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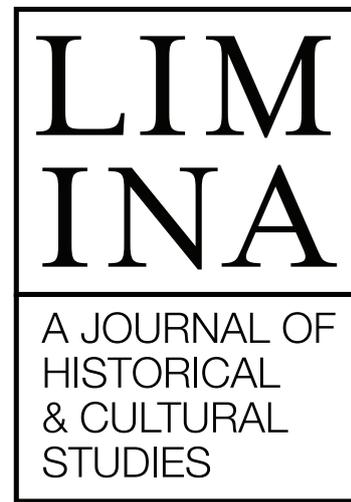
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Submitting to Limina

Information regarding the journal and how to submit can be found at <https://www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au/future>.

Cover Image

UWA Japanese Garden, Perth, Western Australia. Photograph by Rebecca Repper.



The Salvation Collective

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I'm waiting on my front step, refreshing my email. It would be nice to know what I'll be doing next month.

A flash of lightning backlights the city skyline, and I decide an odd number of flashes means that work will renew my contract, while even means they won't. After seven, I clamp my eyes shut and force myself to lose count. When I open them, Lucas is pulling up.

He doesn't apologise for being late. Instead, he points to the sky and says, 'it's a pretty ominous backdrop considering we're going to stay with a cult.'

'They're not a cult.' I roll my eyes.

'They're called The Salvation Collective. You of all people should recognise *believers*.'

We drive west, away from the storm. Lucas pulls a mini tub of yoghurt from his bag, tilts his head back, and pours it into his mouth. He licks the lid with exaggerated glee and stuffs the empty plastic tub into the paper bag that I use as a bin. There are already two tubs in there from driving him to work last week. I purse my lips but say nothing.

Our phones vibrate – bushfire warnings.

'You know what's dark?' Lucas says, 'we're on our way to try to land a deal for a major developer while...' He trails off.

'While somewhere nearby the bush is burning.' As I finish the sentence, my mind conjures up intrusive images of charred bones and grey dirt and my chest starts to itch.

When I believed in God, it had been easy to label my guilt. Now it's dispersed across imagined landscapes, text message warnings, and a vague sense of responsibility to upcycle Lucas' yoghurt tubs. Not to mention the partnerships brief Lucas has just opened with our company's tagline on the front: *Creating a new, aspirational identity for living well in the Anthropocene*, which we both know actually means 'helping corporations craft a more sustainable image while continuing to increase profits.'

A glitching sound fills the car. Lucas is hooking up his phone to the Bluetooth speakers. He's watching a video of The Salvation Collective's founder and I recognise her out of the corner of my eye. She was a few years older than me at art school – her graduate show had been a video installation of inverted pentagrams. I had been 19 at the time and newly, cautiously, agnostic. I remember leaving the media room with a feeling that something terrible would happen to me, with a purple rash spreading across my chest. I had pulled on a hoodie in the summer heat. I told myself later it was worth it for the exposure therapy.

The founder's voice fills my car a decade later. She doesn't seem like someone fascinated with the occult. Instead, she reminds me of the narrators from my meditation app. I want to listen to her forever.

'We're a community of artists that facilitate, well, it's pretty much planetary mutual aid,' she purrs. 'Our carbon debts are all we leave behind. We owe it to ourselves and our terrestrial community to balance the scales through carbon offset. The Salvation Collective is a solution to the ecological emergency backed by science and fused,' the founder pauses, staring into the camera, 'with the sense of community we're all looking for.'

'That's the kind of person who would make an installation piece putting "the divine feminine essence" in a jar or something, and sell it for \$10,000,' Lucas says. I laugh, somewhat relieved, as he pulls me back to the present.

Dusk is setting when we arrive at the collective's headquarters, emerging into a large clearing where dozens of tents and vans sit sprawled in front of a mid-century farmhouse. The collective is only a year old, but it already has nearly 5,000 members. 80 of those members live full time on the property. We drive past a gathering of members clustered around a campfire, laughing. Their faces blend into each other, distorted by the flames.

The founder is waiting for us in a beige linen tunic, her dark hair loose over her shoulders. She hugs me; I breathe in deep and hope she doesn't notice.

She leads us on a tour of the grounds under a gumtree canopy draped in fairy lights.

'Members must commit to settling their own climate debts, but most will also commit to paying others' debts, by bringing friends into the community to share the load,' the founder tells us. 'Those new members then do the same. The response has been magical. As artists, I think we're just naturally innovative. It's this entrepreneurial *essence* that will save us all.'

Lucas coughs, trying to catch my eye. I avoid him.

'By recruiting new members to help pay the debts, you earn a commission,' the founder tells us. 'Once members reach salvation status – sorry,' she has put her hand lightly on my arm and looks genuinely disappointed in herself, 'we're taking "status" out of our community narrative. Once members reach *salvation*, they find they can fully dedicate themselves to creative projects and start-ups that are good for the planet.'

I watch two linen-clad members roll a log into a fire. Their shoulders are pulled back; their movements are slow and deliberate. It reminds me of the confidence I had as a teenager when I'd known the recipe to being a *good person*. I just had to go to Mass, pray, and not fuck anyone.

'It's a natural step,' continues the founder, 'for people on this journey to want to cohabitate somewhere in nature. That's why we're interested in expanding.'

'And our client would like nothing more than to build tiny houses for your members across Australia,' Lucas says. 'Let's bring local to the global!' I know that last bit is a joke because it's the title of a campaign we worked on, for a client we both hate.

The founder beams.

She leaves us in a modest room with twin beds topped with beige linen. Lucas

starts rolling a cigarette.

‘So what do you reckon, are they too much of a cult?’ he asks. ‘Does it pass as a multi-level-marketing scheme? We’d have to see if the carbon offset is at least legitimate, I guess, before the client signs on.’

Our phones vibrate again – more bushfire warnings.

‘Don’t you think,’ I hesitate, ‘that the members seem happy? Maybe because they feel like they’re contributing tangibly to action on climate change? And, I don’t know, isn’t that a good thing?’

Lucas shoots me an unbelieving look before a wry comprehension suddenly takes over. ‘I understand why this is so attractive for you. They’ve pretty much quantified morality.’

‘Wouldn’t you, for once, like to be part of something? Rather than just a critical hypocrite?’ I can feel a rash spreading like wildfire across my chest.

‘Babe, this isn’t a second chance at getting into heaven.’

‘Fuck you, Lucas.’ I go downstairs without him.



After dinner with the founder, which I spend drinking a bottle of natural wine and ignoring Lucas, we’re taken to the clearing to celebrate members who have reached salvation. I already feel dizzy from the wine and the heat when the founder hands me a mug of pure cacao. It’s tradition, she says.

One of the members who just reached salvation starts telling me about the ethical fashion label she’ll start up now she’s spending less time recruiting. She’s going to call it *Future Vintage* and only design styles that will ‘stand the test of time’. I wonder what it means to stand the test of time and realise that the moon has moved and hours must have passed here in the clearing.

I feel like I’m moving as part of a larger body – like the collective is breathing together. The founder is stroking my arm. I’m almost asleep.

Then, I’m sitting alone watching the sky, and Lucas joins me.

‘I never thought I’d be the drunkest person at a cacao ceremony,’ he laughs awkwardly. ‘Or a person *at* a cacao ceremony. Do you feel strange too? What else did they put in this?’

I ignore him, watching the skies. The storm has followed us here, and a flash of lightning reminds me of my contract. I don’t count the flashes.

‘Ugh, don’t be mad,’ says Lucas, ‘you’ve come a long way since leaving the church, and I just don’t want you slipping back into some eco version of it.’

Our phones vibrate. *Prepare to evacuate.*

Lucas reads the text too, swearing as he springs up. ‘Shit. We’re too drunk to drive,’ he sways on his feet slightly, ‘but, uh, maybe we can order an Uber to at least make it to an evacuation site? Hello?’

I stand up, keeping my shoulders pulled back, and my movements are slow and deliberate as I hug Lucas goodbye.

It’s nice to know what I’ll be doing next month.