

Potential [5]

by Angela Haake

Inside you
electric potential leaps through myelin
like smears of headlights on dark highways
neurotransmitters land in synaptic clefts like sudden firecrackers.
Electron's paths weave a bright network of memories and emotions
a bright fire ignites between white and gray matter
two hemispheres intertwined by fleeting ionic embers.

Thus is stored the distance of the arch of your foot,
the curve of the skin between your forefinger and thumb.
By similar delicate mechanisms, electrical potential allows
vegetal intelligence to know heliotrophy, climb bean poles,
fungal intelligence to know death, let trees hold hands underground
predators to know the paths of blood vessels, the umami taste of bone.
By this chemistry,
elephants wave at the waxing moon,
dolphins whistle their names,
birds fly migratory paths,
bees dance maps.

Our every thought is electric potential, ions by which we find potential for progress,
preservation of all things amazing. We have more potential to affect Earth
than any other animal that has ever walked or *thought* on the planet.
Unicellular organisms first corkscrewed through primordial soup—
now there are nerves named you. We can outwit the latest AI
avoid a paperclip-maximized society's demise, hypothetical
in which robots use Earth's every resource making
paper clips for a CEO's profit. We worry
in our projected future self-aware robots
will not have any resources left to use.
Human brains have more potential
than voltage, the intelligence to
feel the danger, to learn
the science of saving
before it all comes
to an end.