

# THE INTUITIVE WRITER:

## RESILIENCE

### – WITH CHRISTINA CROOK –

In this month's #unpodcast episode, I sit down with Carmen Spagnola. We talk about the metaphoric power of the autumn season, ritual literacy, attachment theory, and what we can do whenever we start to think, "Does any of my writing matter? What is the point?"

September 25, 2021.

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Sarah Selecky 0:07

Carmen Spagnola's work is a cross pollination of attachment polyvagal theory somatics, trauma recovery, and mysticism. Her upcoming book, *The Spirited Kitchen: Recipes & Rituals for the Wheel of the Year* will be released by W.W Norton & Co. in the fall of 2022. This is from Carmen's website: "People find me because something is collapsing within or around them, their relationship, self identity, ecosystem, or something else. They find me because that's where I am. In the collapse place, holding ground."

This is such a beautiful articulation of her gift and something that she offers the world, one of the many things she offers the world. I've known Carmen for a very long time. And our friendship started way back in the early aughts in Victoria B.C., when I was an event planner, and she was a wine rep. I will never forget the day that she came into the office, wearing these elegant tall boots — Carmen is very elegant — and told me about this new program that she'd heard about at Royal Roads University called "life coaching." This was a brand new field back then. Carmen is one of the very first people



Sarah Selecky  
WRITING SCHOOL

I know, knew, who are interested in the big questions, the deep questions, and the deeper ways of living and understanding a good life, in other words. We've seen each other live through several transformation cycles. Collapse and renewal, collapse and renewal. I know that Carmen knows these story beats very well and this is her work now. She helps people feel secure, connected, and therefore ready to evolve through that cycle. This is why I asked her to speak about our theme for September, which is resilience. I also personally have worked with Carmen on a professional level on a few occasions, and most notably, for this conversation anyway, she helped me through some really deep stuckness when I was at a turning point in a later draft of writing *Radiant Shimmering Light*. And we can talk about that later in this call. I hope! Welcome Carmen.

Carmen Spagnola 2:14

Hello, Sarah, it's so wonderful to be talking with you again. And this time the tables are reversed and I'm your guest on your podcast. And I feel nervous.

Sarah Selecky 2:25

Well, it's not really a podcast, I mean, so you can not feel nervous about that. I'm calling it an unpodcast, because there's nothing official about this. It's just a recorded telephone call. Because we have such good conversations! It's it's, it's so true. And I love all the times that you've interviewed me. And I'm really honoured to have been a guest on the *Numinous Podcast*, and I just want to ask you some questions.

Carmen Spagnola 2:49

I'm very excited to be asked questions. Also, you know, I had the sense of like, what will I possibly say to a writer who's like, that's your, that's your work, is articulation. And then I was like, wait, I've written some stuff on a website. And as you were reading my website, I was like, oh, I would buy that, like what, what's that person offering? So yeah, I'm gonna, I'm gonna chill and relax I think. We have great conversations and you actually engender quite a feeling of confidence in me, which I really appreciate about you and you're a great teacher that way. So, happy to be here.

Sarah Selecky 3:25



Thank you. Thank you. Well, we can, I think that we have lots of talk about, writing and otherwise. And just as we, just before we started recording this call we mentioned, we were talking a little bit about how everything is connected to everything. Everything is connected. Everything is like writing. Writing is like everything. Metaphor is like the...life blood of this world. It's everything. So this is, this is going to be fun.

My first sort of entry question for us to discuss, because I know that, well it's September 2nd today, when we're recording this, it's going out later this month. But it's the beginning of that change of season here in the Northern Hemisphere. And I know that you do a lot of work around cycles, and phases, and seasons, and the Wheel of the Year. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about what you call the Four Shields of human development. And tell us a little bit about what this season might mean for us as writers and creatives.

Carmen Spagnola 4:32

Good. Okay, clap, clap. We're excited. Okay, so the Four Shields of the Human Journey is actually the title of a book written by Steven Foster and Meredith Little who were the founders of the School of Lost Borders. And they were sort of, I would say, the first psychotherapists to really give a container to eco therapy and wilderness therapy in a white Western context. So they were in California and they were doing these wilderness quests. And, you know, we can look back now, you know, through the modern day lens and say like, hmm, there are problematic things about this. But what I like about the Four Shields work is that it uses the seasons as our guide, really nature as therapist. And even the idea that there are four seasons of course is, again, a very, like Western kind of notion, right? If we were in Finland, there are eight seasons and, and even among, you know, the Cree of the parts of Manitoba and, and Métis of the Red River, they would, you know, they would be like, well, there's three seasons and it's all around the ice up and breakup of the river, that kind of thing, you know? So, let's just locate ourselves. I do like working with this rhythm and with my heritage as Scottish, German, English, Irish. Basically, colonizers all the way down. If you look at my history, it's like, ah, no matter where we've gone Germans and Bessarabia and Moldova, like, colonizers. So we've like transported this notion of four seasons around the world. And so there is a kind of like morphic resonance to it. But it's like, yeah, okay, it's a very basic framework. It doesn't work for every time in every place. There's no such thing as



monomyth. But I like this particular one, and it resonates with different lineages that I carry. So in the fall season, we're really talking about adolescence, and I love this meme, I recycle, I love fall, I'm a fall person. So I recycle the same memes every year, right, like fall of the patriarchy. And also one of them that I love is one that says, I don't know how to explain this but eight o'clock, Thursday, and October are all the same. And I'm like, yep, and adolescence too. All the same. They're exactly the same.

So we're in this liminal gloaming of the year but also of our lives. And so the work of fall is initiation, and what has to precede initiation of severance. So this is the time of letting go, release, and just acceptance that we're crossing a threshold into the underworld, we're going into the long dark night. And even within a Western European, like a Greek heritage, if we're looking at the myth of Persephone going into the underworld, there's the patriarchal version of the myth that we all know where she's abducted. And it's like an unbidden or unwilling initiation, a rough initiation into the underworld journey. But before that, prior to that, that was the pre-patriarchal myth that was, you know, part of this more materialistic culture where she voluntarily goes to the underworld. She sees the suffering and the need, and says, I can go and help those restless undead and help those souls pass to the place of peace and accept their transition to the other world. And so how we are initiated in the fall kind of, I would say, has a lot to do with pre-work we've done to help us be resilient. The threshold is coming, whether we want it to or not, that's kind of fall's big, scary lesson, is like: bidden or unbidden this thing is happening. But how we approach is something we can train for. It's the thing we can practice, it's the thing we can get better at. We don't just get one chance. So if we cross the threshold, and it's kind of messy, that's okay. But it is a time of being more withdrawn. Kind of a deep dive into the watery depths of emotion. And if you think about adolescence, it's like, it's that kind of anger turned inwards, you know, and powerlessness. And what are you going to do with that? And is it going to consume you? And so developing agency and differentiation while you're still not feeling ready, you know? That's the, that's the whole thing, is no, we're not actually ever going to be totally fully prepared. Fear is just baked into it. And so the resilience is what gets us through.

Sarah Selecky 9:10



Hmm, I am so glad you brought that myth up in particular. I remember being on retreat with you out West and you told that story. You retold the story over dinner, and it was the first time I'd heard the retelling from the non-patriarchal version of it. And even just hearing you just mentioned it now it still gives me little chills. Like I've got some chills for it. Because the other thing I wanted to talk about, because we are speaking mostly to writers, you know, the anxiety... We thought there was anxiety, we were living with anxiety, and now in the past couple of years, we're really like, the anxiety is not stopping it's going up. And with the injustices that are rolling out, and this deep kind of fear and reorganizing and restructuring of everything, many writers I know are faltering a little, because they don't quite know that their work is meaningful. Especially fiction writers. And, and also just, it's just questioning like, that approach to the underworld, which is such a key part of story. I think is, like, what writers can offer the world. But I wanted to ask you, do you think that writers are part of the healing in the change, even fiction writers now? Does writing matter? And when we're at this point, not just autumn, but like, there's an autumn in the world that's happening right now, also, where does the stamina and motivation to write a book come from? How'd you do it?

Carmen Spagnola 10:47

You know, I think that the distillation when I'm in my own collapse phase is, does this even matter? So I'm gonna speak from that kind of more extreme perspective. Because it's always there in the background, for me, as a person who's been tracking collapse for like, decades, first through my own lived experience, and then patterning in like, oh, capitalism, oh, white supremacy, oh, patriarchy. That question of like, does anything I'm doing even matter, especially with the intensification and the increased velocity of these converging emergencies of climate, you know, social challenges, etc. If I were to distill all of my body of work, and any kind of therapeutic intervention I would do for somebody, let's imagine I'm taking everything I know, somatically, emotionally, from attachment, from collapse into the ultimate exercise, or practice in a therapeutic session with somebody. It really comes down to this: we have to reach towards what we care about. That is the only thing that matters. And writers are really good at articulating what we care about. And we don't all care about the same things. You know, for me, it's like, you know, how's the human race going to do? I don't know, we're not all gonna die. And of the ones who survive, I want my kid to be part of the futurity of the human race,



because I think he's pretty high calibre, I think he'd be good for us. So still, like, that's what matters to me. So everything I'm doing, everything I orient towards is like, what is the legacy that I can give to him that will help him through.

So if we were in some kind of, you know, if we were sitting together in my office, and we were doing some work together, and you were like, does my writing even matter? I would say, okay, what is the current troubling situation as you're experiencing it, and let's just make it kind of amorphous, like a ball of energy in front of you. And, you know, what's the shape? What's the feel? And everybody's sense of the current troubling situation it's going to be kind of different. And we would probably do some feeling into it, and working through grief, and all of that kind of stuff. And then what I would say is, now what do you care about? Like, you probably won't be able to articulate it, if you're really reaching towards what you care about, you kind of, it's ineffable. It's so big, and it also feels so audacious to be like, I care about saving my child, or changing the world, or, you know, emancipation for all incarcerated people, or, you know, whatever, whatever it is, whoever's liberation's. If you're really reaching towards what you care about, you can't even necessarily define it, but you'll feel it. And this is how writers help us is they can articulate what we really care about. And so then I would say, okay, feel what this current troubling situation is like, and now imagine what you care about is just on the other side of it. And feel yourself, like feel yourself, reach towards it. And once you really make contact with it, let it land inside you, don't be afraid of its plenty. I can't remember. I think that's Mary Oliver, don't be afraid of its plenty. You know, and I think Toni Spencer, somebody in a poem says, you know, don't hold back your receiving. Let the thing you care about make contact with you.

And then it doesn't, like whatever the current troubling situation is kind of is like, okay, well, this is just what we're facing now. Or this is what we're moving through now. It doesn't matter. That's what doesn't matter anymore. Because there's a biological rightness and for me, it's a moral imperative. This is just the right way for me to show up as a human in these times because I have a child who's looking at me, and that's my motivator, but everybody's is different. I think if you can attend to that sense of a moral rightness inside you about how it feels to be aligned as a human and to say, like, no, there's something so beautiful and life giving about this thing that I care about that it would just feel so utterly wrong for me to give up, or deny it, or, or diminish it and



demean it by saying it doesn't matter enough for me to keep going. And like this is in a very specific context where I'm talking about writers. I'm obviously not talking about people who have other challenges with carrying on. But I think when you're writing, this is the gift you can do is help us lift up the tones, and textures, and nuance of what we really care about and remind us and, and help kind of connect this amorphous feeling in the body or in the collective field with our minds so that we can like see and say what we really care about, and then recognize it when we see it. That's all I have to say about that, Sarah. [Laughter]. I mean, like, I don't know, I could probably talk about that forever. But that's how I see it.

Sarah Selecky 16:12

It's pretty profound what you just said there because it actually doesn't matter if what you're writing is like a memoir, a cookbook, romance, fiction, fantasy, a thriller, it doesn't matter. And the other thing I hear you saying is that, that moral rightness is not like, it's not a thought or a concept that's the morality. The moral rightness is feeling a good feeling in your body as you receive peace. With a feeling of peace and joy and love, like the things that make your body kind of hum and sing and feel like all is okay. The moral rightness is feeling at peace or feeling... Maybe peace is like too much of a...

Carmen Spagnola 16:59

I don't know that I...

Sarah Selecky 17:00

...word no. Feeling the feeling...

Carmen Spagnola 17:01

What I would say, feeling the feeling resonance. Yeah, I feel the feeling...

...there's a resonance.and I can... and it's speaking to my animal self.

Sarah Selecky 17:13

Right.

Carmen Spagnola 17:13



It's like, ah, life, how cool. Now I have a will towards life, and an urge towards life, and an urge towards consciousness, and a will towards consciousness or whatever it is that the feeling is for you. And this is again, yeah, why it totally doesn't matter. Like, you know, I wrote a cookbook, basically, because attachment is really important to me. And ingestion behaviours like eating and drinking are like one of the fundamental parts of creating secure attachment. And I'm like, you know what, I feel like I need a record of this for my kid.

Sarah Selecky 17:24  
Wow!

Carmen Spagnola 17:25

This is like, I don't talk about attachment in the book. But that's the feeling that I have. And the entire thing is infused with that intention. And so that's the moral rightness to me, is like, this is a book about secure attachment.

Sarah Selecky 18:01

That's awesome. I want to bookmark that and ask you more about attachment. It just makes me think that so many, when my first book came out, so many of the interviews and the questions I had were like, why are you writing about food so much? Why do you write about food? Sarah Selecky, why are... the meals really seem to take place in most of your stories. Why do you write about food so much? And like, I don't know. And you just nailed it. I mean, that's it. It's like all the emotional, it's imbued with the emotion in the scenes, is what they're eating and how they feel when they're eating and where they are as they're ingesting and imbibing. I'm just kind of, you just kind of blew my mind there. It's great.

Carmen Spagnola 18:37

Yeah, I'll take your mind just a tiny bit further. So that is a form of contact nutrition. And contact nutrition is to secure attachment, what vitamins are to a healthy diet, let's say. It's a building block. And so other forms of contact nutrition, there's basically five, it's kind eyes. It's warm vocal prosody. It's safe touch. It's shared rhythm. And it's ingestion behaviours. And so this is the blessing and the curse of being human. Right? It's like, Oh, my gosh, there's so many problems, and we only have five solutions. It's





like, oh my gosh, there's so many problems, and there's just five things we can do. That's great. [Laughing]. It really all boils down to that.

Sarah Selecky 19:23

Are they related to the five senses?

Carmen Spagnola 19:27

Every sense is. They're related to the nervous system.

Sarah Selecky 19:30

Right. So of course we related to the five senses.

Carmen Spagnola 19:33

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Sarah Selecky 19:36

Okay, can you go out, like stretch with me through metaphor a little bit. Coming back to attachment, staying in attachment. I often help writers reach a different kind of relationship with their writing by actually thinking about writing as a relationship. So we put that story, we put that story on, we put that metaphor on, it's you know, to some it's not a metaphor. To some it just actually feels...Like to me sometimes it really does feel like there's another presence that I'm collaborating with creatively. And I am in a relationship with it. And then I also understand it on a metaphorical level. And I wonder if attachment, if you have any thoughts, as... Explain a little. Maybe just explain a little bit about attachment, the theory and as it pertains to relationships. And do you think that there's a place here for writers to engage?

Carmen Spagnola 20:29

Well, as you said, metaphor is everything. Attachment is everything. There is not a single thing, nothing in the realm of human endeavor is void of attachment. It's...So yes, the answer is yes, Sarah. Yes, writers are in relationship. And you can, you could anthropomorphize, you could personify writing as a person, if that feels good for you. But I will say this, a lot of people have a hard time finding secure attachment in another human. And so you know, we might start with the more than human. So we might go



to like an animal, or a tree, or like a boulder, or a body of water that you really love. It's this sense of my nervous system is shaped by my environment, like never goes away. It's not and it's not unique to the relationship we have with other humans. Of course, we have that with the environment that we live in. And of course, that includes, I mean, we have a relationship with the internet, we have a relationship with our phones, if we were sitting together, and I took your iPhone, your phone from you right now, Sarah, I was like, oh, I'm just gonna like look through it. Yeah, you can feel it right now. Right? Like, it's just like, Oh...

Sarah Selecky 21:49

That's private.

Carmen Spagnola 21:50

Yeah, this is private. This isn't good. And then if I was like, oh, here, Ruben like, here's Sarah's phone, and then I like passed it along, you can feel it right now, right? You have a relationship there. So if you think you don't have a relationship, that includes your attachment injuries of the past, and your current ongoing situations of healing through and using different attachment styles to survive in the world, if you think you don't have that with writing, we should talk because there's like, there's no area of human existence that doesn't impact our nervous system. And our nervous system is the vehicle for our attachments. So yeah, there's, there's like, I want to contain and, I'll just pause for a second because that's like a thick and existential almost question. Yes, yes, we have a relationship and, and there are characteristics of secure attachment that I think is helpful to consider in light of how we're going to show up to our relationship with writing. And that could be simple things like a secure attacher, like, feels and deals with their emotions, right? A secure attacher can handle comings and goings, a secure attacher will let somebody know if they're not going to meet expectation, if they fuck up, they're there to repair. A secure attacher can leave a situation where they're not being well met. And if you think about your writing, if you're like, okay, you know, this is just becoming more frustrating than it ought to be, then a secure attacher can like, put that draft in the drawer and walk away until some other time. So you can look at it from metaphor, but I bet you can feel it in your body. Right?

Sarah Selecky 23:35



I can feel it, I can feel it. I mean, that's, that is a really lovely framing of where I'm at right now, with my novel. In a drawer. It just didn't feel good anymore. And the story, there was like, just didn't feel good. And it was confronting, I think it's confronting to, you know, the people who I was in agreement with in a writers group, was like, I need to take a break, because I got to leave. And it's confronting for me too, because it doesn't seem, you know, the creative process can be quite nonlinear where it needs a lot of breaks, and it doesn't appear to match up with the industry that... The publishing industry, you know, that wants the new book right away. Right? Or the two-book deal or whatever. Like, it's like that, that sort of stuff is, is... Yeah, so being secure enough, being confident enough to have your relationship on your own terms. It's really, it's a really beautiful framing of it.

Kind of feels like a good time to talk about when we worked together when I was writing my last book, with you. So I came to you because I was... My character was at the brink of collapse, and I couldn't write. And I think as I was making notes for this interview, actually, I have like a little note in my margin saying, whoa, is writer's block a freeze response? Like...

Carmen Spagnola 24:56  
Oh, yeah.

Sarah Selecky 24:57  
Is that what it is?

Carmen Spagnola 24:58  
Yeah.

Sarah Selecky 24:59  
So I think that's where I was. I was in a freeze response. I couldn't... I was withdrawn, and I couldn't move. And I reached out to you for help with what the heck was even going on. What do you remember about this call? Because we haven't actually debriefed about, like it was amazing, turned things around. I was kind of in a trance through some of it. So I don't remember a lot of it. I remember some of it. What I do remember is that I felt freed after. I felt quite liberated after the call, and then completed the book,



completed the scene and moved through the transformation, like went into the underworld and was able to move through the transformation through the writing for the character. What do you remember about that call?

Carmen Spagnola 25:35

I remember that we were in a trance journey, and you let yourself be seen by the Northern Lights.

Sarah Selecky 25:46

Yeah.

Carmen Spagnola 25:47

So moving. I use it again and again in other trance journeys, because, you know, I'm often, and this is exactly foundational attachment work is, most of us actually, the challenge is not with, you know, the desire to connect what we have is a receiving problem. So, you know, releasing the barriers to receiving love and care, and along with that are being seen. So in order, you know, secure attachment is feeling safe, seen secure, soothed. And that notion of being seen fully, can take a little time. And sometimes we have to slow it down and really, like, dose the field with a lot of safety, and build up the capacity to tolerate receiving appreciation, joy, like totally, uncensored love and appreciation, that sort of thing. And with people, it can seem a little unbelievable. But if we can connect up with a sense of awe, or something bigger than ourselves. Nature, for instance, or the numinous, then what happens, psychobiologically, neurobiologically, is it engages the pro-social part of ourselves that the sense is like, I'm so small, and the world is so vast, and I'm willing to collaborate with this thing that is bigger than me, because it's so beautiful. And I'm being enfolded into this larger collective. So something as simple as like, okay, you're looking up at the Northern Lights, you see the Northern Lights, it's beautiful. Now what happens if you allow yourself to be seen and be held, you know? Let the Northern Lights appreciate and love you and hold you. And we did that. And then afterwards, after you were quiet for a bit, you were like, I feel good.

Sarah Selecky 27:56

Yeah!



Carmen Spagnola 27:57

Yeah, that's what I remember.

Sarah Selecky 27:59

It was such an amazing moment, I really remember it. I've quite internalized that. Like, it's, it's an embodied memory, it's a physical memory, that I call on now. So that it's like, it's very helpful. And it makes the task of whatever it is I'm working on feel like, nicely out of my control so much. Because the task of writing a story often to me feels bigger than me. Like, it really feels like, I can't do this. Sometimes, especially after writing a first draft, if I'm able to tap into going through the portal and letting go of things to write a first draft, when I come back to it, it's a mess, right? The first draft is often quite messy. Like it doesn't always come out right the first time. And then I look at it and feel like, this is beyond me. I think a lot of writers feel that and what this reminds me, when I have the druthers to like call it up and not spin out from that feeling of being out of control is like yeah, it is bigger than you. Exactly. Because it's like, it's part of the Northern Lights or like, insert whatever, is in there. It's part of nature. It's a force of nature. It is bigger than you. And like no one else can write it but you, at the same time. And that paradox is like that's the fun of it.

Carmen Spagnola 29:25

Totally, exactly, yeah. And holding the paradox, I mean, that's a whole exercise that's both like physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, right? But being able to tap into the "more than" gives us the capacity to hold bigger paradox and... Because we're not doing it on our own, right? It's like you said, it's part of this larger thing. And personally, you know, you can be neutral about it or not, but I think the larger thing, when I'm tapping into it tends to feel very benevolent and supportive and like, kind of like crushing on me. Like I'm like, you like me! You really like me. Okay. I'm willing, you know?

Sarah Selecky 30:11

Yeah it is! I've used the word like, curious. Like when you're looking at trees for an extended period of time and their branches are waving at you and you can like feel them sort of... I grew up spending a lot of time out in the bush with trees, like they were kind



of my main companions. The feeling I get is like, they're curious and flirtatious. What are you ? What's going on in there? Yeah.

Carmen Spagnola 30:37

Yeah, exactly. I think that's a thing I've definitely distributed throughout my life. It used to be a fairly private experience, what we now might call animism of like, oh, I'm beholding you and you're beholding me. Like, I'm in this reciprocal relationship where I behold you with awe and wonder and delight, and oh, wait a second, you're taking a delight in me? And that's where the attachment comes in. Right? It's like, oh, this is like the amygdala whisperer. That's like, you are so delightful. And you're like, yeah! You know, I am delightful. And like, we do need that, you know? We do need that, not just in those key developmental stages, you know? Up to eight, or arguably like fourteen but like, if we don't get that, that sort of amygdala plumping, where somebody regards us with just pure delight. Thank goodness now we know like, thank you, neuroplasticity, thank you, therapy, like we actually can work on that. But that reciprocal relationship with the more than, that animistic view of like, I delight in this. Oh wait, it might also delight in me. You know? And sometimes not. And not everybody in nature is a big fan of me. I can feel that, right? But like, generally the more, the larger kind of numinous forces tend to take a lot of delight in the sort of bumbling around that humans do, as far as I have experienced.

Sarah Selecky 32:10

Yeah! This makes me think of adolescence in the season we're in. An adolescent season. I mean, this is the realm of a lot of fantasy, YA, magic, like from a writing perspective, it's the stuff of fantasy, and magic, and magic realism. And, you know, like, I'll just bracket a quick sort of roundup of some thoughts I've been thinking over the past like handful of years of waking up to this objective Hemingway, Fitzgerald, kind of writing. This writing style that came out during the certain modernist period, which was very not that, and kind of raised to this gritty realism. Raised to this literary standard, over a lot of fantasy and magic and how harmful I feel that has been for us culturally over the years, and in our writers lives to be cut off from as a high literary standard says a lot about this feeling of safety that we're missing and that amygdala plumping of feeling connected. And I also want to share that like, when I started putting a little bit more magic into my own writing, it felt very controversial... I felt like I was doing something



wrong. I felt like I wasn't allowed to do it. Like, not just that I wouldn't be taken seriously though, that is definitely part of it. But it's also just like, no, like, you can't just write this magical thing. You can't just write that the tree talks. But of course, you can. That's our power as writers, we can write...

Carmen Spagnola 33:48

And like, hello, internalized patriarchy. You know? Like, just like, oh, you want to talk about magic? You're fucking in me. I'm gonna exorcise you, you demon.

Sarah Selecky 33:58

Right.

Carmen Spagnola 33:59

And, and, you know, well, when I was talking about fall as the season of severance and initiation. The thing...So I said the word differentiation. And here's the great gift of adolescence. So it's ironic because we live in a totally childish culture. Our culture is still stuck in summer, right? It's like, very vain and oriented towards the surface of things. And you know, it's, yeah, anyway, won't talk about that. But we're in a childish culture, and it's actually fall's adolescent that initiate summer's child, and the way they do that is through differentiation. And so if we didn't have this urge to separate from our, you know, oppressors, our parents. If we didn't have that urge, the world would always stay the same. The reason the world doesn't stay the same is because we have this incredible period between like fourteen and 24 where suddenly our brains are changing, our bodies are changing, and suddenly we're starting to make connections. It takes a little while, but we're like, wait a second, the world I was promised I'm not going to get? And the people who have been controlling me don't know what the fuck they're doing. And so I need to find my own way. I need to break away. I need to do something different. And that's actually how the world changes. That, you know, this is why we have like younger people at places like Standing Rock, or like Fairy Creek where I am right now. This is like, that desire to do something differently is so necessary for society.

And so the kind of like, demeaning, glib, derogatory ways we've regarded adolescence are, are like, ugh, eyeroll, like, it's not cool. That's not what we do anymore, being like, ugh, teenagers, like, nope. This is the great hope, right? This is, these are the people



who look around and go, no, this is... You guys are fucked. We're not doing this this way anymore. And so celebrating the sort of raw force of energy, and life, and that sense of both individual but I would also say collective care. I mean, adolescence is a time when we are very oriented towards peers. Whether we have a lot of friends or not, we are tracking the collective like nobody's business. And so this is one of the gifts of adolescence, it's like kind of a big part of, in my attachment for parents course, is trying to like help people honour their inner adolescent. Remember what it was like to be an adolescent. Remember those feelings of powerlessness and the empowerment and vitality that comes from breaking away from harmful systems, or people, or whatever it is. And so yeah, the inner voice that's saying, you can't do that you shouldn't do that, and especially if it's a cis white male voice it's like okay, red flag. We should exactly do that thing. We're like uninitiated boys that like don't even know how to name a feeling — like no we're not doing that anymore.

Sarah Selecky 37:14

This just... I mean, that just comes back to what do you care, reaching for what you care about. And, and how that is actually like, life giving. It's a life-giving, culture-making decision and action. Have you, side note, have you watched... Do you watch television?

Carmen Spagnola 37:36

I watch Netflix.

Sarah Selecky 37:39

Have you watched The White Lotus yet?

Carmen Spagnola 37:41

No.

Sarah Selecky 37:42

There's a, it's... Anyway, there's a... It's wonderful.

Carmen Spagnola 37:45

What is it?





Sarah Selecky 37:45

I really like it. It's this six part series that Mike White wrote and directed. And it all takes place in a hotel in Hawaii. But there is a teenage, there are some teenagers and there's one teenage character, a teenage boy who I don't want to give any spoiler alerts but just as you're describing the hope, I mean, it's a pretty cynical story. It's delicious. It's luscious. It's beautiful to watch and all the characters pretty much feel pretty, pretty loved by the writers, I think. Most of them. Which is something I always go for in anything that I read or watch. But the hope of the adolescent and what this character ends up doing kind of carries, it carries us like through the end of the story ends on that and I see it working out. This is very general because you haven't seen it and I don't want to give any spoilers but watch it. Six episodes.

Carmen Spagnola 38:49

For sure. Thank you. Good recommendation. I would like to recommend, so I branched out and got Disney+ because I wanted to see Reservation Dogs. And it's by that New Zealand director. Anyway.

Sarah Selecky 39:03

Yes!

Carmen Spagnola 39:04

And so the first episode dropped last night, same thing! They're like adolescents living on the rez in Oklahoma and it was like awesomely funny. It was so good. Especially you know, I grew up in Duncan, B.C., so Cowichan Tribes territory. If you've grown up around the rez, then you will be like, oh, this is rez humour. This is like a certain kind of, like Indigenous humour that is so good. It's so saucy. It's so like, silly. It's like you know, like there's just like a really good old fashioned kind of wholesomeness to it, even as they're talking about very modern issues of like, basically, white supremacy is killing us. So highly recommend this, like, no, we've got... The story is so captivating after the first episode because the kid basically is visited, experiences a visitation and is like, oh, I don't need to say fuck the rez, I need to protect my people.

Sarah Selecky 40:05

Right.



Carmen Spagnola 40:07

It's like, see you get enfolded into the collective and you want to collaborate with it.

Sarah Selecky 40:12

Right.

Carmen Spagnola 40:13

Yeah, it's cool.

Sarah Selecky 40:14

Oh, so cool! Okay, we're coming, we're coming up to wrapping up. So I want to just like bookmark that because I want to talk about Instagram later with you at some other point. I just took it off like, I took the app off my phone today but just thinking about the collective and how that complicates things, like noted for a future conversation.

Carmen Spagnola 40:33

Okay, but I'm gonna tell you this right now, whatever the future conversation is, is people who don't like Instagram aren't following enough goatsagram and sheep of the day. If you just fill your feed with goatstagram and sheep of the day, I'm telling you, it's a whole different experience. That's my solution.

Sarah Selecky 40:53

Actually, yeah! It's the animal videos that actually keep, that actually make my heart soften when I...It's just the problem is it's all the other stuff. Yeah.

Carmen Spagnola 41:03

All the problems. Yeah.

Sarah Selecky 41:05

Uh! Also goat. Greatest of all time.

Carmen Spagnola 41:10

Yeah. [Laughter]



Sarah Selecky 41:15

Can you tell us a little bit about what's going on in your Numinous Network right now? And, and your book, which is coming out in the fall of 2022? What are you excited about? What's going on right now that's lighting you up, and what are you building and launching and bringing into the world that's exciting you?

Carmen Spagnola 41:35

Okay! Well, I am very excited about my book. So yeah, *The Spirited Kitchen* is a cookbook that is a journey through eight micro seasons. And it's not wholly based on, you know, postmodern witchcraft or neopaganism. So it's not like a Wiccan cookbook. It's truly a shit ton of research that I did you know, where you're like, I'm gonna read this book on Irish medieval cattle herding, and that will give me two sentences. That's like exactly what this book is. It's all my kind of nerding out on ancestral healing. And all the work I've done in the last sort of ten years around, like, who were we before we were white? And, you know, what does it mean to be a white settler who identifies as animist on stolen land? You know, really grappling things. While at the same time being somebody who's like, you know, yeah, I went to Le Cordon Bleu, I was a wine and spirits rep for years, I had, you know, a long career in restaurants and hospitality. But also like, I believe collapse is happening. I've been tracking it and like, orienting my life and preparing for it. And yet, as I have gone through my own therapy, and then gotten certifications in, like somatics, attachment, etc. I'm like, oh, right, it all begins with the table, to quote Joy Harjo, right? It's like, maybe life not only begins and maybe also ends, but maybe also is resurrected around the table.

And so yeah, it's a cookbook, but it's also rituals. So each season opens with, you know, a chapter where I'm like locating ourselves. So fall is harvest home. And I talk a little bit about different traditions of that, different rituals we might do for that, some themes we're working with. And I've submitted my manuscript and it's like, twice the length it was supposed to be, but I was like, I don't know, Isabel, you tell me what's boring. I don't know. I feel like I need all of it. I need all 84,000 words. And I will cut whatever she wants. And I'm guessing the part with like the Zapatistas, and the Black Panthers might not make it in. But like, I don't know how many cookbooks are talking about capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchy. But mine shows up. Because it is



all connected. So it's like a book where we're grappling with how to be present with a new micro season, which might be wildfire season, or flood season, or smoke season where you live, like, how are we going to be together in a way that feels good and right, as we're going through the large scale problems together. And one of the things that we can do is rely on contact nutrition. Eating and drinking together. So like, I'm super excited to bring that to the world because I did write this book to be like, quite accessible for like, the normies, the muggles, whatever you want to call it.

But ultimately, yeah, it leads to my work, which is right now, I'm bringing it all into the Numinous Network. And what I'm trying to help people see is that it's an ecosystem. system. You can enter into, you know, witchcraft through working with me to develop your intuition. And we are going to end up at attachment wounds, and work that out somatically, and work that out with your guides. And then ultimately, this is going to help restore, but also make us more resilient for collapse. Or you could enter through, I've just gone through some kind of trauma, some kind of personal collapse, and battle inevitably bring up again, like something like attachment or trying to come back home into your body in a way that feels safe enough. And of course that's gonna lead us to competent protectors and the more than human rounds and working with intuition or becoming more ritually literate, you know? Or maybe you come to me through grief. And, you know, we want to do some, you know, just kind of processing that trauma. Well of course, if you don't have community, which most of us don't, in late stage capitalism, you're going to start with a one on one paid relationship with me. But ultimately, it's like, okay, well, if you don't have community, then we need to have ritual. Because you have to have a container for your grief. And you also have to have relief, and some release from it. And so if you don't have community, and you don't have ritual, that's going to become your body. And we don't want that, because that becomes, you know, long-term illness. And that might...If that's your case, maybe you come to my work through some kind of need to regulate your nervous system, because you have a sensitive nervous system. Well ultimately that's going to lead us to attachment, ultimately, that's going to lead us to collapse. See? It's an ecosystem. We're all related.

So when you come to the Numinous Network, it's like I kind of have a map. It's like, where are you starting? Here's the places you could come in, but you are welcome to all of it. And I did that because I mean, it's been a long time since I've been unhooking



from, you know, the circumdrome of internet launches and things like that. And I just want like an easy button for my life. I want us to just, people to come hang out. I am really tired of gatekeeping, and mental health, and psychotherapy. So I do a lot of kind of edgewalking with like, what would be legally permissible within my certifications.

Sarah Selecky 47:18  
Right, right. I know!

Carmen Spagnola 47:18

But it's like, you know, we're in collapse, those rules don't really apply anymore. So there's just gonna be a lot more cross-pollination and a lot more just relying on each other. So I'm excited to keep going with those things. And I'm excited to like, yeah, talk about well, all the things that show up in the book, like just going through the cycles and seasons, and what the spiritual developmental tasks are each time. I'm a little, there's a little bit of sadness, because one of the things I did to write the book was I established a committee of care. I just knew that writing the book was going to bring up a lot of shit, like, I'm estranged from my mother and have been for like, thirteen years. And I was like, oh, this is weird, I'm gonna have like the biggest thing of my life happening, it's gonna be super visible. And like, she's like alive like, in the world. But like, for lots of good reasons, I'm not going to include her in this experience. But that I was like, oh, look, I've got a bunch of stuff coming up around inadequacy and being a sham, or just like all the stuff. And so I had three friends that I was like, I would like to meet once a month. And that will be the time, I did a whole kind of ritual around like, the predator energy when I would write, that it was like, look, you need to fuck off when I'm writing. You can like, I will give you some attention, but you can't cripple me with self doubt. Like I do have some worthwhile things to say. And you're just getting meaner and meaner. So I had this ritual of calling in the dark where I negotiated with that predator energy and was like, I will give you all the time you want for one hour a month, and I will be even bring in witnesses. And I will acknowledge all the ways in which I think you're right. I like suck. But the rest of the time, you have to fucking, like, screw off, and it was like, okay, yeah, that was the negotiation we could do. So I established my committee of care. Every month, I'd be like, no, I'm fine. It's good. I don't need it. They'd be like, yes, yes, we should probably meet and I'd get on the call and be like, yeah, no, it's okay. I don't know, I'm fine, it's good. And then I'd just, like



cry for an hour. I'd be like, I'm gonna have an ugly baby. My books going to be ugly. And they'd be like, you know what, we will love your ugly baby, but it's not going to be ugly. And I'd be like, okay, and so I like am a little kind of sad that... I mean, I could establish... I could, I could call a committee of care for anything. But that was like a really special experience to have people who like, had it in their calendar that they were going to show up in like witness me fall apart and then just like, keep telling me it's going to be okay. We love you, we love you, we love you.

Sarah Selecky 50:02

Can you share what, sorry to interrupt, I just love this so much. And I know that a lot of the writers who are listening to this are working on memoir that's particularly... Like there's a thing that happens when we write a memoir, where, you know, you have this experience, and you're like, I gotta tell the story, or people say, you need to tell the story. And then you don't have the support. It's not just about writing it down. Like, it's all the things that you talked about. So I'm really interested in this, because people may be able to actually recreate this for themselves today, you know? This afternoon. They could call some people and do it. Can you explain like, what happened after a call? Like, how did you feel? Like what did it do to the darkness, or with the darkness?

Carmen Spagnola 50:44

Well, so first thing I want to do is credit the Quakers. I'm a Quaker, and this is a Quaker process, a committee of care. I just want to like name that, I didn't invent it. And also, it comes from a ritual that I learned through Sparrow Heart and in my apprenticeship to do wilderness quest. And he learned it from Meredith Foster, and sorry, Steve Foster, Meredith Little, the School of Lost Borders. So that's the lineage of calling in the dark. So that's kind of the first part is you like, you get ready in your ritual. It's a nighttime thing. Some things have to happen at night. You like create a circle of allies, maybe with your rocks, or pictures of people, or whatever it is. You step in, and you're like, okay, I'm ready for you, whoever wants to come. Like, I'm ready. And you call in the dark. And then you negotiate with it, like, who are you and what do you want? And so my dark was like, I want you to die. Like it was like, I want you gone. And I was like, okay, that's extreme. No, I'm not doing that. So like, the whole thing is, you're going to keep setting boundary, until you can find something you're willing to do to acknowledge this, the need of this dark. Why it keeps pursuing you. And so then it



was like, well, I want you to be humiliated. I want you to get what you deserve and be humiliated. And I was like, that also seems mean, no, I'm not willing to do that. And it just keeps going and going until finally it was like, I want you to admit you feel vulnerable. And I was like, okay, that I can do. That doesn't feel good. But yes, I can do that. So based on that, that helped me understand the need of who I would choose for my committee of care. So I was like, I need strong people, but people who will love me fiercely. And when I am vulnerable, they will honour that and not try to fix it, save me, nothing like that. They're just gonna, like hold me in very high esteem.

And so I had a few friends that I knew could be like, good listeners, and I just said, like, would you come and do this? So then they would come and do that. That's what they would do. So just like, they would listen to me like until I was like, you know, overtired, cranky baby, couldn't talk anymore. And then they'd be like, are you ready for mirroring? Afterwards, I would feel a tremendous amount of relief, but also clarity, because what I had negotiated with my dark was like, I will acknowledge how vulnerable I feel for that hour, and then you shut the fuck up. And that, on a mystical level, like, that's binding. Like, we sealed that. It's like, nope, that's like a, that's a covenant. And so then the rest of the time, I was like, a thought or a feeling might come in, but it would be fleeting, and I could kind of mentally place it in my calendar three weeks from now, I was like, yeah, maybe I look fat in these photos, like fucking fat phobia, fuck you diet cultures from my grandmother. You know? And just like mentally file that in, you know, two weeks from now, for my committee to put it in the file.

Sarah Selecky 54:01  
Put it in the file.

Carmen Spagnola 54:02

Yeah, just put it in the file and I'll get to it. And so that, I held up my end of the bargain. When I didn't, if I pushed it off and I skipped a month, boy did I start to become consumed. And then I kind of did deserve it because I broke my promise more than human right? It didn't take much to get back in repair with that. So if I held up my end, the larger forces held up their end too. And that was very relieving. And I could just do the thing. And I found that as I got closer to submitting my manuscript, that like rising anxiety of like, it's not charming enough, this chapter sounds great and then



the rest of it isn't my voice, ahh I'm freaking out. I actually was able to just be like, whatever. It's just like, it's fine. I still have lots of time. Isabel, my editor, is amazing and she's gonna make it... She's gonna show me where I could be more charming and I still have time. It's fine. It's fine. And I was able to look at the photos and be like, God, Steph, my photographer, is like fabulous. She's gonna save this whole project. Her name should be like, three times as large as mine. But like this is great. This is great, you know, like, so I was just able to release the like, or at least I would say that those like, talons, the you know, those like sharp nails that were dug right into my heart and chest, they just kind of like let go and relaxed and it's like, oh, there's my demon sitting right there, but like, not on my chest anymore.

Sarah Selecky 55:32

Yeah. I think that a lot of people who are listening will relate to that. I mean, that's so much of the writing process for so many writers I know, is finding ways to negotiate with that. And I love the way you described it and taught us how to do it. Like that's ritual literacy. So good.

Carmen Spagnola 55:55

The important thing is just don't make promises you can't keep. That's all. And like, you know, as writers, you know this, right? You've read all the fables.

Sarah Selecky 56:05

Yeah! Right. Carmen, this is the end of our call. This has been an incredible hour. I always feel this way after talking to you like, kind of like not quite on the ground and yet completely deep into the earth at the same time. I'm going to, there are a lot of resources dropped. I'm going to try to collect them and put them all in a list. So there'll be listed on the blog site that goes along with this recording. And for those of you listening, you can pre order *The Spirited Kitchen* right now. And do go visit Carmen Spagnola. That's c a r m...

Carmen Spagnola 56:47

Wait a second, wait a second, wait a second!

Sarah Selecky 56:48





What!?

Carmen Spagnola 56:50

Can you preorder *The Spirited Kitchen*? No, I don't think you can. It doesn't come until like next fall.

Sarah Selecky 56:56

Really!? Yeah, but you can preorder it, can't you? Have you checked?

Carmen Spagnola 57:00

I don't know. I haven't looked... No, I should go check! You're saying this and I'm like, oh my God! That's what I'm excited about! I'd have to go look. I don't know. We don't have a cover yet. So.

Sarah Selecky 57:08

You don't need a cover. I bet you Norton's put it up there. If not what they can do is go to your website and get on the list to be notified, right?

Carmen Spagnola 57:17

Yeah, yeah. Just like yeah, sign up to be on my newsletter and you'll be... I'll definitely be... Or follow me on Instagram if you're still doing that thing, @CarmenSpagnola because of course that's where I'm celebrating the Wheel of the Year. And yeah, we can even, if you join the Numinous Network, I'm doing Wheel of the Year ritual and celebration in the lead up to *The Spirited Kitchen*. It's kind of a preview already.

Sarah Selecky 57:43

Oh! See!? Okay. So that's... I'm going to spell your last name because people may be listening and not reading, Carmen c a r m e n Spagnola, s p a g n o l a . c o m . And if there is a preorder, link, you know I'm putting it up, so...

Carmen Spagnola 58:00

Oh, thank you.

Sarah Selecky 58:01



That'll happen. Carmen, thank you so much for spending this time with us today.

Carmen Spagnola 58:07

This was delicious.

Sarah Selecky 58:08

Really, really good.

Carmen Spagnola 58:09

Thank you for inviting me. I appreciate your questions. And I love you.

Sarah Selecky 58:13

Congratulations on everything. I love you too. More soon.

