# **Wu Ming-yi’s Search for a Planetary Intelligence:**

# **The Land of Little Rain in Re-vision**

Ping-hui Liao

“There’s a language without question marks.

You can read it in the rings of trees.

And in the wind and the river.

And in the sound of birds singing.

Has their song changed since they sang it once in Eden?”

--Gene Scheer, “The First Morning of the World” / Joyce DiDonato, *Eden* (2022)

In her foreword to the 2022 CD titled *Eden*, American mezzo soprano Joyce DiDonato reveals how she renews hope and perseveres during the long Covid period of isolation and loss. She admits that several pieces of music help sustain her, among them, a song based on Gene Scheer’s poem, “The First Morning of the World.” The affirmative tone that opens the poem quoted here does not appear to be a song in celebration of pre-Edenic innocence or of nostalgic memory. On the contrary, it employs the past perfect tense to ask a complex question: “Has their song changed since they sang it once in Eden?” Intricately, the speaker refers to birds, trees, wind, and river, among other beings, to mend our anthropocentric conception of the cosmos on top of raising a planetary consciousness. In many ways, it is also an echo or even hymn to what Wu Ming-yi highlights in a recent collection of short stories.

Drawing on Mary Austin’s 1903 *The Land of Little Rain,* Wu’s recent work under the same name interweaves stories of adventurous climate scientists to pay tribute to the seminal piece of nature writing. However, the Chinese title carries an overtone of bitterness and pain in pining or longing for rain. Rather than portraying the land, animals, plants, and people of the American west ranging from Death Valley to the Mojave Desert, Wu’s collection of short life sketches traces several characters’ transcultural and transpersonal journeys across borders and genres. It is clear that Wu is inspired by Austin’s nature writing, intermingling personal observations with folk legends, but he is more into climate science and in many ways suggests alternate ways to search for a planetary intelligence which, in the words of James Bridle, aims to learn from natural systems surrounding us, “to live as symbionts rather than subjects, as equally valid and responsible inhabitants of a messy, more-than-human world.”[[1]](#endnote-1) The “more-than-human” and “symbiont” perspectives distinguish Wu’s work from Austin’s as a result.

In his “postscript,” Wu reveals that he intends to move beyond the limits of nature writing. On several aspects, Wu’s *The Land of Little Rain* marks an important departure from his early novels. First of all, it forms an intertextual relationship with Austin’s best-known work. This is among Wu’s first to frame his subjects around American or even world literature. By going beyond national or Austronesian boundaries, the new work aims to build cases around the global fights against climate change. However, the stories by Wu are not located in America’s west coast or even in Taiwan’s east coast with which Wu is familiar. Instead, the characters are displaced or dislocated to other places—Germany, Arctics, among others. The move away from one’s comfort zone suggests something more fluid, as we now get to know more about the cosmic consequences of climate change that air pollution, sea level water rises, sandstorms, drought, and so forth are not restricted to any specific places. A recent 2023 wildfire in northern Canada, for instance, affects cities ranging from Toronto to Chicago, New York, and beyond. With El Nina surging, we are experiencing unprecedented warmest weather ever recorded while the ocean surface temperature all over overreaches average of 20.96C (69.73F, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service). Wu also highlights the regenerative or rearticulated aspects of the species assumed to be extinct and of the entangled colonial/post-colonial temporalities in terms of sidesplitters, rather than just dwelling on a somewhat coherent natural history of the animals and plants in the American deserts. More significantly, Wu’s work offers a crucial point of departure around the ways in which the question of agency is raised whether individuals or institutions (such as nation-states, OECD, or multinational corporations) should be the primal actors in response to climate change. Here, Wu appears to provide more sensible and nuanced accounts than those promulgated by other colleagues in the field to opt for maintaining “attainable sustainable,” “reprogramming the planet,” or helping the poor with most efficient solutions as “best things first,” to achieve (albeit partially) our global sustainability development goals.

Unlike Wu’s earlier works such as *The Stolen* *Bicycle* which traces Taiwan’s colonial history and famous bicycle brands, or *The Man with Compounded Eyes* that is preoccupied with the island’s aboriginal myths of natural disasters, *The Land of Little Rain* has multiple characters who are scattered around the globe and cultivate their knowledge regarding multifarious ways of beings—of animals, birds, trees, insects, worms, and machines. The protagonists are mostly autistic but having special gifts in concentrating their studies and thereby acquiring expertise in accessing the world of other species about the ways in which they cope with climate change. One of them is capable of understanding birds’ languages, for instance, due to his otherwise autistic tendency not to interact with other human beings. Stories of the second half are on viruses and cloud cracks on the web and virtual reality, but mostly on the ways in which we may reconstruct or retrieve planetary archival histories of the vanishing or even presumably extinct. Wu’s archaeological projects of planetary intelligence draw heavily on a rich diversity of materials ranging from life science to travelogues and even fictions. To appreciate the work in terms of its width and depth, in the pages ahead I would like to consider the following topics: a), global trotters and climate science; b), viruses and ecological crisis; c), the questions of agency; d), alternative ecology.

## **Traveling Climate Scientists**

Story of Sophie opens the book, to lay out a complex journey to global climate science. Sophie is an adopted child growing up in Germany. She learns belatedly that her foster father has been a hiker to Taiwan’s mountainous areas and owes his life to a local rescue team. Upon hearing news that a tribal child has been born prematurely and abandoned, he decides to save her by bringing her to Europe to receive advanced medical treatment. Together with his wife, the foster father has been generous, if a bit indulgent in supporting Sophie’s research projects on dirt, insects, and in particular earthworms. Her foster parents are keenly interested in the arts. The foster dad would often explain the stories of art and all sorts of “hidden pleasure” to Sophie in detail. By uncovering layers of meanings and beings in the art works, the foster parents in fact teach Sophie to cultivate the symbiotic reading practice to look for the interactive and interdependent modes of existence with other organisms. This is most evident when she reaches puberty; suddenly, she associates earthworms’ acts of copulation with her own sexual instincts and reproductive impulses. However, Sophie is always made aware by her foster brother and her classmates that she is a stranger on top of being short and deformed. Eventually, after the death of her foster parents, Sophie moves on to rediscover her identity and to become an assistant in a climate science laboratory.

Sophie’s trajectory reveals the complex travel routes. Not only does she get to travel to a foreign country to receive care and education, but she is given the opportunities to realize and to expand her bio-political potentials to be a climate scientist. She also travels back and forth between symbiotic systems—painting, poetry, stories, and above all, life cycle of earthworms in relation to environmental changes. Her travel routes also enable Sophie to discover her cultural roots and ethnic identity, on top of constituting her everyday practice based on a deep understanding of ecological symbiotic systems around her.

In *The Land of Little Rain,* not only does Wu refer to Mary Austin to build intertextual relations, he also constantly mentions many transmedia and transcultural writings to suggest that we can travel across time and space, across borders and genres. A painting by Edward Burne-Jones, “Love leading the Pilgrim,” for instance, stands out in retelling the story of Cupid (God of love) giving a helping hand to a poor monk lost and trapped in a jungle of thistles. Sophie interprets the painting as more about birds and other living beings, besides hidden links between the painter and Algernon Charles Swinburne on the implications of love that puts people in motion and thereby pushes forward a political economy of movement to bring them to build new connectivities: “Love that is first and last of all things made, / The light that moving has man’s life for shade.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Immediately, her foster father realizes that Sophie is to go on pilgrimage for lights and shades.

Together with Sophie, several characters in the novel travels to the past or “two thousand meters into the cloud” to learn birds’ language, to rediscover the mythic figures such as Taiwanese snow leopard, to launch dream encounters with blue fin tuna or flying fish, and to walk on “untrodden” paths to uncover all sorts of mysteries about our planet. Unlike Austin who tends to observe animals and trees close by in American West, Wu’s characters are in constant motion to elsewhere, becoming climate scientists in “monocular” reconstruction projects (as indicated by the Balzac epitaph that “one can rebuild the world from a single bone”) or time travelers amid the “cracks of the cloud” and the spam world of artificial intelligence. Often, the travelers are not on their own. They diverge and converge, always traveling in an interactive or in the mode of transfiguration, fusion, and cross-pollination with beings around them. For example, in the concluding scene of “Woods of Ice Shield,” the characters blend into the environment:

“The tree shakes, giving off a wildlife of breath, as if uncannily familiar. He swings and holds her from behind, his embrace almost suffocating her, but caressing her with an inescapable kiss. The tree shakes again, all seems to expand, relocate, and dazzle. Rain mingles with sweat, bodily fluids, and tears, illuminated by the stars and moonlights. The drops hit the ants below and instantly turn into icicles, crystalized to form a ball that reflects all surrounding the forest.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Here, human beings embrace each other, while their breath, sweat, tears, and fluids becoming one with the outside world. In many ways, travel or movement that in the words of Gilles Deleuze, “relates the objects of a closed system to open duration”[[4]](#endnote-4), brings the characters to a new contact zone in which they transgress physical, spatial, and temporal boundaries, to become symbionts in the changing environments. A motif in the stories is on these climate scientists who travel across species, capable of developing adaptive, interactive modes of new relationalities with a rich variety of animals, plants, machines, etc.

**Virus, Epidemics, and Cracks**

Throughout the stories,viruses and hacks in biochemical, physical, or virtual forms are always in the background. Several characters become ill because of venoms, virus attacks, or invasive devastations from outside or on the internet. Wu’s work is done before the epidemic Covid-19 or, in ways probably more foretelling, days ahead of the prevalent manipulative deepfakes of the artificial intelligence on the social media that have increasingly raised global concerns. Dizi, the protagonist in “How the Brain Got languages,” for example, suffers from hearing loss due to an unknown neurological side effect after taking vaccine insemination as a child. However, on the positive note, he can hear and understand birds’ languages. His mother is a painter and ornithologist who studies birds, but Dizi is endowed with a new capacity as a result of what is a supposedly undesirable virus attack to be able to decode birds’ speeches, as if he were a “Tiresias” (41), the blind prophet of Apollo in Thebes, or perhaps another Siegfried from the *Nibelungenlied*. Here, Wu seems to draw on traditional Chinese proverb that “bad luck may well bring something good: a fall from a horse may cripple one, but because of the handicap one may avoid conscription and stay alive.” Dizi’s adventure is one among many twists and turns. In the middle of the story, Dizi also learns of Sophie’s adventures with earth worms and her climate science project.

Wu goes on to depict Dizi as suffering from another virus attack due to fever and ending up in losing the ability to pick up some ranges of birds’ sound frequencies. The idea of having organisms constantly exposed to alien viruses or unpredictable environmental impact is certainly a common topic in the evolution of species, but during the Covid years (2021-23) the controversies around natural anti-body and immunity have rendered the post-truth world more divided between science and politics, between those embracing vaccines and those rejecting them. In Dizi’s case, Wu seems to blend old and new conceptions of evolving organism in response to viruses, in suggesting that our birds’ language decoder enjoys the bonus of a virus attack but then also suffers from another virus impact. In this regard, Dizi stands on the borderline between ancient myths of birdman and contemporary synthetic biology of monocular organisms. As a climate writer, Wu appears to move fluidly between fiction and science, not only drawing on biological anatomies, fieldwork eco-ethnographical notes, and academic research reports, but he also expanding the horizons of literary imaginations to incorporate the non-human voices and to destabilize the hierarchical structure of knowledge. As a minor and female with disabilities, Sophie, for instance, gets to develop her climate science project by studying the earth worms, to publish her findings in the field of planetary intelligence. Of course, Sophie is not a single case in Wu’s stories of the climate scientists whose lives and works show complex, mixed trajectories of disabling and enabling, pluses (bonuses) and minuses (viruses), local and global, among others.

**Regenerative Biological Narratives**

Why should some species suddenly disappear, vanish, and then reappear? While paleontologists believe that the impact of a large asteroid or comet from the outer space might have played a major role, a lot of them conjecture that climate change or viruses might have also contributed. Indeed, viruses and diseases, on top of invasive species, ecological imperialism and overexploitation, deforestation, and loss of habitat, among others, could be top causes. Wu devotes three stories of *The Land of Little Rain* to trace the presumed extinct snow leopard and other vanishing species. In the search for the legendary snow leopard, Guan sets up a camera on a mountain two thousand feet high, hoping to catch its image. Deep down, he realizes that the desire to see a snow leopard reappear on the screen may be delusional. However, to learn about the perhaps extinct creature, one must “think like a snow leopard,” even though the animal only exists now “as a story,” “part of the indigenous ancestors’ spiritual world . . . of the mountain.” (148) In the story within stories, Guan attempts to solve the mystery of his late wife’s murder, pondering over how she has just evaporated from the “cracks in the cloud.” At the same time, a shadowy presence, A-bao (the human leopard, whose hunter father might have killed the last snow leopard), catches his attention as a story subject, very much like his double. One night while asleep Guan dreams of a female snow leopard entering his tent. In the surreal encounter with a female big cat, Guan says the snow leopard’s “sharp teeth bite into his chest, and her thorny burrs pierce his skin, gently but forcefully.”(163) Suddenly, Guan’s sexual desire is aroused, as if a volcano erupts. He reacts by biting the big cat’s neck and inserts his penis into her vagina. The act of cross breeding occurs in a mode of magical surrealism. Perhaps in yet another legend, the last snow leopard may become a mother.

Dreamy encounters that perpetuate cross breeding or cross-cutting between species prevail in the last two stories, as the characters dive into the ocean to find the marvelous world of blue fin tuna, or to look back on traumatic memories of an eagle gone and a tiger butchered in the marketplace. Interestingly, Wu titles the underwater story as “A Forever Impregnable Female.” As in the snow leopard story, man is male while the beast and the ocean are female. Of course, these stories may reflect the global mythic traditions in which Earth Mother brings forth new lives, even though sounding a bit phallocentric. (And, no tourists to the Orchid Island would miss the phallic symbols in the legendary rocks that the local insist are about the genesis of lives.) However, we may well consider Wu’s characters to be entertaining the phantasmagoric narrative desire to stage newly imagined origins of regeneration in response to loss and extinction. For every episode in *The Land of Little Rain* starts with a quote regarding an ambitious project in natural history to reconstruct and to r: “Our immortal zoologists can use a dead man’s bone to revive the world well lost, just like Cadmus who is able to rebuild a city from a tooth” by Balzac, or, as Mary Austin observes that pine seeds would lay dead for years before they regerminate. It is up to the traveling climate scientists to bring back the dreams, fantasies, and legends of resurrection.

Here, I think we need to raise an important question of agency if Wu believes individuals or institutions to be the primal players in making the world more sustainable. Lots of climate activists, for instance, take on individualistic roles to reduce carbon footprints: biking, not flying, driving only electric cars, and diligently recycling. Kris Bordessa’s *Attainable Sustainable*, for one, discusses the “lost art of self-reliant living,” and numerous books provide “eco living tips” on topics ranging from gardening to going “zero waste” and adapting a “greener lifestyle” to save our planet—toxic free, plastic free, and even carbon free. However, to promote sustainable development on a larger scale and to be more cost effective, we have quite a few climate scientists stressing the institutional operations in terms of wind and solar energy infrastructure, governmental policies to tax the polluters, and international organizations (like OECD) to come up with smart solutions through economic prioritization. Bjorn Lomborg, for example, outlines the “12 most efficient solutions” for the world’s poorest and our global SDG promises in his *Best Things* First, a book aiming to convince policymakers, philanthropists, and influencers to do public good. In relation to these stances, Wu’s proposed alternative seems to emphasize planetary intelligence. In the remaining pages, I would like to deliberate on the current dilemma of climate actions.

**Agency of Change in Critical Response to the Net-Zero Sum Game of Colonizing the Future**

As a minor and a disabled person (her foster father is also crippled from the mountain accident), Sophie is more able to be in sympathetic and symbiotic mode to observe and to participate in the search for a planetary intelligence. Like Sophie, other protagonists of disabilities or diseases in Wu’s stories are in search of a planetary intelligence. For instance, an autistic boy (Dizi) in the second story is capable of understanding birds’ languages and their ways of being. In many episodes, the aboriginal life lessons in interacting with animals and plants are further revigorated, so that scientists can gather more information about the ways in which the once legendary snow leopards may be retraced and remapped cognitively. Dizi used to be a normal boy, but the measle vaccine immediately changes his life, making him quiet and irresponsive, very much fallen into an autistic mode of non-communication, except with birds and animals. The deprivation functions to open another channel to understanding non-human creatures, especially those flying in the air. Throughout Wu’s *The Land of Little Rain*, the bio-informatics risk factors are constantly threatening human beings in the form of “cracks in the cloud,” of spams and viruses, of pandemics, among many others, rendering all lives on earth vulnerable and in dread or agony. It is small wonder that the work attracts large readership during the Covid 19 period which leaves the world isolated and devastated.

On the paradoxical nature of the disabled endowed with special gifts, Wu may be indebted here to the traditional Chinese proverb that “one may never know if loss can be gain in disguise,” as we have advocated. But he is certainly in agreement with many life scientists on the topic of biodiversity, for advocating that diseases and epidemics may well offer new challenges to boost immunity or to constitute new ways of being. Synthetic monocular biologists have recently demonstrated that incorporating foreign organisms into our body may bring about evolutionary adaptation, re-formation, and even “repurposing” of existent constituents in response to new demanding environments. But in the field of genetic editing and genomics, or of numerous “programmable planet” projects as described by Ted Anton (though mostly for sustainable causes), there have also been attempts and trials to scan and to weed out potentially “bad” cells in our body, especially before a baby in question is even born[[5]](#endnote-5). As if to colonize the future, medical professionals now use DNA sequencing and editing to keep the body in check and to prolong its lifetime in staying healthy, with the “wrong” genes or cells removed or at the very least modified. The idea is to prevent or curb the bad cells from infecting the body, in the name of preventive medicine. Of course, the operation is costly and not without danger or controversy, as it assumes the body will be sanitary and manage to be cleared of any infections or virus invasions from foreign or unknown sources. Critics have raised questions over the years of its ethical implications, not to mention the tremendous impacts on gender, race, and class disparities. For often the genetic samples are drawn mainly from the white, male, and well-to-do species men.

In a fearsome symmetry, the climate change solutions proposed by lots of global (members of the OECD, specifically) policymakers on net-zero emission follow the logic of colonizing the future, either by reducing carbon or by taxing the polluters. The idea is to capture carbon by using new material or technology in the manufacturing process, so that the carbon can be contained. Unfortunately, only small steps have been achieved in this, and they tend to be smart but small in scale, not easily reproducible in other places. So, policymakers are more into emission reduction rather than capture, though they still keep net-zero as the ultimate goal.

Carbon emission reduction can take the form of going green (solar, wind, hydrogen, natural gas, and so forth) rather than burning oil and raw coal. With solar panels becoming more affordable, it seems the decrease of global carbon emission is near, just like DNA editing is to remove “bad” cells for good. And several remarkable steps have been made, for example, carbon free salmon fish tanks in Norway, carbon-captured steel manufacturing in Finland, recycling the batteries in France, E-bikes in India, electrical vehicle BYD (Build Your Dream) in China, among many others. However, there are tremendous hidden costs, especially as power transfer grids and new infrastructure are essential for preserving and transmitting green energy, on top of developing sustainable government policies and international coordination ties. As of now, not only does Biden’s administration falter to implement its green energy policies, but most of the G7 members are now pulling back on carbon tax (for instance, France), rethinking electrical vehicle as prime transportation means (UK prime minister has just postponed it to 2050, instead of the projected 2030), or rejecting new boilers in Germany. New Zealand and Australia, among others, are no longer keen on costly green. China, the most outspoken green energy leader, burned four (the world’s total was 7) billions of coals in 2022, and the number is climbing. It is evident that unstable electro-politics in the world today is not helping the net zero project, either in the form of colonizing the future (keeping the potential polluters in check) or of taxing the “wrongdoers” but economically the most resilient, if not powerful (such as America, China, and India, the big emitters).

The prevalent global sustainability policies are either to prevent the earth from warming further or to tax the polluters. And mostly it is the former colonial and capitalist powers (OECD members) that are taking the initiates. Needless to say, it is ironic on several levels. First of all, these developed countries are major contributors to global carbon emissions and, as Ian Baucom indicates in his *History 4 Celsius,* they have been the driving force behind the slave trade and the continuing increase in global gas emission, that serve only to make the world at least four degrees C warmer. Secondly, they set “universal” standards to curb or capture carbon while not abiding the rules themselves and often not taking into consideration of the developing countries’ needs to build infrastructures to stabilize energy supply. Thirdly, OECD countries promised to dedicate 100 billion to help those still developing and struggling countries, but the pledged sum (though just one third of what is required) has never been raised. Fourthly, the world has seen more of green industrial subsidy projects in the name of self-interest and national security, rather than global cooperation. And lastly, the rise of ring-wing self-protectionism and the bipolar West (US and EU)/Anti-West (with China and Russia leading many autocratic countries) structure, the world is now even more divided, if not edging toward another new cold war. All these make the world not only unsustainable but also increasingly uncertain or unstable, not to mention unsafe. It is certainly not helpful when lots of climate activists, most notably Greta Thunberg, draw on anthropocentric data to hold the OECD countries responsible for major action in response to climate change. We have regrettably witnessed their extreme ways to call attention to planetary consciousness by damaging museum artworks, with counter-productive results. Scholars such as Ian Baucom and Dipesh Chakrabarty have cautioned us against anthropocentrism on the ground that the globe is a human-centric construction under colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, as the imperial powers contribute to the planetary crisis of climate change. To hail them as primary helping hands in curbing carbon emissions is only ignoring the brutal fact that they have been the main causes for global warming and even if they are advocating green policies they do so not consistently, and often to promote national interests. Biden administration’s two bills to reduce the US greenhouse emissions are to create jobs in American in defiance of China, for example. And the bills have encountered strong opposition in the Senate. Globally, as *The Economists* report (Sept. 21, 2023 special issue on hidden costs of the renewable, for one), the green projects suffer backslidings, especially now with two long wars raging in Ukraine and Israel which may further divide the world in addition to cutting off transregional supply chains. At this important juncture, perhaps it is more sustainable to call for a common everyday practice from bottom up in the search for planetary intelligence, as Wu Ming-yi and James Bridle urge us to.

## **Ways of Being**

In conclusion, I would like to bring Bridle’s recent work, *Ways of Being*, in dialogue with Wu’s *The Land of Little Rain.* Like Wu, Bridle is a scholar, writer, and environmentalist. Both of them also are quite actively involved in the social media to promote ecological consciousness; in the case of Wu more on mapping the routes of migrating butterflies to urge people to stay away from highway at the peak season, while Bridle more into radio (BBC 4) and the internet on exhibiting artworks in relation to the survival of our planet. Wu is in Hualien, on the east coast of Taiwan, and Bridle is in Epirus, Greece, when their conceptions of climate science are being formulated. Bridle tells us that his book “emanates from a wider and deeper dawning: the increasingly evident and pressing reality of our utter entanglement with the *more-than-human* world.”[[6]](#endnote-6) The same can be said about Wu’s *The Land of Little Rain*.

Bridle uses “Wood (rather than World) Wild (instead of wide) Webs” and the “Internet of Animals” to discuss the ways in which animals and plants construct their “mycorrhizal” networks of distribution and mutual aids, especially from other trees to their offspring, “not just about sharing food . . . also about sharing information.”[[7]](#endnote-7) In the world of animals and plants, indeed among many non-humans, “information pulsed beneath the ground and floated on the breeze, interactions pulsed and shifted to the rhythm of the seasons, and knowledge and understanding grew, slowly but sturdily, over decades and centuries. . . .—multiple kingdoms—of flourishing, active, even intelligent beings.”[[8]](#endnote-8) This passage may well complement Wu’s story on “Woods of Ice Shield,” in terms of how plants and fungi extend their living, communication networks. For Bridle draws on many works by climate scientists and fiction writers such as Richard Powers, Suzanne Simard, Monica Gagliano, and many others, to provide more comprehensive and multi-sensory (sound, memory, cognition, and so forth) accounts of “different” realities that would force us to move beyond the measure of anthropocentrism. He suggests that the thickets of life seem to “reinforce our idea of Artificial Intelligence as a kind of guide to understanding the more-than-human intelligence which surround us.”[[9]](#endnote-9) But Bridle is wary of the neoliberal capitalist logic in the name of an idea of progress: “What matters here, to me, is that the most advanced technologies, processes and businesses on the planet—artificial intelligence and machine-learning platforms built by IBM, Google, Microsoft, Amazon and others—are brought to bear on fossil fuel extraction, production and distribution: the number one driver of climate change, of CO, and greenhouse gas emission, and of global extinction.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Against such exploitative use of AI, Bridle advocates “ecological thought” that finds meaning in the “interrelationship” between us, “rather than within us.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

Bridle quotes three of the world’s leading biologists about DNA sequencing by emphasizing an interconnected landscape at every level of existence, as the technologies “have not only revealed a microbial world of much deeper diversity than previous imagined, but also a world of complex and intermingled relationships—not only among microbes, but also between microscopic and macroscopic life.”[[12]](#endnote-12) This can easily serve as a footnote to Wu’s stories on the interactions between human and no-human worlds. For both of them offer a new view of life, symbiosis, in contrast to the conception of life’s emergence as competition and survival of the fittest. As Bridle argues, the vision of life is “profoundly ecological and relational, and it extends all the way from the sequence of our DNA to the composition of our bodies, to the kind f societies in which we live.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Wu’s depiction of Sophie’s interactions with the earthworms and other characters’ responses to environments or virtual realities echo such a symbiotic relationships.

Wu Ming-yi ends his stories with dreams of the underwater lives and songs, while Bridle on a computer world made out of crabs, “entangled at every level, and singing, full-throated, the song of its own becoming.”[[14]](#endnote-14) In spite of the worst scenario of impending climate catastrophe, both authors mingle hope with fear and dream of the journeys “from one place to another” that have encompassed flying fish, whales, snow leopards, earthworms, giant redwoods, slime moulds; or as Bridle puts it, “neural networks, non-binary computers, satellites and self-driving cars; the I Ching, the music of John Cage . . . new forms of ancient governance” and so forth.[[15]](#endnote-15)

At least, we reader find in these authors’ works a wakeup call to a more feasible plan not to rely on anthropocentric interventions on the part of OECD (which fail on many fronts anyway) but to search for a project on planetary intelligence. The main obstacles, as I have argued, are climate colonialism and capitalism that draw on in self-defeating ways the logic of developmentalism attempting to pay and to prevent the future global warming, even though they have only contributed to more disputes and disagreements among the interested parties. It is up to us who lives in the land of little rain to take in the ways of being and to cultivate a planetary intelligence.

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1. Note

   James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 112. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Wu Ming-yi, *The Land of Little Rain*, 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Wu Ming-yi, *The Land of Little Rain*, 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See Ted Anton, *Programmable Planet: The Synthetic Biology Revlution*. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 60-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 312. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. James Bridle, *Ways of Being, Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence*, 312. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)