

**BLUE METROPOLIS FESTIVAL – DREAMS & PEACE FORUM
FESTIVAL METROPOLIS BLEU – FORUM RÊVES & PAIX**

Catherine Bush

Each participant will answer the following questions:

1. What are, in your view, the utopian ideas of the moment that may become the reality of tomorrow?

We will recognize our porousness to other humans and the rest of the living world. We will establish expanded communities of attention and care. We will teach all children the names of trees and plants and send them to forest schools. We will be radical, rooted in place, and mycelial, our networks reaching out in all directions. Our kindness means discovering kinship throughout our biosphere. We will acknowledge ourselves as bodies, and our bodies as complex ecosystems, hosts to other life forms — bacteria! microbes! —and guests among others. We will revere the air, inside and outside us, breath and atmosphere.

2. If we were to introduce but a single important, even radical change to our societies, what would it be?

We need to unmake the stories of individual and human exceptionalism, the stories that put humans — especially certain humans — at the centre. In our new stories, we shrink even as our responsibility to others extends. Time deepens. Endless economic growth becomes a dinosaur bone, abandoned to extinction. In the new stories, like the old stories, we reimagine ourselves communally, across generations, and every political action will be considered by its effect over generations, across the entire biosphere.

3. Where do you find peace in your own life?

I visit a stand of trees in High Park, near my home in Toronto, close my eyes and breathe. The scent of pine duff rises from the forest floor. The black oaks reticulate towards the sky. These woods are remnants of the black oak savannah that once stretched across this part of southern Ontario. There are sites sacred to indigenous people in the park and the nearby streets sling pavement over paths travelled for thousands of years. There is nothing about this place over which I can claim ownership. And that inability to say, This is mine, feels necessary to the reciprocal feeling of care and being cared for.

4. Reading: What book changed the way you look at one aspect or another of reality? Please provide the name of author, title, publisher, and a brief explanation of your choice

I return again and again to a particular story in American writer Ted Chiang's recent collection, *Exhalation*. "The Great Silence" has a life beyond the page as part of a collaborative art project. It's short: you can read it in minutes before being haunted for a lifetime. It has the lucid power of a koan. The questions asked by its parrot narrator ransack my heart. Why, he queries, are humans so intent on seeking signs of intelligent life in the universe while failing to recognize the alien intelligences all around them? The question feels crucial to the life to come.

"The Great Silence," in *Exhalation: Stories* by Ted Chiang, Knopf, 2019

Catherine Bush's five novels include the just-released *Blaze Island* (2020) and *The Rules of Engagement* (2000), a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Globe & Mail* Best Book of the Year. She was recently a Fiction Meets Science Fellow at the HWK in Germany and has spoken internationally about addressing the climate crisis in fiction. She is the Coordinator of the University of Guelph Creative Writing MFA and can be found online at www.catherinebush.com.