

# Designing for Healing: *UnearthU*

Kara Stone  
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## *UneathU*

released May 2021

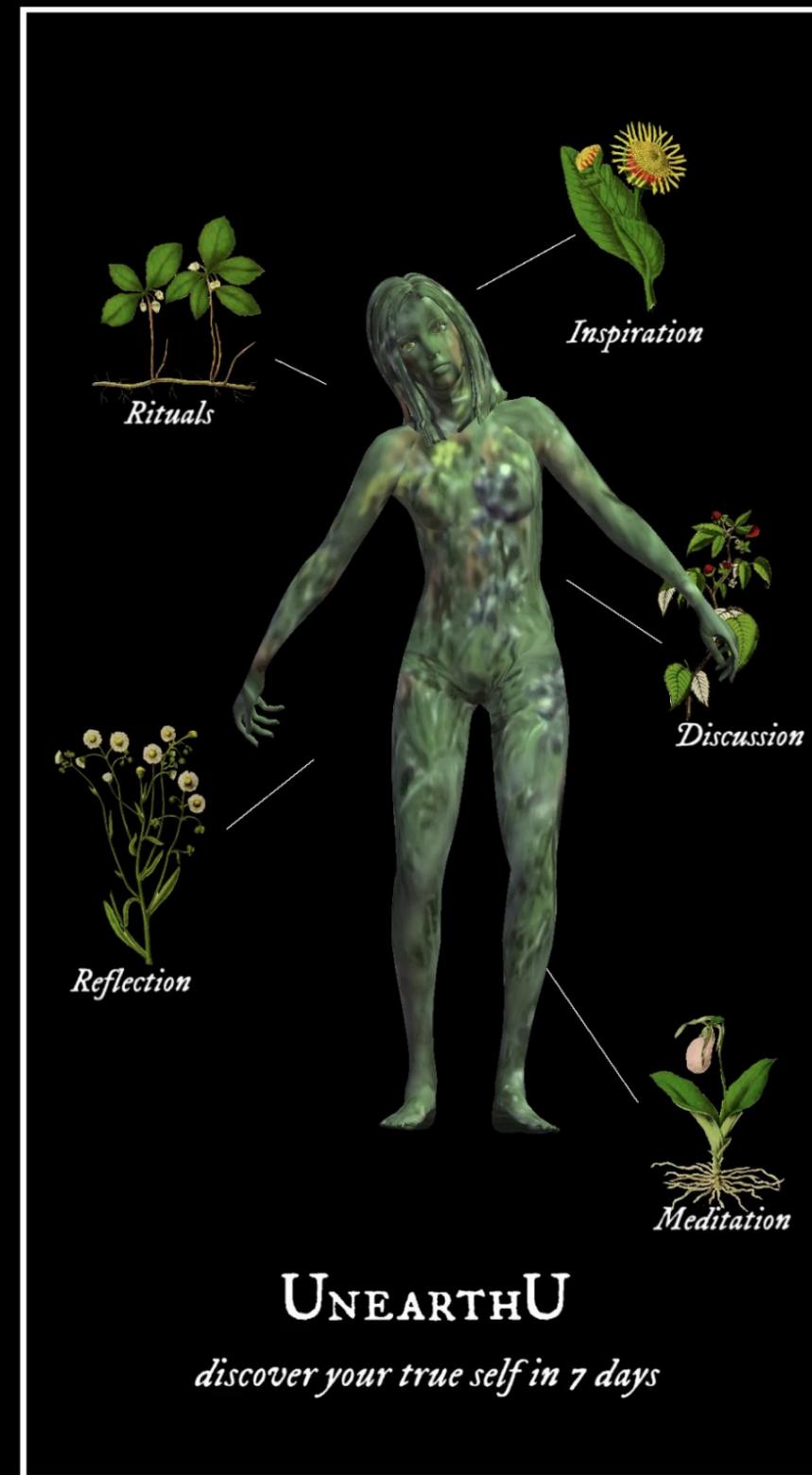
Kara Stone: Creator

Parul Wadhwa: Co-Writer

Andy DiLallo: Composer

Chris Kerich: Programmer

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# What I'll be talking about:

- Inspiring problems + ideas
- Principles of *Reparative Game Creation*
- Ok so what is *UneathU*?
- Process of making
- Ok so what exactly is “healing”?
- 3 Healing Journeys
- Synthesis of principles



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# Problems/ideas I wanted to work through:

- production of technology's role in environmental destruction
- critiquing unfair labour practices and creating a personal work practice that supports forms of disability.
- understanding healing in a new way, one informed by non-ableist assumptions around health and wellness.

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# *Principles of Reparative Game Creation*

## REPAIR

- Games are no more healing than any other art form.
- Games will never cure anyone. Cure is not the goal. Make work that changes the media landscape, adding to a culture oriented towards making life more livable for those with psychosocial disability.
- Do not only represent psychosocial disability but design for it.
- No score, no winning, no losing, no good paths, no bad paths, no one right way to play, no punishment, no reward.
- Be emotionally challenging, not mechanically challenging.
- Describing some feelings as “good” and some feelings as “bad” are judgements. They might ease classification but are not inherent or true.
- Feelings are a political resource.
- Everything is an experiment and an exploration.

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# *Principles of Reparative Game Creation*

## CARE

- Recognize not only the labour of the time spent working, but also the preparation and recovery.
- Do not expect to work like a machine (consistent, always productive, not emotionally affected by mood, physical experience, environment, food, weather, past experiences, brain fog, pain, injustice, neurochemicals, microbiome, our partner's mood, noise, etc.). We are not machines. Capitalism has set up unrealistic and unattainable work expectations. These expectations actively damage and drain us. Resist wanting to and trying to live up to them.
- Know our cycles of work. Know that some are in our control, and some are out of our control.
- Rest without guilt.
- Art does not need suffering in order to be made.
- Affect cannot be quantified. Foster emotional self-reflection rather than aiming to funnel the players into a specific emotion.
- Do not overwork and do not ask players to overplay.
- Be cautious—and grateful—of how much time is asked of players.
- Remind ourselves and players that there is life beyond the screen.
- Make space for self reflection in the game. Emotional choices, diary entries, mood trackers, pauses, time outs, direct questions, surveys.

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# *Principles of Reparative Game Creation*

## SHARE

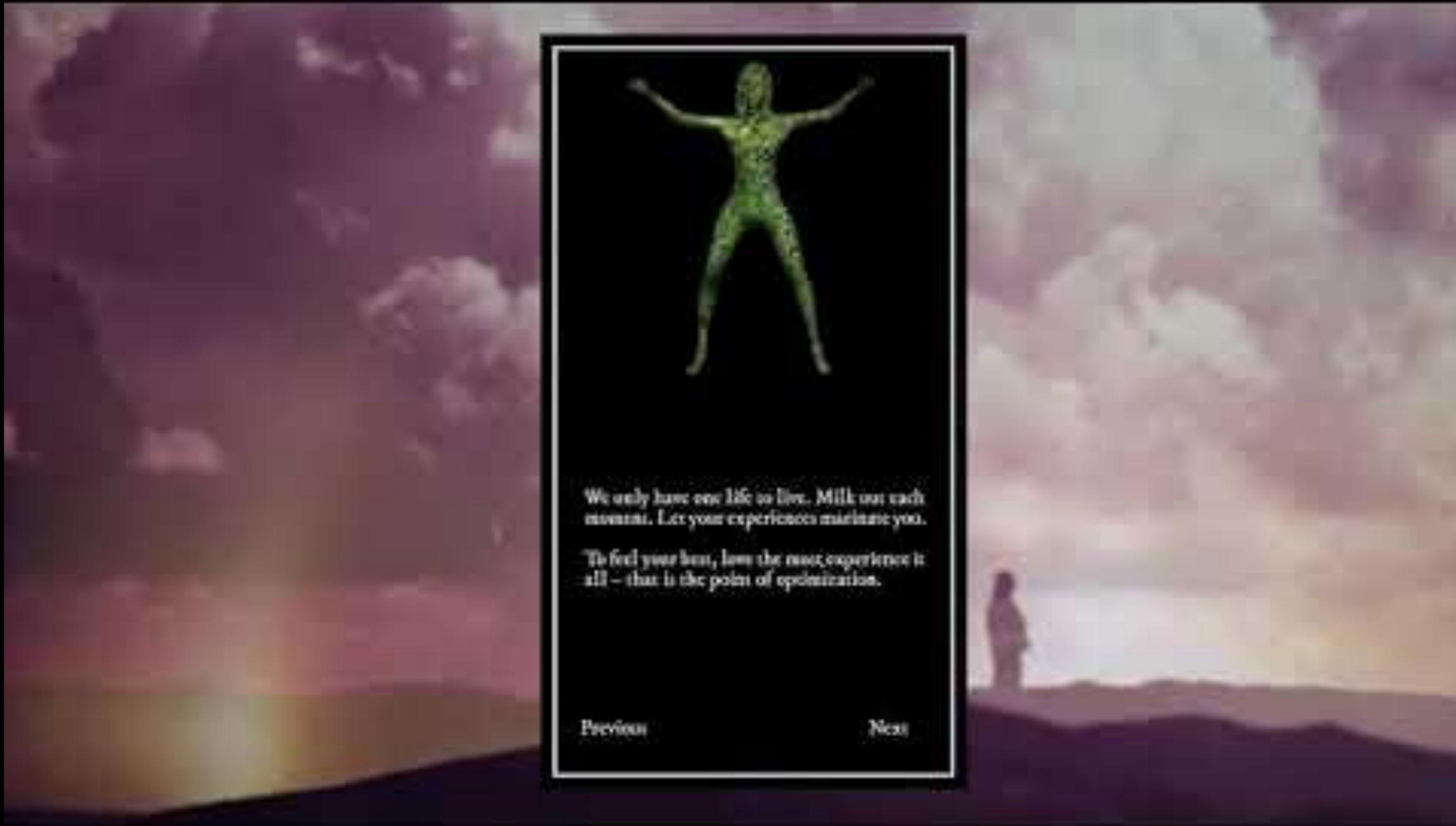
- Be vulnerable. Be radically open during the creation stage. Edit after it is already created if necessary.
- Ask others for help. There is beauty in dependence.
- The process of making is about coming to understanding, not demonstrating understanding.
- A good game is not determined by a game one wants to play all the time. Meaningful experiences last beyond the playtime.
- Perfection does not exist. Nothing is ever perfect, only an expression of that moment in time's preferences, desires, expectations, conditions, and experience.
- Feelings are powerful and should not be avoided, but think through how some may affect potential players. Will it make the game inaccessible to certain groups?
- Imagine the audience as someone in our communities; experiencing psychosocial disability and many forms of debilitation, not an audience we must explain our experiences to.

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We only have one life to live. Milk out each moment. Let your experiences maximize you.

To feel your best, have the most experience it all - that is the point of optimization.

Previous

Next

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*Rituals*

*Inspiration*

*Discussion*

*Reflection*

*Meditation*

**UNEARTHU**  
*discover your true self in 7 days*



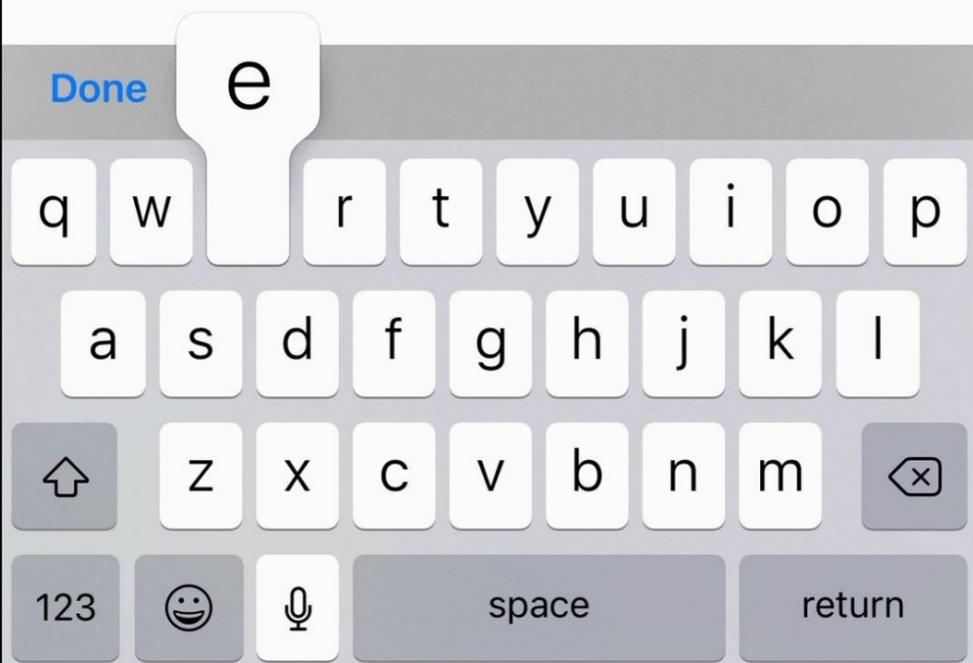
# DAY 1

WHAT EXPECTATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR LIFE? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE "SHOULD" THAT RULE YOUR LIFE?

*I think I should be*



I think I should be



3:02



breathe out



*Day 1*



*3 Deep Breaths*

*Write a Gratitude List*

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

This is where you and I track healthy habits done outside this app time together. When you have done one of the daily rituals, check the box to note it as complete. It feels so good to checkmark a finished task!

## DAILY RITUALS



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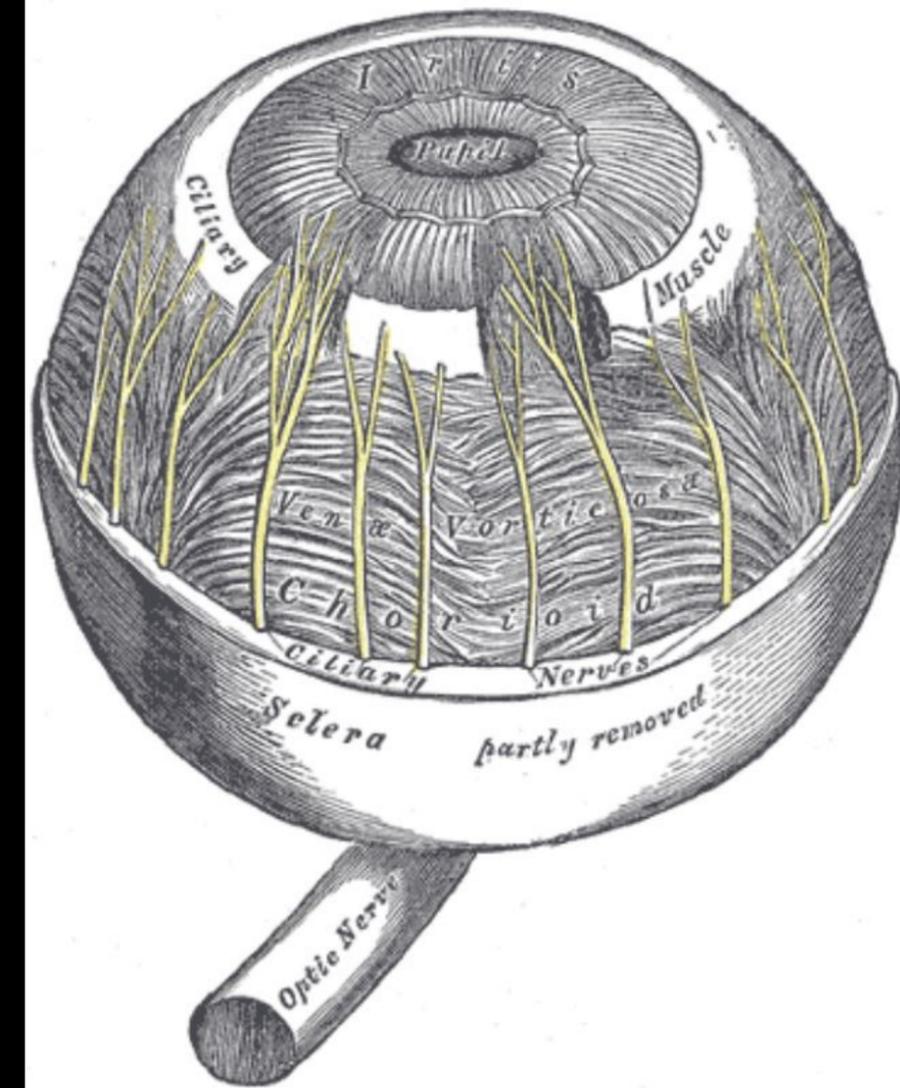


Nº 9,  
HELLEBORUS NIGER.  
*Black Hellebore Christmas Rose*



AND OUR  
SELF-DISCOVERY PROGRAM  
SHE GUIDES YOU THROUGH

FIG. 872



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What are you working on today?

# Crises upon crises



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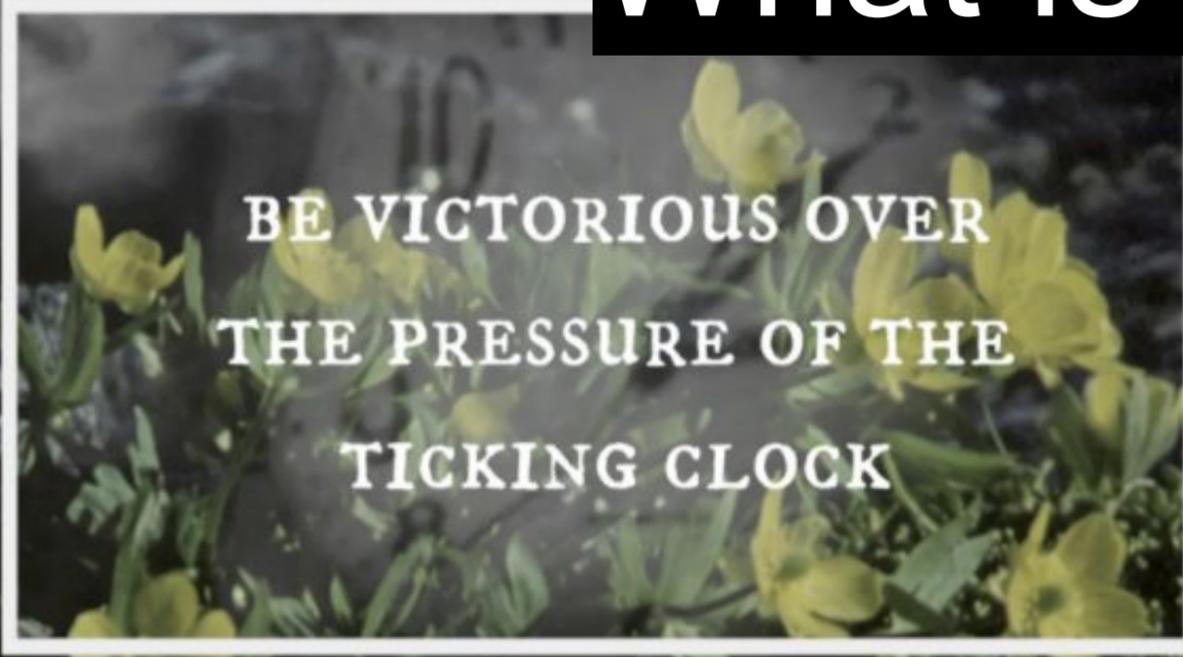


WE LOOK FORWARD TO  
SEEING HOW YOU BLOSSOM



CHANGE STARTS  
FROM WITHIN

# What is “healing”?



BE VICTORIOUS OVER  
THE PRESSURE OF THE  
TICKING CLOCK



MORE TIME TO  
WORK

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# 3 Healing Journeys



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## DAY I

WHAT EXPECTATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR LIFE? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE "SHOULDs" THAT RULE YOUR LIFE?

*I expect life to be perfect. Or at least, that perfection is achievable. I expect my life to be controllable, that I can fully determine my path, and then if there are any failings it is all my fault. I think I should be always on, always performing at my best. I should have a steady mood, a loving relationship, and a successful career. I think my belief about a successful career rules my life the most. What it even means keeps getting pushed further and further away. I feel like I'm always chasing after some expectations, some shoulds. But who made these shoulds? Me?*



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*How did the game make you feel?*

centered, warm, overwhelmed, resolved

curious, unsettled, calm, cool, creepy, back in time

reflective, motivated, calm, curious, nervous, sad, disturbed, angry

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“Kare would share secrets with me, and address me personally. It made the whole experience feel like an intimate whisper, simultaneously hushed and liberating.”

“...ended up getting a deep gratitude at the connection and a being that ultimately is part of the ineffable whole.”

“I walked away from this game feeling a deep sense of connection. A feeling like, "I'm ok." A sense of gratitude for just being me. It felt like KARE/Maya's offering.”

“I want to take away both valuing and guarding my time for myself and the thoughts around technological bodies and trauma. Our technology and the body of our algorithms are made from minerals extracted from the earth at the expense of so much human life and environmental damage; our technology holds so much trauma in its body and how do we heal that?”

“I felt like I was on a journey... Like this work is deep and scary, but it's ok, we can do it together (with KARE). And in order to do this work we have to acknowledge some really fucked up stuff, but it's ok, we can do it together. And it's going to be ok.”

“I like that that continuing to play rather than putting the 'bad app' away was framed as a good process for KARE.”

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# The Reparative Game Design Principles



games are not cures





design to allow a wide variety of feelings, not just represent them



the creative process can be  
healing

no addictive cycles



# anti-capitalism and utopian dreaming





Thank you!

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