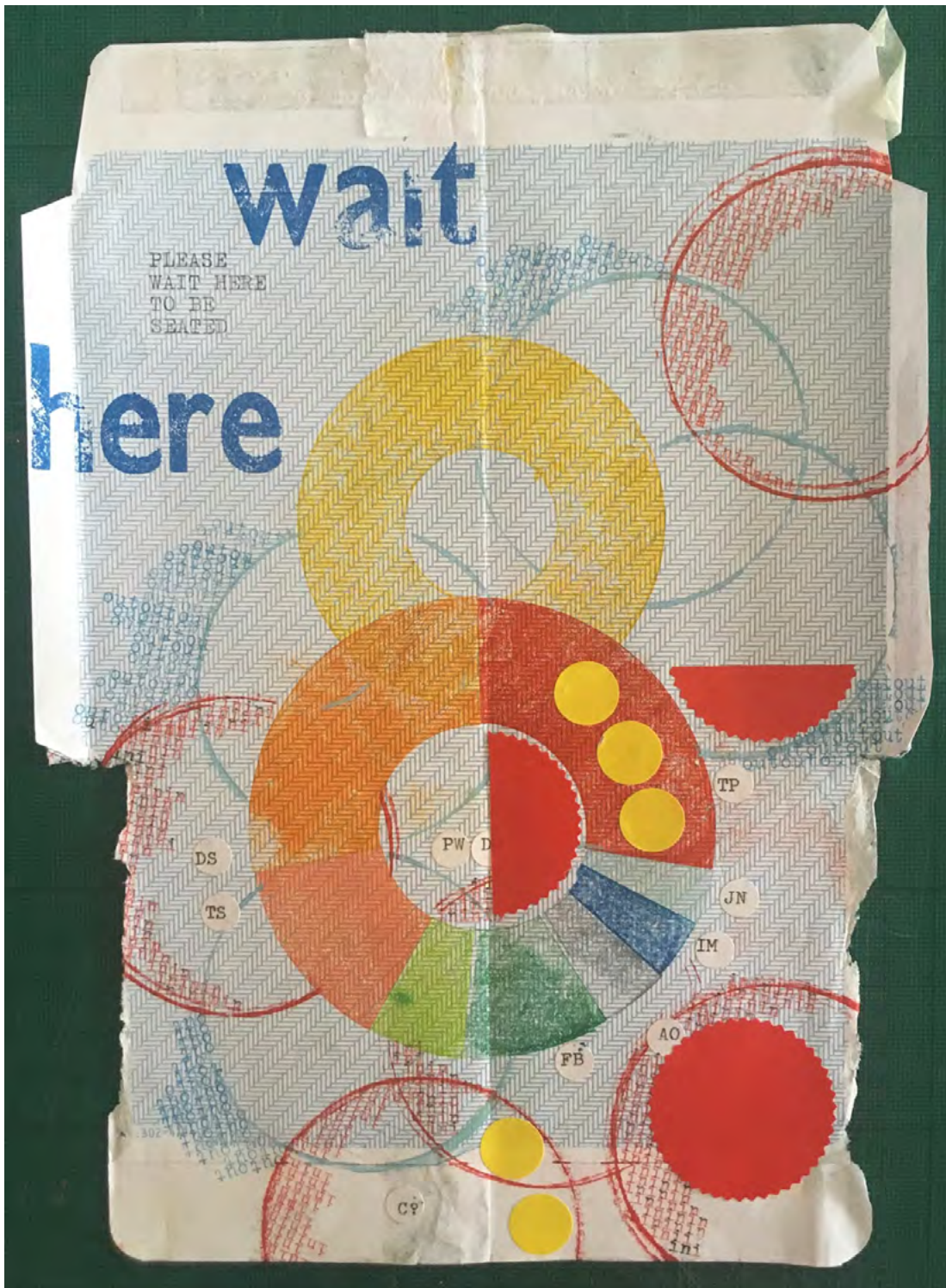


ON THE MEND

Care, repair and breakage





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WE ALL NEED A BREAK

Introducing 'On the mend'

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WE ALL NEED A BREAK: INTRODUCING 'ON THE MEND'

Ursula K Frederick, Tracy Ireland, Monica Andrew and Kerry Martin

When first setting out to edit a volume on care and repair it seemed like the world, in so many and varied ways, was in need of serious attention. Although many of the issues confronting us were not new, the increasingly devastating effects of climate change and the emergence of COVID-19 had brought the need for mending into sharper focus. At that time, only a year into the pandemic, we envisaged breakages, fragilities and fault lines as things that urgently needed fixing. That perspective is still valid, but we now also sense a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities that 'breaks' may bring.

Viewed as intervals, pauses, or rests the restorative power of the break needs little explanation. But conceptualised as an imperfection or alert to something that is not fully working, breaks may also be important early warnings of a malfunctioning 'system'. How often are we hearing that 'things can no longer go on as normal', or that 'things must change'? These phrases may be worn out and sometimes lack sincerity or meaning yet the role of the break as a disruptive or intervening force in the normative ways of doing can be essential to expanding our awareness, for reflection and renewed actions. A shake-up, a change of course or a second-chance, a 'New Hope'. Who better to illuminate the world of possibilities and the potential of reinvention that breaking and mending might bring than artists, poets, writers and other cultural and creative practitioners?

This issue of Axon has the theme 'On the Mend', responding not only to global events over 2020/21, but to the many ways the worlds in which we now live might be in need of mending, and to broader themes in creative practice and scholarship that centre the topics of care, repair, breakage and their entanglement. In our original call we cast a wide net and we were overwhelmed by the number of submissions made in response. We are excited by the currency of this project and delighted to present this volume of diverse contributions spanning the breadth of applied arts and humanities scholarship. Each work creatively explores, challenges and responds to this broad but resonant theme. What emerged as key to all of the contributions was the importance of relationships – whether they be with place, objects, the state, other individuals or the self – to the health, maintenance, and well-being (or not) that we perceive as integral indicators of breakage, care and repair.

From Hannah Arendt's ethics of care, based on love for the world, to Mara Puig de la Bellacasa's speculative ethics expanding to the more-than-human—feminist moral philosophy of the 20th and 21st Centuries has been concerned with formulating ways to articulate and enact relational practices, frameworks of care and the envisioning of acts of restoration and recovery. The gendered dimension of this topic is a strong, binding thread throughout the submissions, as is the language of domestic, repetitive caring practices and their ability to hold people and worlds together in reciprocal relationships of continuous tending. Stitching together, re-using remnants for new purposes, darning for longer life and embroidering over tears to transform a repair into a creative act—metaphors of needlework recur throughout the submissions.

In 'The Eiderdowns', Jane Downing offers a story about building a new life and new friendships in a new country, and the protagonist's use of discarded materials to recreate the remembered comforts from a previous life. Susie Campbell's 'Visible Stitches' discusses her text and textiles as an inter-related creative practice which makes fragility an aspect of beauty, creating an

aesthetics of damage and repair that shows that not all things can be 'made good'. In 'Making Mending Visible' Monica Andrew also draws attention to the public visibility of mending, by examining the role of community repair spaces in fostering needlecraft repair skills—spaces which promote clothing and textile sustainability, as well as an environment that also cares for people and their communities.

Kerry Martin reflects upon the emotional impact of bearing witness to a parent's descent into Alzheimer's disease in her reflective essay '[Thread]Baring'. Her artworks recall the currencies of her shared life with her mother, activities that she had rebelled against in earlier days, but which now offered some solace. In 'Apocalypse(s)', Hannah Macauley-Gierhart explores mother care in chaotic times and how the increasing climate disasters and global instability we are experiencing complicates the love we feel for our children. While Lizzie Buckmaster Dove's 'Stitching Art Practice' describes the challenges of dealing with lockdowns and her efforts to combine art practice with the needs of children learning from home. Gemma Nisbet's essay 'The Point of the Thing' extends the exploration of familial and intergenerational relationships through the lens of objects that once belonged to her grandfather.

But an equally strong theme in this issue is the need to break up some old things, or break them down, to create useful materials that might sustain new relationships. In 'Mend That', poets Paul Collis and Jen Crawford discuss reconciliation, with a focus on Paul's poem, 'Reconcile That'. This work voices anger about the impossibility of mending colonial wounds—the evidence of which are still be churned up and revealed by Country—but which also reflects on the capacity of Country to sustain and mend. In 'Too Many Cocks' Ursula Frederick and Tracy Ireland argue that graffiti can play a role in making democratic dialogue visible, making fun of the patriarchal nature of colonialism and its heroes by stripping them of their pants and their bronzed monumental gravitas.

In 'Breaking/Unbreaking Un-Making/Making' Ashley Eriksmoen describes the cultural and historical context that motivates and shapes her creative practice, focusing on the industrial production and consumption of new furniture, the stresses on forests and wildlife habitat, as well as ever-accumulating waste. Of a similar vein, Alexis Fedorjaczenko's 'Healing for Fragile Forms of Being', describes how she coped with writer's block during the COVID-19 pandemic by cutting out and rearranging words selected from news sources, making tender, fragile objects from the scraps of our past world as a palliative process for a world that will never return. Disassembling and reassembly through collage was also a practice shared by Tamar MacLellan and Philippa Wood, 'Good Companions', who worked collaboratively to rejuvenate social exchange through the materialities of the artist book.

The relationship between creative practice, repair and difficult situations is explored in a number of contributions, from Heather Cameron's essay 'Writing Creatively about Cancer' addressing the motivations for authors who write about cancer, to Eve Nucifora's 'Solstice' which uses creative writing to explore the idea of healing by living with and accepting ambiguity. In 'When Our World Breaks We Bend with It' Sandra Renew uses poetry, and the unique coronasonnet form specifically, and is amongst a number of other poets whose writing evocatively captures the brokenness, lulls, revival, relief and disquiet to be found amongst things, within our lives and amidst our environments. (See the poems of Lucy Alexander, Cassandra Atherton, Paul Collis, Adam Day, Lucy Dougan, Jacqui Malins, Gail Pittaway and Les Wicks).

The potential for personal healing through creative practice in a group context is examined 'In A Matter of Balance' by Vahri McKenzie and Caren Florance, who consider a four-week intensive residential program for ill or injured serving Defence personnel. Penelope Russon's contribution 'Advicecomics.Tumblr.com' discusses a collaborative online project in which anonymous users write in with problems and comics artists make comics in response. These essays raise important questions about the role of communities, online and off, and wider society in contributing to practices of care through different creative modalities. Ranging from the self to various collectives, many of the contributions urge us to think about how well-being, repair and care are represented, maintained and valued. Whose responsibility is it to look after ...? is a question that underpins several of our papers, but it is Dominic Amerena who directly poses 'Who Cares, Why and How' in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Central to his essay is a consideration of what type of care we should expect from governments and others, both during times of crisis and 'normality'.

Michele England's 'Landscape Reconstruction' is a series of paintings, inspired by the Flinders Ranges, made in response to the ecological impact of humans combined with an awareness that, with concerted effort, at least some of the damage can be reversed. While in 'Stitches for Survivable Futures' Sera Waters explores five stitches as a kind of cultural heritage resource and the reasons why we need these traditional hand-embroidery techniques to craft new traditions and new futures. She expands their reach into the 'bodily, ecological, truth-telling and survival terrains' that need to be traversed to ameliorate current degraded environments.

What has become increasingly clear, is that now more than ever we need the creative approaches, insights and inspired thinking and feeling that the arts and humanities bring to examine what it means to be 'On the Mend'.

Cover detail

Tamar MacLellan and Philippa Wood, detail of a C6 envelope from their second project, 2021

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