

Circular Storytelling

An international creative writing project

Three Engineering students from TU Delft and three French students from Université Lumière Lyon 2, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 and Université Paris 8 explore the world from the animal perspective while becoming first-time authors. An exercise in storytelling, creativity and empathy. Here are their stories.

Creative Writing Workshop held during the **International Forum on the Novel** (Lyon) by Matthew Neill Null, author of *Honey from the Lion* (Lookout, 2015) and *Allegheny Front* (Sarabande, 2016)

With special thanks to Eric Baratay for his input and advice.

These stories are part of the Circular Storytelling partnership project between Villa Gillet (Lyon) and the LDE Center for Sustainability/DORP (The Hague). This collaboration was conceived during the Tandem Europe program and was financed by Tandem Europe.



Villa Gillet
Lyon / Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Leiden•Delft•Erasmus
Centre for Sustainability

INFINITE

by Renee Swinkels (TU Delft, engineering)

'We dance by ourselves, that's why we listen to electronic music'

She felt

insignificant. Infinite buildings rising around her. It struck her every time, the joint feeling of amazement and fear in this big mass. A mass always in motion. Always in a hurry. Where are they all constantly going? The air always damp even if the sky looked clear. It was a sunny morning. It almost appeared quiet and calm. The light turned green, and it started. The buzz, the rush, the chaos: people running, pushing, cursing. A mixed sound of claxons, engines and silence. The pace was fast, people hurrying to their destinations. Everybody seemed alone in their collectiveness. Alone. All together in the crowd. But still alone. The common loneliness.

This moment always

reminded her of the first moments she found herself lost in the city. It represented the city as a massive living organism. All parts interconnected by overcrowded vessels. Continuously adapting to change, to growth. Always wanting more. An unexotic world acting like an ecosystem. A saturated, polluted ecosystem with its own metabolism. An overload of possibilities, excess of interaction made them all act as individual cells in this system. Individuals always wanting more. These kinds of mornings made her long her early days. Days when quiet mornings remained quiet. Where a clear sky was clear. Where she could find something untouched.

She is a worker, she has long days from 9 to 5. Days with only one goal: finding food, surviving. The division in society is clear. Every individual fulfilling their own task, having their own place in the smooth working superorganism: The city. A unified entity carried by women: workers, engineers, scouts, soldiers, nurses and the queen. The work divided, 'A factory with a fortress'. Every day, the same riddle again. The exploration, the search. Diving into the infinite world. She used to be higher up the hierarchy, closer to the queen. Not anymore. The system grew bigger, colonizing bigger parts of the world. Thriving new ecosystems. Thriving and adapting to its new environment, adapting but not disturbing. She grew older and devalued. But there is no problem to risk her life day in day out. She accepts her place in the collective: take one for the team.

She used to be a worker, before she got lost. Before the incident happened. Before They took her away from her sisters. They all walked behind each other, an endless trail, the chain looking for food. Suddenly they felt the earth shaking, something approaching. It was one of Them, one of them but different. Tinier than usual, tiny but still gigantic. It was clumsy, stumbled around making undefinable coo-cooish sounds. A massive fleshy substance approached, it came closer and closer. It tried to grab all of them, tried and succeeded. A dozen milling around on the hand. The surface moving closer to a warm, breathy opening. At one moment, there is a glance, they meet, an encounter. She looks in the eyes of her predator. The confusedly joyful and warm eyes. An overwhelming sound grasps through the air. An

overwhelming sound, followed by an immense shock. 'HONEY DO NOT PUT THAT IN YOUR MOUTH'

The ground beneath her feet disappeared. Launched through the air. Finds herself dazzled and lost. Alienated. No sounds, no scent, no signals. Where is everybody? She needs to get home. She needs to bring back food.

The daily conquest begins. An endless concrete plain opens in front of her. Her eyes on the target, a large pile of resources at the horizon. Close but so far away, distanced by uncountable obstructions. The immense grey surrounding feels hostile, a constant tension is present. The constant roaming sound works disorientating. Spinning objects coming dangerously close. Trying to avoid one, two or four wildly rotating objects. Then there is Them. The human chaos: unsystematic, solitaire and almost without a purpose. Why do they all gather on this artificial grey representation of nature? Instantly the temperature rises, she feels an instant heat surrounding her. She accelerates her pace, trying to avoid the red, smoldering mass. What is this? What is this smelling, burning substance? The mapped out clear path fades, the number of feet rising. Plastics and cans turning up all around. More. Always more. It is impossible. Impossible to see the wood for the trees. The leaves blurring in the sea of plastics, cans and humans. Strayed in the changed ecosystem. The only task seems impossible now, now she is alone. With no one to be warned by, no one to carry the price with. No one. She needs to get home. She needs to bring back food.

A little rest, deserved rest. She always loves the water. The stillness, the straightness, the fresh breeze. But it changed. Changed like the City did. Changed like every landmass after They colonized it. The bright glint waned, when time passed. She just sits here to look at them. To observe them. Them and their way of living together, their strange colony. Their collective of millions solitary individuals. Observing them, feeling them, climb onto their infinite body mass rising above her. Climbing through their hairy legs, arms, hands. Trying to understand them. She finds herself dancing on a slippery screen, a screen continuously changing from light to black. Losing her grip. Desperately trying to find common ground. Trying to find help, she looks in the eye of the predator. Infuriating eyes. A hostile look as if their whole life was centred around this black slippery screen. A huge shock made the screen underneath her disappear. Launched through the air. Finds herself dazzled and lost. She need to get home, away from these infinite creatures. She needs to bring back food.

Finally home. The longing for the scent, sound and structure dominated her. An indescribable force always drawing the ants back. Back to the heap. The smell of pheromones strengthens. The finite building rising upfront her. A highly populated pile. A megastructure above and under the ground level. Legions carrying bits to construct and maintain it the colony. It strikes her every time the feeling of almost a utopian world. A spotless matriarchal society. A unified entity with millions of individuals collectively working together, working to support the colony. Working to make it work. A mass always in motion. Always in a decisive hurry. A structured chaos: carrying

leaves, twigs, nursing, constructing. Women coming back and forth, cringing systematically. Together. All together in the crowd.

Promptly a strong, swirling wind comes in. A cylinder with an incredible blowing force. A force combined with a horrible roaring sound. She tries to hold on. Hold on to her leaflet, hold on the ground. Trying to continue her way back to the leap. They all try to hold on, to protect their home, protect their lives. But it is stronger. Stronger than the individual. Stronger than the society. Stronger than the structure. Leaves, twigs, sister flying through the air. Chaos. They broke it. Disrupted it. We have to start all over again.