essence of flesh.'

However, our effort has been to de-centre the human body, to try to privilege the many-more-than-human. Is this possible? In her PhD thesis, 'Queer (and) Decolonial (and) Feminist Botanical Entanglements: I Am Listening' Storm Greenwood writes: 'In honouring the flowers, materials and my body as equal participants in the co-creation of study, making becomes not something separate to be analysed and measured, but something that is in and of itself a sensorial act of thinking...' (p.85).

The question of what can be visible is also addressed in Robert Newton's writing on the Australian Aboriginal artist, Yhonnie Scarce, who in 2019 created an installation of transparent glass drops in the form of yams to express her people's experience of nuclear testing on Aboriginal lands, in 'Listen to the people who know': Nuclear Colonial Memory in the work of Natalie Harkin and Yhonnie Scarce'.

¹³ We also read Karen Barad's argument about language having too much power: 'How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?' and her questioning of the relations between us and things: 'Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves nor things-behind-phenomena but "things"-in-phenomena. The world *is* intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. That is, it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena comes to matter [...].' In 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter comes to Matter', (p.802, 817)

So the poets would make a cloak instead of words, or a cloak with very few words, and would embed the process of *making as thinking*, as proposed in NSotA's Patchwork Thinking seminars.

¹⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, writes of our place in nature: 'In the indigenous view, humans are viewed as somewhat lesser beings in the democracy of species. We are referred to as the younger brothers of Creation, so like younger brothers we must learn from our elders. Plants were here first and have had a long time to figure things out. They live both above and below ground and hold the earth in place. Plants know how to make food from light and water. Not only do they feed themselves, but they make enough to sustain the lives of all the rest of us. Plants are providers for the rest of the community and exemplify the virtue of generosity, always offering food [...] Many Indigenous peoples share the understanding that we are each endowed with a particular gift, a unique ability.... It is understood that these gifts have a dual nature, though: a gift is also a responsibility. If the bird's gift is song, then it has a responsibility to greet the day with music. It is the duty of birds to sing and the rest of us receive the song as a gift.

Asking what is our responsibility is perhaps also to ask, What is our gift? And how shall we use it?' *Braiding Sweetgrass* (pp.346-7)

What does one need to make an invisible/visible cloak of courage, something to be ritually enclosed in, enveloped in, invisibly and visibly?

And what is it one wants to be cloaked in to feel courage, in all its versions of interpretation?

As always, it starts with an idea, an instruction, an action, imagination.

Once we knew the enquiry was Courage and knew we wanted to attempt ‘courageing’ from the many-more-than-human, we turned to what was around us. Winter, what to find in winter, what process of gathering in the sunken part of the year.

Our loose instruction was to find around 25 objects each, from the outside world, things that were just there, natural things. We gave each other a time, a few weeks, to see what we found. Each object was laid on a wide window seat, the beginning of a collection of whatever was around.

Then one day we gathered them together on the window sill. We had arrived at the magical number of 47 because we had the 47 small tea infuser bags. Garnered for some other project, they became the frames, holders and grid for our random natural objects.

47 took on significance. Research began into all that number represented in history, metaphor, science, folklore, in the end it became the right number. Happenstance and working with what was there. Something given.

So we placed the objects on the flat small bags to create a grid, a framing to work within.

The amulets

1. Lichen, *Parmeliaceae*
2. Sea snail shell, *Neverita duplicata*
3. Trough shell, *Mactridae*
4. Oyster shell, *Ostreidae*
5. Oyster shell II
6. *Viburnum*
7. Owl’s feather, *Strigiformes*
8. Beech mast, open *Fagus*
9. Beech mast, closed
10. Paper plant seed spray, *Fatsia japonica*
11. Sea holly flowerhead and ruff, *Eryngium bourgatii*
12. Fringed willowherb, *Epilobium ciliatum*
13. Black alder catkins, *Alnus glutinosa*
14. Sheep’s wool on a twig
15. English walnut shell, *Juglans regia*

16. Common yarrow stem, *Achillea millefolium*
17. Honesty leaves, *Lunaria annua*
18. Pearly everlasting flowers, *Anaphalis margaritacea*
19. Common St. John's Wort, *Hypericum perforatum*
20. Tussock moth, *Lymantriinae erebidae*
21. Peacock butterfly, *Aglaia io nymphalidae*
22. Grey willow leaf, *Salix cinerea*
23. Fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*
24. Common fig, *Ficus carica*
25. Red-stemmed feather moss, *Pleurozium schreberi*
26. Scots pine cone, *Pinus sylvestris*
27. Charcoal
28. Quartzite
29. Pebble
30. Bean pod, *Phaseolus coccineus*
31. Tasmanian blue gum leaf, *Eucalyptus globulus*
32. *Fuchsia magellanica*
33. Cow parsnip, *Heracleum sphandylum*
34. Fungi on twig, *Teloschistaceae*
35. Scots pine leaves, *Pinus sylvestris*
36. Mollusk
37. Beeswax
38. Cornflower, *Centaurea cyanus*
39. Lesser knapweed, *Centaurea nigra*
40. Hedge bindweed, *Calystegia sepium*
41. Sheep's wool and plant detritus
42. Common hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*
43. Common ivy, *Hedera helix*
44. Candle larkspur, *Delphinium elatum*
45. Common poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*
46. Greywacke stone (sedimentary)
47. Sea comb, *Plocamium cartilaginum*

Then we waited how to approach these natural objects and find a way to 'amulet' them. To find a way to honour and invest in each in ways we could. Large histories of amulets were looked at and one felt in the

long line of honouring the natural world and also struggling for something unusual to bring to them, something we as poets could bring to them.

We evolved a solo attention practice for each:

Sitting beside each other, courage notebooks with us, the object laid ceremoniously before us, we addressed four approaches to every object:

We asked, how is it ‘couraging’?

We would write as if from the perspective of the object.

We would make five-sensical observations - sight, taste, smell, touch, hear.

We would voice the imagined sounds of the object..

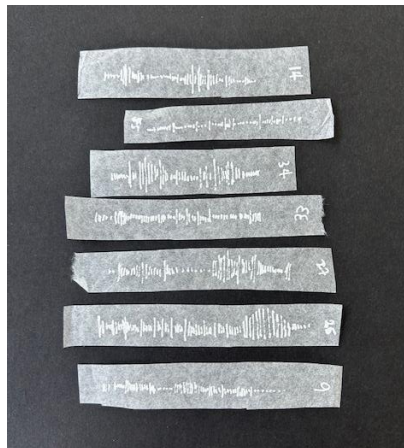
To write intently, together in silence, about 47 small objects was our mission over several weeks. A bond of time and intent, a real investment in attention and believing and leaning/learning with the objects ensued. After each writing we would read aloud whatever had flowed improvisationally onto the page. Then we sang, chanted, moo’d, hummed whatever sound warble resulted from the fourth approach. This became our part to carry forward. The sound wave captured on the phone, its pattern of shorter and longer lines, its visual language, became our measure to carry forward.¹⁵

Each precious object (because yes with this attention each one had become beloved and honoured and now precious), was going to become part of our garment, our imagined Cloak of Courage.

Each amulet would be placed within its own pocket and attached to the cloak.

Within each pocket we would also place the imagined sound of each we had created.

The tiny sound wave was drawn on thin handmade paper in white pen, to be placed with its individual object in its pocket.



The objects lay on their bags on the window sill over many weeks. Many of them changed, dried up, changed colour, became more fragile, hardened, as they will continue to do after being sewn into their

¹⁵ There is always the problem of anthropomorphism and ventriloquizing in such an enterprise. In *Thus Spoke the Plant* Monica Gagliano distinguishes between empathy and listening, arguing that our ‘availability to truly listen by feeling the other as we meet is not empathy, which bears upon the empathiser projecting and depositing himself into the other in order to rediscover himself--a form of narcissism [...]. Instead, knowing by deep listening has the quality of perfect surprise, pertinent to the moment of the encounter...’ (p.17). We recognise our form of listening and voicing can only be an experiment, a combination of imagination and concern.

pockets and cloak, some natural transforming will be continuing on and on as they slowly evolve, change, dissolve, disappear, leaving their imprint as any talisman will.

The room they were in has doors open to the outside so the winds and rain were nearby and sometimes entering. They were laid out altar style, we were careful, as almost all the objects were fragile. But we were not alone. Insects also came in with them or found their way to traverse over them. Then a bigger disruption. When *kin'd* was away, a squirrel fell down the chimney and was later caught running around the house. It must have run ramshod through the objects in its pandemonium to get free and it was there for a few days, trying to find things to eat so it scattered objects and nuts and shells were broken open and fingered and gnawed on. *kin'd* arrived back, found the dismantled altar and cried out - then smiled - how appropriate that an animal had added its potential to the objects in a many-more-than-human way of being. We had to laugh and incorporate this extra step of the ritual!

So here we were with reams of writing about each amulet. How could we condense or find a way to find the essence of our exploration of courage? Back to the cloak and its evolving form...

X

The making of the cloak

[The speakers meet the cloak's maker, the making begins.]

We needed a maker, someone to make our concept material and present. We knew someone would arrive and then, just there, hiding in plain sight, Larch Rose, a designer and maker¹⁶ so an asking and an offering and on acceptance she came alongside us in the conceiving, contouring and forming of this cloak of courage from our imagination. Breathless and smiling she considered courage, sourced materials for us to choose from, shapes to try on, ideas of pattern and arrangement to consider.

We met and touched fabric and thread and unfolded, lay out the prototype on the ground, put it on, turned around in it; drew it on small paper with the words as rays on the cloak's panels... What was our scale, should the word-embroidery thread be shiny or matt, should the pockets be this way or that, would the pockets form a grid, where would they start – on the shoulder, would they start at the front and work their way round? We all said, yes, shoulder darts, yes, a small collar. We had thought of having fourteen lines for a sonnet on the cloak. Too much embroidering! So we said seven lines because seven is still good. So the inner layer has the pockets; the outer layer is embroidered with seven lines drawn from our writings but ah, no, let one line be embroideries of seven amulets, each chosen by Larch Rose.

Larch Rose tried embroidering a line, with matt thread, with shiny thread. We all said matt. We said a classic serif font, but not that one, this one: Minion Pro Italic.

We tried the placing the amulets inside the pockets: the pockets were too small for the amulets, needed to be re-sized, tried, tested – here was the courage between us – to make something of wild beauty, a carrier of honour – and so much time taken to cut out, make pockets with ironed and sewn edges, hour after hour, a slow encroachment of couraging as we saw each step into this enterprise, en-couragement when the effort overwhelms.

And then, how to find the lines of words for the outer cloak!

The words are forming, the cloak is forming,
the pockets are imagined, the cloak is forming, the pockets

¹⁶ *kin'd's* step-daughter

are going to line the panels, the amulets are going to touch the wearer's heart.

The cloak is imagined, it is a half circle, two half circles on a rod,
it will be hung from a high place, it has a small collar,
we wrap a sheet round our shoulders, we feel the cloak, the cloak must be
light, the cloak must be sculptural,
the cloak must be a swirl and a swish with the pockets over the heart.

Two layers of vintage organdie, opaque: it is magisterial, ministerial,
simple and with a quiet formality,
in contrast to the chaos of climate change and eco-destruction,¹⁷
and to the anyway decomposition of the amulets.

The colour needs to be softened, there is tea, a bath of tea,
the fabric is dipped, it is perfect.

The words are coming again, the sewing is coming, the words are thread,
the thread is embroidered, the cloak is becoming,
the words sail down the panels, seven panels
and the pockets inside with the amulets –
a feather, a stone, a moth, a walnut shell, some sheep's wool –
sewn inside the pockets, we can see them nestled there,
an outline, a form we can at once perceive and imagine.

The fabric is finished, the words are thread, the threads make lines,
there are the promised six lines and the amulets are drawn and sewn.
The amulets are thread, thread threading courage.

The words are coming, and only six lines to find. Each line to be whole on its own but also to form part of a poem if read in order.

We devoted some time to examining our various writings.

We had invited responses from our fellow NSotA cohort to answer three questions about what courage meant to them and we wanted to incorporate some of those; we imagined putting their writings on a scroll at the cloak's presentation.

Then we excavated phrases and intense parts from our own and each other's amulet words.
We presented to each other skeleton phrases that we picked out of our own and each other's extensive writings and came together to see if we had overlaps. There were a few, and we began the painstaking work of paring back to find the few lines that contained as much as they could, but also containing a simplicity ... It was truly hard and took a few meetings and changings and compromising and agreeings, dismissings and simplifying.

¹⁷ Our courage-work here is deliberately not a narrative of loss and ruin of nature at human hands. A fascinating article by Margaret Ronda, 'Mourning and Melancholia at the End of Nature' focuses on Juliana Spahr's long elegiac poem, 'Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache' (2005), which despairs in its 'guilty recognition that cannot lead to reparative ethics'; our effort of 'couraging' in the presence of the many-more-than-human is an attempt at a kind of neutrality: we are here now, this wild is here now. What is it asking of us, but courage?

We arrived at our six lines and gave them to Larch Rose. We handed over. Later in the week we changed small things and then it was out of our hands. Meanwhile, Larch Rose spent time with the amulets, drawing and inking, to find the amulets that she wanted to embroider on the central panel of the cloak.

Here again is reciprocity¹⁸: the feeling brought to us by the wild objects, what they wanted of us, how the wild objects met the human making. Here are some of our skeleton lines (the numbers correspond to the previous amulet list):

1. **Lichen** - cooperative, symbiotic, relational

3. **Trough shell** - *my making is a hollowing and a holding*
the colours fade and bed from orchid to blue to fawn

4. **Shell with hole** – *I have lustre, I have layers, a defined shape. I arc, split, resume*

5. **Oyster shell** - razors, then a soothing whisper

6. **Down feather** - ready to fly on a breath, to soar in wind, land in grace
I am symbol and also the bird

8. **Beech mast** – premise of a future

9. **Beech mast II** - courage in the discarded
an outer cloak for inner heart

10. **Old man's beard** - over-unders of joy.

14. **Sheep's wool caught on a twig** – (1) *allow your host to hold you* (2) *hold on tight but without tension*
(3) *allow new interpretations of your purpose.*

16. **Yarrow stem** - wings gestle

18. **Small flower with complex leaves** - *half my blooms are lost, and there is more space now for reflection*

20. **Moth** – *we don't bother with the abstract question of Time like you humans do. Yet we know all about waiting, waiting and becoming*

21. **Peacock butterfly** - a surprise light
a soft carapace of courage

26. **Pine cone** - *My pattern is not incidental nor ornamental – and I know the exact moment for release*

27. **Charcoal** - to go dense and yet be cobweb

30. **Bean pod** - keeping in simple quietness

32. **Dried fuchsia** - *I continue. I extend. And only now you see me*

33. **Cow parsnip** - radial joy

¹⁸ We are trying to de-centre our human role in acts of reciprocity, believing also that reciprocity itself brings de-centering. We like the idea of 'reciproesis' discussed in *Counter-Desecration: A Glossary for Writing within the Anthropocene*, in which 'Reciproesis is our doing in response to listening. Reciproesis arises from the understanding that all making, all doing, is done, in reciprocity with the Land. [...] (p.58), original emphasis

34. **Lichen-covered twig** - species entertaining species

vast and tiny measures in the wild fruitfulness

my ancient power of life-ing, my force in every stretching, chirping spore

43. **Ivy** - a stem as rudder, us as boat

43. **Sea comb** - slink around, up and under-over strike out and curl back,
move onwards, look outwards

44. **Flat lilac coloured flower** - a message from beauty

From all the words, these lines assemble...

**an outer cloak for inner heart
a message from beauty
a snowdrop, lichen, larch
the amulets symbols (indecipherable sound)
a patterning of touches
a hollowing and a holding
courage, a dare of love**

and become the lines we will embroider on the cloak.

XII

*[The speakers imagine a Ritual for the presentation of the Cloak of Courage.]*¹⁹

To create a new ritual.
To create a new ritual for courage.
To create a new ritual for a cohort.
To create a new ritual with its boundaries of time and place and people.

Care preparations for months.
Care-full making of cloak of courage.

17. Rituals surround us. To find a new one is a mixture of the repeated and the authentic moment. We were reminded of the cloak ritual created for Derek Jarman:

To be sainted: Derek Jarman, film maker, writer, gardener, was made a saint on 22nd September, 1991, by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, in his garden by the sea under the shadow of the Dungeness nuclear power station. Wearing a gold lamé robe, his head covered in a sparkling cover, Jarman was led out to a throne-like chair placed on a carpet laid on the shingle. A ceremony took place, the Sisters' habits blowing out in the wind. A hymn, an incense thurible swung and there was a call to 'Reach out and touch, handle for a moment, lay on our hands and venerate...Hail, Saint Derek' as he stood and turned, arms outstretched regally. Touching and venerating a person dying of HIV at that time was courageous.

To be cloaked is an ancient and modern, visible and invisible way to partake in a ritual
with parameters of time - speed and place.
A moment in time.

An open space.
A line to walk.
One behind the other.
Objects to cross
river, mountain, desert, sea, forest
air earth fire water
in one footstep.

Instructions to line up one behind the other.
A line moving down the centre of the space.
Could be the long writing to be walked on no shoes
with a first symbolic/metaphor step to be in imaginative time.

To walk forward in turn
listening to a whispered recitation of the cloak's lines.

The cloak placed on, receiver turned clockwise to the four directions.
Look up look down look forward to meet eyes.
Hand gestures hand over hand in from my heart to yours and reverse.
Remove cloak.
Show the inside of cloak in changeover.
Receiver moves forward to pick up 'angel' and part side to side to fill up edges.
So by the end in a circle.

Cloak laid in centre.

Take angel turn up other way and
all say *take courage* and a cheer!

Everything at a speed.
Time is sped up.
Imagine it is in slow motion
that the ceremony is slow and timeless
and speed it up
like lightning like a heartbeat like an intake of breath a pinprick, a presence.
A light transformation, a little surprise.

A quiet call to action.

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Drawing on front cover by Larch Rose.

Appendix

In January 2024 we asked three questions of the NSotA cohort

1. What, for you, is the colour, form or shape of courage?
2. What is the first instance of courage that you remember, even if you didn't know what it was at the time?
3. What is the future of courage in the Anthropocene?

This is a selection of the NSotA participants' responses:

Form, colour or shape

[Courage is] a snowdrop; a larch tree.

[Courage has] a shiny exterior, one that catches the light and glints dazzlingly when it is observed by others.

[Courage is] something that is so hard to break when you have cut away everything else – like a root/kernel or central core – thread – the bit that won't let you get cut down.

Colours: black, brown or purple, deep maroon, orange warm and a bit fiery, orange, blue, red and black, maybe red, orangey-red, beige.

Shapes: something fleeting and hard to get hold of: moving and transforming, changing shape, malleable, gloopy and able to fit the shapes of the circumstances that surround it and get into cracks and holes; a blue amorphous form; a steely rod.

[Courage] is sharing what you don't think you have.

[Courage] is staying in love with each other, all others.

The future of courage

That people have protested and fought for change before [...] is the source of courage that we must draw from as we move forwards.

Challenging status quo – disruption, even if you are the only one standing.

...acting with consciousness [...] with every person in every interaction ...

...nature wants to repair and we can assist in our daily interactions.

'Courage calls to courage everywhere' (Fawcett banner).

The future of courage has to be found in community...courage is [not] something you muster on your own.

[Courage] is the ability to stay true to one's values and convictions in the face of significant opposition...It may require risking everything that is held dear ...