

How To Thrive In 2050: 8 Tentacular Workouts For A Tantalising Future! (Kai Syng Tan Summer 2021)

Transcript

00:00-01:04: WARMING UP How to Thrive in 2050

Are you crossed at the injustices of the world? Fed up at how normative 'standards' have been sub-standard?

Stop taking things lying down. Exercise your rights to kick up a storm! Hi! I'm Kai. I'm a chimera, an Octopussy, infused by ancient wisdom to reconnect the body with mind, soul with sole, the common, under-commons with the cosmic. I'm hyper-active. I can't, won't sit still, and I'm restless for change.

2050 is only one generation away, so we're running out of time. Slash your safety harnesses. Put on your tinted goggles. Join me in 8 tentacular workouts. for a tantalising future. Stretch your imagination. Re-imagine a future that re-centres creativity, diversity and neurodiversity – celebrating our different brains, minds, beings and possibilities.

We've got our work cut out. Let's get our hands filthy.

Are you ready?

01:04-02:16: EXERCISE I Bunny Jumping Over the Moon, Hissing in Bliss

2050: Protected Characteristics as Common Sense. 'Neurodiversity' and 'Biodiversity' as Standard. Normativity and affluence ostracised. Autistic Greta Thunberg and Dyslexic Joshua Wong as global leaders. Zero Hunger. Rude Health. Digital Wealth. Quality Education. Great Job. Clean Energy. Pristine Water. Sustainable Communities. Responsible Consumption. Zero Carbon. Temperature not rising. Gender Fluidity. Black Lives Finally Matter. Equality. Equity. Civil Freedom. Human Rights. Democracy. Peace. Justice. Bliss.

Jump for joy. Skip out of your comfort zone. Plunge into the unknown. Grin from ear to ear. Be over the moon. Make giant leaps for (more than) humankind. Make my heart skip a beat.

02:16-04:36: EXERCISE II Anthropoid Artfully Raising Fists and Hope

(Bob and Roberta Smith in conversation with Kai Syng Tan as Octopussy)

Octopussy: Hello Bob, how are you?

Bob: I'm very well! Is that a placard there?

Octopussy: Yeah!

Bob: That's pretty good.

- Octopussy: I'm keen to talk about being artful because people have been talking about the virus as being quite crafty, because it hijacks your body to jump off to other bodies.
- Bob: I love the idea of artfulness and people having to think in different ways and come up with solutions and plans. Making art is a way of keeping that human instinct for individual thought alive. Also we are promoting that idea that we've got to exercise our sense of free speech just as much as we've got to exercise our bodies. Because when you are making art you are sort of in this space. It's like before Christmas or before Diwali or Eid. You're kind of preparing for tomorrow. You're thinking about ...
- Octopussy: ... This sense of anticipation
- Bob: Yeah! ...
- Octopussy: ... and something coming into being?
- Bob: Exactly. You're kind of making these things, which you hope to show when you're making films. It forces us into a world of optimism. I think the idea that you come up with your own ideas is very important for democracy and human rights. This whole Covid thing, it made me revisit the very first art book that I bought, which was On Modern Art by Paul Klee. He does talk about this idea of the life force. He has a metaphor of a tree. You've got the octopus (*laughs*) but he has a tree. The body of the tree is in a way that of the artist. It has roots which research things and see things. And then the artworks are the tentacles, the branches
- Octopussy: That's quite a powerful imagery
- Bob: Great idea, this idea of the life force. And actually there's something...
- Octopussy: ... life giving about it
- Bob: I might catch this idea that art or experimental music will crush the virus. It's not a total joke.
- Octopussy: No.
- Bob: It's about driving forward with new ideas. And if you are coming up with stuff in your studio, you are thinking about the future. It does force you to be optimistic.

04:36-07:17: EXERCISE III

Curating Change (Cat and Muse)

(Title and chapter's text on screen, no voice over)

Art has always craft brave new visions to illuminate, interrogate and extend what, whom and how we are and can be. Art raises (new) questions, dances with its muse, to amuse, confuse, bemuse, refuse, resist, evoke, provoke and woke.

To create is to survive. Why else did cave-dwellers make drawings?

To dream is to re-world. Why else do dictators fear artists?

Art hammers reality into new shapes, mocks and knocks the masters' stories, reshapes them so that the Davids trump the Goliaths, then hump the Adams, Eves and Steves. and birth a multitude of tales, a plethora of possibilities.

It is when resources are scarce, minds are closed, and walls are erected, that art must lead new dialogues, dis-entangle knots, and invent new entanglements.

It is when we dare to be powerful, and use our strength to serve our vision, that we'll no longer fear, but begin to thrive.

Curate. Take care of. Cure. Agitate artfully to catalyse conversations for change. Make art that sweats, that's pungent, that stinks, stings, bites, that perspires, aspires. Quake us out of illusion, wake from the consensual hallucination, shake us of complacency. Re-invent the wheels. Heal. Take the colonisers to task. Repatriate. Repair.

07:17-08:58: EXERCISE IV

Octopus Bending Rules and Twisting Fate

If you're looking for a mascot to bring to life what it means to thrive, look no further than the octopus. Pre-dating dinosaurs, octopuses have lived for 296 million years. The 300 species have beak-like jaws and superior eyesight, their soft bodies rapidly contorting to infiltrate small cracks. Octopuses have 3 hearts, and eight tentacles, each of which with a mind of its own, carrying half a billion neurons or 'excitable cells'! Like Homo sapiens with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD, octopuses are insatiably curious, crafty, and allergic to boredom. One octopus at an aquarium learnt to switch off lights, while another escaped from its tank, but on dry land, died – killed, literally, by boredom.

Embody the octopus. Strive, thrive. Prise open glass labyrinths. Access all areas. Go out on a limb, or eight. Live fast, don't die. Get a life. Get out of here alive. Be larger than life. Be tentacular, amorphous, ravenous, promiscuous, ambiguous, adventurous. Switch off the naysayers. Turn the tables. Bend rules. Twist fate. Raise the game. Change the game

08:58-09:57: EXERCISE V

Killer Whale Biting Back and Kicking Butts

(Text on screen as placards held by protesting killer whales. No voice over)

Whale sounds and sirens

Techne = Art. Augment reality. Digital = tech and toes. Make life High Definition. Elevate Humanity See with your heart. Thrill my body. Blow my mind. Feel others' body blows. Embody others' pain and joy. Make your heart sore = soar. Make my day. Exercise your rights. Kick up a Storm. Sight + Site of Dissent. Equity. Creativity. Justice. Don't you dare. Don't you care?

09:57-11:41: EXERCISE VI

Bright Stars Shining, Tantalising Times Coming

Bethany-Anne Arnold:

I do think about the future, yes I do.

I'm Bethany-Anne and this is my son Orion. I was 21 when he was born. My mum is Jamaican and my father was born in Germany. I'm teaching students with special educational needs.

I wanted to make the arts curriculum more diverse and differentiated and to talk about all these significant issues, because we can use art to broach those difficult subjects. I do see a difference between myself and my students. They are a lot more aware of LGBTQIA+ people and things that marginalised groups face. It takes a lot to unlearn internalised prejudices and I'm grateful that the next generation are able to go through that unlearning process sooner than our generation was and that the ones preceding were. There are wider conversations to be had about the intersections of race and class and gender and sexuality. It's only through fostering these difficult conversations that we can enact change. If someone uses homophobic, transphobic language, challenge it. If someone uses racist language, challenge it.

Making the world a better place is a series of act of kindness to ourselves, to others and to our planet. I can't be anything other than hopeful, I want to be optimistic. I hope that the best of the things can happen.

11:41-13:11: EXERCISE VII

Falling Head Over Heels for Neuro-Futurism

Once upon a time, neurodivergent cockroaches were unpopular. Hierarchies of normality pervaded, even within neuro-divergent communities.

One day, a band of diasporic neurodivergent cockroaches at the bottom of the food chain got fed up. They ganged up, and took action. They slaughtered all ruling pigs, burnt their whitewashed tales, and invented a neuro-fantastic, neuro-futuristic neuro-utopia.

Finally, neurodivergence – decolonised, queered, de-territorialised – is the new normal. Finally, we distribute NDEs – NeuroDiversity medals of Excellence. Finally, schools celebrate disruptive pupils, and reward failure, prioritising those who learn differently,

Fall, fail, for the spell, of a better future. Mis-spell and fail dyslexically. No matter, try again. Fail again, fail better. Learn, unlearn. Fall hard. Fall for. Fall into. Fall in love. Stumble. Tumble. Fumble. Bumble. Bee. Don't be. Butterfly. Earth, wind and fire in your belly. Plunge into infinite bunny holes. Shift your attention to where the heart flutters.

13:11-13:54: EXERCISE VIII

Octopussy Running Riot and Having a Whale of a Time

Run for your life. Run your life. Don't toe the party line. Re-align with nature. Restore the planet. Curate spaces for healing. Bridge divides. Look out for, look after one another. Raise the bar. Raise your expectations. Reach out to other body-minds around you and throughout the universe. No one is safe until every body is safe. Flourish. Flower. Our. Power. It's time to thrive. We've got a tantalising future in our hands. Let's join forces. Conjoin at the Hip hip, hooray!

Are you ready?

13:11 - 13:54: CREDITS

Performers

Bethany-Anne Arnold
Orion Corrigan-Arnold
Bob and Roberta Smith
James Smith

Composer + Sound Engineer

Philip Tan

Animator and Additional Camera

Zineb Berrais

Producer

Erika Conchis

With thanks to

Unlimited
Manchester Metropolitan University
Rudi May Hart

Visual citations:

Wellcome Collection
Orca Research Trust

Textual citations:

Samuel Beckett; Abdelkader Benali; Berthold Brecht; Peter Godfrey-Smith; Audre Lorde; James Steventon.

Executive Producers for the BBC

Jonty Claypole
Lamia Dabboussy

Executive Producer for The Space

Natalie Woolman

Director, Writer, Performer, Sound Designer, Editor

Kai Syng Tan

END CARD