

I WANT TO

BELIEVE IN

SHARED

BREATH

BLESS OUR BREATH

ABOUT

bless our breath is a deck of cards that facilitate conversation, reflection, and creative process around breath, as both a theme and a practice. Working with breath as an intimate medium for connection with ourselves, our communities, our ancestors, and the futures of our worlds, this deck of cards guides card-players through a range of ideas, questions, and prompts. The project honors the symbolic and practical implications of breath within this cultural and political moment of uprising and rupture: the intersections of the movement for Black liberation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impacts of climate change resulting in mass wildfires and polluted air. While holding space for aggregated legacies of grief, the cards aim to build critically intimate, compassionate, honest, and resilient relationships with one's self and others.

welcome

Thank you for picking up this copy of the *bless our breath* processing deck! The following text, which includes segments from a conversation between alea adigweme, Malcolm Peacock, Gordon Hall, Jovonna Jones, Ceci Moss, Kimi Hanauer, and Alice Yuan Zhang, is divided into sections that correspond with each card in the deck. By including this text, we hope to invite you into our process and inspire your own reflection on these themes. While we include some optional directions on how you may use the cards below, we welcome you to use this deck of cards for your personal processing, reflection, and conversation as best aligns with your needs and desires. You may simply lay out a few cards in front of you and consider how you want to use them.

optional directions

You may use the cards with someone else as a way to facilitate a conversation or by yourself for your personal reflection and processing.

1. Separate the cards into two decks, one for Ascending Blocks and the other for Building Blocks. Ascending Blocks have a yellow seam and Building Blocks have a pink seam.

2. Shuffle each of the deck of cards with your hands. You may choose to close your eyes or keep them open. As you shuffle, you may choose to check in with yourself. *How does your body feel? Notice your breath. Is your breathing fast, heavy, slow, deep? Tune into any or all of your senses, what can you hear, smell, taste, touch, see around you? What are the sensations on your surface of your skin? What can you notice inside of your body? What can you notice around you?*

3. To pick a card, you can spread out each deck, Building Blocks and Ascending Blocks, in front of you and pick out any card that stands out. You can also split both of the decks in half and pick out the top card.

4. Lay out an Ascending Block and a Building Block side by side.

5. Building Blocks invite card-players to reflect on specific themes as they relate to the futures of our worlds, as well as histories and limitations.

6. Ascending Blocks invite card-players to breathe life into something. While Building Blocks invite card players into free-form meditation and personal processing, Ascending Blocks may more directly invite conversation, collective processing, and community-minded practice.

7. Take a few minutes to meditate on each card. You may do this by journaling, drawing, or just sitting in silence. You are encouraged to use your senses as part of your processing, for example, for the Building Block "Relation" you may consider, *What does relation feel like? What does relation smell like? What does relation taste like? What does relation sound like?* And any other senses you may wish to focus on.

8. You can also explore Building Blocks "Touch", "Spoken Risk, Unspoken Risk", and Ascending Block "How do we find the future in the present?" as augmented reality filters on Instagram by opening each link on your phone. Using the QR codes or links below, open your phone to initiate the filter. Hover your phone over the Building Blocks cards to create an animation in response to the rhythm of your breath. Take time to find intentionality as you relate each card to your digital presence. *When do you sense spoken and unspoken risk online? What are the powers and dangers of your touch on the screen? What does utopia look and feel like in virtual space?*

"Touch"



"Spoken Risk, Unspoken Risk"



"How do we find the future in the present?"



Augmented Reality Filter Links:

tinyurl.com/touchbreath | tinyurl.com/riskbreath | tinyurl.com/futurebreath

9. Next, think about the relationship between the cards as they relate to your personal experiences and community. If it's helpful, you may look at the text that correlates with each card to support your processing and inspire further reflection.

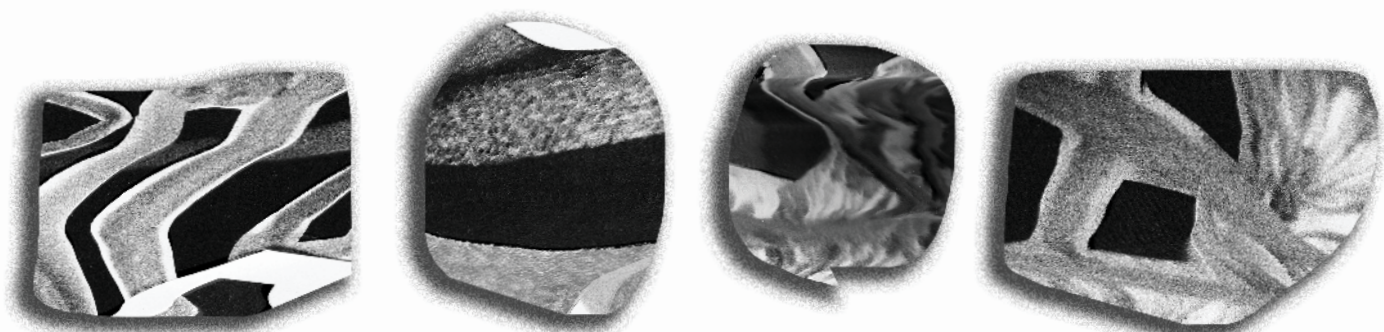
BUILDING BLOCKS

relation

alea: There's so much bacteria in us that we need to survive. The existence of so many microorganisms that enable us to live and move through the world. They enable us to go out and not be in a bubble or hazmat suit in order to survive. There are some things that don't "breathe" and they are vitally important to our ability to survive and thrive in this moment. I'm thinking about the connections between everything [our bodies, ecosystems, the natural worlds] — which have been very much a part of denigrated cosmologies — that are only now beginning to get acceptance because "the white man's science" says they are true, like epigenetics and the notion of trauma being passed down between generations. People have been talking about that forever. What does it mean to be born into a lineage of grief for our bodies and our relationships?

touch

Alice: If we were in a real space together, I would feel your breaths and be able to respond to that. That connection is missing right now and something feels very broken. How do we signal [communicate] in non-physical ways? I'm reminded of the book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*,¹ where it talks about how in Indigenous languages, there are so many more verbs than nouns. In English, we have 70% nouns, while in other languages there are so many other verbs that describe stuff like 'to be a saturday is... to be a rock is...' how do we find ways to breathe together? To feel connected in an ecosystem?



air

Ceci: Who gets to breathe? Facing the current wildfires in California, we see the combination of climate change and bad policy decisions producing a state of emergency. The indigenous community knew how to allow natural wildfires to occur, but the colonizers suppressed that knowledge. How do we feel the earth breathe? How do we see our relationships in another way? I'm living near an active wildfire, and I've been putting out water for the wild animals that have been fleeing the

fire, these dehydrated animals that are fleeing the forest. It's been heartbreaking. There was one day where I listened to the helicopters drop water on the fire, sitting with all of the sadness. How can we center a different kind of existence?

spoken risk, unspoken risk

Malcolm: There is an unspoken risk and interdependence that we are birthed into, it's the precarious nature of being human. Kimi and I were talking the other day about a weird dream I had about a friend of ours, it was really violent. Something bad had happened to them, and I was like, when you live amongst terror in such pervasive and insidious ways, it will seep and marinate so deeply into your bones. It will make you question the reality or unreality of your dreams. And we talked about how it's so astounding, our spirit of this porousness, that we still choose to reach out to people, to be part of communities, completely knowing that there is always the opportunity for these catastrophic pains or dangers.

beginning

Alice: How is breath a beginning? How does breath conjure new life?

the ground

Malcolm: On Black precarity, something I have been experiencing but haven't voiced often: I notice when I'm out on the street — as a runner, I'm usually out without much clothing on, which is something I've done half my life — since people became aware of Ahmaud Arbery's murder, the social space has completely shifted for Black people and it's been really interesting. It has a deep hold. In response to what makes me feel held: the emotional safety and assurance of what it means to be vouched for on the street by people who share the same grotesque relation to the world, to flesh — the darkest — the one that's most disposable. A deeply resonating hold, a constant hug, without any retreat, just an impression on the skin.



collective breath

Gordon: Thinking about breathing makes me think about the porosity of my body, of our bodies — how we often imagine ourselves to be unique finite things, bounded by our skin, with some degree of autonomy, freedom, self-ownership, and protection from the world around us. Thinking about breathing brings me closer to feeling and knowing the ways that we are constantly open to the world around us, bringing it inside of us and then putting parts of ourselves back out into the world. Air, food, water and so many other ways that our bodies are less boxes and more sieves, bringing in and putting out what is around us. There are aspects of this reminder that are of course horrifying — we are so vulnerable. Fragile and constantly exposed to being poisoned, injured, crushed, or extinguished by breathing in or ingesting aspects of an unlivable environment. But with this terror is also the basis of a mode of existing that takes the porosity of our bodies as a given and a starting point...

opening

alea: How do you breathe life into something so it becomes something new? I'm thinking about how this thing we do automatically without thinking can also be something that is intentional. "Breathing new life" into something as a framework to situate our questions.

interdependence

Jovonna: What does it mean to reach out? To be reached out too? To be more intentional with one another? It's valid to ask for a sense of connection. What does it mean to belong? The trust that comes up with belonging and the fear that comes with wanting to belong, not knowing if that's gonna happen, the gift of presence, the desire to admit that I need you all. Belonging feels like holding something together tenderly, to be here together intentionally.

generations

Kimi: How many generations does it take to heal a wound? What does it mean to "heal"? What kinds of wounds can and cannot be healed? Can and cannot be tended to or cared for?

ASCENDING BLOCKS

how do you feel the earth breathe?

alea: In thinking about ground, with utopia always being on the horizon, if we are really thinking about the ground and reconceiving it, I come back to the question of "How do we feel the earth breathe"? The very foundation that we walk on, even that is very shaky, it has cracks that we can no longer take for granted because of the way the pandemic has broadened and deepened them. What does that mean for how we move forward?

be willing to be moved, to be shaped differently, by your circumstances, positions, or practices.

Jovonna: I'm trying to recalibrate how I allow myself to be shaped and moved by the earth. How is my desire shaped by the earth? Talking about breathing is stressing me out. Today, all I could do to not get wild in my head is just run. I get too stressed about body politics. I walked for a long time and whenever I felt like I would transition into running, I wasn't listening to my breath. I was allowing my body to stress, to sweat. Being willing to be moved, being willing to be shaped differently by the earth — reintroduce myself to the earth. Can I even know what the earth feels like? When humanity has intervened so much in what that relationship is today?

how do you practice reciprocal relations with the world around you?

Kimi: Conversations about sustainability are so often about 'taking less', but what about reciprocity? How do we give to the world around us, enact reciprocal relationships to the earth? We share and give and take in each other's breath, the air that we breathe travels to us from all over the earth. We are always breathing each other's material breath, but we don't breathe the same social air, we don't suffocate in the same ways and to the same degrees, and we don't practice reciprocity in the ways that we really need to, especially if we want more than mere survival, if we want true collective liberation.

how do we find the future in the present?

Malcolm: We have messed up relationships and possessive qualities, we have issues around scarcity. Something I hear us touching on is trying to work toward modalities and to be inside of our feelings, finding the future in the present. We are already ancestors, or we can think of ourselves as them. What are we laying the groundwork for?

describe the breath of a loved one.

Kimi: How can language signal a pattern for breath? And what does it mean to

know someone through the pattern of their breath? Or know yourself through your own breathing, your heartbeat, and other bodily movements? I'm thinking about how my body is so impacted by my emotional state, my body always knows how I'm feeling before I'm even fully aware of it. I wonder if I could recognize a family member or loved one just by their breath? Or if I can remember the breath of family members and loved ones who have already passed? I want to spend time just observing breath, my own and others', like, what are the qualities of a breath filled with laughter? Where do my exhales travel? What air am I breathing? Can breath be liberating? Or can you be liberated from breath? What does my body want and need to breathe?

describe and be with stillness.

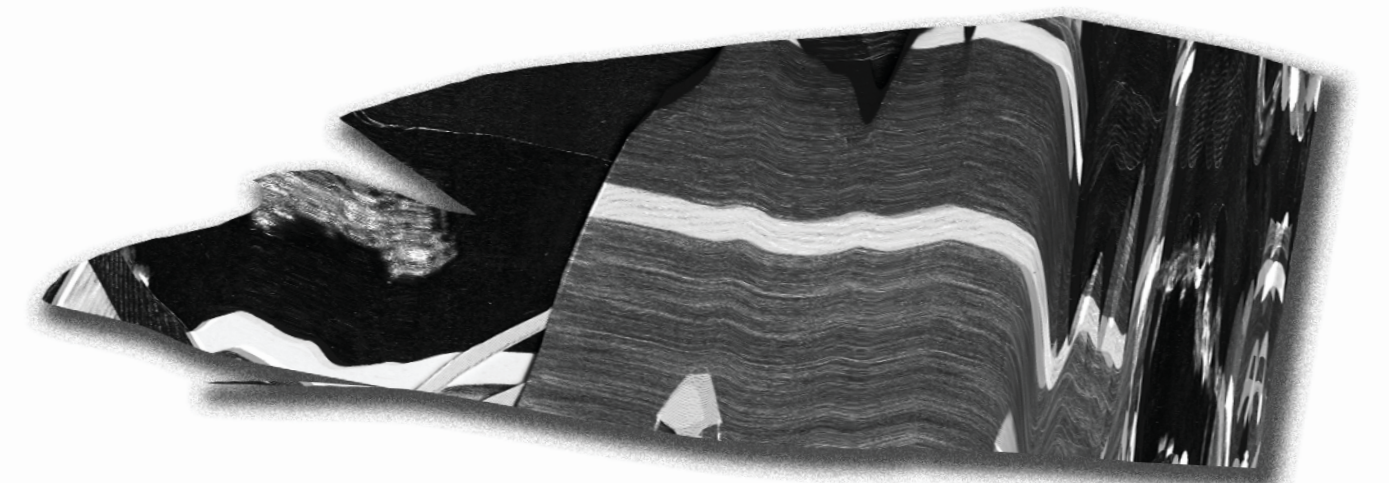
Alice: Sketching out a rhythm of my breath, shared breath. I'm thinking about the warmth from napping in this one room in my grandmother's house: an upward feeling of being held and not having the fear of anything, not having weight to your selfness. A napping breath, baby breath, dala breath, new world breath, feeling of time when you are held in a pod of warmth. My grandparents' room was facing south, all quiet, after everyone's eaten lunch, a serenity of being locked in that moment, a stillness, time is not passing, and yet, you feel like everything is progressing the way it should. The trees, seasons, doing what they need too. Breathing, leaning into joyful breath.

we are already ancestors. what are we laying the groundwork for?

Jovonna: As a Black person living in the United States without wealth, I am trying to wrestle with this feeling of guilt around not having something to inherit, feeling like I need to rigorously and enthusiastically account for that lack of inheritance financially. A whole life can be about trying to get that house so you can leave it for other people. There is this sense of value to finally figure out inheritance for Black folks in particular, but all of that is about capital. What are we laying the groundwork for as ancestors? Can we think about that so much more radically? Even our sense of what that groundwork is, is so shaped by capitalist desires. I want to divorce myself of the desire for property. Property is how we ravished the earth.

to be born into a lineage of grief.

Kimi: In Hebrew, the word for breath [neshama] and the word for soul [neshama] have the same root word. The language connects the meanings of two words, as if to say, *neshama* gives life to *neshama*, or vice versa. My mom [Dafna Rehavia] would say, "*Neshima* is to have a life and *neshama* is to appreciate the life that is all around us." I'm thinking about the breaths we share with others, those we know and don't know, and how that relates to the way grief, especially grief that is passed on through generations, can divorce us from the linear perception of time, opening up past, present, future at once. Being born into a lineage of grief, for me, means being intimately connected to the terror my ancestors survived, and carrying a deep sense of responsibility, fear, and guilt, for and around the terror I bear witness to or experience in my everyday life. What does it mean to think of your breath as connected to your soul? Remembering that breath is necessarily shared with others, those you know and don't know, moving from inside to outside to inside of your precariously living body?



feeling like prey.

[The following is an excerpt from a short-essay-as-social-media-post alea adigweme posted on august 29th, 2020, following Chadwick Boseman's death.]

*alea: i am feeling a lot of heartbreak today. thinking about having cancer in secret and continuing to work. thinking about the ways white cishetero patriarchy and ableism poison relationships at every scale and level of intimacy. thinking about the two men of color i had to "terminate" yesterday on the direction of my manager's manager because they were deemed "low-performing" [y'all know i always have my odd jobs; i'm currently "Census Field Supervisor" aka, Federal Employee], thinking about forgetting i had my second appointment with my new psychiatrist yesterday, where we were going to talk about my options because my major depressive disorder is drug-resistant and i have tried almost every drug on the market since i first started antidepressants at 12, but i don't want to add an antipsychotic because i worry about side effects. thinking about, as ever, work and what it means to work and what counts as work and what it means to Not Work [a very belated thank you to kiese for that last one], thinking about what my life looks like to y'all through the lens of social media updates. thinking about how you would eulogize me if i died. thinking, always, about the cancer coming back. thinking about the precarity of black life, the constant feeling like we can't have *anything*, like we can't do *anything*, like something — someone, a posse of so many someones — is always waiting to snatch your life, your kin, your breath, your happiness at any and every moment. thinking a lot lately about never writing another thing again. thinking, really, about never writing another word of nonfiction again that isn't a social media post. thinking about my mom, every day, and whether she would be proud of me and how much she would hate that i'm a messy domestic failure despite her exacting standards and sometimes-cruel tutelage. thinking about how this week started with Good News, but that good news feels like it happened to someone else many universes away. thinking about all the emails and texts and phone calls and letters and postcards and whatsapp messages and dms that i already owe to people, and the responses to this post that i will likely read and "love," but probably not respond to in depth [sorry]. thinking about whether that just makes me a Taker who never gives anything. thinking, always, that i'm, like, The Shittiest Friend. thinking about how puffy my face is from crying for the better part of nineteen hours and the zoom i have to be on in 45 minutes. thinking about the ending of <<donnie darko>>. thinking about my friend adina talve-goodman and the last phone conversation we had and what her mother said during her funeral, which i watched on my laptop in my bathrobe — that "adina LOVED her life" — and what it means to continue to get up each day — most days — and try to keep Doing The Things when the getting up, most days, and the trying, most days, do not have a value that most people recognize. thinking about productivity and temporality, illness and neurodivergence. thinking about having cancer, in secret, and working So Hard and Publicly, not only for the self, but to give an entire people a bounty of gifts. what a crushing week. what a crushing series of weeks.*

what does liberation feel like?

Kimi: I'm thinking about the 2015 Baltimore Uprising and participating in marches and protests that took place at that time. What it meant in that particular moment and place to be one of many voices chanting, *I Can't Breathe*, in an immediate response to the murder of Freddie Gray, and more broadly, as a response to the legacies of violence and anti-Blackness this country was built on and perpetuates. And what it has meant this past summer, in protests and marches in Los Angeles, during this pandemic that has made me and so many others in my life fearful of gathering with others, to again be one of many voices chanting, *I Can't Breathe*. I keep coming back to one of the phrases I've heard repeated throughout many of the events: "We are at war. We have been at war."

¹ *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* is a 2013 nonfiction book by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

THANK YOUS & CREDITS

bless our breath is initiated and designed by Kimi Hanauer and organized in collaboration with Gas. *bless our breath* is based on ideas and phrases generated through an online workshop including artists, writers, academics and organizers, alea adigweme, Gordon Hall, Jovonna Jones, Malcolm Peacock, Ceci Moss, Kimi Hanauer, and Alice Yuan Zhang in the summer of 2020. Augmented reality filters for the deck of cards are created and designed by Alice Yuan Zhang. Presented by Gas in November 2020. Learn more at: gas.gallery/exhibitions/bless-our-breath.