Here is where we began –

A scouting party assembled for this mission from among the Consortium Stars. Landed in an unknown place and thinking of home, wherever that is. The Consortium is a planetary alliance forged through years of antagonism, collaboration and colo

unsteady peace is all we know, are cautious, curious, and a little shy with each other. Part of the pact is that we communicate in a shared language, but as with all official languages we each speak different variations at a place: for which we all use different words. Home is hard to describe even if you do speak the same mother tongue, it might not be a physical space at all, perhaps for some of us it is located in the shape and weight of the bodies we love, or might live on as a memory whether good, bad or bittersweet. Anyway, it’s important to focus on the mission, and home is not necessarily the place that we’re all coming from. Moons revolve, planets can be destroyed. Home might only exist as an imagined future, or a place we could create now with the right tools.

Interstellar travel can be very disorienting, so it’s important to quickly find your bearings and establish spaces of safety and escape. Coll, who had been a navigator on a previous mission, had picked up on some unusual sonic activity, so we split up and set out on our own to test out the new environment. The terrain was wet and claggy, so were grateful for a mission that didn’t need us to carry more stuff. Naturally, some of us have better trained ears than others – or rather we are tuned in to different things.

We heard:

Breathing, slurping, self
Under tree applause, Static
Random tick
A leaf fall and hit the ground
Rub a dub, dub
Footsteps, door on carpet
Creaking around, opening doors,

cooking utensils. Talihoi in the duty of a Winter Bed facility, was just grateful for the quiet, finding peace in the dwelling. I too enjoyed standing alone at the window and watching small flying creatures zip about in the dusk air. They reminded me of the swallows I witnessed during any time on planet Earth – birds which sleep on the wing, and can fly the distance between Earth and its moon and back, seven times during their lifetime of migration.

As the day went on we continued to explore and map the location, this time organizer into small groups with shared instincts about the space. One group was made up of people who had been speaking with the dwelling and had established its age and gender. As the house creaked out its complaints they harmonised, singing:

[Am Dm G Am]
Irregular flow of footsteps in dusty old veins.
Cracking around, opening doors, rattling panes.

[Sd M G C E]
Still so much movement, though this body will never take a step.
What is the lifeblood, what are the

Esco in particular was fascinated by the rainwater, declaring that on his home planet of G4ll1c14 “rain is an art” full of subtle

disturbance – we were not alone. A build

intergroup was made up of people who had

shared instincts about the space. One

Distant Voices: a project that is in progress. The text is designed to be printed onto A3 paper, read and then folded into an origami house. It’s a little tricky to make, but there is a helpful video tutorial here: ‘make an easy origami house’ by Layla Torres https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIN2N8CvWw.

I made this piece because as the research associate on Distant Voices I was tasked with making a creative response to our first core group research retreat, that aimed to capture different perspectives on the experience. The core group is a diverse collection of people who have come together to try and map out and understand experiences of homecoming after prison. Some of us have lived experience of imprisonment or familial imprisonment, some are social workers, some others are academics (representing musicology, criminology, politics, and sociology), musicians, artists, writers, third-sector workers, and probation or prison officers. For many of us these areas of expertise and experience blur or overlap – for example we might be a probation officer and a musician. We’re trying to build a shared understanding and approach through this research, but this is not the place that we’ve started from. My response acknowledges collaborative research is not an easy thing to do, requiring the creation of mutual trust, respect and the destabilising of existing hierarchies.

I wanted this response to include some text and images based on some of the things we had made during the retreat. My first thought was to produce something that looked like the surface of a crystal, with segments containing fragments of the work we had done that would intersect in interesting ways. I could have stuck with this idea but decided to create a narrative that wove together some of the things we made and had done, and rework our retreat as a piece of science fiction. To retain the idea of juxtaposing fragments, I designed the work as a piece of foldable origami. As such, when you fold the story into the shape of a house the folds will create new combinations of words and images, and perhaps a new story. I chose the shape of a house because we were exploring the theme of home and homecoming during the retreat, as we are in the project more broadly. The images for this piece were made by collaging photographs taken on the retreat by my colleague David Shea, with images from the British Library’s online collection of cop-
My new companions and I were those who had felt uneasy in the dwell-
ing, which seemed to us neglected and somehow off-key. We decided to reappro-
ach that which had comforted us in other times and spaces. In this ritual, you seek out the most under-appreciated element in that place and bring it together in one room to cele-
brate it. We were grateful that everyone participated in our ritual with good humour and indulgence for our alien custom. Memory and ritual seemed to be on everyone’s mind in this first day ‘in a new space. Kerr who had lived on a neighbouring planet all his life, saving two years in a galaxy far, far away, told us about a grounding ritual he had wit-nessed in his travels. In this, an indigenous lifeforce touched their newborns’ feet to ground from their ancestral home. If they couldn’t birth on their homeland they brought containers full of sacred earth to the scene of the labour. Perhaps thinking of his own children back home, Kerr wrote:

Where heel struck ground first, (whether jarred or feather-light), from there you will run.

Push off, push up
Push off, push on

We ended the day playing music for
and with each other in a room that was too rectangular for us to gather comfortably around the fire. Some of us dazed in the warmth of home wondered whether we were home yet, and what it would take to make a new space together where everyone felt comfortable. Some of us thought about whether we had been wise to accept the mission, not fully knowing what it was to be. It was not a time for stories from our own worlds, but music helped hold us together in the same space and time despite misgivings about the mission. As we became sleepy or even just desiring a little space to ourselves we slipped off to bed. A few who could speak music fluently stayed up late chatting to each other. Someone had allotted us bedrooms and I found my name on the door of a room that had the most amazing murals on it, a space some painted by someone who never left this planet (the man in the moon looks nothing like that). Sharing a room promotes an instant intimacy and I found myself speaking without restraint to my roommate. I later wondered if this had been wise, how do we learn to trust and be trusted?

It is notoriously difficult to sleep after intergalactic travel and so to aid in this, one of my tasks was to provide the group with an injection of artificial dreams. I chose some classic tales of adventure and transformation, with an artist turned into a spider by a jealous god, a nymph into an echo because no one paid her any attention, and a

push off, push up
push off, push on

tricks we never should have key?

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