

ARC grant
final report
2 short scenes from *Emergency Mushroom Report*
by David Bloom

The following are two scenes that connect to the idea that fungi have been connecting with humans for a long time. The first is an interview in a police station with a woman who seems to have some mental health issues. (In fact, she finds life as a part fungal human incredibly difficult.) The second is an interview between the leader of a mushroom cult and a mycologist about the possibility of human/fungal symbiosis. They have somehow seen parts of the first interview and refer to it.

In the context of *Emergency Mushroom Report*, The Speaker is showing various bits of data to various members of The Mountain. At this point, the population of The Mountain has been underground for 300 years. They periodically send Ranger units out to explore the surface world. The most recent trip has unearthed a trove of data in multiple formats which The Speaker is trying to interpret in consultation with different, trusted members the "Small Council". [I'm hoping I will be able to upload a short video clip from the 'Symbiotic Cabaret' which will make this process a little clearer.]

During the show, she will present short excerpts of the following scenes to illustrate points. (The Speaker holds information tightly and only shares what she absolute must: one of the ways she holds on to power in The Mountain.) The full scenes will be accessible online if audiences wish to explore the world further after seeing the show.

Mushroom people

INTERVIEWER and MADDY. Police station interrogation video.

INTERVIEWER: Interview re-commence at 4:47 pm. Okay, Maddy, have you calmed down?

MADDY: Sorry, I... was I out of control? It's just it's been awhile since I've had to talk about this to anyone. I don't know how. People get...
...or is it me?

Pause

MADDY: Hm...

INTERVIEWER: Is what you?

MADDY: Sorry?

INTERVIEWER: You said, "or is it me?"

MADDY: ...

INTERVIEWER: Is what you?

MADDY: (beat) I think maybe it's me. But you too, eh?

INTERVIEWER: Um...?

MADDY: Yeah, you too.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to need a little more than —

MADDY: Words are just terrible.

INTERVIEWER: Which...words?

MADDY: They're wrong. It's like making an omelette with flippers. With... like talking with flippers. If you could reach out your... (*hyphae gesture*)... eh? I could just share it with you. But you won't.
I mean, you can't. Sorry, not your fault.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Maddy, I feel like you're trying to tell me something, but you're talking around it.

MADDY: No, *language* is weird.

Beat

MADDY: Can I...? Let's start again.

INTERVIEWER: That would be great, Maddy.

MADDY: Hold my... can you hold my hand?

INTERVIEWER: What? No. (*INTERVIEWER looks O/C, reconsiders*) Yes, of course, I —

INTERVIEWER takes out hand sanitizer, starts cleaning hands,

MADDY: What's in that?

INTERVIEWER: It's just hand-sanitizer.

MADDY takes the bottle and reads it.

MADDY: (*uncertain*) Okay.

MADDY puts out hand. INTERVIEWER takes it. After a moment the INTERVIEWER recoils in horror. The INTERVIEWER has had a disturbing vision though MADDY's touch.

INTERVIEWER: What the —!?

MADDY: Yes, it's different, isn't it?

INTERVIEWER: That's... what did you do?

MADDY: You see why it's hard to put in language.

INTERVIEWER: It's a nightmare.

MADDY: ...a...?

INTERVIEWER: It's just... it's disgusting.

MADDY: I see you have tr[ouble]—A nightmare? No, I... disgusting? It's truth.

INTERVIEWER: That's some H.P. Lovecraft shit right there. *(to camera)* No, I'm out, man —

INTERVIEWER starts grabbing stuff to leave.

MADDY: You see, this is why I find it hard to communicate with humans —

INTERVIEWER: *(stops)* What'd you say? ... "with humans"?

MADDY: With...*other* humans. Because you don't see what I... feel what... do you see? You're afraid?

INTERVIEWER: Look, that was freaky. I don't know what you're —

MADDY: Yes. But this is the world. And somehow I'm supposed to help you see...

I'm supposed to help you all see. But I don't speak your language. I don't know what they were thinking.

INTERVIEWER: Who's "they"?

MADDY: I was born...

INTERVIEWER: ...yes?

MADDY: ...yes. But when my... *(rounded belly gesture, looks for word)* ...*mother* was carrying me, they... joined in.

INTERVIEWER: "they".

MADDY: Yes. They helped my mother to make me.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MADDY: It's not as unusual as you might think. There are many of us. But I'm not supposed to be ... public yet. It's not time. I'm just not very good at this.

INTERVIEWER: *(to O/C)* Okay, I need someone from social services here. I *told* you —

Camera is turned off.

THE ROOT and DR ANJAY E KAMAT recorded in a lab setting

KAMAT: Thank you for joining us today

THE ROOT: A pleasure.

KAMAT: We're recording this conversation...

THE ROOT nods assent.

KAMAT: Good. Are you familiar with the case of Maddy Jane Doe?

THE ROOT: This is the woman who you spoke to me about...?

KAMAT: Yes.

THE ROOT: I watched the footage.

KAMAT: Yes, we were contacted by Social Services. They're trying to understand her claim to be... part... well, fungus.

THE ROOT: Quite a claim.

KAMAT: The obvious answer is that she is delusional, but it does appear that she is capable of... her touch has stimulated what appear to be vivid hallucinatory reactions.

THE ROOT: Yes, fascinating if it's true.

KAMAT: What do you make of her claim?

THE ROOT: Her claim to be a kind of human/fungal hybrid?

KAMAT: Yes, I was thinking that would be quite... aspirational for your followers.

THE ROOT: Oh, we don't claim to *be* fungi. We're just people.

KAMAT: But from what I understand, you believe that fungi are superior to humans, isn't that right?

THE ROOT: We don't see the world in a hierarchical way.

KAMAT: So, if I put it another way, would it be fair to say they're more... important than humans?

THE ROOT: More necessary perhaps. Inevitable... more central. But superior/inferior, higher/lower these things don't really mean anything under the earth.

KAMAT: So then, at the ... heart?

THE ROOT nods slightly at 'heart'

KAMAT: At the heart of your ... belief system, fungi are necessary, humans aren't.

THE ROOT: It's actually a very calming thought.

KAMAT: Is it possible, though, that people like this Maddy Jane Doe are evolving to communicate with the fungal world?

THE ROOT: You're suggesting that someone like Maddy has somehow fused with a fungus?

KAMAT: What did she say? "... I'm supposed to help you see... I'm supposed to help you all see."

THE ROOT: Yes.

KAMAT: And she seems to believe that some kind of fungal intelligence was involved in her mother's pregnancy.

THE ROOT: What a wonderful idea! "Fungal intelligence." In this woman's mind, she has a mission to be a bridge between fungi and humans.

KAMAT: That's what she seems to think. But it's made her life hell.

THE ROOT: Well, of course, the way we understand intelligence and communication are wildly different from how fungi interact with the world. So, for a human mind to share ideas with a mycelial network, that could be very unsettling.

KAMAT: Certainly, the cop she touched was... she was pretty damn unsettled.

THE ROOT: So, in this world we're imagining, fungi have decided, for whatever reason, that they need to communicate with humans, but their whole way of being in the world is so radically different from humans that they've ... shall we say *infiltrated* the human gestation process and cooperated in the making of a human, but in so doing they've driven her mad.

KAMAT: I agree, it's fanciful.

THE ROOT: And in this thought experiment, Maddy is one of the first, a failed attempt at communicating with humanity.

KAMAT: Perhaps?

THE ROOT: I suppose my question is, why now?

KAMAT: Interesting.

THE ROOT: Humanity in one form or another has been around for nearly three million years. Fungi have been on the planet far longer, and we've seen that they interact with hundreds of thousands of species. Why now?

KAMAT: Unless they sense a crisis of some kind, and we're the cause...

THE ROOT: That's fun. Fungi see, for example, radical climate change emerging and conclude somehow that humanity is the primary cause —

KAMAT: A correct conclusion...

THE ROOT: Most likely, yes... So, they reach out to random humans like Maddy in an attempt to warn us... is that it?

KAMAT: In this thought experiment?

THE ROOT: Yes.

KAMAT: Having spent my life studying fungi, I can't bring myself to rule it out.

THE ROOT: Too bad they're too late then, eh?

KAMAT: The earth's entire ecosystem was overwhelmed by Anthropocene climate change.

THE ROOT: That could be your answer then. It's a last ditch, desperate attempt to reach out to humanity. If so, we can expect to see many more failed experiments like Maddy.

KAMAT: That's depressing, isn't it, that thought?

THE ROOT: Since we're fantasizing, shall I spin you another possibility?

KAMAT: Please, please do.

THE ROOT: As you surely know, the timeline of fungal evolution is very long. Fungi find ways to interact with other beings, and it can take thousands, hundreds of thousands of years for these connections to be made.

KAMAT: Quite right.

THE ROOT: If there was an evolutionary benefit for fungi to interact with human beings, would it not have started a long, long time ago. If fungi needed to interact with our species the way they do, for example with / root systems...

KAMAT: /...root systems...

THE ROOT: ...yes, then why would they not have started ... well, if not millions of years ago, at least thousands of years ago when human civilization began?

KAMAT: Well, as you say, the timeline is long. Perhaps they did.

THE ROOT: And Maddy is the final result...?

KAMAT: Hm...

THE ROOT: Mm...?

KAMAT: Well, of course there would be more than one final result.

THE ROOT: One would think.

KAMAT: Many more...

THE ROOT: Thousands of millions of attempts, surely?

KAMAT: That would be most likely.

THE ROOT: What did she say about timing?

KAMAT: Mm?

THE ROOT: (*consults transcript*) "I'm not supposed to be ... public yet. It's not time."

KAMAT: Quite right.

THE ROOT: "I'm not very good at it."

KAMAT: So, in this scenario, she's... she's just...

THE ROOT: Unlucky. After all, mushrooms that produce spores, makes thousands of them that never grow. They throw them to the wind, scatter them, feed them to animals...

KAMAT: Nature is excessive. Hippocrates was quite wrong about that.

THE ROOT: So, presumably, if one unsuccessful human/fungal hybrid is visible to us...

KAMAT: Oh, and if they're not supposed to reveal themselves... "It's not time".

THE ROOT: Yes —

KAMAT: Then there are thousands or or or... *millions* of other human/fungal hybrid experiments out there.

THE ROOT: Certainly, why not?

KAMAT: So, why isn't it time? What are they waiting for?

THE ROOT: Who's to say?

KAMAT: Well, surely a ... a mushroom... cul — (*stops himself from saying 'cult'*) group like yours would be contacted by these hybrids. Surely!

THE ROOT: One would think.

KAMAT: But you haven't... it's not time yet, so you don't share that information.

THE ROOT: Doctor, we're still fantasticizing, yes? Is that a word?

KAMAT: Are we?

THE ROOT: It's a lovely fantasy. That there would be humans walking among us today who can shift from a... well, a mushroom consciousness to a human and back again. A lovely, lovely idea.

KAMAT: Isn't it?

THE ROOT: But, of course, we're... my followers and I, we're just people.

KAMAT: You're sure?

THE ROOT: (*laughs*) Of course, in this thought experiment, I couldn't tell you if it was otherwise. "It's not time."

KAMAT: "It's not time."

THE ROOT: But no, we're just people.

KAMAT: You are.

THE ROOT: Of course.

There is a cagey pause. THE ROOT laughs again.

THE ROOT: Of course.

Long pause. Camera cuts off.