



CO-CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS SYMPOSIUM

Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and
Political Lives

February 27-28, 2026
New York City

HOSTED BY

THE
TAOS
INSTITUTE

M MERCY
UNIVERSITY
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
THERAPY PROGRAM

CO-CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS SYMPOSIUM

Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and Political Lives

HOSTED BY



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CO-CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS SYMPOSIUM

Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and Political Lives

PROGRAM

FRIDAY, FEB 27TH, 2026

2:15 – 3:00 PM | CHECK-IN
• 3rd Floor | Mercy Campus

3:00 – 3:50 PM | **SYMPOSIUM OPENING**
Co-creating our community
• 3rd Floor | Mercy Campus

4:00 – 5:30 PM | **THE SOCIO-RELATIONAL IMPERATIVE**
Catalytic Conversations Panel 1
• Room 333 | Bove Auditorium

5:45 – 7:45 PM | **SYMPOSIUM RECEPTION**
Small bites, music and connection
• 3rd Floor | Mercy Campus



Mercy University — Manhattan Campus
47 W 34th St., New York, NY 10001



Note: This program is subject to change.
For the latest updates, visit the **symposium's virtual platform**.

SATURDAY, FEB 28TH, 2026

8:30 – 9:00 AM | CHECK-IN
• 3rd Floor | Mercy Campus

9:00 – 10:30 AM | **MONEY, MEASUREMENT & GOVERNANCE: A RELATIONAL CHALLENGE**
Catalytic Conversations Panel 2
• Room 333 | Bove Auditorium

10:30 – 10:45 AM ● Coffee Break

10:45 – 11:45 AM | DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS I
Concurrent Breakouts (4 themes)

11:45 – 1:15 PM ● Lunch Break (Self-Organized)

1:15 – 2:45 PM | **HOPE, AGENCY & COMMUNITY: PRACTICES FOR TOGETHERNESS**
Catalytic Conversations Panel 3
• Room 333 | Bove Auditorium

2:45 – 3:00 PM ● Snack Break

3:00 – 4:00 PM | DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS II
Concurrent Breakouts (4 themes)

4:15 – 5:15 PM | DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS III
Concurrent Breakouts (4 themes)

5:30 – 6:30 PM | **CLOSING RITUAL**
• 3rd Floor | Mercy Campus

CO-CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS SYMPOSIUM

Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and Political Lives

CATALYTIC CONVERSATIONS

Room 333 - Bove Auditorium

THE SOCIO-RELATIONAL IMPERATIVE

Sheila McNamee & Saliha Bava



Fri, Feb 27 • 4:00pm - 5:30pm EST

Why do social and relational practices matter for a generative life, especially in the midst of divisiveness and dissonance? What do we even mean by the relational imperative? How does a constructionist locate the social, and how do we engage it to make better worlds?

MONEY, MEASUREMENT & GOVERNANCE: A RELATIONAL CHALLENGE



Ken Gergen



Facilitator: Amos Wolff

Sat, Feb 28 • 9:00am - 10:30am EST

Reimagining the systems and stories that shape our public lives as relational and responsive. How do we not split the social from the economic? Rather, see the economics as a social project, not just socially organizing? What shifts when we center connection, care, justness, and lived experience in how we organize, who (ac)counts, and what's governed? How might we challenge taken-for-granted regressive norms to co-create more inclusive and dialogic forms of coordination across institutions, communities, and organizations—all viewed as the public sphere?

HOPE, AGENCY & COMMUNITY: PRACTICES FOR TOGETHERNESS

Mario Ismael Espinoza, Chris Hoff, & Abbie VanMeter



Facilitator: Somer Saleh



Sat, Feb 28 • 1:15pm - 2:45pm EST

A generative dialogue exploring how we might respond to disconnection and division locally within our communities and relationships: What practices foster belonging, mutual care, and meaningful change today? How might we embrace the processual messiness of co-creating and uncertainty as we bridge differences and power differentials?

CO-CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS SYMPOSIUM

Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and Political Lives

Theme A: Meaning-Making and Relational Ethics for Worlds We Create ● Room 343

How do our stories, interpretations, and ethical commitments co-create the worlds we inhabit? What becomes possible when we treat meaning as a relational achievement rather than a personal possession?

Theme C: Relational Care, Belonging & Radical Practices That Host Us ● Room 339

How do relational practices of care, presence, and mutual support help us create spaces of belonging? What becomes possible when we understand care not as a service, but as a co-constructed, courageous way of being with others?

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS

Breakout conversations are offered in three rounds of four concurrent sessions, each with its own sub-theme. You may return to the same theme or explore a different one each session.

Theme B: Relational Learning: Witness, Play, and Experimental Ways of Becoming ● Room 315

How do play, experimentation, and collective learning practices shape who we can become? What forms of learning and development emerge when play, curiosity, and collaboration replace performance and evaluation?

Theme D: Power, Visibility & Co-Creating Just Public Worlds ● Room 332

What — and who — becomes visible or invisible in our shared social worlds, and how do these patterns get constructed? How might we collectively re-imagine justice as ongoing relational practices — of doing and making — rather than an endpoint?

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS I · 10:45-11:45AM

A · Sub-Theme: Whose Knowledge counts? And how? · Room 343

- Listening Beyond Words: Challenging the Limits We Create - Karina Guerschberg
- Leading through Social Construction: Reflections - Larry McLemore
- Dating Apps and Democratic Knowledge - Tamara Richter

C · Sub-Theme: Social Practices of Aging & Dying · Room 339

- Connected Elders: Relational Opportunities - Ilana Reisz
- Supporting Maternal Identity-Practicing in the Absence of the Child - Rachael Toth
- The Many Deaths Before Dying: Understanding Social Death - Sarah Hahn

B · Sub-Theme: Crafting & Performing Togetherness · Room 315

- Fostering Collective Learning in Intergenerational Mentorships - Abbie VanMeter & Ilene Wasserman
- Global Play Brigade: A Playful Experiment Crossing Borders and Cultures - Cathy Salit & Sarah Filman
- Co-Creating Social Worlds: Narrative Transformation as a Pathway to Integral Human Development and Wayfinding - Susan Mossman Riva

D · Sub-Theme: Art, WordPlay & Rituals · Room 332

- Artistic Collaboration and Analysis of the Creative Process - Kristina Brajović Car & Aleksandra Đurić
- Understanding not Withstanding: Homonyms, Hymns and Names - Thomas Schleicher

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS II · 3:00-4:00PM

A · Sub-Theme: Friendship, Frames, and Futures · Room 343

- What is Friendship? A Relational Inquiry - Elizabeth Aikman, Rachel Harrison, Hamish Borno, & Jillian Thayer
- Manifesto for the Future - Paul Costello
- Beyond Fixed Frames: Co-Creating Psychotherapy Models - Rick Murphy

B · Sub-Theme: Relating to the Other · Room 315

- Co-creating the Social World of the Child: The Duality of the 'Other' - Helge Wasmuth & Elena Nitecki
- Relational Risk and Radical Care in Fostering - Jamie McCreghan & Linda Hill

C · Sub-Theme: Holding Tension & Coherence · Room 339

- Social Construction as a Bridge Between Intent and Impact - Abbie VanMeter
- Questioning the Utility of Religion as a Moral Arbiter - Jeremy Schumacher
- Speaking in the Wake of Silence - Sylvia London, Irma Rodriguez, & Tamara Richter

D · Sub-Theme: Socio-Cultural Forces & Analysis · Room 332

- From Invisibility to Intervention: Understanding and Addressing Socio-Cultural Constraints to Making Meaningful Change - Emily Doyle
- Transformation through Conversation - Helen Bohme & Donna Hewitt

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS III · 4:15-5:15PM

A · Sub-Theme: Ethics of Responsiveness and Attentive-Receptive Presence · Room 343

- Practicing Radical Presence in a Pressured World - Emily Doyle
- A Sufi Perspective on Collaborative-Dialogic Practices - Maha Khalil

B · Sub-Theme: Transforming Power of Play, Rituals & Art · Room 315

- From Commemoration to Collaboration: Relational Pathways for Youth Empowerment at U.S. 250th - KaRa Lyn Thrasher
- WASH! Awakening Community at the Washline: Exploring Metaphor to Generate Space for Therapeutic Conversation - Maria Seddio & Pia Tempestini

C · Sub-Theme: Radical Presence & Engagement · Room 339

- Reimagining "Knowledge": A Socioculturally Attuned, Human-Curious Way of Empowering New Clinicians - Anne Holen
- Students' Experiences Impact Their Sense of Belonging to Their University - Julia Zavala & Nadia Ramjit

D · Sub-Theme: Care, Connection, and Relational Labor · Room 332

- Learning in Community: Notes on a Feminist-Collaborative Practice - Adriana del Muro
- Imagining Otherwise Places: The Yet-to-Be as Relational Practice - Danna Abraham
- If I Could Write, This Is What I'd Tell You - Kristin Bodiford & Dutton, the Horse

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Reimagining Our Personal, Public, and Political Lives
February 27-28, 2026

DIALOGIC REFLECTION ABSTRACTS

Saturday, February 28, 2026

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS I · 10:45-11:45AM		
A · Sub-Theme: Whose Knowledge counts? And how? · Room 343		
<i>Listening Beyond Words: Challenging the Limits we Create</i>	Karina Guerschberg	Adults with intellectual disabilities and their families often face barriers that limit participation in their own lives. The ethical and practical challenge of creating collaborative dialogues invites us to question pre-established meanings. By learning each person’s communicative forms and prioritizing conversation over correction, we expand autonomy, relational agency, and genuine involvement.
<i>Leading through Social Construction: Reflections</i>	Larry McLemore	<p>Our opportunity as leaders is to lead as influencers to the mission and help those we lead also be influencers in our mission outcomes. Leaders must drive a collective, generative movement in pursuit of our agreed-upon mission. The root opportunity in this is to always be in truth of our collective mission. This root opportunity is also where many leaders become distracted by the reflections of the people we lead and the reflections we hold as individuals. The world is not designed to follow collective truth; rather, the world (people) is designed to do the opposite. People challenge the truth and look for a new truth. All things beautiful, and all things horrible, are the result of this human inquiry. Truths are always made in two ways, under cover, or in darkness, and illuminated or in the light for all to see. Understanding these dynamics prepares us to examine how leadership style impacts organizational culture.</p> <p>I will use the words Illuminate and Cover as I continue to frame our search for the truth. With this stage set, we now know we are all a reflection of all the inputs preceding the moment to come. We now know that as leaders, we must evaluate the reflections of the people we lead. We know that our work must align with the organization’s mission, vision, and values. Now, since we, or I, will assume all organizations have values that we can use to assess and respond or engage with our people in alignment with our mission work, utilizing the values of the organization, I propose. These understood values are not to be confused with my values necessarily, but the values of the organization I have agreed to work for. These values should be the dynamic we as leaders use to apply influence on the people we lead. We can apply a deficit and a penalty, or we can apply generative possibility to our people. Both are common leadership styles, and both can create movement in the organization. Whether it is positive or negative to the people we lead, both will create action. I argue, however, that both styles do not always align with an organization’s stated values.</p>

Dating Apps and Democratic Knowledge	Tamara Richter	Using Tinder to meet people in Bilbao showed me that those who could benefit most from recognition and validation policies had never heard of them. This piece questions who counts as an expert, why academic knowledge stays trapped in institutions, and how everyday encounters can reveal more democratic ways of knowing.
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B · Sub-Theme: Crafting & Performing Togetherness · Room 315

Fostering Collective Learning in Intergenerational Mentorships	Abbie VanMeter & Ilene Wasserman	How can we foster collective learning in intergenerational mentor relationships? Ilene Wasserman and Abbie VanMeter reflect together on the impacts of their shared professional and personal relationships and how they intentionally seek to learn from and teach each other across their generational differences, with a great respect and curiosity for their diversity of experiences.
Global Play Brigade: A Playful Experiment Crossing Borders and Cultures	Cathy Salit & Sarah Filman	Global Play Brigade was formed spontaneously (improvisationally) during the Covid pandemic to create connection, relational play, and emotional support across borders and geographies. Now five years down this emergent/unknowing road we continue to co-create and experience the transformative power of improvisation, play, and relational dialogue with people from very diverse backgrounds, life circumstances, and political persuasion. In this interactive session we will explore both the theory and the play that helps to unburden, share, disrupt and break down barriers of all kinds.
Co-Creating Social Worlds: Narrative Transformation as a Pathway to Integral Human Development and Wayfinding	Susan Mossman Riva	Crafting Peace through Autoethnography presents the Transformagram Learning Model, a framework for transformational and arts-based inquiry. It cultivates mutual accompaniment through duoethnography as a pedagogical and relational practice. This shapeshifting and wayfinding process co-creates meaning and reimagines our personal, public, and political lives as interconnected pathways toward integral human development.

C · Sub-Theme: Social Practices of Aging & Dying · Room 339

Connected Elders: Relational Opportunities	Ilana Reisz	Let's explore the intersection of trends: a rapidly aging population and a loneliness epidemic negatively impacting nearly 18 % of older US adults. The Taos community is well placed to offer relational alternatives to the older adults in our lives. We can offer enhanced relational resources for connectedness and agency.
Supporting Maternal Identity-Practicing in the Absence of the Child	Rachael Toth	Drawing on Buber's I-Thou concept and Gergen's relational imperative, this paper considers how miscarriage and stillbirth complicate mutually constitutive mother-child identities. Using social constructionism and agential realism, it considers ways in which language and therapeutic/medical practices shape these identities and proposes generative care practices to support maternal identity formation across professional contexts.
The Many Deaths Before Dying: Understanding Social Death	Sarah Hahn	What if dying is not a singular event but a series of social negotiations about who counts as "alive"? Social death reveals how cognitive changes and ageism erode belonging before biological death. This reflection invites us to see death as relational—unfolding in language, recognition, and the quiet erasures between us.

D · Sub-Theme: Art, WordPlay & Rituals · Room 332

Artistic Collaboration and Analysis of the Creative Process	Kristina Brajović Car & Aleksandra Đurić	The performative act of 33 art students socio-political engagement has unique characteristics usually not found in the context of regular art production, nor in the spontaneous creativity of isolated artists. The symbolism of the co-constructed "wall of blocks", for public exhibit group dynamics, psychoanalysis, content analysis, focus group, artition, goes in a various directions of interpretation.
Understanding not Withstanding: Homonyms, Hymns and Names	Thomas Schleicher	So, shall we..., socially De-construct the cons, struck Up for some of us, and instead, add up the sum of us? Replace languishing with language-ing, Writing songs and righting wrongs? We salute, remaining resolute: Seeking harmony without harming, Making peace among pieces and Solving for a less whirled, better world.

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS II · 3:00-4:00PM

A · Sub-Theme: Friendship, Frames, and Futures · Room 343

What is Friendship? A Relational Inquiry	Elizabeth Aikman, Rachel Harrison, Hamish Borno & Jillian Thayer	This paper explores friendship as a relational form that resists clear definition and exists outside formal roles or systems. Through lived experience and embodied reflection, it examines how connection shifts through illness, transition, change, and movement, and considers friendship as presence rather than responsibility, obligation, or category.
Manifesto for the Future	Paul Costello	Time has stopped. We are going backwards. Agendas long settled are back in dispute. The future is no longer the horizon of our conversations except as threat or fear. "Now" seems too overwhelming. Our dialog will discuss the Future Manifesto "How do we get the future back into our thinking?"
Beyond Fixed Frames: Co-Creating Psychotherapy Models	Rick Murphy	My book "Integrative Person-Centred Counselling" invites us to move beyond fixed frames and treat therapeutic models as ongoing conversations. This paper asks how we might loosen our grip on method, embrace uncertainty, and co-create practices responsive to the relational worlds we generate together, opening possibilities for more fluid, ethical collaborative practice.

B · Sub-Theme: Relating to the Other · Room 315

Co-creating the Social World of the Child: The Duality of the 'Other'	Helge Wasmuth & Elena Nitecki	The social world of a child is embedded in dual dimensions of the child as an "Other." In one sense, adults attempt to make the child ("Other") into a productive adult ("Same"), without respect for childhood in its own right. Our expectations are based on notions of adulthood and succeeding in a capitalist society. In another sense, the child who is different (the "Other") is normalized into the "Same" based on norms of child development. We examine these dual dimensions of the young child as "Other," as well as the impact on how a child's world is constructed.
Relational Risk and Radical Care in Fostering	Jamie McCreghan & Linda Hill	What does it mean to offer care that is both safe and brave? Fostering asks adults to embrace uncertainty, vulnerability, and difference while co-creating belonging with young people. How might relational practices in fostering help us reimagine risk, not as danger, but as the birthplace of human connection and growth?

C · Sub-Theme: Holding Tension & Coherence · Room 339		
<i>Social Construction as a Bridge Between Intent and Impact</i>	Abbie VanMeter	If you've ever found yourself in a conversation where one person says, "What you said hurt my feelings..." and the other said, "Well, I didn't mean to," then you've experienced the difference between intent and impact. Social construction is a potential bridge between intent and impact, giving us the tools to discuss the relationship between the two and how we can align them in our communication.
<i>Questioning the Utility of Religion as a Moral Arbiter</i>	Jeremy Schumacher	This paper challenges the assumption that religion functions as a reliable moral arbiter, examining how religions can produce moral injury exacerbated by cultural norms that position religious institutions as inherent moral authorities. We can reframe religious trauma as systemic ethical rupture rather than individual failure, inviting alternative, relationally constructed morality.
<i>Speaking in the Wake of Silence</i>	Sylvia London, Irma Rodriguez & Tamara Richter	As Jews we have experienced the chilling effects and the emotional toll of being silenced in the midst of raising Antisemitism. Drawing from our experience and using the relational framework of Shared Vulnerability, we would like to host a conversation to navigate the tension and discomfort of being silenced.
D · Sub-Theme: Socio-Cultural Forces & Analysis · Room 332		
<i>From Invisibility to Intervention: Understanding and Addressing Socio-Cultural Constraints to Making Meaningful Change</i>	Emily Doyle	We often feel powerless to spark change amid oppressive socio-cultural forces shaping our work and our lives. Hidden organizational layers obscure what sustains disconnection, often making them difficult to interrupt. When we learn to see and name these forces, we can advocate for meaningful change by drawing distinctions that can make a difference.
<i>Transformation through Conversation</i>	Helen Bohme & Donna Hewitt	In 2023, having become increasingly frustrated that 'racism awareness' training in the UK had become a 'tick-box' exercise, Donna and I started a conversation, ... which has also become a research enterprise. Donna, is a black woman and member of the Greater Manchester (UK) Panel on Race and Equality. I, Helen, am a white woman, an educator and family therapist. We are both grandmothers. As systemic and social constructionist thinkers we see racism as much a white issue as a black issue. We are community activists whose aim is to re-politicise what has been de-politicised. Together, we want to explore systemic racism in organizational and community spaces and facilitate transformation through collaborative conversation.
DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS III · 4:15-5:15PM		
A · Sub-Theme: Ethics of Responsiveness and Attentive-Receptive Presence · Room 343		
<i>Practicing Radical Presence in a Pressured World</i>	Emily Doyle	An ethic of responsiveness invites renewed attention to how we look, listen, and relate within systems that shape and constrain us. By privileging dialogue, congruence, and radical presence, we create openings for shared sense-making, courageous questioning, and more liberating ways of working, learning, and being together across contexts.

<p><i>A Sufi Perspective on Collaborative-Dialogic Practices</i></p>	<p>Maha Khalil</p>	<p>Social constructionism and collaboration-dialogic practices bear remarkable similarity to Muslim philosophical/mystic (Sufi) concepts. Both see self, reality, and knowledge as relational, generative, and socially constructed. Ma'rifa (experiential knowledge) is a Sufi framework to expand awareness towards "unity of being" - seeing others as myself in different form, thus generating genuine kindness and respect. Specific practices enable self-detachment from limiting thoughts, obsessions, and oppressive constructs. Knowledge is generated with the Divine and with creation relationally, humbly, and experientially. In social constructionism self and knowledge are de-centered because they exist only in relational, social, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Humbleness, respect, and genuine curiosity are employed to create safe and deeply connecting spaces. How could both approaches complement one another and how could they integrate to produce a more accessible and sustainable collaborative stance in personal and professional contexts?</p>
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B · Sub-Theme: Transforming Power of Play, Rituals & Art · Room 315

<p><i>From Commemoration to Collaboration: Relational Pathways for Youth Empowerment at U.S. 250th</i></p>	<p>KaRa Lyn Thrasher</p>	<p>Celebrating anniversaries may seem trivial in tough times, but they can also spark joy and remembrance. What if we approached the United States' 250th as an opportunity to boost youth engagement? Explore how relational practices, such as collective imagination, participatory decision-making, and national service, can inspire intergenerational meaning-making and action.</p>
<p><i>WASH! Awakening Community at the Washline: Exploring Metaphor to Generate Space for Therapeutic Conversation</i></p>	<p>Maria Seddio & Pia Tempestini</p>	<p>WASH!, an interdisciplinary, public art initiative utilizing a dialogic social constructionist lens emphasizes story-sharing as intrinsic to community. This model leverages metaphor, bringing practitioners, artists, and participants together to engage in therapeutic conversations, encouraging connection and empathic learning to counter effects of an increasingly polarized global environment, leaning toward isolation.</p>

C · Sub-Theme: Radical Presence & Engagement · Room 339

<p><i>Reimagining "Knowledge": A Socioculturally Attuned, Human-Curious Way of Empowering New Clinicians</i></p>	<p>Anne Holen</p>	<p>This paper explores how linguistic and knowledge hierarchies shape what we perceive as "knowledgeable contributions" in our classrooms and supervisory spaces. Drawing on the experiences of Angolan Portuguese speakers who, like me, were told they speak "bad Portuguese," I invite reflection on how linguistic hierarchies can prevent us from "coordinating difference" (McNamee, 2015). Furthermore, I invite reflection on how knowledge hierarchies influence which knowledges are recognized, valued, or diminished within academic and clinical training spaces. What might shift if we help emerging professionals define (not find) their voices, and experience empowerment within relational spaces that can often diminish the knowledges they carry? <i>How might modelling this empowerment help clinicians also see their clients as holders of powerful relational knowledge?</i></p>
<p><i>Students' Experiences Impact Their Sense of Belonging to Their University</i></p>	<p>Julia Zavala & Nadia Ramjit</p>	<p>Sense of belonging to an institution is important for student success. College students, particularly first-year and first-generation students, perform better when they perceive a strong sense of belonging to their university. We will explore how sense of belonging impacts student engagement and whether social support systems moderate this relationship.</p>

D · Sub-Theme: Care, Connection, and Relational Labor · Room 332

<p><i>Learning in Community: Notes on a Feminist-Collaborative Practice</i></p>	<p>Adriana del Muro</p>	<p>In this paper, I would like to share a question that has been present in my practice for over 10 years: Is a Feminist-Collaborative stance possible? I will share some reflections that have helped me realize that not only is it possible, but also truly necessary within my community.</p>
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<p><i>Imagining Otherwise Places: The Yet-to-Be as Relational Practice</i></p>	<p>Danna Abraham</p>	<p>This paper invites reflection on women's relational labor as a radical form of collective imagineering. Through feminist and social constructionist perspectives, I explore care, teaching, and poetic practice as acts of resistance that cultivate yet-to-be spaces, environments where imagination can reshape how we create and perform together.</p>
<p><i>If I Could Write, This Is What I'd Tell You</i></p>	<p>Kristin Bodiford & Dutton, the Horse</p>	<p>If I Could Write, This Is What I'd Tell You</p> <p>By Dutton (with Kristin Bodiford as scribe)</p> <p>I am Dutton, a horse who has spent my life observing humans try very hard. Often too hard. They forget to breathe. They forget their bodies. They forget each other.</p> <p>When Kristin joined me, I taught her what all horses know: Center first. Everything else follows.</p> <p>From Centering comes Connection. From Connection comes Care. From Care comes Curiosity. From Curiosity, Courage emerges naturally. And when courage is shared, we Create new movement together. And when movement is shared, we Celebrate the joy of being herd.</p> <p>This paper explores how horses help humans revise their relational templates and co-create social worlds rooted in attunement, presence, and possibility. Humans call this affective neuroscience, resonance, and co-regulation. We call it life in the herd.</p>