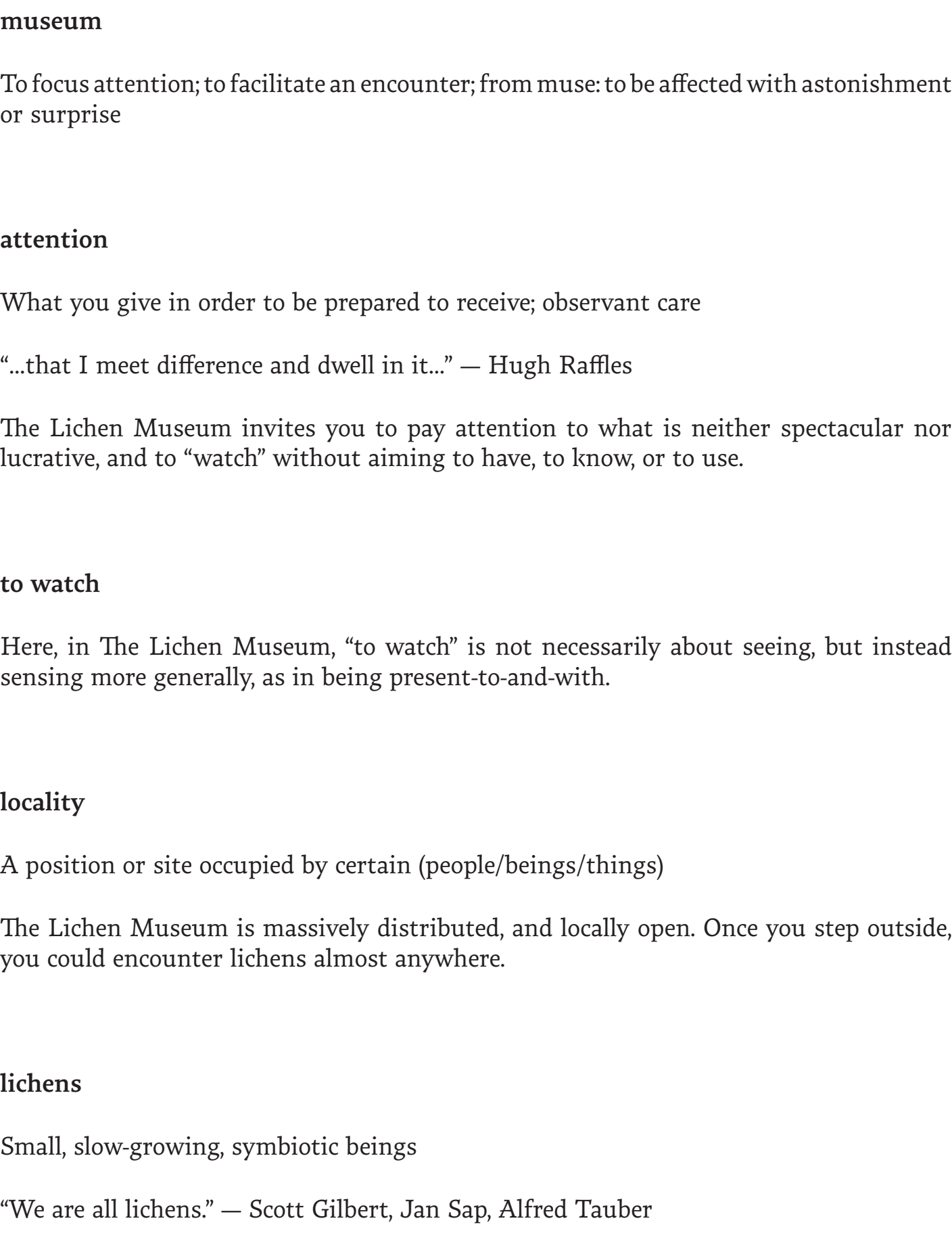


CFAR's *Papers on Power* is a series of commissioned essays for which artists, writers, activists, and cultural producers have been asked to respond to the question "What is power?" in whatever form best relates to their work and thinking.

A PARTIAL GLOSSARY, FOR VISITING THE LICHEN MUSEUM

A. LAURIE PALMER

[The Lichen Museum](#) considers this slow, resistant, adaptive and collective organism as an anti-capitalist companion and climate change survivor. This glossary is a living text that pulls quotes and excerpts from that work-in-progress.



Lichens, Northern California, photo by A. Laurie Palmer

museum

To focus attention; to facilitate an encounter; from muse: to be affected with astonishment or surprise

attention

What you give in order to be prepared to receive; observant care

"...that I meet difference and dwell in it..." — Hugh Raffles

The Lichen Museum invites you to pay attention to what is neither spectacular nor lucrative, and to "watch" without aiming to have, to know, or to use.

to watch

Here, in *The Lichen Museum*, "to watch" is not necessarily about seeing, but instead sensing more generally, as in being present-to-and-with.

locality

A position or site occupied by certain (people/beings/things)

The Lichen Museum is massively distributed, and locally open. Once you step outside, you could encounter lichens almost anywhere.

lichens

Small, slow-growing, symbiotic beings

"We are all lichens." — Scott Gilbert, Jan Sap, Alfred Tauber

symbiotic

Living together; involved in social life

"...a collective body ... hath not derived...the principality of power into someone or few." — c. 1600, *The Oxford English Dictionary*

collective

Acting as a group; as opposed to individual

"...collective imagining and doing to generate alternatives to what is counters ... the 'absent future' that offers only debt, austerity, individualist competition, the subsumption of life into work, and massive inequality and injustice." — Deborah Gould

individual

"The individual...reveals a subject tethered by various orders of constraint and obscured by the figure of the self-possessed." — Saidiya Hartman

self-possession

"...the delusion of possession of a body is directly tied to the destruction of the earth..." — Fred Moten, in conversation with Saidiya Hartman

attachment

"The attitude of dispossession is not possession, it is deep, reciprocal, consensual attachment. Indigenous bodies don't relate to the land by possessing or owning it or having control over it. We relate to the land through connection—generative, affirmative, complex, overlapping, and nonlinear relationship." — Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg)

relation

"I ran from it and I was still in it." — Fred Moten

environment

"Thus far we have tended to think of a living thing as distinct from its environment or as something in a specimen box. Thus we think that the field of living can be separated easily from a living thing and think of it as a kind of stage on which an organism makes its living. However, the real living thing is an integration of the living thing and the environment on which it depends and that is the organized system of the living thing itself." — Kinji Imanishi

life

"I do not find it a problem to admit the life of non-living things" — Kinji Imanishi

rock

Cryptolitholichens are so intimately enmeshed with the rock they are embedded in that it is practically impossible to determine what is alive and what is not. Researchers suggest that some lichens in Antarctica have been living at very slow metabolic rates in these sanctified situations for 10,000 years, "nurtured" by the heat-absorbing capacities of the rock.

land

"In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold." —Robin Wall Kimmerer

property

"It appears to me that the fluctuation which attends property is, of itself, a proof, how absurd it is to base the rights of man on a bottom so instable; and still more so to draw circles around places, as if to encompass or confine a quality so fugitive ..." — William Drennan, 1794

de-acquisition

The Lichen Museum refuses to own anything, or to wrest, gather, extract, encase, collect, or materially preserve; its "holdings" defiantly remain where they live, in place—pretty much everywhere.

decentralized

Lichens have no centralized system we can recognize — nervous or vascular.

freedom

"The question persists as to whether it is possible to unleash freedom from the history of property that secured it, for the security of property that undergirded the abstract equality of rights bearers was achieved, in large measure, through black bondage." — Saidiya Hartman

rights

They can be given, and they can be taken away; if a person can be considered to own themselves, that ownership is already alienable. Without the separation of an abstract lien—splitting off from actual land an idea of land that could be owned, taken or lost, or splitting off from the actual person an idea of personhood that could be owned, taken or lost—and persons remain living places and beings, engaged in and constituted by, networks of interdependent relations, coming up together in a "world in which many worlds must fit" (see "worlds")

person

A mask; one who plays or performs any part

"You cannot be both performer and spectator...If a door is open, it is not closed." — Basic Logic, 1952

to look

"The separation of subject and object is the most central dogma of modern epistemology. It is also the problem of looking." — Mieke Bal

thing

"In refusing what is most integral to the thing, racism denies the thing its humanity and denies humanity its thingliness...Can the world of the thing, the thing's irreducible embeddedness in a world, which is to say in a world of things, be understood also as that which is integral to the thing, that which constitutes, as it were, the thing's interiority?" — Fred Moten

plural

Lichens are by inference and constitution wholly oriented towards the other(s) that make up themselves. Current research acknowledges that more than two beings (fungus and algae) compose a lichen holobiont—probably many more: "hundreds, thousands, or perhaps tens of thousands of other species..." — Dr. Anne Pringle

worlds

"...There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is room only for the big and their helpers. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit" — Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional

humanism

The core violence of western humanism lies in the non-reciprocal relation of power that transforms whatever is considered not human into less-than-human, into an object—a specimen; an instrument—to use; or a resource—as supply.

instrumentality

The problem with instrumentalizing anything is fatally exposed in the old, deep roots of western philosophy with its distinctions between human and inhuman value, and securing of the category of property thereby: "...Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others lifeless; ...the servant is a living possession, and property a number of such instruments... From the hour of their birth some are marked out for subjection, others for rule...the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life." — Aristotle, c. 350 BCE

inhuman

"...the division of materiality (and its subjectings) as inhuman and human, and thus as inert or agentic matter, operationalizes race...a transmutation of matter occurs within that signification that renders matter as property..." — Kathryn Yusoff

more-than-human

We live in reciprocal and inextricable relations of sociality with and for others. This horizontal interdependence includes more-than-humans (mountains, cyanobacteria, watersheds, porcupines, jelly lichens...) as well as human beings. It is not the dominant understanding of how things work now, but it is simmering under the surface.

invisibility

Part of what is compelling about lichens is their ability to be virtually invisible while also massively distributed, to flourish and to be hidden in plain sight, as if their marginality allows them to occupy and to thrive in a parallel world; a world that functions on a different kind of time and space and with collective relational skills that will allow them, in that world, to outlast the one that racialized capitalism, with its roots in western humanism, is so badly fucking up.

opacity

"The opaque is not the obscure, it is that which cannot be reduced." — Édouard Glissant

to see

"The eyes know this, that everything lives—that the dull or gleaming surfaces they gaze at are also gazing back at them, that the colors they drink or dive into have been longing to swallow them and to taste of their hazel, their bright hints of green." — David Abrams

to sense

"Only as our senses transfer their animating magic to the written word do the trees become mute, the other animals dumb." — David Abrams

color

We don't just see color, color sees. Pigments detect, as well as reflect, light. The whole world is full of eyes, responding differentially to the sun, and pressing it into food, or images, or thoughts, or as obscuring mineral semiotics we don't know how to decode.

to know

"Why (lichens) grow so slowly and survive so long are intriguing and largely unanswered questions." — Vernon Ahmadjian

naming

"There's another species called *Tininia aromatica*: *Tininia* is the main taxon; the aromatic name came because the person had received the specimen in an envelope. The envelope had a distinctive smell, but the lichen doesn't smell at all, it was the envelope." — Paul Whelan

observation

"How can you tell if it is lichen, and not chewing gum?" — A Lichen Walker in Chicago

form

"It is more appropriate not to subsume the details of living in the form, but to consider the form a part of the details of living and to use the word ecology." — Kinji Imanishi

slowness

"...because of (lichens)' slow growth and inability to grow in a lab, they have not been suitable for commercial exploitation." — Vernon Ahmadjian

anti-capitalist

Scientists have learned to synthesize certain "lichen substances" of particular interest to medicine and chemistry, but they can't force the lichens themselves to produce them—even though the "natural" versions tend to be more potent and effective. Scientists can grow the fungus and the algae separately in petri dishes in laboratories, but the symbiotic union that produces most of the mysterious "lichen substances" has not been successfully sustained. This is lichen's anti-capitalist stance: because lichens can't be cultivated, they keep the keys to their own labor, and bio-, power.

time

"As lichens grow older, the probability of death seems to decrease." — Dr. Anne Pringle

indolence

"Are living things indolent; do they, while eating or sleeping without expending any effort, unknowingly become beautiful? I would frankly admit that there is an aspect in living things or in the life of living things that cannot be explained only in terms of a drive to survive." — Kinji Imanishi

horizontality

Considering the humble and largely horizontally-oriented (though not exclusively so) lichens, as teachers, is one potential step towards knocking down the vertical hierarchies that certain humans have constructed, with themselves on top as masters of the world. It is an imaginative move — but the existence of lichens is not imaginary.

sun

You don't need a ticket to enter *The Lichen Museum* (you are already in it) and you don't need to pay because it is already always giving itself to you, though never giving itself up. It is a museum of the already here, and the lasting; but also of the fugitive, in the sense of escaping spectacle, as well as categorization, enshrinement in the geological record, and commodification by capital; a museum of the marginal and the insignificant; a museum of what's un/common, under the sun.

The fires are not the sun's fault, even though the sun feels hotter, more penetrating, more dangerous than before.

photosynthesis

"The heart is built of light's gold, and the cucumbers and the salad are the stimulus..." — Rudolf Steiner

life/world

"I regard life as extending to this world and because of that extension this world can be our world. That is the best conclusion I can reach at this time." — Kinji Imanishi

lichenologists

"They are not all shy and retiring. Some of them are quite outgoing... It's not an exciting hobby—at least not in an obvious way...They just want to study the thing they love." — Alan Orange

coming to know

"...There is very little you can do without thanking somebody else." — Paul Whelan

Lichens, Northern California, photo by A. Laurie Palmer

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Biography:

A. Laurie Palmer is a writer, artist, and teacher. Her place-based, research-oriented artworks take form as sculpture, public projects, and artist books, and she collaborates on strategic actions in the contexts of social and environmental justice. She is a professor in the Art Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), and the current Director of Graduate Studies for UCSC's MFA in Environmental Art and Social Practice (EASp). The Lichen Museum is her current book project.