

CONSTELLATION CONVERSATION — PLUTO

Daniel Alexander Jones & Langston Kahn

Daniel Alexander Jones:

The Vietnam War, the waning of the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the Women's Rights Movement and the LGBTQ Movement, Watergate, oil crises, the rightward shift in United States politics and the election of Ronald Reagan, various economic downturns and booms, the rise of neoliberalism, the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, the development of the internet, the late Cold War and the fears of nuclear holocaust, the fall of the USSR. The election of Bush and Cheney, 9/11 and the war on terror, the great recession and the election of Obama. The rise of Trumpism. The development of social media and the progress in [the development of] artificial intelligence.

This list, what does any of this have to do with the planet in question, Pluto? Pluto, because of its location at the edge of the solar system and the length of its orbit takes a very, very long time to circuit the Sun. And so astrologically it exerts an influence on whole generations. This list of things that I've shared all impacted the development of my own identity and the development of the identity of everybody in my generation, Gen X, and the subsequent generations. They're forces that shaped the contours of our lives, opened or closed pathways, and suggested something about the kinds of questions we as generations needed to ask ourselves in order to grapple with one of Pluto's chief influences, which is, bringing us into contact with the idea of transformation and rebirth, a process that can be incredibly fraught with danger.

And so, I wanted to talk with someone who thinks about these things in terms of generational, inter-generational questions. What we inherit and what we pass along from one generation to another generation as these larger forces work their influence on all of us. And that person is Langston Kahn. So read up on Langston by the information we provided, but first, give a listen to our talk with this incredible, incredible being. Langston Kahn, talking about Pluto.

Langston Kahn:

Oh, wonderful to be here with you and I'm really excited to be talking about Pluto together. I guess a little bit I'd share about what I do is, is I call myself a shamanic practitioner and I'm not someone who's practicing primarily in a traditional shamanic lineage. For example, a shamanic lineage coming out of the Tungus people or Peruvian shamanism, but rather a contemporary lineage that really is about addressing the brokenness of the time we're in. As people coming from deeply fractured lineages and traditions, many of us who carry lots of different ancestries.

It's a tradition that's about claiming spiritual adulthood and wholeness from within that broken culture and using a lot of different spiritual technologies to do that but holding ourselves accountable to this pre-contact Indigenous understanding of what it means to be an adult. A lot of my work is about guiding others and continuing to guide myself down that path of what does it mean to move towards greater wholeness and resiliency so we can weave that wholeness in these broken places in our culture.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So beautiful. I have a question just based on that and it is a question about wholeness. And I'm thinking as we were working on this project that the tagline, the thing that kept coming back to me is "I choose to remember as whole," this idea that wholeness is implicit versus wholeness is something that is attained. I'm curious if you would speak a little bit from your own work and your own tradition, knowing that this is such a broken time, such a fragmented time, and that knowledge of this brokenness is embedded in many of the prophetic traditions of so many Indigenous cultures that they have said, this was a time that was coming, that we are in a moment where the earth itself is reflecting the end of the line of ways of being in relationship to it. But I'm curious from you, do you believe our wholeness is integral or do you think it is something that we must and is maybe part of our journey to achieve?

Langston Kahn:

I think both are true.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Wonderful.

Langston Kahn:

Yeah. I think for me there's one level in which at least on an individual level, certainly, we can never be broken or fractured or wrong or something. That there's this space in all of us of deep wholeness at the essence of who we are that carries everything you've ever been and everything we'll ever be, I think. And I also believe that as individuals we can miss our destiny. That there's one level which we can't help but be from a shamanic perspective, that unique energy we came here to this earth to embody, that dream we felt so in love that we decided to come to the earth to manifest it. And the earth used all the incredible resources it takes to give someone a body so that we could manifest that dream.

And so on one level we can never not be manifesting that dream in some way. And yet, because in my understanding humans have free will and we can make choices, we can choose to move in opposition to our essence. Like a tree... a pine tree can't suddenly say, "Actually I want to be a squirrel. I'm going to be

a squirrel now." But we can say that we want to be something completely in opposition to the essence that we are, even as we are that essence. So I think that's how I hold that paradox. And so I think that's true on a collective level as well that on one level, everything is exactly as it should be, everything is perfect. And on another level there's very real challenges that we're facing as humanity and very real pain and suffering people are experiencing. And just because there's that spiritual truth of perfection or oneness, true alongside that pain and that brokenness, it doesn't mean that brokenness doesn't need to be addressed directly.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Yeah. Now, when I think about wholeness I often think about the idea of containing that brokenness rather than thinking of it being absent from the being. I go back to something that my late mentor, Robbie McCauley always said, which is, "Always seek to house your contradictions rather than resolve them." What does it mean to be able to say that there are some things we...? I cannot mend climate change, I don't have the power to mend it, but I'm part of the people who are alive right now who are attempting to mend it. So it's both things being true at the same time.

And there's a relationship at any given moment to be able to be present to the Earth that in a given moment in a particular place can have great beauty and can have great serenity to it even. But it's in the context of knowing there's, not many miles from here right now, a massive wildfire. We just have seen these floods in the south and we've seen the floods in Europe and so there's no hiding place. Something you brought up brings me to one of the first aspects of Pluto that I'd like to introduce to our conversation, which is this idea of Pluto as a generational planet. Meaning, because it is the furthest out object, which is now called a dwarf planet. Some people just say that it's an object in the outer sphere. But Pluto takes such a long time to orbit the Sun and therefore its influence is, within the realm of astrology, it exerts a slow pull, a deep impact.

The questions that come from Pluto are often questions that accompany a whole generation. I'm thinking of what you were talking about, about this being a broken time and that we are in the midst of generational questions and generational stories some of which have come to the surface, some of which are still in shadow but they move at a pace where none of us can escape them, all of us have to engage them.

And one of the things that I loved about... I was rereading some data on Pluto in terms of its astrological implications and they were talking about how Pluto rules *plumbing*. Pluto rules these deep interior parts of the being where many things might be gurgling and bubbling and happening but it takes them a while to surface. But when they surface we can mistake that for an epiphany or a thing that just shows up quickly, but it's actually the result of a longer process.

In your observation, in your work, a lot of what you talk about is the necessity of engaging, not only generational healing but what is intergenerational. What does it mean that there are some things that carry over? What are some of the particular generational issues that you were born into, that you have lived with, that feel like they are vital for your understanding of your life, of our world, and that have taught you or challenged you?

Langston Kahn:

There's so many. And I think when I try to look for the root that touches into the many different challenges I could talk about, what I think about is actually the abandonment of ritual. And for me, I mean, it might sound like that's an esoteric concept or not specific enough, but how I think about that abandonment of ritual is the abandonment of tending these necessary thresholds that all humans pass through. The abandonment of tending birth, really communicating with the young ones that are coming before they get here on this earth, making sure they know what they're getting into, talk to them about the gifts they're bringing so we can help support them in remembering those gifts when they get here, because there's that amnesia that happens when we're born.

And the tending of the initiation into adulthood, that threshold where we are able to really drop our family of origin baggage, reconnect with our lineage of ancestral wisdom, coming through us, reconnect with that essence energy that we came here to embody and then take our place in community sharing those gifts in relationship with not just the human world but also the more-than-human world and that being an intrinsic part of how we live our everyday life. Understanding that I think many people have the misconception that in Indigenous communities, the shaman, or spiritual leaders or priests or the people who manage a relationship with spirit, but in most pre-contact Indigenous communities everyone is responsible for tending their personal relationship with spirit. You go to like the shaman when things are really going sideways.

Yeah. And so I feel there's this lack of understanding that to be an adult in those cultures would mean that you were tending that relationship with spirit for yourself and taking on that responsibility. Because we can't help but be in relationship with each other and with the spirit world all the time, the relationships are there no matter what, but we want to make sure they're not relationships with exploitation.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Absolutely.

Langston Kahn:

Yeah. I feel that there's that... that abandonment of rituals is abandonment of tending relationship really on so many different levels and I think we see the fallout of that generationally as we lack elders. This

other threshold that these people that have moved to those gates and have transmuted what was poison in their life into wisdom they could really deeply share with others. And—

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Yeah. We were just talking about the *Summer of Soul* documentary and we're talking about summertime music festival, the celebration. It was absolutely ritual. It was the summer equinox and that period of celebrating the vitality of life manifested in an urban secular context. Right. But for sure we all acted that way and there was something about what it meant to meet one another. Even as little kids, going to this festival—in the context of the festival, you were different, you were presented differently. You moved differently, you saw your fellow members of the community differently. They were opulent, they were beautiful, they were kissed by the sun, and there was a way that it became a kind of gratitude space.

You celebrated that you made it through a dark winter in Massachusetts, and you celebrated that people had new kids or that somebody was a teenager now. It was a place also because it was usually right after whatever school year would be completed, there was also the sense for the kids of graduating from the fifth grade and you're going to go to the sixth grade and everyone marked collectively that people had lived another year and they celebrated that.

And then the other thing that comes to my mind is, as you were talking about what is the work that *you* do versus going to a shaman in traditional cultural context. And this is a strange image but it came to me so strongly because I remember my father, his best friend, Rodman, our neighbor, Mr. Burr, trying to fix my mother's car. And they were all three of them, and there's a picture of it, I still have a picture of it. And they're all up under the car. The hood is up, somebody's legs are sticking out from under or whatever, but I'm like, the car was constructed in such a way that most people knew what the parts were. And they knew something about what it took to keep it going.

There came a time because of automation and Reagan and all this stuff like that, and now you have to be a computer scientist to fix the car. There's a way that that knowledge got divorced from folks. And it's a symbol of something much deeper, which is without those rituals, without those understandings of the map of what a human life usually contains, as these big signifiers, when we lift up the hood we don't know what's under there. We're presented with this incredible being, this incredible manifestation of life, but we don't know what the plumbing is doing. Right?

Langston Kahn:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, that's such a good metaphor. And I think what that makes you think about too is how there's somewhat of a malicious undercurrent to that too. It's not just that we forget what the

parts look like or the parts get too complex, it's now, for example with many computers you get sued if you try to open them up and work with them even if you are a computer scientist. There's this move away from allowing for that personal tending and responsibility that I think is necessary collectively.

And so another thing that makes me think about too is with this lack of elders, I think one of the things that really has characterized my generation perhaps is this sense of having the emotional body of children a bit. I don't think that's just unique to my generation, I think many of us are raised by adults similarly, but maybe it was characteristic, is navigating the social media spaces with that lack of an adult emotional body and then having to learn how we can engage with each other as a people, side-stepping around those traumas that we carried from our childhood and understanding trauma. But then I think there's been a danger of not just my generation of people in general, right now adopting trauma as trauma theory, like polyvagal theory or attachment theory, as a cosmology for their life.

And it's part of a symptom I think of what you're talking about, they're forgetting what's under the hood because it's like we receive this information that's good, vital, important information around trauma, but we have so little other context and references for health in our lives and our culture that we latch onto that as that which we would carry in an Indigenous culture to navigate our life. But it doesn't have the same purpose. It shrinks us and shrinks our world, seeing only that psychological lens versus an actual authentic cosmology which stretches you and helps you to live in the mythic and remember the vastness and multiplicity of who you are and sort of puts you back in relationship with that subtle pull of an energy like Pluto that's calling us back to our desire and the parts of ourselves that we've maybe never even seen a reflection in our world yet.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

So beautifully said. So evocative and so healing, even that language the way that you phrased it. I think about in your book there's a point where you're talking about the phenomenon of being triggered and how replete our popular discursive spaces are with the language of what it means to be triggered. That an event that we, or an experience that we have in the present moment unlocks traumatic memory and that the event may have congruence with the thing that happened to you. It may be different than it but it's somehow signifies it for you and it creates a response in the body, in the consciousness, that is at a scale that is out of proportion to the event that's happening in the room or in the space in real time.

It also becomes a collapse of time and collapse of dimension. So a past event and a past place collide with the present moment and collide with a population of people who weren't there at that time. It's an interesting also blur of one's interiority and the outside world, all of which is happening together. But I love in your book that you talk about... And I'm going to paraphrase here so forgive me, you can correct me because you wrote it. But you talk about often those triggering experiences as being invitations. It's like a

friend coming to you to say, look, here's a place where you can journey. You can actually move deeper into your own awareness. You can begin a healing process or amplify a healing process.

And I think about that in light of your invitation and the book says, It is the equivalent to me of an elder's hand coming out to the child that's crying and saying, 'Come on, let's get you cleaned up. I'm not going to take away what made you sad. I'm not going to tell you not to feel sad, but we're going to move from this moment where you're on the ground screaming and I'm going to bring you in the kitchen and put some water on your face and we're going to deal with what's wrong.' And that act of saying there's something beyond this moment of heat is so generous and so rare at this time.

And I'm curious if you think this is one of the big generational lessons that we are having to grapple with. I see so much discord around this issue between the boomers; my generation, which is Generation X tucked up in the middle of all y'all; and then the Millennials; and then Gen Z. We have a lot of different, a lot of different constituencies who have very different relationships to this idea of healing your trauma.

Langston Kahn:

Yes. I think that the act of withdrawing our projections when we have been triggered and being willing to actually take the time to unpack the gifts of that trigger, to track, to understand what does it feel like is being done to me and then find the way we're embodying that dynamic within ourself. Understanding that no one else can make us have a trigger, that someone can embody a pattern of energy that reminds us of another pattern that is already set up but then that doesn't mean the person is any less of an ass for whatever they did.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Mmm-hmm.

Langston Kahn:

But it means that we can take back our power through being willing to look at the trigger as a message from our body and our life as in conspiracy with each other to try to remind us of parts of ourselves that are stuck in choices we made to survive when we were younger.

And I think maybe what is so important right now in this generation in my perspective and something I'm really working to do more and more in myself is not stop there either. I think that's a great important place to go, that willingness to do that. But we've had technology to do that for so long and different processes and different beautiful work people have done since even the '60s and '70s I'm sure before that too. But what I think is unique about this time is bringing together the really effective tools for that kind of deep

inner work with our outer work of organizing, of direct action, of community building with each other and not seeing those two as separate or compartmentalized but as a necessity for each other to exist and actually have traction in the world.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Absolutely. I was mentioning to Kyla¹ that I did something the night before last that I do maybe once a year and I wasn't sure why I was compelled to do it until I remember we were going to be having this conversation. I watched a documentary that I watch... I try to watch it annually and it's called *Word is Out: Some Stories of Our Lives* and it's about the queer liberation movement in the 1970s. And it interviews a couple dozen folks. It's a long documentary, it's almost three hours long, and I go there because I want to visit with them. I fell in love with all of the people in this documentary when I first saw it many years ago.

One of the big reasons I went back is that one of the members of that group of people who were interviewed was this incredible lesbian feminist activist named, Sally Gearhart, and she just passed away a few days ago. And she was ill and last year I remember I donated to a GoFundMe campaign for her. And I felt some kind of way, I'd never met her, but I felt such a connection to her and to her as a kind of ancestral figure, an elder figure.

And when I went back I was struck by the following thing, that there were a lot of the conflicts in the film, which were intergenerational conflicts, so it felt like this is a Plutonian visit to that film. Where it mirrored some of the things today, there was one woman who was interviewed by these three young... She's was older, probably came of age in the '20s or '30s. And she was adamant that she was proud to be a lesbian but that she was uninterested in foregrounding that in her identity. And they were saying, "We feel it's so important to be in our rage and to actually yell at men on the street." It was amazing this late '70s moment. And they're like, "And we want to be alone. We want to be away from men."

And Sally Gearhart, whom I mentioned, was a separatist. She was... They asked her, "Do you think that women should be away from... Lesbians should separate from men?" She's like, "Yes, I do. And let me tell you why I think that." And she ended up living most of her life in a community of gay women in Northern California and was happy as a clam, it actually worked.

But the difference that I saw was that there was also a sense of the responsibility that all of them had to everyone's liberation and that there were definitive moments where that got linked to the Movement. And it was clear that the reason anyone was being interviewed, even though many of their stories were deeply painful, personal, interior experiences, often involving, because many of them came of age in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, horrible stories about being put in institutions and given electroshock therapy and losing family and living with such shame and sadness about what the effect of coming out was for them.

¹ Kyla Searle, the co-creator of this series of conversations.

There was also this other thing. And there are so many scenes of these same folks who were interviewed individually, at a march, in a protest, in a gathering, working with other women to make a thing. That part of it was filled with love and that's what I noted. It wasn't transactional, it wasn't about, "this is a good strategic move," it was a genuine belief in the ability for the society to be transformed. Pluto represents that kind of deep generational transformation. And I noted that the documentary was filmed in the mid-'70s. It was completed in 1977, came out in 1978. And of course there's this sense of everything, we're breaking out, we're about to do it and then you get the AIDS crisis and then you get Reagan.

And, I knowing the other side of that history also come with a reverence to say, "I'm watching these people who were about to head into a storm and a storm that's going to take many of them." And how profound it is to bear witness that there were things that they held that are gone now from our popular culture and there are things that they held that survived. What, what a big, big thing. And that's been on my mind in terms of this generational thing in questions of deep shifting.

And so I'd like to ask you, what do you think... When you look at your life, and you can share how old you are if you want to or not, but what do you feel as you've gotten older and as you've gotten deeper into the work, what are the things that you have carried from a previous generation that feel like good useful tools? What are the things you've let go of, and then what would you offer? I mean, you obviously made this incredible offering in the book, but what do you offer as something that you feel is an exemplary aspect of your generational gift? And what would you be like, "You know what? I ain't taking that. We're not carrying that forward?"

Langston Kahn:

For me, one thing that I carry forward... Well, I just think about what led me on the path that I am today and it definitely was people in my life who were holding this vision for me in different levels. And one person I remember is just a middle school teacher I had when I was in, I think I was in eighth grade, maybe even seventh grade. And we would go into school at, I don't know, 5:30 AM or 6:00 AM in the morning or something because they started school at...

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Wow.

Langston Kahn:

... ungodly hours. And so we would go before school started to meet with this teacher. So this is out of the kindness of his heart, he wasn't getting paid for this and he would read these counter-cultural books of the

'60s with us. I remember we read *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey. We read like some Thomas Pynchon, we read *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, there were written these crazy books for middle schoolers to be reading at 13 or whatever. But it was so helpful for me especially *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and that idea of The Combine. This hungry colonizing force.

To embody that in that book and help me to strip away how smooth and inevitable it can feel growing up where I was growing up in upper-middle-class white suburbia. My early years of my life I was in New York City in these alternative schools with so many different types of kids from all over the world. And then suddenly I was dropped from this very homogenous town when I was a little older in elementary school and middle school. And so for me that lineage of these countercultural writers actually really helped me to start to see that the pain that I saw my friends in and the fact that most adults and psychologist didn't seem to be able to help in any way wasn't just an inevitability but there was a larger structural problem that I needed to be investigating.

And that led me to start asking the questions that actually took me into shamanism because that was the first place where I really found some answers to what I saw as these deep structural problems that were so strange to me. Like the people that I found that were the most creative, the most sensitive, the most spiritual, were the ones that were in the most pain often and the most easily dismissed, it seemed in terms of conventional ideas of success.

Yeah. And so I think from there, there are many parts of that question. I might have to be reminded of certain parts of them. But when you talk about some of the... I guess the gifts that are unique offerings now for me, something I see in myself and in many other colleagues in my generation are people that can hold both the need to innovate and intense commitment to traditionalism *simultaneously*. I think in a lot of that counter culture of the '60s and '70s, there was this total throwing away of tradition. Postmodernism, "everything is fake, God is dead from modernism. Let's just do whatever the hell we want, and everyone can be a spiritual teacher".

And what I see in many of my colleagues and myself is this understanding that there's important ancestral wisdom that needs to be preserved in traditions from all around the world. For me, I'm part of a Lukumí tradition, Afro-Cuban tradition. I'm also part of a few other Indigenous lineages and I don't mix them or suddenly claim I'm an expert in them. It's very important to me to learn from the elders in those traditions slowly and carefully over decades as I grow in those practices and not rush to be an expert teaching other people about them or influencing people as an identity.

And I think we also hold an understanding of the unique challenges of the time that we're in that some of those traditions don't address, and the need to also innovate both within those traditions without disrespecting the lineages we come from and being very clear about where we're innovating, versus many of the writers from the '80s and '90s who were just pretending to invent things or just drawing from

whatever source they wanted to draw and claim it was their own writing. There's this new sense of reverence I think both to name our lineages and simultaneously be discovering what are the unique tools that can address the challenges of the times we're in versus trying to just do some kind of reconstruction in an imaginary world.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Absolutely. Which is one of the great pitfalls of looking back acritically and also looking back without an attention to the nuances of the moment that we are in, and also the potential futures that are linked to that present moment. I'm reminded, I go back to—you and I have talked before about Malidoma Patrice Somé's work and the call to understand what ritual is, as you've talked about also so powerfully and beautifully. And to say that a tradition becomes a tradition because of something that... It started because somebody needed to figure out how to fix something or how to address something or how to speak to something that was unutterable or didn't have a pattern. It came from an action. It came from a thing that hadn't been done before that then worked and people did it again, and they then taught other people how to do it.

But to remember that at the beginning there was a need, there was a call that was responded to with an action that became a thing that we think about as ritual. That idea that I also inherited from being a child of the '60s and '70s philosophically, is you can make a new thing. And by new I don't mean that it's never been done under the sun but you can respond to the moment that you're actually in with who you are, with what you have available to you, and there can be a truth to it and an importance to it.

And then too, what you're talking about is so vital because we have seen the ways in which the settler colonial project has severed and erased and expunged so much wisdom. So we then are tasked with looking at the times where we see people reinventing wheels because they don't know that there's already been so much work done and there's so many incredible resources available, but the ancestors are whispering right here. "We", and I'm not trying to put everybody in one box of "we", but we can't hear them because of the way that we've been conditioned.

I want to ask you in connection with that, a question about... This is a more personal question and it's one of the things that I was struck by with Pluto, is how familiar the idea of Pluto felt, in that Pluto is the furthestmost out in our popular imagination of the solar system. Therefore, there was a perspective to be had that it is the object that is at the margin. From the center of the sun, from our proximity on Earth. It's so far out, it can't be seen with the naked eye, of course.

For many years it didn't even register that there was something there and then people would theorize its existence. Then it came into existence, it was called Planet X for a while then it became Pluto. Then it was named a planet, then it was declassified to a dwarf planet and now people still don't know what

they're doing with it. But that idea that even in its invisibility and its furthestmost-outness it began to have narrative attached to it, projected onto it, and a story given to it.

And there's also the story of what it might feel like to be Pluto. The converse of that, which is, *where you are is where you are*. And you're not the furthestmost out if you're at that point in the heliosphere and you're conscious, that you're at the leading edge, you're the thing that's pushing it forward. You're the one who's going to see before anybody else sees where we're heading with the knowledge that the solar system is actually traversing the universe too.

And I thought about that a lot for me, for you, because in many ways we share some identifiers that are not common identifiers, but they're regular to us. But around gender representation, around identity, around race and culture and the imbrication of spirit with creative and intellectual pursuit, all of those things. But I said, a lot of my life I felt like Pluto, meaning that I've been on the outside but I haven't always felt like an outsider as much as somebody who's at the edge looking at what's coming. And there are times where I have felt that sense of watching time move that slowly, where I'm seeing and saying, "Oh, my memory is long. I remember before I was here. I remember the lessons of the elders that they gave me."

I also carry that slow generational regard for current events. And I often will look at a thing that happens and the first thing I think about is what is its precedent? How does that link to patterns of how that might've happened before? So yada yada, all of that's to say that I felt a deep kinship. And I'm curious about for you, can you talk about your own Queer body as a planetary body, as a celestial body? And thinking about Pluto and its positionality and its purpose, is there a story that feels like it's a right story to tell or an observation that feels like a right observation, and maybe even a question you want to ask?

Langston Kahn:

Sure. Yeah, I love that question. When I feel into my own Queer body as a planetary body, I feel this pull towards something that is undefined. And for a moment to be less personal about that I felt there's a way in which we're all, if we're really following that call of Pluto and the call of our own desire and our purpose, we're all on our own leading edge, we're all at our own margin because there's always that vastness of the unknown of our unconscious waiting to be brought into embodiment and expression that we're hopefully choosing to proactively dip back into so life doesn't have to be knock us over the head and push us in the water.

But for me right now with gender is probably a place that I feel this Plutonian element, this marginal element. Interestingly, as I'm beginning to explore more of the spaces and activities that would be expected of my gender assigned at birth, of being male. There's a way in which so much of my journey with gender was this decolonizing of my body and freeing my hips to move the way they wanted to move,

my hands and wrists to articulate beauty through them unapologetically and to explore these things that our culture labeled as the feminine, that I wouldn't call the feminine, but that are just parts of who I am, parts of my divinity.

Because in our culture there's a way that women are asked to be the sole bearers of beauty in some way. And this may be changing slightly but still heavily informs a lot of our culture so in exploring my own beauty, and my softness, and my fluidity, and ornamentation, that might be labeled as exploring the feminine. But for me it was untangling the things that I had said that, "Oh, I'm not allowed to use that part of my power because I have been labeled a man," and then exploring the masculine was a lot of, oh, this thing that I actually rejected because I was told I wasn't enough of a man to embody it, now I'm beginning to explore that.

And I feel like that's part of where I am right now in exploring things like boxing and certain aspects of weightlifting in certain ways and feeling this need to become harder in a sense so that my softness and my natural shape-shifting nature and fluidity could be a choice, a conscious choice I was making each moment versus a capitulation to the culture. Because the culture is like, "Oh, you're too femme, so you don't get to be called a man." So then I was like, "Sure. Fine, I don't want to be a man." And I'm not so interested... I don't really care if I'm a man or not but the fact that someone tells me I am not that thing does make me want to say this thing can also be something that's full of softness, and fluidity, and beauty, and multiplicity, and vastness. That to be a man is so much more than whatever you might label as the masculine.

And so I feel like that's just this very Plutonian element within myself because I'm doing these things on the surface, I don't feel necessarily even a ready desire to explore because parts of me so long ago were like, "Well, I don't want to do *that* if that's the rules you have to embody in that space." But feeling slowly how I can cultivate the capacity to embody all of me even in those spaces that have been labeled as the masculine and just seeing what new elements of myself that's revealing to me.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Oh, I love that so much. It makes me think about, again, thinking of Pluto on the outside, imagining Pluto for a moment everyone together as an eye, looking back toward the Sun and thinking about all that exists in our solar system is visible to it. So it actually in many ways is the container of the complicated whole, it contains all the possibility. And I reflect for a moment back to the film I was talking about, *Word Is Out*, and how there was a knowledge in so many of those figures that the bill of goods that they'd been sold was bull, it was a fake bill of goods. They didn't yet have all of the language to articulate it. We now have all that language, and it's so interesting to look back and say the knowledge of the experience was clear but it hadn't been so named. Now it is named but I also wonder, is the knowledge clear? Is the embodied experience of what that means so that what you're describing becomes a liberatory practice of saying, for

lack of a... you know, this is my kitschy head talking, of like Ashford & Simpson's lyric for Chaka in "I'm Every Woman." It's all in me. I have all of these possibilities.

And maybe one of the biggest generational liberatory questions — they could go either way — right, because also Pluto, it's interesting that Pluto has in it that possibility, that it is not a good or bad attribution, it's going to unfold however it unfolds. But that thing of *we are all these things and more*. We're all of what's seen and what's not seen. And so the ability, as you're saying, to make the space between yourself and the proclamation about who you are from someone else, the story that's been written. You're not a planet, you are a planet, you're not a planet. Whatever you've been given, you're not a man, you are a man, you're not a man, whatever those layers of identity and narrative are.

That there's a willingness now to say all of that is mutable, all of that is in a constellation of multiple possibilities. So in a way the generational question that I feel my generation has walked with, quietly, because I think Gen X is known for being grumblers but not necessarily... I think many of us are starting to speak up more... but I think we learned how to see *multiply*. I think our generation was a generation that learned to see the many, not the one. But we came of age at a time under Reagan where everything was directed toward the individual. So it's like our consciousness was forged with a collective mentality that then got dropped into a hyper-individuated machine, that machine you were talking about from your reading.

One other question I want to ask you, to conclude, is the relationship [between] Pluto and the underworld and death, and the idea of the death of an idea, of the death of... There are so many kinds of deaths. I, of course, while there's not a direct attribution mythologically, whenever I think about the underworld I think about Osiris. And I think about Osiris because to me this is a story of an underworld that is linked to the resurgence of life. The idea that it is through the journey in the underworld that you reclaim regeneration, the re-flooding of the Nile and this sense of Osiris moving from being the king to being the green god responsible for this vegetative force across the globe.

And you... I'll tell anyone who's listening that I've worked with Langston. I've come to Langston at some times of deep transition in my own journey and can attest to the power of your work... But one of the things you told me very early on is sometimes you need to kill stuff. And it was such a revelation to me because, and I can share with listeners, I grew up in a household that was dominated by nonviolence, which is a funny phrase to use, but it was... we grew up with... My parents were from the King wing of the Movement; and nonviolent protest and working toward peace and brotherhood were key.

I had another uncle who famously was friends with and knew Malcolm X who did not believe in that necessarily in the same way, so I definitely I had a range of influences around this question. But, yo, there is something so liberating about knowing that sometimes something must come to an end. And I wonder if you might talk a little bit about death in your understanding of its centrality to transformative practice.

Langston Kahn:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I want to say first that we're in a time right now with so much death that people are experiencing so immediately. And so I think we can have even more of a biases [sic] coming from maybe a different place than non-violence, but this real fear of killing things. And we're already feeling so much, people maybe not even having the space to really feel the grief of the loss as we've experienced, so I just want to acknowledge that.

And to me death is a necessity because I mean, obviously not just to me, to the Earth. If you look at any ecosystem, in any closed system or process, if there's not death then ultimately things will drown in their own waste and die. Living things need death for more life to emerge because we're in a closed system with a finite amount of resources to some extent. And so in our own bodies as planetary systems, if we aren't willing to sometimes really let things die, we're engaging in a kind of *hoarding*, a kind of binding of energy that's not ours to bind.

That, for example, this is something that really emerged for me recently in my community the Last... Well, really the Last Mask Center for Shamanic Healing and the cycle teachings in the community that grew out of that actually had to go through a death process to get closer to the vision of what our community really was meant to be. The vision that we were originally given by our helping spirits that we were asked to help manifest in terms of leadership by council and these ways of how as non-local contemporary people we can engage with each other in a way that honors Indigenous principles.

And so for me, that really taught me how if you were holding on to shame from your childhood, if you're holding on to like resentment for a parent or whatever it is, whatever the emotional expense you're holding on that came from your past, you just took whatever energy was around at that time and bound it in that form within you. And so to not allow that to die when it's ready to die, and I'm not talking about a spiritual bypass of "just let it go, just get over it"—no, but to actually really engage with it with fierce compassion and love and see that energy for what it was in the moment and see the self that made the choice to bind that energy and show up for them as your adult self in a way that they feel ready to truly authentically release that binding, to unravel that curse, you might call it.

Then we feed the invisible world. Because what was painful to us that was this horrible shame or this resentment, or bitterness, or anger, jealousy, or rage to us, to the spirit world is like incredible food. And so we stepped back into this relationship with this larger living system that we're all part of, versus getting stuck in this intense individualism when we drown in our own waste in a sense. And so for me personally,

I've had to go through many deaths in my process of different identities that I held for the sake of a more authentic understanding of who I could be in this moment.

There is... Yeah. I think of so many moments where the self that I thought was just me was in a sense this one part of me that had taken the reins, that was holding on really tightly and needed to be allowed to be lovingly honored and released and moved into the unknown, into that in-between place. It can be really uncomfortable that, you've talked about it before, that icky place in the chrysalis where everything's melting and gooey and gross so that I could have a chance to be in that space of the unknown long enough to feel a truer, deeper level of belonging of who I was here to be at this time.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's exquisite, exquisite, exquisite. And it's terrifying work. I think terrifying work for most people who through no fault of their own have... Again, I'm thinking about this thing of severing. When you have not been introduced to your own agency in matters such as this, it reads as an impossibility. It's not improbable, it's impossible. And this work that you do. I think one of the things I'd like to say to folk who are listening is that your book is so generous in that it tells the truth, both in a broad philosophical way so we can wrap our ideas around... wrap our heads, excuse me, around ideas that are generational ideas or multi-generational ideas or as-long-as-humans-have-been-on-the-planet ideas.

But also with such specificity, real stories, real examples, and practical tools to use to engage your everyday life, your body, your small rituals, the relationships that you do have. So that this is not—and what I love, and I think you talked about the '60s, '70s, then the '80s, '90s, and now—and this is not a self-help book. This is not a book that you go to... "Tuesday we're talking about goal setting," that's not this book at all. This is a book that I feel is intended to heal the planet. It absolutely has a humongous intention but it lives in the intimate relationship that we all have with ourselves and with what we've inherited as you just so beautifully, beautifully articulate it. Is there anything else that you want to say that I didn't open up a door for you to say or a question you want to ask?

Langston Kahn:

Maybe just talking a bit more about the role communities played in my life, briefly, because when we're talking about naming lineage before, and so much of the teachings that come out of that book come out of the work of one of my primary teachers, Christina Pratt, and people in the Last Mask community, of her 30 years of practice and my decade in that community really trying to break these tools together, really trying to figure out how do we do this as the people we are in our life now in the time we are now. And for me, it was really a revelation to experience.

I'd heard it intellectually, oh yeah, community support, and of course. But to really feel in my heart how there were levels of myself and my power that I would never have expressed if I wasn't trying to bring into

manifestation a vision that was larger than myself, that was larger than just my own personal sense of purpose even, but a vision that could only be manifest by many individuals choosing to live those unique gifts they embodied together as a collective and to do the work of not letting the community implode every time some projection, or trigger, came up or some new identity emerged, or someone changed their identity. But be willing to go through those death process together and hold each other's vision of our authenticity versus fixating on what we think that person should be because they were that yesterday.

Also talking of the generational gifts I think this is the biggest gift and challenge that maybe my generation has to offer right now of what it means to constantly be questioning and exploring identity very seriously and deeply and letting that shape how you show up in the world and to not get fixated on that identity and allow it to die when it needs to die so something truer can be born. *To not mistake the map of the identity as the reality.*

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's so beautifully said. And it reminds me of a quote from the late great Betty Carter that I often go back to. And she always said she never listened to her own recordings because she would run the risk of repeating herself. For her the most important thing was always to enter the *song* and that the song was always going to be distinct on a given day. And she would even say, it's not about the melody, it's about something else, the song. The song is bigger than all of it. And that melody, like an identity, is a thing we can discern, we can share, we can latch onto. Other people can see it and know it's form and its shape, but it is not the whole and it only serves you so much as it is a touchstone or a launch pad for an experience of this thing we call the song.

And I would equate the song with life. There's no way that Daniel from 1983 could handle 2021, but there are lessons that Daniel from 1983 learned that help Daniel in 2021 handle himself. I mean, it's that thing. But I want it so I want to carry forward those things that are beautiful and precious, but also be willing, be willing to let go. And also let other people, this is the thing I felt in that film, I'm going to say one more time about that film. Let people live their lives. Let people be who they want to be, and they may want to be many people during their... There are many aspects to us that we want to have shared or to be reflected and that feels like a powerful gift from your generation.

And I do see it. I'm amazed and delighted to see the shiftings and the transformations and the kind of continuous unfoldings. And I'm aware of and cautious about rigidity in identity and what I think of as a kind of neo-essentialism. That who we are named to be or who we name ourselves to be somehow will predetermine how we will behave, and that's a very slippery slope. And we've been here deleteriously before, and so I'm a little nervous but I feel we're at the leading edge or something like, oh, we're going to go down that road? That's not a good road, that's not a good road.

It feels really good. I'll close our formal conversation by saying that the song for Pluto came all at once. It was so clear when it came through. And I remember being so surprised by the last line and it was a line that I sang and wrote, it came right out of me. "I'll always be your friend." And it felt to me that was the wisdom of Pluto, that no matter what other people's story is, not only about who you are, but what's possible, what's possible in relationship to other people and in relationship to the society, you can choose where you are. To live where you are, to be where you are, to own where you are. And your perspective is sacred and it does not, as you were talking about before, it doesn't need be collapsed into someone else's story. And it's that simple action of saying, "No, this is how I am." It shifts something in the bigger picture.

So, yeah. Thank you, Langston.

Langston Kahn:

Thank you so much, Daniel. This is wonderful to talk with you. Thank you and Kyla.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Always.

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This conversation was recorded as part of *ALTAR NO. 1 – Aten*. For more information, additional conversations, and to participate in this immersive journey, visit:

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Learn more about the speakers and their work at:

<http://www.danielalexanderjones.com>

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