

# THE UNFIXING

a creative documentary

by Emmy award-winning filmmaker Nicole Betancourt

IN POST-PRODUCTION  
90 minutes



ONLY IN NY



Council on  
the Arts



WMM  
WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

Stories are in the landscape, and stories are in our bodies. As the climate crisis escalates, a debilitating illness threatens Nicole's life, then her daughter's life, sending her on an unexpected journey into hidden realms. Adrift yet lucid, her camera becomes her most powerful tool, as she creates fantastical imagery revealing patterns in ancestry and nature that unveil a new way to see the world.



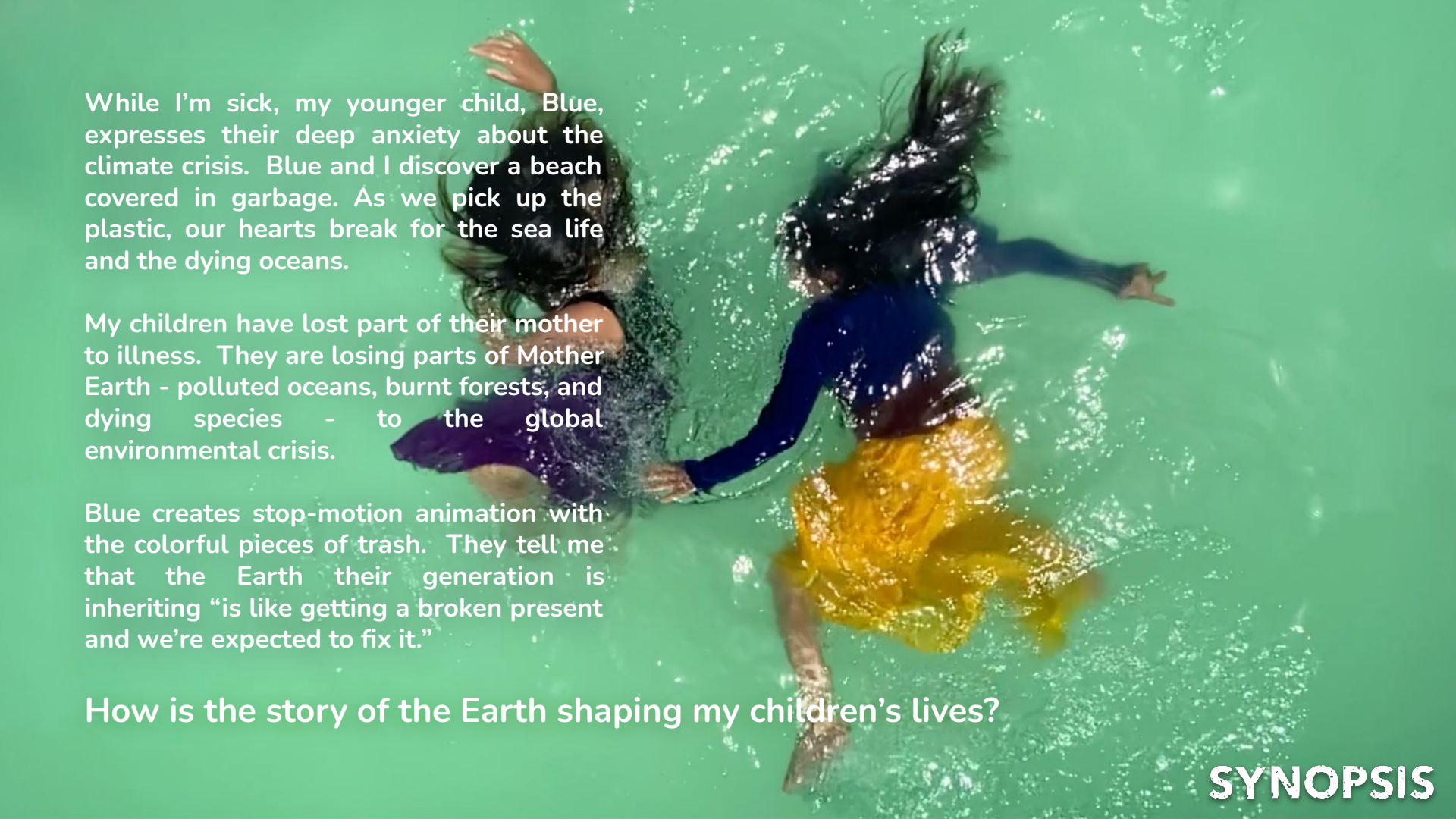
# SYNOPSIS

I get sick in 2014. I lose my ability to work and can barely parent my kids. No doctor can identify the cause.

As I begin to unravel the mystery of what is wrong with me, I discover larger and larger questions that connect my journey with my parents, my children, and Mother Earth.

After 3 years, at age 50, I am diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS). The same age my father was 50 when he died of AIDS.



A woman and a young girl are swimming underwater in clear, green-tinted water. The woman, on the left, is wearing a dark purple long-sleeved top and has her arms outstretched. The girl, on the right, is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved top and a bright yellow skirt, with her arms also outstretched. Both have long dark hair that is flowing in the water. The scene is captured from an overhead perspective, showing the ripples and bubbles around them.

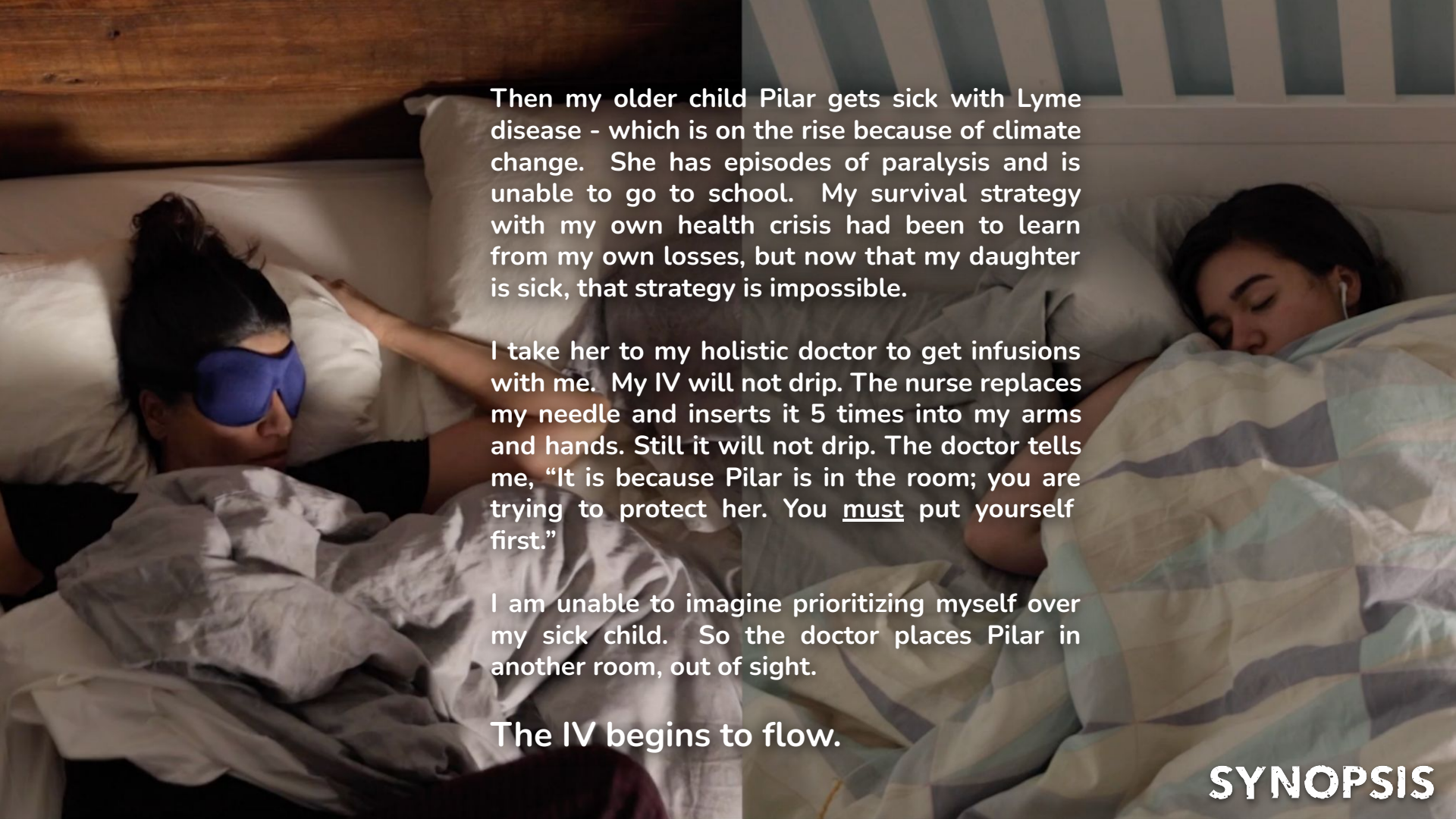
While I'm sick, my younger child, Blue, expresses their deep anxiety about the climate crisis. Blue and I discover a beach covered in garbage. As we pick up the plastic, our hearts break for the sea life and the dying oceans.

My children have lost part of their mother to illness. They are losing parts of Mother Earth - polluted oceans, burnt forests, and dying species - to the global environmental crisis.

Blue creates stop-motion animation with the colorful pieces of trash. They tell me that the Earth their generation is inheriting "is like getting a broken present and we're expected to fix it."

How is the story of the Earth shaping my children's lives?

**SYNOPSIS**



Then my older child Pilar gets sick with Lyme disease - which is on the rise because of climate change. She has episodes of paralysis and is unable to go to school. My survival strategy with my own health crisis had been to learn from my own losses, but now that my daughter is sick, that strategy is impossible.

I take her to my holistic doctor to get infusions with me. My IV will not drip. The nurse replaces my needle and inserts it 5 times into my arms and hands. Still it will not drip. The doctor tells me, "It is because Pilar is in the room; you are trying to protect her. You must put yourself first."

I am unable to imagine prioritizing myself over my sick child. So the doctor places Pilar in another room, out of sight.

The IV begins to flow.

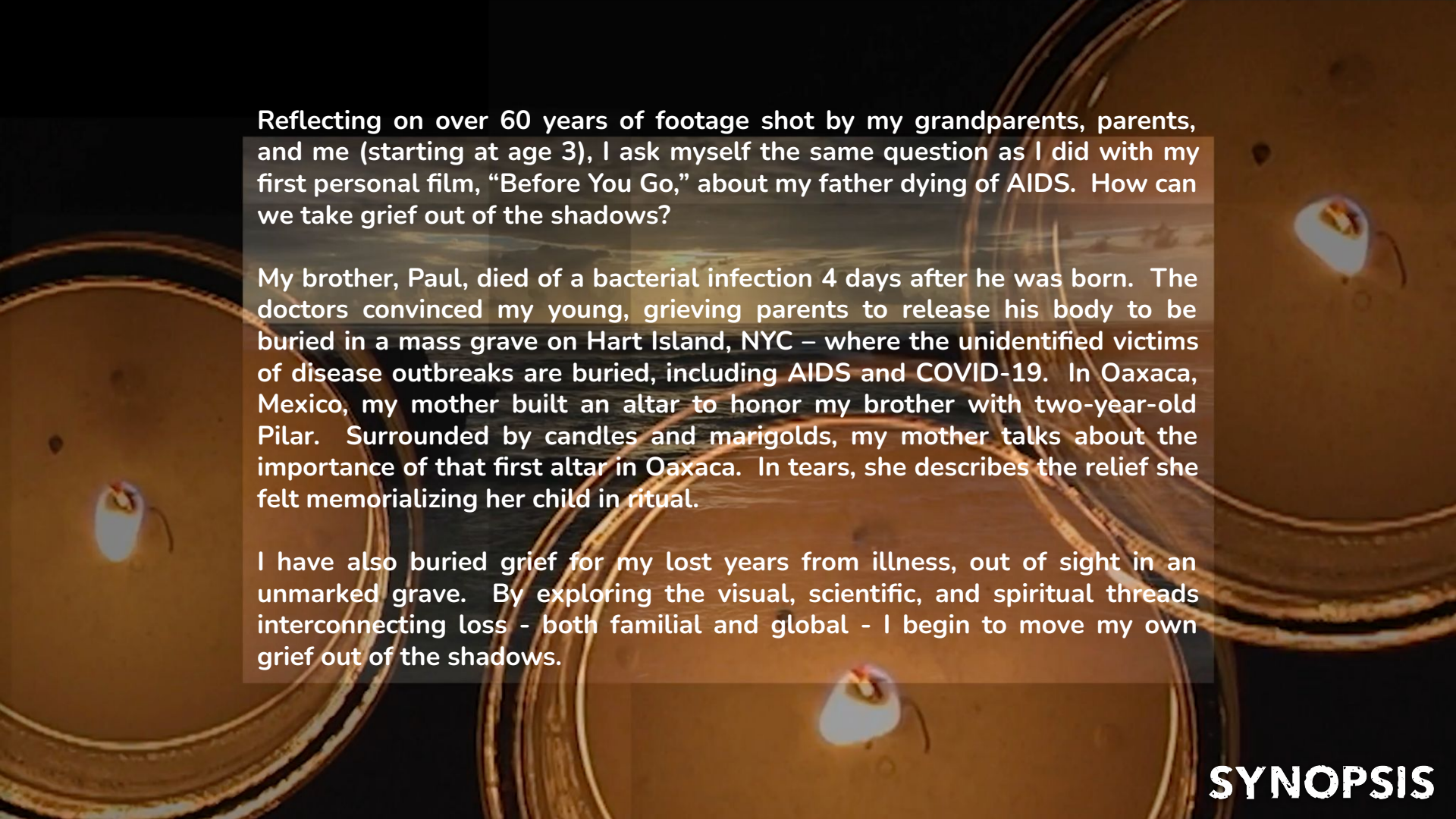
**SYNOPSIS**



At the lowest moment of my life, losing my will to live, I have a vision of my father. Seeing him at peace gives me the courage to face the heartbreak, to explore what I can learn from my broken body and the loss I am facing in my family and my world.

My most powerful tool for discovery becomes my camera.

**SYNOPSIS**

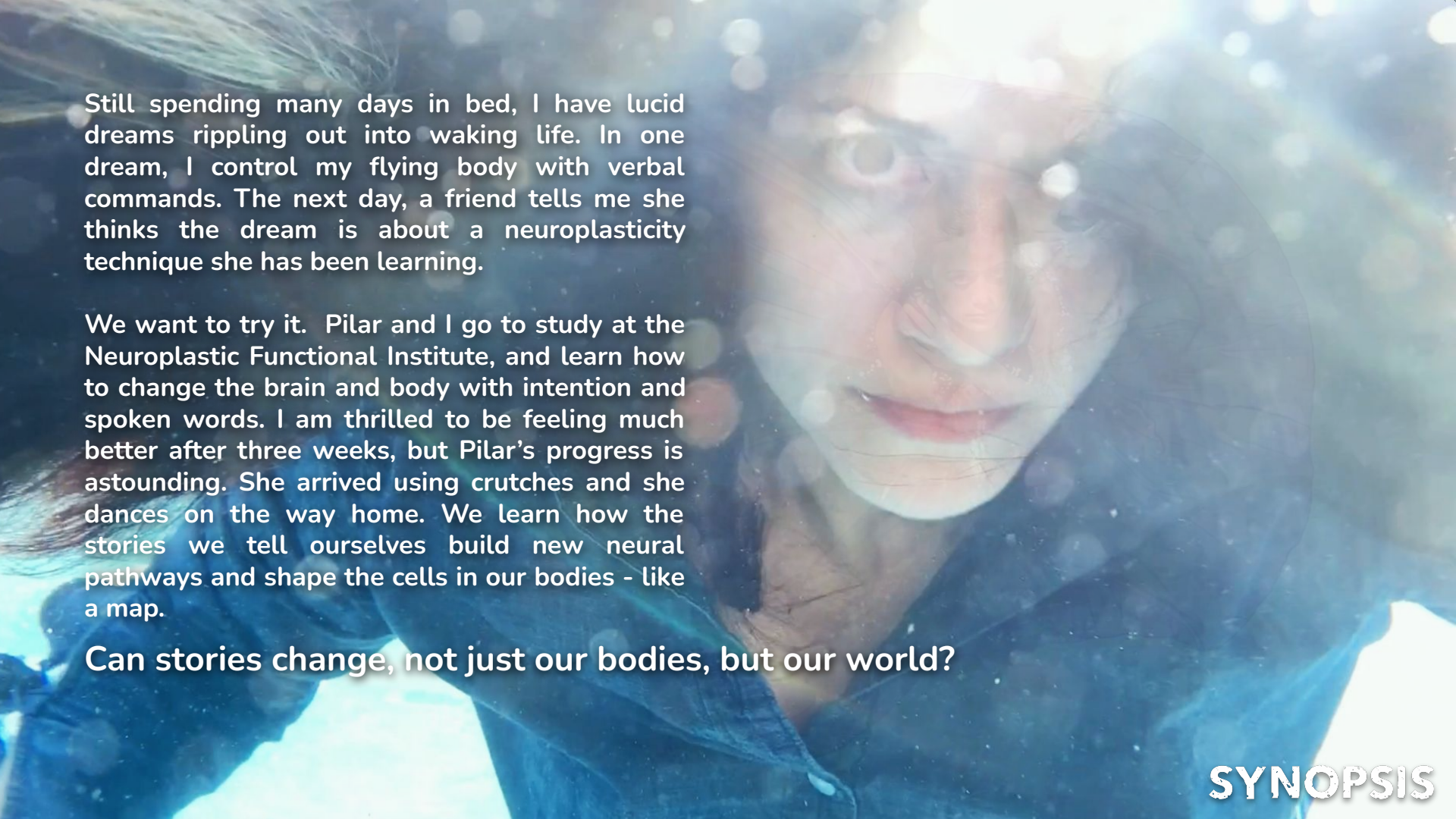


Reflecting on over 60 years of footage shot by my grandparents, parents, and me (starting at age 3), I ask myself the same question as I did with my first personal film, “Before You Go,” about my father dying of AIDS. How can we take grief out of the shadows?

My brother, Paul, died of a bacterial infection 4 days after he was born. The doctors convinced my young, grieving parents to release his body to be buried in a mass grave on Hart Island, NYC – where the unidentified victims of disease outbreaks are buried, including AIDS and COVID-19. In Oaxaca, Mexico, my mother built an altar to honor my brother with two-year-old Pilar. Surrounded by candles and marigolds, my mother talks about the importance of that first altar in Oaxaca. In tears, she describes the relief she felt memorializing her child in ritual.

I have also buried grief for my lost years from illness, out of sight in an unmarked grave. By exploring the visual, scientific, and spiritual threads interconnecting loss - both familial and global - I begin to move my own grief out of the shadows.

**SYNOPSIS**



Still spending many days in bed, I have lucid dreams rippling out into waking life. In one dream, I control my flying body with verbal commands. The next day, a friend tells me she thinks the dream is about a neuroplasticity technique she has been learning.

We want to try it. Pilar and I go to study at the Neuroplastic Functional Institute, and learn how to change the brain and body with intention and spoken words. I am thrilled to be feeling much better after three weeks, but Pilar's progress is astounding. She arrived using crutches and she dances on the way home. We learn how the stories we tell ourselves build new neural pathways and shape the cells in our bodies - like a map.

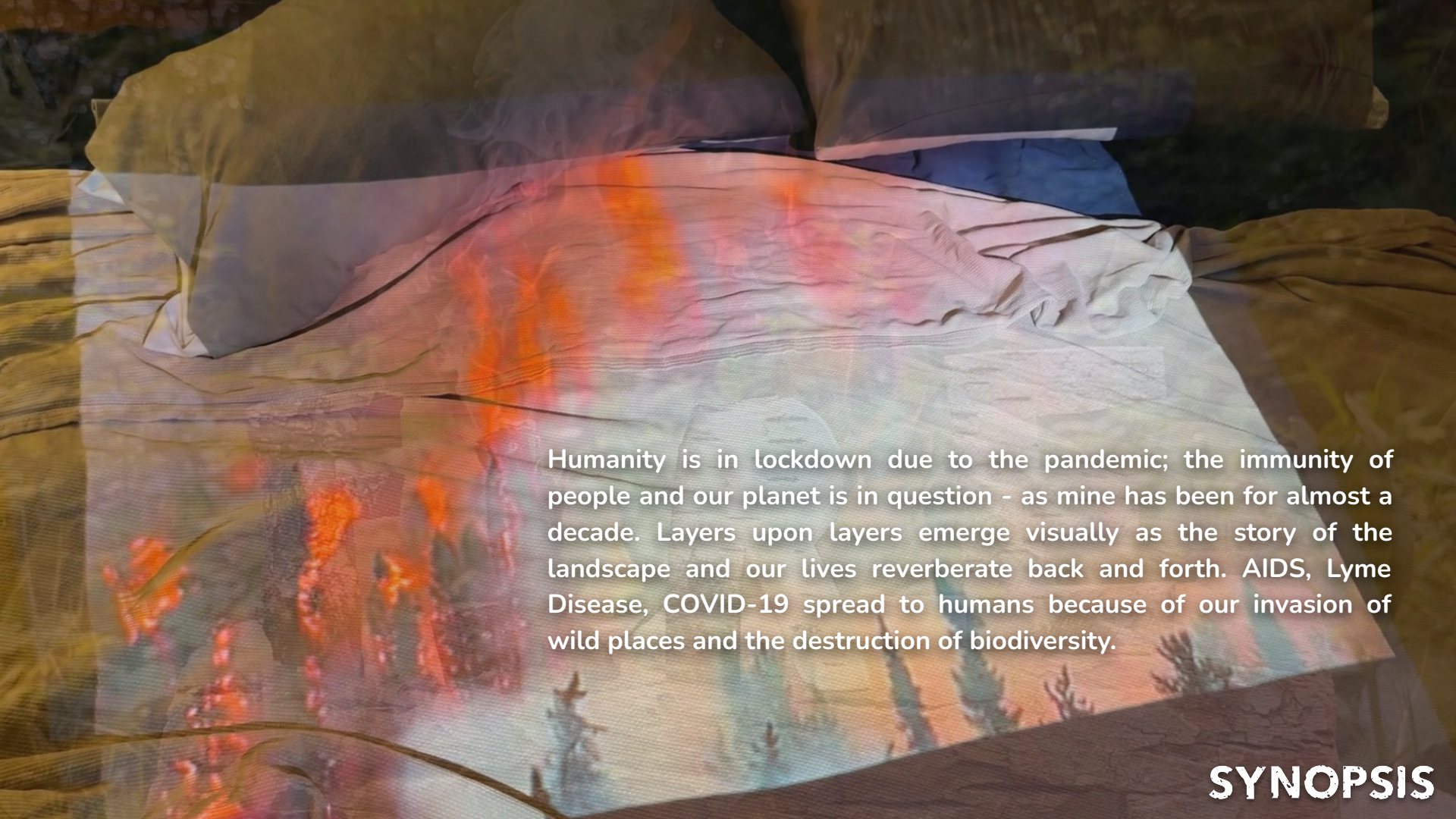
Can stories change, not just our bodies, but our world?

**SYNOPSIS**



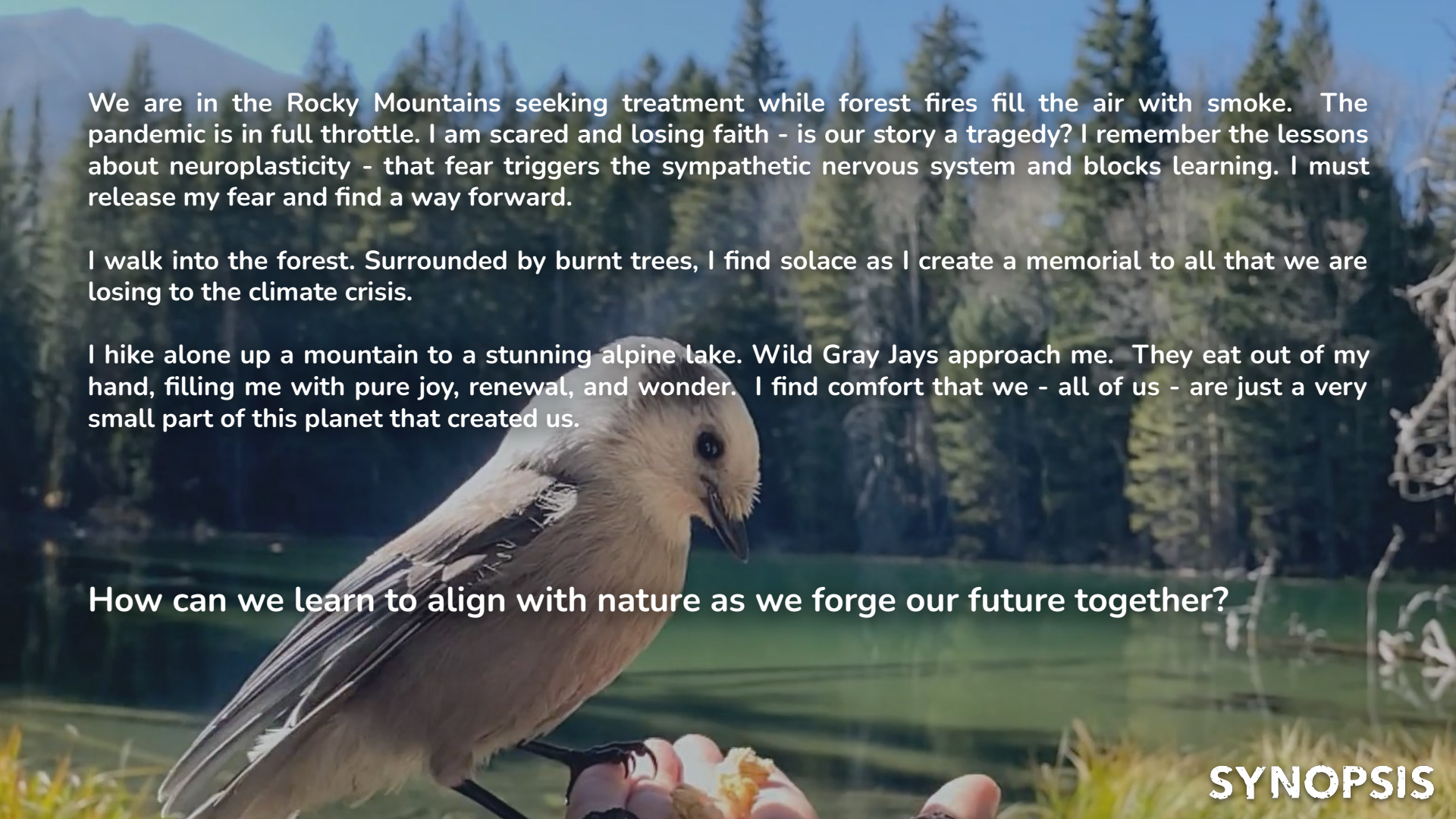
Pilar and I recreate Frida Kahlo's painting "The Two Frida's." Hearts connected, we spontaneously converse about how our family, our planet, and our healing are interconnected. We are now able to get infusions in the same room.

**SYNOPSIS**

The background is a complex, layered artwork. It features translucent fabrics in shades of white, light blue, and yellow, which are draped and folded over a dark, textured surface. Bright, vibrant colors like orange, red, and pink are painted or stained onto the layers, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of a multi-dimensional, ethereal landscape.

Humanity is in lockdown due to the pandemic; the immunity of people and our planet is in question - as mine has been for almost a decade. Layers upon layers emerge visually as the story of the landscape and our lives reverberate back and forth. AIDS, Lyme Disease, COVID-19 spread to humans because of our invasion of wild places and the destruction of biodiversity.

**SYNOPSIS**

A Wild Gray Jay bird is perched on a human hand holding a nut. The bird has a white head, a black collar around its neck, and grey wings and back. It is looking down at the nut. The background is a blurred forest of evergreen trees and mountains under a clear blue sky.

We are in the Rocky Mountains seeking treatment while forest fires fill the air with smoke. The pandemic is in full throttle. I am scared and losing faith - is our story a tragedy? I remember the lessons about neuroplasticity - that fear triggers the sympathetic nervous system and blocks learning. I must release my fear and find a way forward.

I walk into the forest. Surrounded by burnt trees, I find solace as I create a memorial to all that we are losing to the climate crisis.

I hike alone up a mountain to a stunning alpine lake. Wild Gray Jays approach me. They eat out of my hand, filling me with pure joy, renewal, and wonder. I find comfort that we - all of us - are just a very small part of this planet that created us.

How can we learn to align with nature as we forge our future together?

**SYNOPSIS**

# ARTISTIC VISION

THE UNFIXING weaves together three styles of filmmaking: personal documentary, interviews, and experimental film. The film includes verité scenes, home movies, and interviews from our 60-year-old family film archive. Conversations with neurologists, indigenous elders, and climate scientists ground the story in a diverse and global context. I visualize my isolation and loss in the film with animation and layered video.

As the film progresses, images and visual themes echo, revealing their connection to the characters' stories. A diversity of landscapes is also important to the structure of the film - the city, the beach, the mountains. These settings are more than just metaphors, they become characters on my journey from despair to wonder.

The unique style, structure, and visual world of the film - layers that cycle and reflect on each other - emphasize the personal and global parallels being drawn.

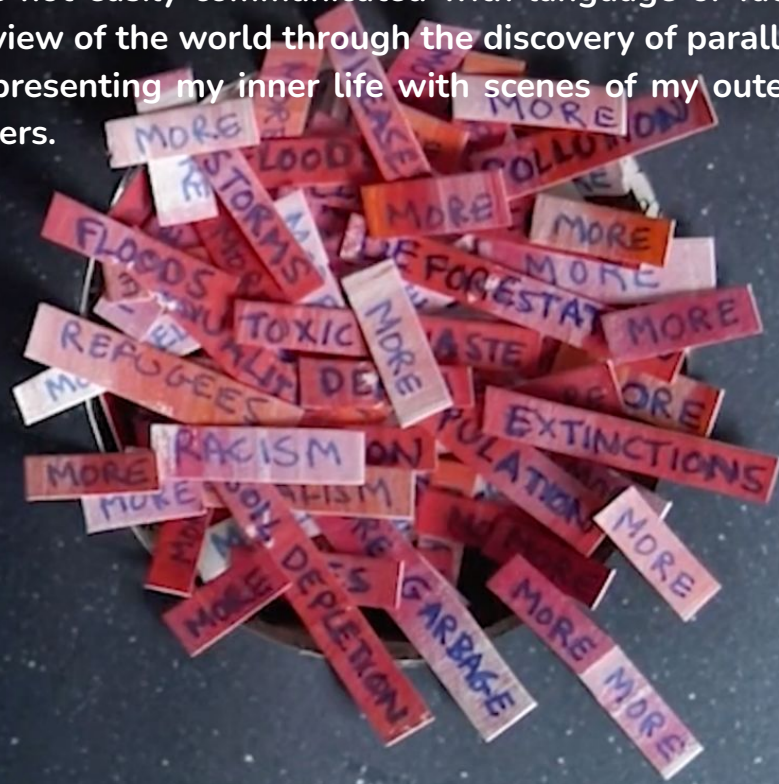




The sound design and music is being created by my husband and longtime collaborator, Bray Poor. Soundscapes built from natural elements, instruments, and distorted sounds from the city will immerse the viewer in the visual dreamscapes. The original score will include orchestrations using a bowable guitar, guitar, piano, and a variety of percussive instruments. Abstract vocals will be used sparingly to highlight key moments in the story arc.

**ARTISTIC VISION**

Being ill has radically shifted my aesthetic as a creator, from a more traditional storyteller to one who incorporates nonlinear, metaphysical, and mythical sensibilities. This allows me to express sensations and impressions that are not easily communicated with language or facts. The act of making this film continues to expand my view of the world through the discovery of parallels between nature and my life. Intercutting video art representing my inner life with scenes of my outer life is medicinal for me and I hope it will help heal others.



**ARTISTIC VISION**

# EXPERTS FEATURED IN FILM

**ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN**

Writer | Octavia E. Butler Scholar

**GRANDMOTHER MARGARET BEHAN**

Cheyenne Traditional Dancer | Counselor | Teacher | Artist

**GRANDMOTHER NANCY ANDRY**

Sundancer | Sacred Pipe Carrier | Healer | Teacher

**DOÑA ENRIQUETA CONTRETAS**

Zapotecan Healer | Midwife | Teacher



# PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Project selected for industry meetings at  
Only in NY 2021 & DocsBarcelona 2023

Principal photography has been  
completed, pending some scenes and  
text cards to be shot in summer 2023.

Rough cut to be completed autumn  
2023.

Final distribution format:  
DCP 4K Dolby Atmos®  
&  
Video 4K Dolby Atmos®

Festival Launch will begin Q1 of  
2024, running through to Q4 2024.

Theatrical releases from mid 2024.

Broadcast/streaming premiere  
anticipated for late 2024.

Geo-specific outreach events and  
Educational Distribution from  
mid 2024.

A nota bene productions (USA) film in co-production with Horizontal Films (SPAIN)

# ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

Our vision is to connect people to each other and the natural world through shared experiences including screenings, discussions, and interactive creative events. We want to inspire audiences to see, communicate, take action, and heal with an awareness of the patterns that connect all life.

- Host brain trust of partners for project design
- Create viewers' guides and website
- [THE UNFIXING INSTALLATION](#) - a companion interactive video and sound installation
- Produce partner-hosted screening events and installations
- Distribute film with curriculum to educational institutions
- Evaluate and adjust plan

# TOPICS OF ENGAGEMENT

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a man wearing a dark jacket and a cap, looking down and smelling a red flower held in his hand. The background is out of focus, showing other people in a social setting.

The imbalances in our world and in our bodies are interconnected and synergistic. The film is a jumping off point for conversations, community building, and creativity. The goal is to spark curiosity about the scientific and metaphysical ways that human illnesses and healing are connected to biodiversity and the planet's health. Celebrating our bodies as part of nature is a perspective that can help us heal the earth and ourselves. It can inform how social and environmental movements move forward from here and help us define how we want to map the future with a renewed understanding of the connectedness of life.

This film is guided by the belief that stories which increase our empathy and sense of inter-connectivity are powerful forces for making positive change.

# NICOLE BETANCOURT

Nicole was the Producer, Director, and Videographer for “Before You Go” (HBO), a documentary that won an Emmy Award and a Golden Spire at the San Francisco International Film Festival about her father who died of AIDS in 1993. She was Producer and Videographer for “90 MILES” (POV/PBS), which won Best Documentary at both New York Latino International Film Festival and at Festival de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Cuba. Her work has been recognized by the International Women’s Festival in Belarus, the Miami Film Festival, Cable Ace Awards, the National Council on Family Relations Media Awards, and Worldfest Houston.

She recently directed and edited two short films - “Healing Rebel,” an educational film about neuroplasticity and “Sing the Water Song,” a viral video created in collaboration with Native American Grandmothers. Her video art and design includes two installations - “The Unfixing” (NY, New York Foundation for the Arts), “Partes de Agua”(Mexico, Studio 11011) - and a play, “Milk and Honey” (3 Legged Dog, NY, W.K. Kellogg Foundation).

Nicole was granted a Food and Community Fellowship (W.K. Kellogg Foundation) and a Sustainability Leaders Network Fellowship. As Executive Director of MediaRights, a nonprofit organization dedicated to media for social change, she produced an award-winning film festival and the first online outreach toolkit for filmmakers. She has served on many juries/panels including the Emmy awards and on the board of New York Women in Film and Television.



# PRODUCTION TEAM

## ROSE KOWALSKI - CO-PRODUCER

Rose Kowalski has worked in independent documentary and film for over 25 years, she has helped numerous international productions become prize-winners including FACING THE WIND, MY NAME IS VIOLETA, TIME THIEVES, FREIGHTENED, and GOOGLE AND THE WORLD BRAIN

## CYNTHIA KANE - CONSULTING PRODUCER

Award-Winning Producer | Former Broadcast Commissioning Editor | Acquisitions Executive | Non-Profit Media Expert (Showtime Networks, Sundance Channel, ITVS and Al Jazeera America and AJE)

## TOBY SHIMIN - CONSULTING EDITOR

Toby has earned an Emmy for Outstanding Editing and a Documentary Editing Award at the Woodstock Film Festival. Films she has edited have won many awards including Audience Awards at the Sundance Film Festival, Peabody Awards, and an Academy Award Nomination. Her work includes "32 Pills," "Buck," and "This is Home," among many others.

## FERNANDA ROSSI - SCRIPT ADVISOR

Award-winning writer/director of fiction and non-fiction films | lectures internationally about storytelling

## BRAY POOR - COMPOSER, SOUND DESIGNER

Bray is a Latinx composer and sound designer for theater and film. His sound design for theater has earned him two Obie awards including one for Sustained Excellence in Sound Design and Lortel and Drama Desk award-nominations. He collaborates with his wife, Nicole Betancourt, on installations and films, including "Sing The Water Song," "Partes de Agua," and "The Unfixing."

## WENDY COHEN - IMPACT CONSULTANT

Wendy has over 18 years of experience at the intersection of storytelling and impact. She was the President of Picture Motion, Sr. Director of Film Campaigns at Participant Media, and is currently Inaugural Board President of Jewish Story Partners.

# ADVISORS AND CONSULTANTS

ALAN BERLINER

Award-winning Filmmaker | Artist | Guggenheim Fellow

EDIE FARWELL

Founder and Director | Sustainability Leaders Network | Life Coach | Sustainability, Climate Solutions and Health & Personal Sustainability

LISA GOSSELS

Artistic Director | Boston Jewish Film Festival and Emmy Award-winning documentarian (“The Children of Chabannes” and “My So-Called Enemy”) | Film Consultant | Writer | Guest Educator | Member Owner of New Day Films

SUSAN KAPLAN

Award-Winning Documentary Filmmaker | Founder of DocuClub

DR. MONICA RIVERA MINDT

President of the Hispanic Neuropsychological Society (HNS) | Professor of Psychology at Fordham University with a joint appointment in Neurology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai | Board-Certified Neuropsychologist

JULIA NOVY-HILDESLEY

Professor of the Practice, ChangeX, & Stanford Woods Institute of the Environment, Stanford University

TRICIA REGAN

Emmy award-winning Director | Executive Producer | Show Runner

PETER SARAF

Award-Winning Producer (“Adaptation,” “Little Miss Sunshine,” “Nuclear Family”)

JUAN CARLOS ZALDÍVAR

Award-Winning Filmmaker | Collaborated with Nicole on projects including “90 Miles” (POV and Cuban television)

# FUNDERS AND PARTNERS



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# THE UNFIXING

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