

BLACCINE

3RD EDITION

A MEDITATION

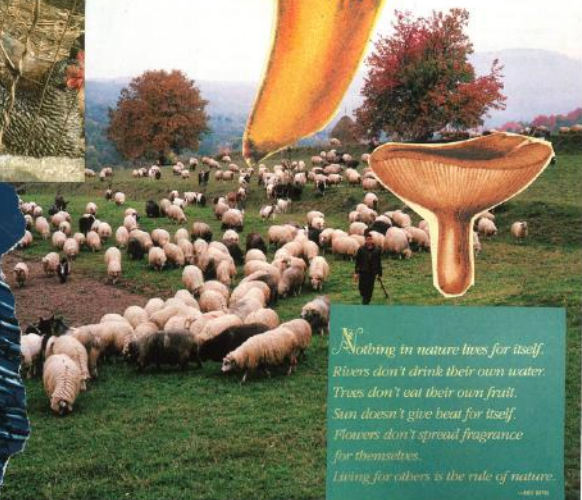
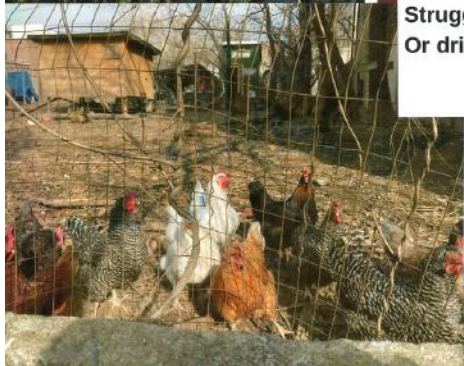
ON MUTUAL AID

Kennedy McDaniel




There is nothing alien
About nature.
Nature
Is all that exists.
It's the earth
And all that's on it.
It's the universe
And all that's in it.
It's God,
Never at rest.
It's you,
Me,
Us,
Them,
Struggling upstream
Or drifting down.

- Octavia E. Butler



*Nothing in nature lives for itself.
Rivers don't drink their own water.
Trees don't eat their own fruit.
Sun doesn't give heat for itself.
Flowers don't spread fragrance
for themselves.
Living for others is the rule of nature.*

- BEN WISE



Perhaps they could tell us

something new about

understanding

and

saving

all of wildlife.



The interconnectedness of
being is who we are.

Why are we here? To practice interdependency.

When I first joined the Bell House Community Build, I had no idea that I was signing up for a life-altering experience. All I knew was that a senior in my community was in need and it was my personal and professional responsibility to help her. In 2020, Ms. Bell began to visit the community center where I worked. She attended our classes for seniors, like digital literacy and line dancing, and it was clear that engaging with us added an element of positive social connection to her life. During that time, staff members at the community center helped her apply to different programs and resources that would help fix up her house – she had been a homeowner in the Greenmount West neighborhood for nearly 30 years.

After being scammed by unscrupulous contractors in 2017, Ms. Bell's home was left in shambles. There was little drywall. You could see straight through the studs in her walls and joists in her ceilings. Her kitchen had no permanent flooring – just sheets of Wonderboard subflooring. The house lacked sufficient insulation. She couldn't properly heat her home and would bury herself under covers in the winter, fully clothed, to stay warm.

She reached out to our neighborhood community association for help. They told her nothing could be done and advised her to sell her home. My co-workers and I helped her apply to city programs that support senior homeowners, but she was denied or placed on the bottom of a waitlist with hundreds of other seniors before her. To see her name in print – Rosalind Bell, Waitlist, #329 – we felt hopeless. She felt dejected. We didn't know what to do.

In September 2020, our team walked through her house and truly saw for the first time how she was living. No senior, no human, deserves to live in unsafe, unhealthy conditions. My boss, Ms. Kisha, had to take a moment to leave Ms. Bell's house. She was overwhelmed with thoughts of her own mother and grandmother, and what it would be like for them to live in those conditions.

That day, she told our team of five something I'll never forget. *Once you see something, you can't unsee it.* We had seen Ms. Bell. Her plight and her living conditions had been made fully visible to us. And we could not ignore it. Vulnerability is terribly frightening, and Ms. Bell had the strength to be vulnerable with us. She asked us for help, even when she had asked many others and been denied previously. She opened herself to interdependency despite being hurt before. In response, we, too, opened ourselves to interdependency.

Our team of five had no experience with building, construction, or restoration. What we *did* have was a sense of dedication to our community, deep concern for Ms. Bell, and faith in the combined skill sets we were bringing to the table. Most importantly, we had a shared purpose and vision.

A non-profit director, a youth program manager, two community artists, and me. Together, we launched the Bell House Community Build and set off a chain of events that would change each of our lives for the better.

ONCE
YOU SEE
SOMETHING,

YOU CAN'T
UNSEE IT.

Agaricus muscarius

Agaricus violaceus

researchers have uncovered

perhaps the single most

important factor in

The

world

lives for itself

Agaricus tabilis

Agaricus

Partnership is giving, taking, learning,
teaching, offering the greatest possible
benefit while doing the least possible harm.
Partnership is mutualistic symbiosis.
Partnership is life.
Any entity, any process that cannot or
should not be resisted or avoided must
somehow be partnered.
Partner one another. Partner diverse
communities.
Partner life.
Partner any world that is your home.
Partner God.
Only in partnership can we thrive, grow,
Change. Only in partnership can we live.

- Octavia E. Butler

There is no other life than the life of nature

Agaricus ostreatus

Why are we here? To partner with one another.

The Bell House Community Build was a mutual aid initiative that subverted gentrification by investing in the homes of legacy residents. Our goal was to restore the home of a legacy resident, Ms. Bell, so she could age in place with dignity and grace. In a span of eight months, we mobilized over 100 volunteers and 140 individual donors. Our volunteer group was made up of folks of all ages, races, experiences, and backgrounds. This effort was entirely grassroots, and we raised \$40,000 to support the restoration of Ms. Bell's home. Every week, new or returning volunteers would give their time, energy, and skills. Whether they were painting, plumbing, or posting about our work on social media – it was amazing to see my community unite under a shared goal.

As I continued to engage with the build, it transformed from a community project and part of my graduate thesis to an ongoing spiritual experience. I knew Ms. Bell personally, so it was no question that I would do what was in my power to help her. But to see strangers who had never met this woman show up to volunteer, week after week, in support of her. . . their selfless actions both inspired me and sparked my curiosity. What motivated them to join this mutual aid effort? And, more broadly, what motivates us as human beings to engage in mutual aid?

Human beings are human animals. Drawing analogous inspiration from the world around me, I began to examine fungi and animal life. After all, who knows more about surviving and thriving than Mother Nature herself?

We have more in common with fungi than you may think. In fact, humans share nearly 50 percent of our DNA with fungi. When an asteroid strike collided with our planet 65 million years ago, 70% of all life on Earth was destroyed. Plant life suffered and decayed, but all was not lost.

These were perfect conditions for our friend, the fungi, to thrive. Depending on your perspective, fungi come at the beginning of things or at the end of things. They are natural decomposers. When plants and animals die, fungi swoop in to begin the process of decomposition and rebirth. They break down organic matter, transforming it into useful nutrients for new plants to grow. Without fungi, death would pile up on our planet. Through all major extinction events in the history of our planet, the organisms that have partnered with fungi are the organisms that have survived. Take, for example, our relationship with yeast or penicillin. In the Middle Ages, beer was more commonly consumed than water. Why? Because beer contains yeast, a fungus that kills bacteria lurking in unsafe water sources. In 1928, Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, a fungus that has saved millions of lives during bacteria-related epidemics. We owe much of our survival as humans throughout history to fungi.

Fungi don't have an affinity for humans alone – they support all life on our planet. When you think of fungi, perhaps a mushroom comes to mind. Mushrooms are the fruiting body of fungi. Beneath the mushroom, growing miles and miles underground, is mycelium – a marvelous network of roots that serve as the information highway for surrounding plant life. Plants can communicate with each other through mycelium. Additionally, plants use mycelium to pass nutrients from one plant to another. If an oak tree is growing strong and healthily, but its offspring are not, that oak tree can send nutrients to its offspring using mycelium as its pathway for nutrient redistribution. Mycelium stores carbon underground, releasing it for plants to use when needed. Scientists say that up to 92% of plants have a mycorrhizal relationship in the soil, meaning that plant relationships with mycelium are symbiotic. Mycelium directs nutrients like carbon and phosphorus to plants. In return, plants will give photosynthates such as sugars and carbohydrates to mycelium. When plants and fungi partner, both parties benefit as a result.

So, what does mycelium have to do with me? I don't want to sound vain, but I couldn't help but find similarities between the vast networks of mycelium growing underground and the network of individuals who joined the Bell House Community Build. Like the delicate, intertwined threads of hypha that make up mycelium, our friends, neighbors, and even strangers connected with each other, one at a time, uniting under a shared purpose: strengthening Ms. Bell and her natural habitat. With speed and efficacy, our network spread key information and communications through word of mouth and social media. Ms. Bell's story and our community initiative were shared far and wide. In a mycorrhizal fashion, we reached out to the living beings around us, signaling that we needed assistance. We asked our neighbors if they had nutrients to share. In response, resources began to flow through us and into Ms. Bell's home. Dozens of sheets of drywall, toilets for every bathroom, and over 2,000 square feet of flooring were among the in-kind donations that we received.

Before the build, Ms. Bell's house was in a state of disrepair. It was decaying. It wasn't fit for human habitation. Over time, and with the help and care of many loving hands, the house transformed from a site of degradation to a site of rebirth, renewal, and regeneration. Just like fungi, we didn't look at this house and see its current state as its end. We saw it as an opportunity to begin anew. To restore fully. We reflected on the resources we each had and gave to this effort what we could.

Like row homes that line a block, we are deeply connected. Our beloved ancestor Maya Angelou said that "a society is only as healthy as its sickest citizen and only as wealthy as its most deprived." Our success as a collective species in a shared community is dependent in part on individual wellbeing and how we care for those who are most vulnerable. By supporting Ms. Bell as an individual, we were able to strengthen our community as a whole.

Fungi don't go out of their way to support all of life on our planet. They do it naturally, by virtue of being fungi. It's in their nature – fungi, plants, animals. When we realize how deeply interconnected and interdependent we are as living organisms, we better understand the individual and collective responsibility that we hold as human animals: responsibility for ourselves, for each other, and for our shared environment.

Fungi, microscopic teachers that they are, have laid out a perfect blueprint for mutual aid. Mutual aid and partnership are not just aspects of life on earth: they are the reason we are all here today. I am writing this and you are reading this because billions and billions of living organisms throughout history worked together to bring us to this very moment. Isn't that magnificent? The inner workings of our universe take my breath away and remind me that nothing is accidental or coincidental. We were destined to be here together, you and I. Will we link arms, partner one another, and partner life itself? Or will we compete with each other, fighting to the death over artificial scarcity? To me, the choice is simple. I choose you. I choose community. I choose partnership.

**NOTHING IN
NATURE
LIVES FOR
ITSELF.**

**LIVING FOR
OTHERS IS
THE RULE
OF NATURE.**



By dancing in a figure eight, a worker bee with primo information on a good nectar location tells the others how to find it. *Harvard University Press*



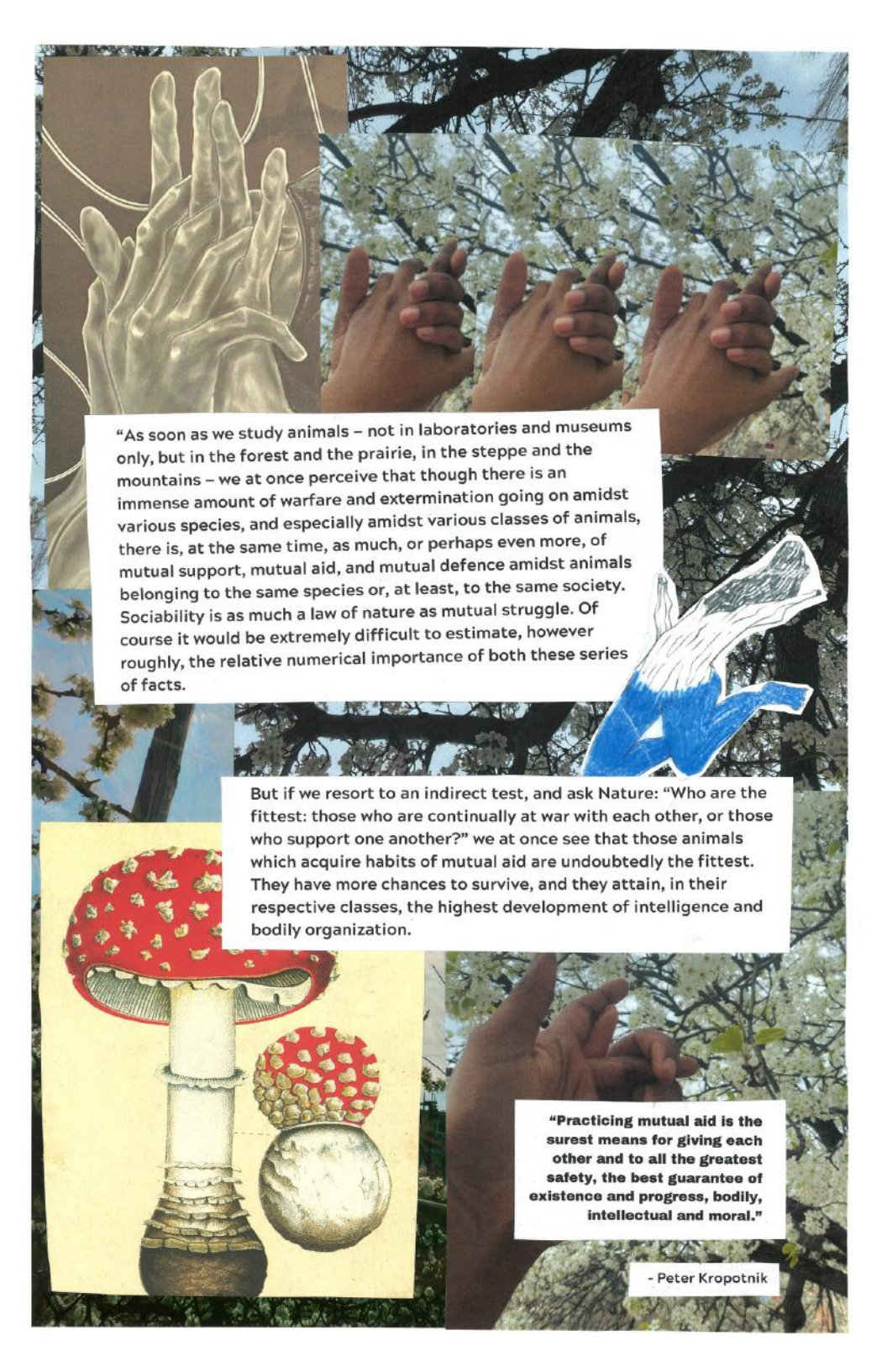
"Back in the early days
our species had been warned
What is really required is a deliberate
reflection
imagination
and
feeling
that are beautiful in their own right."



Foxglove



This is how it begins
"The universe opens up" and reminds us that
we can learn much about ourselves when we take a chance and make ourselves dependent
with nature.
To live like this is a celebration more beautiful than you imagined



"As soon as we study animals – not in laboratories and museums only, but in the forest and the prairie, in the steppe and the mountains – we at once perceive that though there is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on amidst various species, and especially amidst various classes of animals, there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defence amidst animals belonging to the same species or, at least, to the same society. Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle. Of course it would be extremely difficult to estimate, however roughly, the relative numerical importance of both these series of facts.

But if we resort to an indirect test, and ask Nature: "Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?" we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization.

"Practicing mutual aid is the surest means for giving each other and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual and moral."

- Peter Kropotnik



The first phase of the work is

to extend ourselves.

Purpose
Unifies us:
It focuses our dreams,
Guides our plans,
Strengthens our efforts.
Purpose
Defines us,
Shapes us,
And offers us
Greatness.

- Octavia E. Butler

Giving up something is one way we sustain a commitment to the collective well-being. Our willingness to make sacrifice reflects our awareness of interdependency.

- bell hooks

**COMMUNITIES SUSTAIN LIFE ...
THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE
TO LEARN THE ART OF LOVING
THAN IN COMMUNITY.**

Love lays the foundation for the
constructive building of
community with strangers. The
love we make in community
stays with us wherever we go.

- bell hooks

- bell hooks

*"show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving?
show me your feet. Are they wounded in service?
show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?"*
Archbishop Fulton Sheen

Your work an all that u do for
mankind will not go unrewarded. I
declare an decree a physical
blessing, a financial blessing, as
well as wisdom from the Lord. Do
have a tremendously, spectacular
day as was as weekend, starting
right now, in Jesus Name. Amen!
Amen! Amen! Hallelujah!
HALLELUJAH! Hallelujah!
ANYHOW! Smile, Ms. Bell



THE ANSWER
TO OUR
PROBLEMS
IS EACH
OTHER

**A victim of God may,
Through learning and adaption,
Become a partner of God,
A victim of God may,
Through forethought and planning,
Become a shaper of God.
Or a victim of God may,
Through shortsightedness and fear,
Remain God's victim,
God's plaything,
God's prey.**

- Octavia E. Butler

**WE ARE CALLED TO BE ARCHITECTS
OF THE FUTURE,**

NOT ITS VICTIMS.

- R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Why are we here? To shape our present and design our future.

For many of us, work dominates our lives and our society. I can't stand the term work-life balance, as if work deserves 50% of our time on Earth and the remainder of our precious life – family, friends, community, self-fulfillment, rest, partners, time in nature, travel, learning – are worth so little of us. My friends and I often commiserate over the shadow that work casts upon our lives: we work all day, we sleep, we repeat. By the time we do household chores on the weekends and take care of our many adult responsibilities, it seems we have no time for ourselves or our loved ones. It's the capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist society that we live in – from our lived experiences, it seems that so little is within our control.

My relationship with work and with time shifted as I increased my dedication to community. This past year, I've been working part-time while being a full-time graduate student. Every second of my day was accounted for: I was either occupied or I was relaxing after being constantly occupied. Once the build started, the precious free time I had was sucked up by Saturday Build Days, constant social media posting, volunteer coordination, donation requests, and countless other tasks that needed to be accomplished each week. I was busy as a bee!

Would you believe me if I told you this has been the most positive and transformative period of my life? I found that the more time I gave to this community initiative, the more time I had to give. Time is finite but ultimately meaningless. I felt like Jesus with His loaves and fish. I learned to give, and give selflessly. Yes, I was tired. This eight-month process was not easy. But every step I took in the direction of mutual aid fed my spirit. I was an individual feeding into a collective effort.

Many others gave their time, their energy, their skills. Their love. This true feeling of community and unity gave me a sense of purpose and renewed my energy. This was Work. Not work like 9-5, for a paycheck, because we live in a society. But Work. Work that is anointed. Work that creates community and ensures individual and collective success. Loving Work. Divine Work.

Khalil Gibran wrote, "you work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth." While The Prophet has been a go-to read of mine for years, his passage 'On Work' never quite sunk in with me. That is, until I began Working on the build. Suddenly, I understood his call to Work and to Work with love. There's a spiritual fulfillment and appreciation of interdependency to Working that work oftentimes lacks. Unfortunately, work is intentionally designed to distract us from our Divine Work - from the real reason we are here.

**It doesn't have to be this way.
Together, we can do things differently.**

When I think about Divine Work, I think about the constant, vital work of bees. Do you know why we say 'busy as a bee?' Because bees are some of the most diligent, disciplined, and in-demand life forms we have the fortune of witnessing. Honeybees, in particular, have tons of jobs that are necessary for their colonies to thrive – and that are necessary for the rest of life on this planet to thrive as well. Three types of bees make up a single hive: the queen, the worker, and the drone. They each play a role that leads to their communal success – or downfall. I'm used to seeing bees drift from flower to flower, searching for pollen.

While these bees have the role of foraging, other work for bees include: guarding the hive and warning other bees of danger, cleaning the hive and thousands of cells within it, attending to the queen, feeding baby bees, shaping new wax cells, regulating the temperature of the hive, and even performing the duties of an undertaker (removing deceased bee bodies from within the hive). Bees rotate through these positions and aren't stuck with one job for too long. In the life cycle of a bee, there is always plenty to do!

To me, honey bees and their colonies perfectly exemplify the spirit of mutuality, mutual aid, and community. Thousands of bees living in one hive exist together as a superorganism. Each individual bee makes up a larger animal: the colony. Queens, workers, and drones cannot survive independently of their colony. They thrive as individuals when they embrace interdependency. Bees don't hesitate to share food or nutrients with one another. When they find a great location for pollen while foraging, they're quick to share their sweet spot with others. The queen bee plays an important role in the hive, but she isn't a tyrant: colonies favor collective decision-making.

What do bees have to do with the build? We can learn a lot about community building, individual and collective action, and mutual aid from our buddy, the bee. What is a hive mind if not a shared sense of purpose and awareness of interdependence? Just like a colony of bees, we united as a community under a common goal. There were many jobs for workers in this project: coordinating volunteers, installing flooring, requesting donations, installing drywall and insulation, fundraising, plumbing, documentation, and so much more. And we didn't subscribe to hierarchical leadership. We understood that each of us brought a level of expertise to the community build, and we took turns learning from and teaching one another.

My fascination with mutual aid stems from my belief in the power of community. Take the build, for example. Local politicians, city and state resources, and other systemic structures that should have been in place for Ms. Bell failed her. Our community came together, stepped in, and fully restored her home in a matter of months. In the beginning, we had so many doubters. People who said no, who said it couldn't be done.

"She should just sell the house."

"What are you going to do if you can't raise the money?"

"You'll never raise that amount of money."

At times, it was hard to even believe in ourselves. But we stuck it out and we stuck together. We achieved our goal. The old systems didn't work, so we created a new one. The capitalist society we live in forces us into silos where we work in misery and feed into endless cycles of doom and gloom perpetuated by mass media. It's so easy to feel alone.

We are not alone. You are not alone.

Our power as individuals is amplified when we come together in community. We can transform our world if we reject capitalist ideology and embrace ourselves and one another. Imagine the future we can create if we unite in a spirit of mutual aid and interdependency in each of our communities across the globe. That's the future I want to live in.

Do you?

WHAT

FUTURE

DO YOU

WANT TO

LIVE IN?

A 10x10 grid of letters forming a word search puzzle. The letters are arranged in a repeating pattern of 'M', 'E', 'M', 'O', 'R', 'I', 'A', 'M', 'E', 'M'.

gent strategies are ways for humans to practice complexity and grow the future through relatively simple interactions.

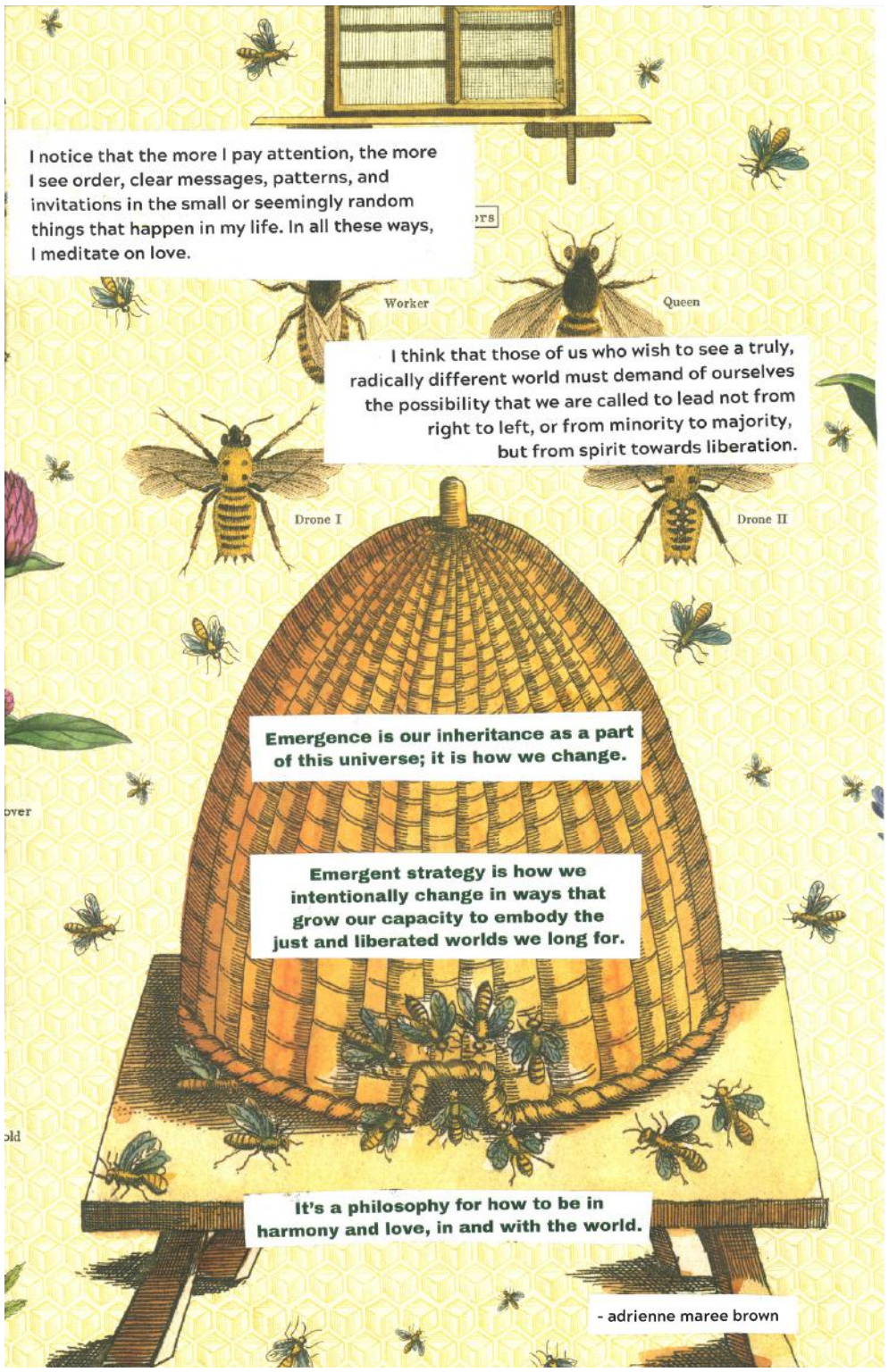
that
cal mass
shows us
critical,
can be

A close-up photograph of many bees on a honeycomb. The bees are densely packed, and their individual actions, such as moving and interacting with the cells, collectively create a complex pattern of activity across the entire honeycomb structure. This visual metaphor represents how simple interactions at the individual level can lead to complex, emergent behavior at the system level.

is a way that all
see the world in
kening us to the
e all around us.



geance is beyond what the sum of its
 parts could ever imagine. A group of
 pillars or nymphs might not see flight
 in their future, but it's inevitable.
 It's destiny.



I notice that the more I pay attention, the more I see order, clear messages, patterns, and invitations in the small or seemingly random things that happen in my life. In all these ways, I meditate on love.

I think that those of us who wish to see a truly, radically different world must demand of ourselves the possibility that we are called to lead not from right to left, or from minority to majority, but from spirit towards liberation.

Emergence is our inheritance as a part of this universe; it is how we change.

Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.

It's a philosophy for how to be in harmony and love, in and with the world.

- adrienne maree brown

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THANK YOU.
LET'S STAY CONNECTED!



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