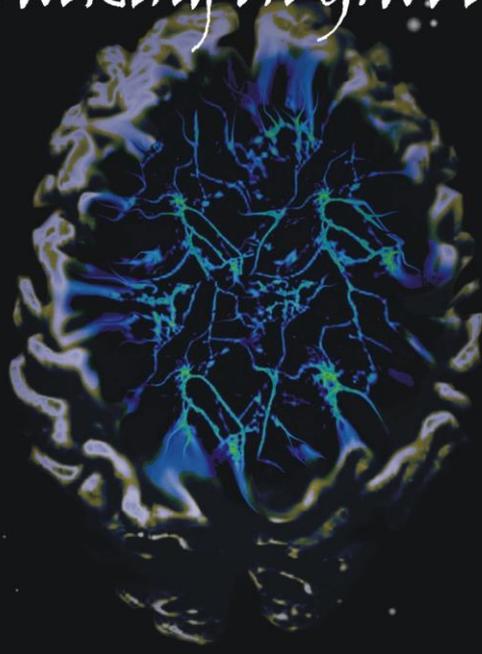


walking on Gravity



Chris Mann & Julia Skeen

WALKING ON GRAVITY

a play

Chris Mann (words) & Julia Skeen (images)

Introduction

Where do we come from? Does a Divine Being exist? Over the centuries our human consciousness has grappled with these two deepest of questions. 'Walking on Gravity' is a play that explores these and related issues, drawing on the insights of Dante and Augustine, images from the public domain of the Hubble Space Telescope and recent discoveries made by contemporary science.

This script comprises the text of the play and a selection of the images in thumbnail format. A full set of the graphic images is available on a dvd.

Cosmogenesis

Astonishing discoveries have been made in astrophysics, evolutionary biology and palaeontology in recent years. A number of scientists and scholars have integrated these discoveries and produced a model of understanding named cosmogenesis. This at present is the standard explanation of the origins of the universe, known colloquially as the big bang theory.

At the start of the 21st century the arts are only just beginning to absorb this momentous shift in scientific thinking. The shift is as momentous as that initiated by Galileo and Copernicus who showed that the earth was not the centre of the universe and that achieved by Einstein who famously revealed that time, energy and mass were interlinked.

The shift in our era is even more dramatic. As the astronomers put it, nearly all the observable universe is 'dark energy' and 'dark matter'. Human beings can in fact only perceive six per cent of the reality revealed to us by the subtle instruments of astrophysics. Martin Rees, the Cambridge professor of astronomy, suggests we need to move on from being 'particle chauvinists'.

The play

Walking on Gravity is a modern version of the mystery play that flourished in Europe in medieval times. Everymind, like the Everyman of the medieval tradition, is an informed, vivacious and questioning observer. In this case Everymind is a woman and her guides are the shades of Dante and Augustine. Both these writers developed cosmic visions of reality built up from the science of their time.

Large-scale graphics derived from the Hubble Space Telescope and images of the brain's neural network are projected onto a screen above the actors during the play. These images function like the chorus of classical plays in Greece. In this case the images counterpoint the dialogue as Everymind floats with her guides through the new dimensions of the cosmos discovered by science.

Music is performed by a cellist and violinist during the contemplations of these cosmic graphics. These tableaux provide time in which the audience is invited to absorb a little of the size and grandeur of the universe we inhabit.

The script is poetic in form and comprises one hundred and thirty stanzas each seven lines long and written primarily in iambic trimeters and tetrameters. This resembles the prosody of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, as does the cosmology of the play which is poetic, scientific and mystical.

The shades in the play

Saint Augustine (354-430) is Africa's most prolific theologian and philosopher. Significant elements of main-line Christian thought still rest on the foundations of his work. There cannot be talk of an African Renaissance without mention of Augustine and the global influence of his prodigious oeuvre.

Augustine was born in Tagaste a small inland town in North Africa, the son of a Berber mother and a municipal official employed by Rome. He was bishop of Hippo, a port on the Mediterranean coast, for most of his life. His investigations of time, the mind, the will and memory rank him alongside Aristotle and Plato.

While there are elements of his belief that we would query today, the restless, questioning, almost existentialist style of much of his writing makes considerable portions of Augustine's work unexpectedly modern.

Dante (1265 – 1321) evokes the shades, the memories of significant other people, throughout his poetry. This vision of the continuity of the living and the dead connects his imagination with aspects of contemporary African spirituality as well as the thought-patterns of the classical world of Greece and Rome.

Banished from Florence, the city of his birth, he wandered through Italy as a political exile. His writing encompasses treatises on state-craft and language policy as well as love-poetry and the astonishing *Divina Commedia* whose breadth of understanding places him with Shakespeare.

A note on the images and genre of the play

Creative use of modern information technology enables the artist to incorporate images into the play. There are in fact over 150 such images. Most are of metaphorical significance and some move.

This pushes *Walking on Gravity* into a new genre. The genre coalesces aspects of poetic drama, an extended art exhibition, film, a live installation and the contemplative trance-life of a religious ritual.

The graphic images are stored on disc and are included on this CD Rom. A recording of a variety of cosmic sounds downloaded from radio-telescopes and used in the play is available on request.

A selection of the graphic images is included in this text to enable readers to link the images on screen to the movements of the actors as they appear on stage.

Pilot production

A pilot production was staged as a play-read in the cathedral of St Michael and St George in Grahamstown, South Africa during the 2004 National Arts Festival. This was a registered fringe production. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Dean and staff of the cathedral for their enthusiastic support. Likhaya Ngandi played St Augustine, Alfredo Terzoli played Dante and the author took the part of Everymind, now revised for a female actor.

There was a good turn-out for both shows and an excellent audience response from among other Bishop now Archbishop Thabo. The response encouraged the author to develop the play. The text was then significantly expanded and edited and is presented here in this revised form for the first time.

Music

The music for the pilot production comprised excerpts from Bach's violin and cello partitas but other appropriate music may be chosen. Details of the music chosen for the original production are available on request.

Malibongwe!

Chris Zithulele Mann, Rhini-Grahamstown 2012

Other plays-in-verse by the author

Thuthula – about a legendary incident from Xhosa history

Thuthula was produced on the main of the National Arts Festival. There were excellent reviews and audiences. The script was subsequently published in book form with illustrations by Macmillan-Ravan SA and is on the list of prescribed texts for secondary schools in the Western Cape.

Mahoon's Testimony – about an evangelist's fall from grace.

Frail Care – about life in a home for the elderly

Both the latter were broadcast on SAfm (national English-language radio public broadcaster) with repeats.

The Ballad of Dirk de Bruin – about one man's struggle with corruption in a church. National Arts Festival Standard Bank Ovation award.

Background information

For background information about the author and artist please see www.juliaskeen.co.za

and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Mann_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Mann_(poet))



The script

The audience on entering the church or theatre sees a large screen hanging from the rafters of the church or from a lighting bar above the stage. The screen ends at head-height above the performance area. Below the screen is a rostrum on which are six chairs. A colourful image glows like an abstract stained-glass window on the screen.

Dante and Everymind are seated in the audience, about ten or so rows back, in chairs on either side the centre aisle. The cellist and violinist are seated on a rostrum to one side of the performance area. The lights on their music stands makes them dimly visible throughout the play.

Lights off. Everymind enters and stands front stage to the left facing the screen. The cellist starts to reverberate a single bass note. The technician projects an image of the brain and its neural networks embedded in the cosmos onto the screen. Everymind speaks as the first three stanzas of the play appear one by one on the screen.

Everymind

Before the very beginning
a darkness brims the mind.
Before a tiny flash of space,
of fiery energy and time
explodes, out of nothing,
a billion, billion galaxies,
a dark unknowing broods.

This is a terminus of thought
that thought can never leap,
a boundary of science
that moves with science,
a holon in past time
infinitely shrinking
beyond the physics of the mind.

Lights come up dimly on Everymind who turns slowly from the screen to face the audience.

Before the very beginning
there is only the mystery,
a mystery as of music,
austere, elemental
heard in an unlit church at night
where you have come in hope
to seek your origins.

First contemplation. The note becomes the first part of a Bach violin and cello partita, a prelude lasting 90 seconds. A new image of the cranium appears on the screen after 45 seconds, this time without words. Different parts of the cranium light up. As the music ends the lights strengthen on Everymind who speaks slightly more quickly and moves about the performance area enacting the text more fully.

Everymind

You sense beneath your feet
the grass and tangled bush
that grew here years ago,
and down below the soil
the rafts of groaning rock
which float the continents of earth
around the planet's core of fire.

You sense within your head
faint reverberations
of strangely familiar sounds,
as if you heard far off
within your reptile brain
the voices of ancestral animals
bellowing from the past.

One of the actors, using a lapel mike, gives three enormous animal roars. The technician quivers part of the neural network as he does so, as if the image provides a visual counterpoint to the sounds.

You glimpse a dragonfly
with hawk-sized wings
hovering above a marsh
and lizard-snouted crocodiles
sloshing through the swamps
that steam in your interior,
your own Pangaea-land.

You glimpse familial shrews,
as small and spry as cats,
fleeing a snarling dinosaur
across the scrub below the nave.

The actor gives a frightened 'shwee-shwee-shwee' call, three times. The technician quivers different parts of the image of the cranium as before.

You wonder if the chattering,
the anxious wariness of shrews
still structures human fear.

The actor barks raucously, giving the 'bo-gom' sound of a baboon. The technician as before.

You hear the bark of apes
loping through the tree-ferns
where steeped stones now tower

then glimpse along the street,
where you have parked your car,
the ghosts of hunter-gatherers
rummaging for bulbs and roots.

Amazing, how many they are,
the creatures in your memory!

Both actors begin to speak different languages quietly and rapidly below the voice of Everymind.

A whole menagerie of animals,
a whole humanity of shades,
who'd talk in your mind at once
did thoughts not come in sequences
like meteor-streaks through time.

The shades ask what you'd ask
when brooding in the hush
you hear the music singing you.

Everymind sings a few bars from the prelude. She closes her eyes, and continuing to sing, spins round slowly across the stage, her arms outspread, then stops.

When you begin to drift
from functional to sacred time,
from thoughts that are particulate
to visions yearning for the One.

The cellist plays the same phrase. She then sings with the cello as the haunting musical phrase is repeated and thereby crosses a threshold into sacred time. She moves as it were into the trance-life that is the rest of the play, taking the imagination of the audience with her. St Augustine and Dante now speak, still seated in the audience, as if they are invisible shades in her mind.

<i>(St Augustine)</i>	Did all the stars of space that glimmer in the dark,
<i>(Dante)</i>	did every cell of life that seethes invisibly on earth,
<i>(St Augustine)</i>	did every thought of every mind
<i>(Dante)</i>	burst into space and time
<i>(both actors)</i>	by chance?

The technician projects a blurred, bluish image. Everymind opens her eyes and takes a few steps.

<i>Everymind</i>	You wake as if you had become an astronaut of thought, a pilgrim of the mind who floated from the earth, tumbling, twirling walking on gravity within the deep space of the brain.
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Lights off. Second contemplation. Musicians play Bach for 60 seconds. The bluish blur drops away image by image into till we recognize a clouded earth and the continent of Africa seen as if from a

space station. Lights return. Everymind faces the audience.



Everymind

I sometimes feel that human time
is but a holograph of light
that glimmers within an energy
invisible to human eyes,
a huge, mysterious energy
from which the shades emerge
as if they lived in fuller time.

The technician projects a fresco of Augustine floating above the earth. Everymind extends her arms.

Take Augustine the saint.
When Augustine was still a boy
and growing up in Africa,

St Augustine stands and walks down the aisle and then up onto the performing area. His voice is passionate, heroic, deeply resonant and at times almost overbearing in its intensity.

St Augustine

When I was still a boy
and growing tall in Africa,
an Africa of Roman roads
and valleys thick with Berber wheat,

Everymind

a northern hinterland
of dust and heat and stones.

Augustine

When I was still a boy,
and learning sums and rhetoric
and Latin poets at school,
my friends and I, one dusk
climbed up a neighbour's tree.

We picked its purpling figs
and ran barefoot across the scrub
and flung them at the dusty pigs
that snorted in a wooden sty.
I heard my father scolding me
and hid in fright behind a shrub
beneath a huge dark dome of stars.

A schoolboy prank? Of course!
I had as yet no words
to understand the turbulence
that swirled within my soul.
And yet years later, when a priest

I looked into that past again
and saw within its childhood mists

some of the active memories
that shaped my adult life.
Do such emotions still exist?
I mean exhilaration at free will,
remorse at choosing wrong
and wonder at the inbuilt power
that shaped such thoughts in me?

Everymind replies. Her tone of voice varies and is at times colloquial, humorous, facetious and poetic.

Everymind Those feelings haven't altered much
since you, my friend, walked earth.
Schoolboys, I'd say, are much the same,
and stars as well as figs and pigs.

Augustine *He speaks with sudden animated fervour, as elsewhere.*

What of the heart, earthling,
what of the human heart?
Is that less avaricious and cruel?

The technician adds the image of Dante with his laurelled brow to Augustine floating above the earth.

Everymind (startled) Dante the poet would I think
know more of faith than I.
What shade could better blaze
the feelings of the heart,
its suffering and bliss than he?
What's Africa to you,
my mentor from the Tuscan hills?

Dante stands and moves down the aisle to the rostrum. His voice is precise, intellectual and fiery and, at times, disturbingly sardonic.

Dante What sphere of heaven is this
that I can wake above the clouds
and contemplate the earth
as if at peace below my feet?
Who floats beside me in the void
so gaunt and eagle-eyed?

Everymind St Augustine, once more in flight.

Dante Speak out, great heart of Africa
and first philosopher of Christ.
How much I loved your books!
We mortals creep like worms
till priestly sages such as you
transform our souls to butterflies
that flutter from our clay.

Everymind We moderns think we're different
and yet, Dante, so much of life
still looks the same from space.

	I mean I've felt the same deep thirst you felt throughout your life Thirst...how did you put it, so many centuries ago?
<i>Dante (on rostrum)</i>	Like this, <i>signorina</i> , like this. ' <i>La concreata e perpetua sete,</i> <i>la sete del deiforme regno</i> '.
<i>Everymind</i>	In my home-tongue that means of course an inborn and perpetual thirst for what we'd call fuller reality, a deeper realm than we know.
<i>Dante (furious)</i>	<i>Che cosa dice, ragazza?</i> with <i>fuller</i> this and <i>deeper</i> that? Be more precise, my child. Are you afraid of faith? Why ruin a lucid line of poetry I laboured on for hours?
<i>St Augustine</i>	Come, what's in a metaphor?
<i>Dante (still angry)</i>	The thirst I felt and wrote about was for a ' <i>deiforme regno</i> ', which means in your <i>gauche</i> tongue 'a kingdom formed by God'.
<i>St Augustine</i>	Metaphors are shadows. Why think they are the sun?
<i>Everymind (to Dante)</i>	But who can talk of kings except as trinkets in this age? Democracy's our sovereign hope, the least worst king so far, and would be yours as well if I remember your brave words and how you cherished liberty.
<i>Dante (sardonic tone)</i>	So brave I had to hood my face and slink through towns at night, a wandering exile all my life. God knows I tasted gall. I dipped my pen in prayer and bouts of animosity at brutal cardinals and kings.
<i>Everymind</i>	How much, my shades, I yearn to shape new metaphors to add to those we know and love. They seem like phantoms now, those angels in bright clouds, that bearded father on a throne, those haloes, swords and crowns.
<i>Augustine</i>	We have been to made to yearn for what is inexpressible.

And yearning day by day
we speak in fumbling metaphors
that change from age to age.

Dante Of course. Even the scroll of Genesis
unfolds creation in two forms.

Everymind But who am I, Dante,
to quibble with the ancient texts?

Augustine Your name, my thoughtful friend?

Everymind Some call me Everymind.

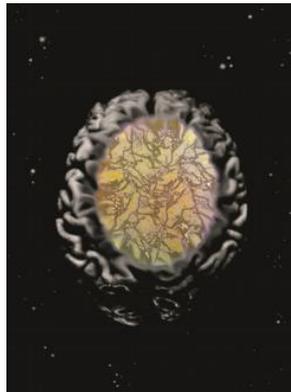
Augustine Believe me, Everymind,
all humans seek beatitude,
that happiness which I call bliss.

'Dilige - et quod vis fac',
I said and say once more to you,
'Love God, and then do as you will'.

Dante Bene! I've always prized your work,
great Augustine, so let me add,
'Love makes all creatures new'.

Everymind Look then where love and yearning brood.

She cradles her head between her upright palms. Lights off. Third contemplation. The cellist repeats a phrase from the prelude for 30 seconds. Images of a neural network appear on the screen. Lights up. The actors face forward.



Dante What music's in the air,
so complex, chaste and passionate,
so structured into time?

Everymind Whether a music of the mind
or the physics of space
turned into analogues of sound
I'd be my friends hard pushed to say.

Augustine depicts another of what he calls his active memories, giving this time a glimpse of his vivid

religious imagination.

St Augustine

That music's like a walk
along the desert shore at night
where I lived most my life.
The harbour town is still,
the great basilica of stone
where I have ministered all day
stands silhouetted by the stars.

I murmur, 'Hush the world!
May all the world be hushed!'
For God again is steeping time
with emanations of his bliss,
a bliss as tranquil as the moon
whose light washed all the sea
from where I stood in Africa,

A pause as the cellist repeats the phrase.

to Virgil's Rome, and Plato's Greece.

Everymind

A music for the cosmic seas
I want to sail with you,
my priestly Argonauts,
that you may tutor my response.
Hold tight, let's first explore
that chilly backyard of the sun
where planets and their moons revolve.

The actors look out over audience and point as lights go off. Fourth contemplation. Musicians play for 120 seconds. We see a series of images of the sun and the planets of our solar system, and then a few faint stars. Lights return. The actors move.



Everymind

That blasé tone of voice which so irritates Dante's shade.

How does the sight of planet earth
whirling its bluish blip of life
among a gaggle of dead spheres
affect your scripted faith
in old Jehovah now my guides?
This planet never was it seems
the centre of the universe.

Augustine We live by faith, not sight.

Dante My sight was dazzled by the sun.

Augustine (a change) Is God not figured in the scraps
and shards of coloured glass
that pattern plastered stone?
These new mosaic images, ha!
expand the vision of my faith.

Dante But where's the earth in this?

Everymind Somewhere across the deep abyss
that gapes right here within our minds.

Augustine Let's travel back to earth again.
I'm strangely home-sick now.

Everymind Turn then and look for home
across the gulfs of space.

Vibrato from cello. A black image with two or three faint stars. Actors peer out over audience.

Dante My eyes need light to see.

Augustine Mine too. Our earth has turned to coal.

Dante (pointing) What's that glimmer over there,
that firefly out at sea?

Everymind A pulsar, spurting beams of light.

Augustine Great God, have pity on my thoughts,
my mind is sea-fog now!

Dante *Repeats a vision from the Divina Commedia.*

*'Col viso ritornai pet tutte quante
le sette spere, vidi questo globo
tal, che' io sorrisi del so vil semblante'.*

Everymind Of course! Your eagle-mind flew high
and saw our earth from space
years before Leonardo Da Vinci
had even sketched an aeroplane.

Augustine Translate for us, my poet-priest,
your metaphors of faith.

Dante (slowly) 'My sight turned back to view
this earthly globe of ours
through heaven's crystal spheres
such that I smiled, I laughed to see
how insignificant earth seemed.'

Augustine How prescient you were,
my visionary Florentine!

Dante (a change)

I feel strange pangs of love
and burning agitations now.
I never knew my thoughts
were such a stream of ghosts.
A stream of fleeting ghosts.

I tell you, Bishop Augustine,
the crystal spheres of heaven
lie shattered in my mind.
The heaven and earth I knew
have dimmed into a bank of mist
and yet God's grandeur now
is huger than I ever dreamed.

Everymind

The grandeur's in the stars.
Around them slowly boom
the echoes of the founding bang
like whale-song in the sea.
But who am I to tell you this?
My physics is a schoolgirl's mess
of rushed miscalculations.

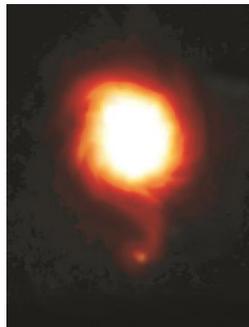
Dante

I sensed geometrical confusion
and exponential doubts in you
the moment you began to speak.
But press on *ragazza*.
I knew you weren't Pythagoras.

Everymind

If scripture's written in the stars
what do you make of this?

The technician projects a binary dark hole and star, a massive image of patterned energy in space.



Dante

Santo cielo! Cosa c'e?

Everymind

A vortex of enormous strength,
which our mole-eyes can't see,
is sucking out of space and time
the body of a dying star.
Some scientists think the hole
spews light into another realm.

Dante

Make this a cosmic metaphor,
my naïve friend, for death.

<i>Everymind</i>	But then, my metaphysicals, who knows how science will image this a thousand years from now?
<i>Dante</i>	Who knows, who knows indeed, so restless is the human mind.
<i>Augustine</i>	So complicated and so deep, so structured by the past.
<i>Dante</i>	And striving, striving from the womb to build new terraces of thought.
<i>Augustine</i>	'Why look towards the stars?' I often asked astronomers, 'there is a cosmos in the mind.'
<i>Dante (burst of acrimony)</i>	A mind that also drools with greed, if I recall the envy-driven men who made our great renaissance dream of prosperous liberty a hell.
<i>Augustine</i>	A greed that also bloodies Africa and schisms church and Rome. But friend, how goes your mind?
<i>Everymind</i>	Too busy with too many trivia.

The technician projects an image of Thackeray's globules colliding against a background of nebulae.



	They billow through my consciousness like particles of dust in space. Dante, you'd blow a fuse to know how much we trust in science.
<i>Dante (a change)</i>	Poor girl! I sense the plight of your strange generation now.
<i>Everymind</i>	It's strange. The more we learn the more we know we do not know.
<i>Augustine</i>	Surely, my child, your guide is science?

<i>Everymind</i>	I mean one year we're told that butter's natural and good and then white-coated experts say that bread with margarine is best.
<i>Dante</i>	<i>Che peccato!</i> Your bowels must be as muddled as your mind. I liked to dip my daily bread in olive oil and table wines that monks matured in casks.
<i>Augustine</i>	We chose, in our hall near the sea, a fisherman's plain diet.
<i>Everymind</i>	But in the shopping malls of science the head-food comes and goes till shoppers mill around the aisles.
<i>Augustine</i>	Shoppers? I'm lost. Completely now.
<i>Everymind</i>	Atoms, the tiny billiard balls once called the smallest particles, have been replaced by fuzzy quarks.
<i>Dante</i>	That sounds too blurred a metaphor to last.
<i>Everymind</i>	The clockwork tick of Newton's time is now a bulge, a warp of gravity that only Einstein understands. And space, once thought a void, is now stuffed full of dark matter that earthlings cannot touch or see.
<i>Dante</i>	Why let the whirligig of science distract you from the nub of faith, the question why we are alive? Seems cowardice to me.
<i>Everymind (stung)</i>	Cowardice? Me? What do you mean?
<i>Augustine</i>	Science is dough in human hands. Our faith stirs in the yeast.
<i>Everymind</i>	Are you opposed to science?
<i>Augustine</i>	Of course not! Science is made by man, and man evolves from God.
<i>Dante</i>	It's not the science I criticise but those who think that science provides unchanging truths. We had such hubris in my time.
<i>Everymind(still evasive)</i>	Hang on a bit, let me download the fireflies in furthest space that Galileo's brilliant heirs

have netted in their instruments.

The cellist begins to reverberate a bass note with increasing intensity.

Look up and see a billion stars
invisible to human sight till now
still bursting from a speck.

We see an astonishing image of densely clustered stars. Dante expresses his awe rapidly in Italian till Augustine shouts 'Ha!' when Dante and the cellist stop. Augustine repeats 'Ha!' twice then bursts into laudatory prayer as is his gift and custom.



Augustine

Great Maker of the Starry Night
and all that is unseen and seen
how you still shudder fright
and wonder through my bones!

Dante

What more is hidden from our sight?

Augustine

What more is breeding in the dark
that whirls around our orb?

Dante

I see it now, great Augustine.
Above each terrace in the mind,
another and another soars, hidden in mist.

Everymind

Hold onto faith and reason now,
my grizzle-headed veterans,
in case your networked thoughts
melt down their mother-board.

Lights off. Fourth contemplation. The musicians play for 90 seconds as we see gigantic galaxies in space, then a cranium with a galaxy in one corner. Lights up. The actors are gazing out above the audience. They move again.

Everymind

Isn't that astonishing!

Dante

Now wait! A moment please!

Everymind

The grandeur of the galaxies
makes even me begin to say
there is an intellect that shapes
what once was just a tiny speck

towards some hidden destiny.

Dante

This ruptures reason's art.
Do you in truth believe
that this great vault of stars
was once as tiny as a flea?

Everymind

That's what the textbooks say.
I have no cause to question them.

Dante

Truth dies in gullibility.

Augustine

Do your philosophers believe
that all of space as well as time
is still bursting out of nothing?
Is that the source of life,
the origin of you and me?

Dante

This dooms the rational.
Proof, child, give me the proof!

Everymind

Astronomers observed deep space,
and from their measurements
modelled a replica in maths,
then made a metaphor in words
for those who can't do calculus.

Augustine

I mocked astrologers for years
but this seems far more magical.

Dante

Science has been so wrong before.

Everymind

Good science reveals the truth.

Dante (explodes)

The truth? What truth is flux?
True science, my girl, is never fixed
as Heraclitus proved so long ago.
The end of science is theories
that change as knowledge grows.

Augustine

Some of my parish disagreed.
They read the bible's metaphors
as if they were a list of facts.
Enough of Christian philistines
who jail God's Word inside a cell!
I say bring on the mysteries,
the miracles of modern science!

Everymind

I never knew you priests disliked
our friends the fundamentalists.

Augustine

I say pile up the new discoveries
around the altars of our faith
like manna from a desert sky
and flaunt the cosmic images
beside the old stained-glass.

Everymind Does that mean God's a scientist?
An *avant garde* philosopher?
A concept artist, hurling pots
of nebulae and dust and stars
all round the gallery of space?

Augustine Dante, I'm totally perplexed
by what this girl is babbling now.

Dante Me too, great Augustine.
This modern art confuses me.
What is this talk of *avant garde*?
My humble friend Giotto,
a struggling painter in my time,
once painted all of Genesis
and merely used a brush.

We see the first image of a series showing Monocerotis, a red giant, blowing off layers of dust.



Augustine Great Maker of the earth and sky,
what monster of the deep is this?

Dante Float on, my curious friend!
I somehow knew it would not be
as Aristotle and the Cynics thought.

Everymind Stars are cosmic installations
that shrink to death, or burst.

They roar like giant buffoons
whose massive chemistry
is far less complex than an ant's.
Watch how this star blasts off
a ragged shawl of smoke
whose dust might drift away
or clot into another earth.

We see the same red giant, now with a thicker sphere of dust. Actors point out over the audience.

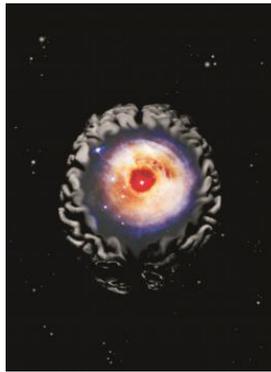
Dante Is this a cosmic halo, Augustine?

Everymind The stars are factories in space

that take three million years
to cook from simple hydrogen
the carbon helixes of life.
In their first fire of particles
our flesh and blood was born.

Thus flies time's cosmic arrow, friends.
From ragged gusts of molecules
to cells and plants and animals,
then language, science and art.
Look back four billion years or so
and see how you and I were bred
from gas and fire and dust.

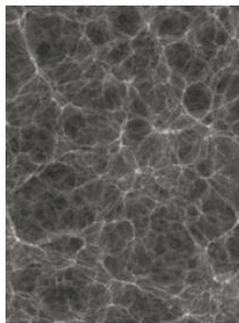
Lights off. Fifth contemplation. The musicians play for 30 seconds. We see images of dust expanding around the red giant star which is seen in the final image of the sequence within a human cranium.



Everymind

There's more. Rest now your wearied eyes,
my stern-voiced poet and my priest,
and listen to the sounds of space.
For round the world tonight
the ears of radio-telescopes,
like dish-shaped webs of steel,
are listening to the cosmic deep.

We then see an image of what looks like huge sheets of finely wrought three-dimensional mesh on the screen. This is accompanied by enormous eerie sounds downloaded from a radio-telescope. They pour through the venue for 20 seconds as if they were a cosmic surf.



The technician increases the volume. The sound washes eerily through the venue. Everymind raises her right hand with fingers spread out and turns her head, eyes still shut, towards the south.

Everymind From near the Magellanic Clouds
there streams a hissing sound
inaudible to our dull ears.
Listen! It rushes through my hand
then rivers through these walls
and out across the atmosphere
until it thuds against the moon.

The technician plays a quieter whishing, clicking sound.

Dante *Bravo!* Do you remember, friend,
when you were teaching near Milan
the sound of insects in the fields?

Augustine Indeed. That clicking, chirping choir
was nature's music to my ears.
And then the murmuring of a dove
flowed through the fissures in my mind.

Everymind *She turns her head and looks and points south-east.*

Behind the towering clouds of gas
that burn beyond Orion's belt
a pulsar's burst of energy
that flashed a billion years ago
comes howling past the sun
and smashes through my brain.
Unregistered. Unheard. Unknown.

The technician increases the volume, adding a rumbling layer of sound.

Augustine Of course! We hear creation's roar
as through a subtle cloth of flesh
that filters out the surf-thick din
and makes our frailty tolerable.

Dante I see a providence in this,
a kind of active, robust grace
that architects the whole design.

Augustine A providence in stars and doves,
in Bethlehem, and figs and pigs?

Dante Ah! my sturdy Augustine,
I wish you'd stayed in Italy!
You rouse a languid soul to faith.

Everymind My logic's lurching now.
Is providence design?

Augustine That thought's too airy, friend,
for one whose life's theology
is written in the blood of Christ.

Dante Come, let's resume! *Avanti*, girl!

Everymind

Full volume next. Let's hear
a few bars of the symphony
that thunders through deep space.

The actors crouch. Lights off. The mesh pulses, the volume escalates for 15 seconds until it starts to be felt in the stomachs of the audience.

Dante

Basta! Basta! Hold off a while!

Lights on. Dante and Augustine clasp their ears and yell until the volume dips. They remove their hands and stand.

Enough, my friends, I grasp it now!
Inside this creaking cosmic hall,
this boarding house in space and time,
we have the hearing of a mouse
to whom a single slipped step
booms like a thunderclap. Correct?

Augustine

Courage, Dante. Let's try to hear
the music of the skies in full.
Once more - bring on reality!

Lights off. The pulsing mesh is sprinkled with stars. The sounds increase for 10 seconds till once again the cacophony becomes terrifying and much too loud for the human ear.

Dante (bellows)

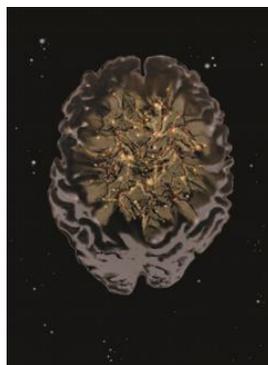
Enough! Enough! Enough!

The actors slowly take their hands from off their ears. Augustine kneels.

Augustine

Great Maker of the Cosmic Dark
and all that is unheard and heard
how you still shake my heart with awe!

We see the neural network, now flushed with eerie light within a cranium.



Everymind sits down in a chair, rubs her eyes, yawns and droops.

Everymind (slowly)

Enough. Yes, I agree. Enough.
But now, my friends, I need a nap.
There's too much data in my brain.
The loops that link and store my thoughts
are jammed with hordes of nano-volts.

She sighs loudly, comically. Takes a mobile phone out of her pocket, switches it off with half-closed eyes, places it sluggishly back in her pocket then sighs again in a semi-comatose way. The lights go dim on Augustine and Dante as she does so.

Augustine Poor child! May angels calm your mind
and soothe you while you sleep.

The image on the screen darkens a little.

Everymind sighs loudly several times, slumps in the chair and dozes off as Augustine walks across to Dante. They speak sotto voce, looking at Everymind as they do so.

Augustine Poor girl! Her whirlwind mind
spins her across the desert dunes
in search of some mirage of rest.

Dante We had such people in my time.
They strode around the market-stalls
so full of talk, so self-assured
you'd think they'd made the universe.

Augustine I taught such pagan minds
in Africa as well as Rome.
Some sat at sloping desks all day
and soaked their busy brains
in lists of ships and merchandise
until their greed for facts and cash
became a self-enslaving malady.

Dante *Si si!* A thirst that could not quench.

Augustine In some the greed became so strong
they could no longer sing or pray.
They toiled all life like ghosts
inside the counting-house of hell.

Dante Great Augustine, I must confess
I did the same at times. The same.

Augustine (groans) My sin as well, I wince to say.
My brain out-thought my tolerance
and grew dogmatic as I aged.
Tsha! I wrote in self-fed rage
and bludgeoned heresies like rats.

Dante But look, shouldn't we help this child
before addiction kills her soul?

Augustine Plotinus the Egyptian wrote
that God is cosmic unity
invisible to our poor eyes
and all we ever know of him
are emanations of the One.

Dante These only come to us in prayer

and worship's music, Augustine.

Augustine Let those then be the remedy
and us the doctors of a mind
which she herself has called
too busy with too many trivia.

Dante Come, friend, let's pray for her
then soothe her restless dreams
before she wakes and whirls again.

The lights dim. Speaking rapidly and quietly, the two pray over her for 20 seconds, speaking in tongues in turns and then together in a rising cadenza in which only the word 'Domine' is audible from time to time to the audience. Lights return, bluish and silver to indicate a dream world. Everymind stirs, clutches her forehead and stands.

Dante What's wrong poor creature now?
Look, Augustine! What troubles her?

Augustine I think she's taken howling space
too much into her human head
and searches through her thoughts
for potent memories of love.

(he steps forward) Come, friend. She needs our guidance now.

Dante No, keep your distance, Augustine!

We see an image of the cranium flushed with fiery light which pulses in one corner.

Everymind This nightmare's worse for being real.

Augustine She looks so panicky, so fraught!
Shouldn't we calm her fears?

Dante Leave her a while, to help herself.
There comes a time in all our lives
when crisis wrecks our vanities.

Augustine It wrecked my selfish dreams in youth
when I lived loose and wild in Rome,
till Christ stepped from the ruins.

Dante This is the rough climacteric
where priests must stand aside
and let a scouring, searing wind
strip back the weeds and thorns.

Everymind turns to the audience, puts out a hand and speaks as if someone is in front of her.

Everymind Now what? Why are you moping here,
that suffering look still on your face?
Why must you haunt my memory?

She walks left and recoils as she appears to see another person standing in front of her.

You too? I thought you had forgiven me.

For God's sake, friend, it's past! Let go!

Augustine Who festers in her thoughts like sores?

Dante The shades, I'd say, of those she hurt.

Everymind puts both her hands in front of her eyes, then turns her face aside, recoiling from the memories of the next two people.

There speaks perhaps the loving lad
she jilted for a handsome face.
And there...the kin in need she spurned.

Augustine But what of those who damaged her?

Everymind steps slowly sideways and backwards with a hand over her mouth.

Dante They stalk her as we speak. Look, look!
Schoolboys who mocked her stuttering.
The pretty friend she saw one night
kissing her loved one by the stairs.

Everymind suddenly flails her hands in all directions.

Her father's boisterous, drunken friend
who fondled her, until she screamed.

Augustine Wash, wash, dear God, her pain away.

Dante Her guilt as well as pain. Watch now,
her truth-fed tears may free her strength.

Everymind bumps into a chair, feels round it as if blind, finds another then starts to stack them on top of each other with grunts of excitement.

Augustine Now what? Dante, she needs our help!

Dante Who's ever looked on Paradise
without purgation's cleansing tears?

Augustine Relent, Dante! You're far too strict!

Dante Just look at her, still unredeemed,
still stumbling through her pain,
still trying to reconstruct
the tower of her human dreams.

They move closer to Everymind. She teeters a chair on top of two or three others.

Augustine She needs our hands, our prayers.

Dante Not yet. Draw close and watch.
Redemption of a kind is near.

They move closer to Everymind. She teeters another chair on top of the wobbling pile. She then touches one chair after the other as she lists her ideals.

Everymind How fine a world a family makes!
Despite the arguments, the rifts,
those old familiar voices shape
the only place on earth that's home.

Dante (whispers) To which I ask, *Who shapes
a family's home from home?*

Everymind (next chair) What's next is friends, a job,
a house and money in the bank.
(another) And then, what should have come before,
sound values such as working hard,
and honesty and care.

Dante She speaks as if her cosmic awe
was disconnected from her life.

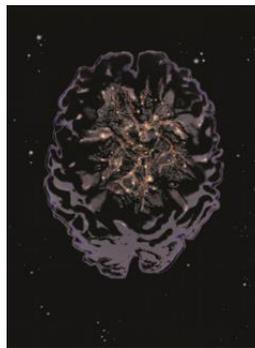
Augustine As if there were no God
except the human self.

Everymind teeters on her toes as she balances the final chair on top of the pile.

Everymind And last, what people value most,
a happy and successful life.

Dante What? Listen to reality!

Sounds from outer space roar back in a gale of noise. Everymind looks round in alarm, her eyes wide opened. Lights off. The sound increases enormously for 30 seconds then stops. Lights on, no longer bluish. Everymind is on her hands and knees, among a sprawl of chairs, staring around her in consternation. The cranium image flickers feebly, then goes black. She starts to experience a form of panic attack.



Everymind Help me now my mentors, help me!
My mind feels like a darkening tomb,
a void in which an internet
of glimmering neural webs
is fusing out, from lobe to lobe!

Dante Be strong, my child! Let thoughts of death
swab vinegar across your pride.

Everymind What's left are fuzzy silhouettes.

She stands and holds her head.

Memories, sputtering here and there,
that flicker through my consciousness
like nerve-ends and synaptic strands
through which residual voltage seeps.

Augustine That metaphor's too strange for me.
What thoughts, what feelings flicker you?

Everymind (pause) Harsh fears of death. Mixed up with awe
at space and how the roasting stars
to us are calm and beautiful
as plankton glimmering in the sea.

Dante Well said, my child. Is there no more?

Augustine Come speak your heart. You're safe with us.

Dante Slide back the stone that seals the tomb.

Everymind (a pause) Awe. And then (*a groan*)... a spurt of shame.

Dante Don't stop, *signorina*! Why shame?

Everymind (slowly) I feel ashamed. And mean. Yes, mean.
Because the cosmos is so huge,
so structured and magnificent
and yet the wisp of life that's me

She pauses then gives a huge sigh.

can't even say that word.

Augustine Which word, my Everymind?

Everymind The word that you and Dante use
as if it were your daily bread.

Dante Come, come! What happens next?

Everymind *She speaks slowly, phrase by phrase.*

I start to cry. A silent cry.
Inside of me. I ache and ache
to just let go. And then, it's gone.

Augustine Let go, let be! You'd feel such joy!

Dante Fear daunts her like the river crab
which sidles back into its hole,
its safe but gloomy hole each dawn.

Everymind suddenly turns on them, shouting with raw anger, her eyes staring, her hands balled into tight fists in front of her stomach.

Everymind Stop it! Stop it! Leave me alone!
You old fools, don't you understand?
The world has changed, changed completely,
life's too busy for your nonsense!

The intensity of the change in attitude doesn't flummox the seasoned activists. Augustine thunders his reply as does Dante.

Augustine No! You stop it my girl! I see it now.
Your age has made the human mind
the measure of the universe!

Dante No wonder God's so far from you!

Everymind *Her reasoning though frantic and insubstantial
must continue to sound sincere.*

And what about my friends? Yes, friends!
They'd find me so embarrassing.
So creepy! They *hate* holy Joes.

Augustine Enough, Dante. We waste our breath.
The intellect can only predispose.
Faith wakes in prayer and music's worlds.

Everymind *Taunting and sarcastic.*

Really, old man? Well sing and pray
for Everymind right now and see
if you can save her from her dance.

She raises her arms and hands to shoulder height, looks up and out into the air in front of her like a ballet dancer and spins around and away from the two of them with a laugh.

Don't you get it? You're both so dull,
so dull and prim! My life's a whirl,
a busy, fascinating whirl!

Dante Stop it! Where's the music you love?

She spins across the stage and then encounters without dropping her head the sprawl of chairs. She stumbles slightly as she passes through the first of them. She lurches once or twice more, spins in one spot as if stuck, seems to find a way forward then trips over one of the chairs. She gives a huge, terrible scream as she falls headlong onto the ground. With her face on her hands she screams again and again, and then lies still.

Silence. We then hear the cellist playing a phrase from the prelude. A part of the neural network on the screen flickers. Dante and Augustine look at each other and then rush towards her, kneel each side of her and put their hands on her head.

Augustine I say to you across the centuries
that stretch between our lives.
I say to you, roused by the words
of one whose love overflows time,

A pause, then with great resonance.

Come out, Lazarus, come out! Out!

The cellist repeats the phrase from the prelude, this time with the violinist. Everymind stands, stumbles to centre stage then spins round slowly three times with her eyes still shut. Augustine sings the phrase of music, passionately, then Dante. Everymind spins twice. The others sing together. Everymind spins once, stops then sings the phrase by herself. The image of the neural network is now flushed with light. Everymind walks slowly away from the two then turns, opens her eyes and speaks to them.



Everymind

At last, my priestly shades, at last!
I feel much more my self. Much more!

Dante

Bravo! Well won't you bring to mind
the galaxies we saw in space
and say what they now mean to you?

The technician displays a magnificent spiral galaxy drawn from the series shown earlier.



Everymind (lifts head) I see a swirl of stars, far, far away.

Augustine Is there no more to stars than that?

Dante We see as through a glass, darkly.

Augustine What of the eye-machines you have
that deepen space and time?

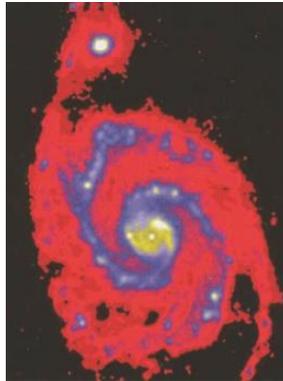
Everymind Those instruments can visualize
what our poor eyes will never see,

the multiple realities that teem
in wave-lengths hidden from our sight.

Augustine

Well look through them with all your soul
and see what thrives within deep light.

We see an image of the same galaxy photographed this time in a different wave-band of light.



Dante

Bravo! Let's call this spiralled light
a stained-glass window in deep space
that shows the craftsmanship of God.

We then see the image transformed into a glowing meta-natural symbol. The music starts again.

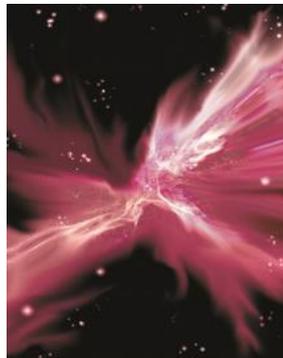
Everymind (gazing)

A Catherine wheel of gravity
that binds a billion, billion stars.

Augustine

If gravity can float the stars
what power embraces gravity?

Lights off. Sixth contemplation. Beautiful variations of the symbol follow as astronomy is transmuted into visual art. Parts of the galaxies flicker. The musicians play for 90 seconds.



Lights on. Dante and Augustine look at Everymind who starts to pace up and down.

Augustine

Is she redeemed from sin and pride?

Dante

Say 'fault', my friend, instead of 'sin'.

The *fault* of intellectual pride.
Her age I'm told has done away with sin.

Augustine They must be saints compared to us.

Everymind (musing) If gravity can float the stars
what power embraces gravity?

Dante Everymind, be generous! Please!
Believe that you may understand.
Don't wait, don't try to understand
all things in heaven and on earth
before you say a single prayer.

Augustine For aren't our minds, in cosmic space,
much smaller than a grain of sand?

Dante Be as generous to your soul
as to the hunger of your mind.

Augustine We're made to yearn, much like the child
who wriggling in his mother's arms
holds out both hands towards her face.

Everymind That's it, my shades! At last, at last!

Dante At last? Now what, *signorina*?

Everymind A metaphor that fits our science!
Isn't the universe a womb?
A huge, fertile, expanding womb
in which our minds are embryos?
Hey? Tiny, live, exquisite specks?

Augustine Go on! Build out your metaphor!

Dante *Always wants to be at the edge of a thought.*

The womb of Bethlehem I wrote about
cradled as much a miracle.
Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore...

Everymind *Stumbles ineptly through the translation again.*
Yes, exactly! 'That...mother's womb
in which pure love...rekindled was.'

Dante *Ma no!* Another ghastly mess!

Augustine Go on, earthling, leap, leap!

Everymind (struggling) If this huge cosmos is a womb
then space which seemed a void,
space gurgles with dark nutrients
as does a mother's bellied fluids.

Augustine What then of time? Is that the same?

Everymind(shakes head) This is all so bewildering!

Dante Come, speak the poetry of the soul.

Everymind (slowly) If time's no abstract ticking clock,
as Einstein taught, if life is wombed
within the parenting of space,
well time's the pulsing energy
that keeps the universe alive.

A pause. Everymind covers her mouth with her hands as she starts to cross over a threshold into the huge open space of an epiphany.

Is energy the blood of...

Augustine God? Come, build out your metaphor
until the full mosaic gleams!

Everymind *She gives a huge sigh, then shakes her head.*

Not here, not now, my Augustine.
Please. I'm suddenly feeling tired.
I can't take things much further now.

A slight pause.

Tired but happy. Strangely, calmly happy.

Another slight pause.

I now believe there is a...

She suddenly looks perplexed.

Dante Say it, my anxious one, from love!

Everymind I'm ready now to say there is a...

She pauses again.

Augustine Be strong, and say that metaphor!

Everymind suddenly walks left then stops, turns and lowers her head.

Everymind (whispers) Not yet, my priestly friends, not yet.

Dante Not yet! *Ma no!* What do you mean?

Everymind (agitated) Something's missing. Can't you feel it?

Augustine I do. Something, someone's missing.

Everymind *She looks up, then opens out her arms and hands.*

What happens when a vision ends,
when all the gorgeous sights of space,
the gaseous nurseries of the stars,
the burning towers of dust dissolve?
What happens when the galaxies

whose clusters ride the cosmic dark
like fleck on tattered fleck of foam

Closing her eyes she curls back her arms until she holds the sides of her head with her hands.

melt back and fade into our heads?

The initial phrase of music from the prelude is heard.

Dante Your question pricks the quick of faith.

Dante beckons Augustine with a hand and moves towards him.

Augustine What happens next is prayer.
What keeps a loving vision live
is memory revived in prayer.

The music continues as Dante and Augustine whisper together.

Dante Listen! That music calls us home.

to Everymind.

Will you still pray when we are gone?

Everymind *She drops her hands, opens her eyes and turns to him.*

I'll try, my friend, though heaven knows
how prayer is crushed, day after day
within the stress-pressed rush of life.

Augustine Our time with you is fading fast.
A city's streets must soon replace
this great metropolis of stars.

Dante Hurry, my Augustine, hurry!

Dante and Augustine move towards the front of the stage.

Augustine We thank you for this dash through space.

Dante So much is different, so much the same.

They walk a short distance down the aisle towards their original seats in the audience.

Everymind Thanks for your sturdy love! Your prayers!
Rest well, my shades, within the dreams,
the memories of my human kin.

They turn and facing the stage call out to her.

Dante Remember us, my Everymind.

Augustine Remember us, and whom we love.

Dante Each time you sense something's missing.

Augustine

Each time you hear the spirit's dove.

They sit again in their chairs as the musicians play the first few bars of the final interlude for 20 seconds and a small barely distinguishable sphere of rainbow- coloured light appears on the otherwise dark screen.

Everymind

Speaks directly to the audience.

Strange thing. I feel now as I did
when I was young and left alone.
My father was a banished ghost,
my mother well, she worked all day.
Each night I'd stand behind the door
and rub my ankle with my foot,
waiting, waiting for her to knock.

Sometimes I'd go out to the yard
and with a circle made of wire
mix soap and water in a cup

She mimes stirring water in a cup.

The yard was then my wilderness.
It smelt of drains and rubbish bins
and car-oil stained its concrete slab
but what was that to dreamy me?

She dips the wire into the cup and holds it up.

I'd dip the wire and stir a bit
then lift its dripping telescope
and peer into its watery lens.

She brings the wire to her eye as the musicians again play the first few bars of the final interlude and the orb of light increases slightly. The music pauses as she enacts, with pauses, the following.

Sometimes I'd see the washing line.
The mulberry tree. A passing cloud.
All strangely new and beautiful
although I knew they were the same.

She stands slowly, then puts the wire to her lips.

And then I'd gently blow and blow
the biggest bubble that I could.

She blows slowly three times. The sphere on the screen increases a little in size each time she does so. She takes the wire away from her mouth and looks in front of her.

Look how it floats across the yard.
Spinning slowly. Sagging. Wobbling.

Spellbound, she tosses the wire to one side, and walks forward one step at a time, holding out both her hands with the palms uppermost as if she wished to catch the bubble in front of her.

Just like a moon made out of air,
a world of hope I longed to catch

and perch inside my childhood's room.

She steps forward again with her hands still stretched out in front of her.

It wobbled past a broken fridge
and glistened wetly in the sun
above old toys left in the grass.
How soon I learned a lasting truth.
How soon I learned

She takes a couple of steps forward and lunges with a hand as if about to catch the bubble, says 'Ah no!' then turns to the audience and lifts both arms in a shrug.

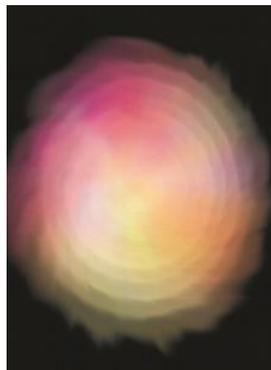
that capture killed
the very thing I loved to love.

What mattered then, I now can see,
was not so much the soapy spheres
that sailed their rainbows through a yard.
What mattered then, what matters now
within this huge, exploding womb of time
is loving something we can never catch -
the life-creating energy of ...

She pauses then whispers to the audience.

GΩd.

The lights focus on Everymind as she leans forward then kneels with her arms and hands outstretched as if she is still trying to catch the bubble. The musicians play the music of the last interlude for 20 seconds as the rainbowed-coloured sphere on the screen slowly increases in size.



The image disappears and the lights go off as the music ends. Dante and Augustine return to the stage in the darkness. Lights go up. The actors and musicians bow and leave the stage. The credits slide appears. Then the abstract image seen at the start of the production returns.

Finis