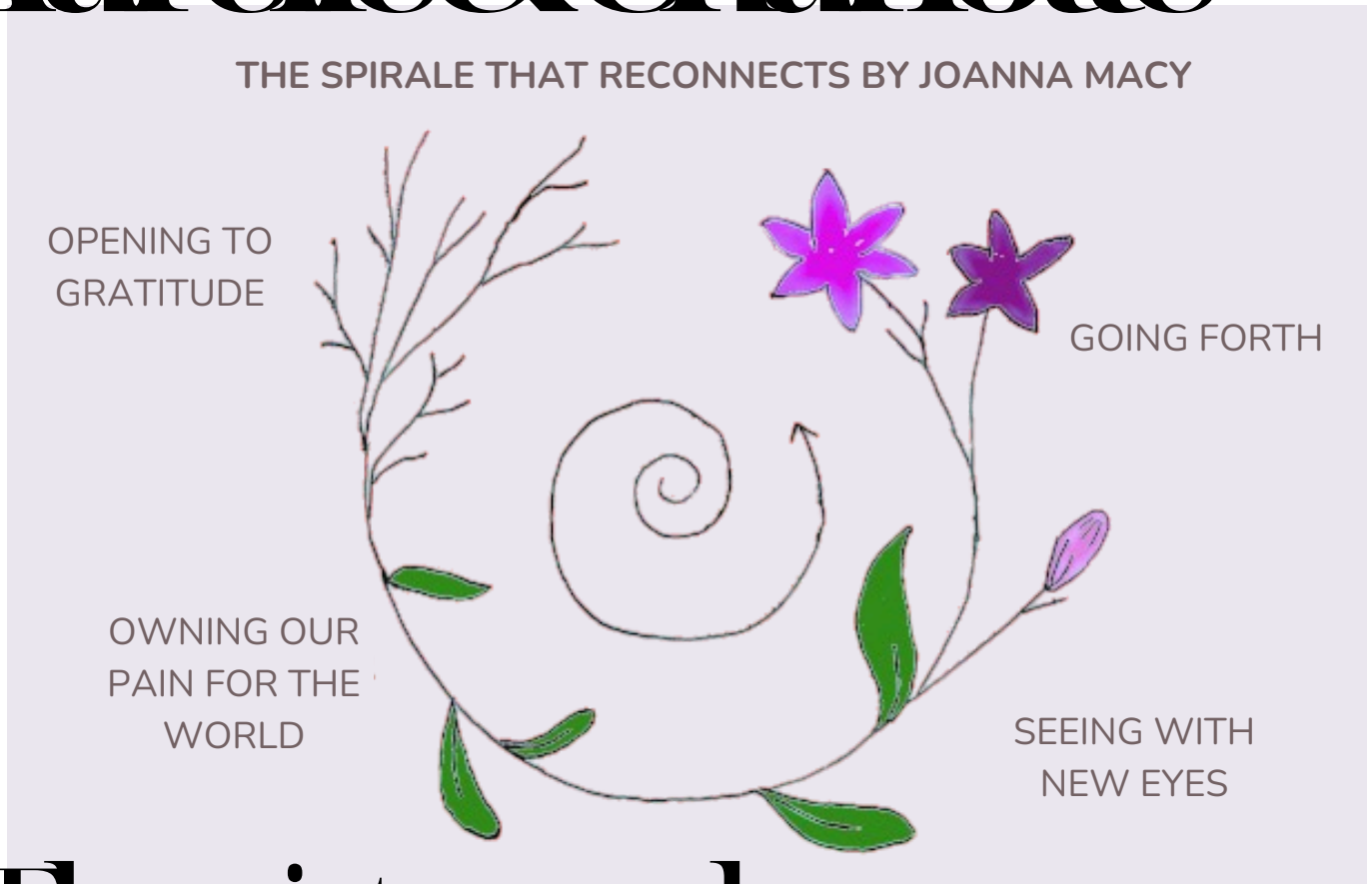


Aurelie & Charlotte

THE SPIRALE THAT RECONNECTS BY JOANNA MACY

Lucie Berat & Marianne Abdellaoui



The sisters who reconnect

When, as part of my search for an "engaged" internship, a friend told me about Aurélie's journey, I immediately identified with her. So I took my courage in both hands and contacted her to ask for career advice. Two years later, we are still in touch, and her journey continues to impress and inspire me. But I am not the only one interested in her story: I recently discovered that she is one of the young people highlighted in the movie *Rupture(s)* by Arthur Gosset (which I highly recommend).

Since we met, Aurélie has regularly invited me to her *the Work that Reconnects* workshops. So I decided to take part in a micro-adventure in the depths of the Vercors mountains with her. It was on this occasion that I met Charlotte, who was leading the four-day adventure alongside her. She has now joined the list of people who inspire me and maybe it will be the case for you too!

Aurelie



"Feeding off the energy of others to move in a direction that attracts us, for me, is really the right strategy."

Aurélie's story is that of an **encounter with ecological issues by chance**, then an increasingly acute awareness of the issues as she meets people.

I find it dizzying to think that someone as committed as her could have had a completely different life, far from any questioning of the current society model!

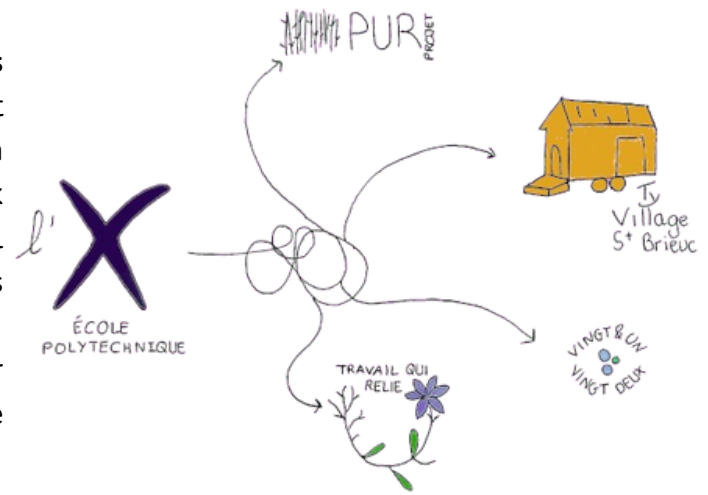
Aurélie grew up with her parents - senior executives in insurance and finance companies in the west of Paris - **far from any ecological and financial concerns**. In such a context, all doors were open to her and, having no academic difficulties, she naturally followed the "royal" path of our modern society: scientific studies then two years preparation to competitive entrance examinations to top schools, and finally the *École Polytechnique*.

She therefore found herself in the most prestigious engineering school in the country, and could then have - like many students I know - continued to fulfill the prophecy of the top job in business, without ever being interested in environmental issues. However, she found her way when she chose her third-year option: nothing appealed to her except *Science for Environmental Challenges*. She therefore embarked on this program for its multidisciplinary aspect, and it **gave her a first glimpse of the current crisis**, with the optimistic vision that - technical - solutions could be found to the climate problem. She then left to finish her studies in Sydney to do a master's degree in environmental engineering.

Once back in France, she **fell in love with the company Pur Projet**, which she joined immediately; it offers carbon offset projects to its clients. But the magic quickly faded and Aurélie became disillusioned after a year. That year, in fact, was also the year she **became aware of the urgency of the situation**: *"There were three events during the year - the festival "Oasis" from Colibris , a "Weekend des possibles" with Hameaux Légers and "the year off" with La Bascule - where I met people who were all in action and who really inspired me and made me change."* It was on this occasion that she heard about collapse for the first time, she immediately understood what it implied and was overcome with **profound sadness for the world**.

Since this shock linked to her realization, **Aurélié has come a long way**. She left Paris and her job, and went to Saint-Brieuc in Brittany to set up the Ty Village, a tiny house village project on family land. She also took the opportunity to explore politics as a municipal elected official for two years. But she didn't like this experience.

She was then contacted again by Vincent, a former colleague from Pur Projet, and together they set up the ecological redirection agency 21-22.



And from this "slap of collapse" come tears that lead Aurélié to discover *the Work that Reconnects* via Joanna Macy's book. The emotional dimension of ecology that she discovers during the workshop she experienced with her loved ones does her a lot of good. From there, she begins to facilitate for the general public, but also in organizations.

In her exploration of a life in line with with her values, Aurélié clearly shows, I think, that **change does not include only professional life**: she gradually flees the city to the countryside, and takes the opportunity to experiment with different types of housing, each more atypical than the last. First, there is a boat in the port of Saint-Brieuc. Then she lands in an eco-place called *Château-Pergaud*, driven by her attraction to community life. Finally, tired of living in a large group, she joins a shared apartment of four people with her lover Rémi; the small group thus formed now plans to buy the house opposite to theirs to make it another shared apartment for four.

Finally, what does her daily life look like?

What is most important to her is that **she works with the people she has chosen and with whom she is, therefore, very close**. These are obviously her brothers and sisters from *the Work that Reconnects*, but also the team from 21-22.

She spends her free time **outdoors, doing micro-adventures** for example, and "*contact with the forest and the rivers [allows her] to remember that there are still living things.*"

Finally, from what she told me, **the line between paid and non-paid activities is very blurred** in her daily life. *The Work that Reconnects* represents a part of her paid work; but at the moment, she dedicates a lot of time to a 21-22 mission which consists of the deployment of training for state civil servants and which is her biggest source of income. With all this, she told me **she earns more money than she needs**, largely because she has very few needs. Such an observation is interesting to reassure people who do not dare to branch out for fear of missing out or going too far outside their comfort zone.

I am somewhat in awe of Aurélié's ability to limit her consumption to her strict needs; the fact of living outside of big cities filled with incentives to consume is certainly a valuable help. In the meantime, knowing my inability to self-constrain, it seems to me for the moment simpler to limit my initial income in the manner of David. (cf. *Housing differently to work differently, The story of Marion and David*)

Charlotte



"I believe in the power of networks and the encounters we can have when we come from different backgrounds, just because we have complementary elements to bring."

Charlotte had a **very deep awareness of ecological issues very early in her life.**

First, her parents, committed to the ecological cause before their time, made her aware of it from a very young age (especially about nuclear waste). Her understanding of the current crisis was completed by certain lessons from high school and then through her decision to focus her studies on these issues by choosing a master's degree in sustainable development policy, a "*master's degree on collapse*" as she says.

This deep awareness that the world is not going in the right direction has caused her **great suffering**. It started when she left for Australia just after reading Pablo Servigne: "*I had the impression of being alone in carrying this distress in a society that does not care about these issues.*"

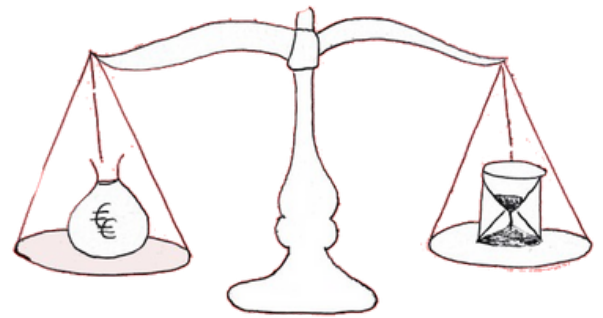
So, it is with all this burden that she begins her professional life in Paris. She chooses to work in firms on social intelligence, whose goal is to help companies set up a framework that takes employees into account; but, despite this human aspect, **she still feels like she is contributing to the capitalist model**. She does not identify with the managerial vision that consists in "*crushing employees*" that she witnesses. However, just like Aurélie, **Charlotte cannot stand dissonance and inconsistencies**; she cannot stop herself from putting her finger on them and pointing them out. After being "*fired*" three times because of her overflowing frankness, she packs her bags and goes *woofing* in the South-East of France, at the *Amanins farm*, on the advice of a friend.

When I asked her why she decided to think outside the box, she told me that it **wasn't really a choice but a necessity**: "*I tried the traditional way of life but it didn't work, I got kicked out*". I find her story very touching because, like her, I sometimes feel very out of step with today's society. Maybe one day, I too will have this disillusionment of realizing my inability to integrate into this upside-down world. It is therefore very reassuring to see that it is possible to find one's place elsewhere, far from big cities and conventional professions.

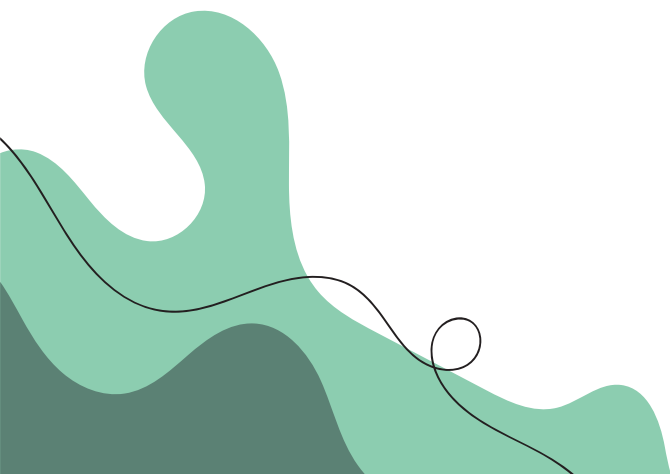
Charlotte therefore ended up accepting her critical mind. It was a slow but salutary work of deconstruction. During this whole period, she felt alone and in pain. Her discovery of *the Work that Reconnects*, recommended by Pablo Servigne at the end of a conference, is what saved her. Her first experience was a great revelation for her: she had the feeling of finding a new family made up of "*conscious people*" like her, and it did her a lot of good. She was also seduced by the **systemic approach** - a subject that is very close to her heart - in addition to the emotional dimension; so much so that she became a facilitator in 2017.

In her career, Charlotte has shown that you can slow everything down all at once. It's been ten years since she left Paris and seven years since she's **lives in a mobile home in the Drôme that was lent to her for free, which allows her to do what she likes without financial stakes.** Here again, it's thanks to the strength of her connection to others that she got there: *"If I was lucky enough to end up in this mobile home, it's not through my family network, but through chance encounters."* She takes advantage of living in the countryside to go for beautiful walks every day. She also likes to take time to meditate and have other reflective moments.

However, **this slowdown does not translate into her current work rhythm** in which she tells me she never finds rest. But in her current lifestyle, she says she never gets bored and is proud of what she does. In short, Charlotte does far too many things at the same time, but it's for a good cause!



This hectic work leads to a second inconsistency that bothers her more: **she earns too much money (€25,000 gross/year) compared to her slowdown posture.** For now, this money will allow her to realize her new project of returning to a more conventional life: *"My parents did not have huge incomes but come from families where there were inheritances. They always supported me in making my own way, and today they lend me money to allow me to **buy a house.** So I completely let go of the notion of profitability, income, remuneration, because I knew that I was not taking a big risk and that one day or another, in any case, I was going to have things that were going to come as an inheritance."* What jumps out at me here is **the difference in the relationship to risk that the financial security of our relatives brings.** We don't allow ourselves to stray from conventional paths as much when we don't have this privilege. To see the glass half full, I tell myself that, for now, it is precious that some people can escape the system and start inventing tomorrow's world. Now we have to **fight so that alternative lifestyles are not reserved for an elite.**



Connecting with others to reinvent the world

The Work that Reconnects

It took me two years to finally participate in a *Work that Reconnects* workshop because the concept has long been very vague to me, in addition to the fact that I had very little free time during my studies. So I will try to summarize what I understood about the initiative as clearly as possible; but I think it is one of those concepts that **you only fully understand when you live it.**

The Work that Reconnects was conceived by Joanna Macy, an activist and theorist of ecospirituality, more than 40 years ago. As its name suggests, the goal is to **connect with oneself, with other humans and non-humans.** To do this, the objective is to create spaces to **release one's painful emotions and thus transform them into energy for action.** Aurélie and Charlotte, like everyone who leads these workshops, are convinced that if we were collectively more connected to our emotions, we would live in a less destructive world, in "a society that supports life" as Aurélie would say.

These group workshops, led by a team, can last a few hours, several days or even weeks. Whatever their duration, all they follow the four stages of **the Spiral of the Work that Reconnects:**

- Opening to gratitude: "cultivating our appreciation for the beauty of life"
- Owning our pain for the world: "sharing our painful feelings in the face of the magnitude of global crises"
- Seeing with new eyes: "connecting to our deepest impulses and our creativity"
- Going forth: "deploying our action energy to get moving"





For a revolution in “professional” relations

When Aurélie told me about Charlotte, her "*sister from Work that Reconnects*", I first thought they were sisters, literally. But although they don't have the same parents, **their bond is just as strong and precious to them**: it goes well beyond facilitating workshops, even if it starts there.

Since she joined the adventure, Charlotte refuses to call "colleagues" the people with whom she shares such intimate and profound things as the animation of these workshops. Indeed, they must be pretty connected by dint of reliving at each workshop the “spiral that reconnects”! Charlotte also confided to me that, even when she prepares an event with Aurélie or another of her sisters, it is certainly work, but also very pleasant moments of complicity and friendship.

Also, as I said, **their relationship goes beyond facilitation**. So when Aurélie organized a “love festival” to celebrate her relationship with her lover Rémi, Charlotte was there. Another of their sisters from *Work that Reconnects* named Lise even gave a speech in which she referred to the people around her as her “*brothers and sisters in sadness*.” For Aurélie, this sums up their connection perfectly: she feels deeply connected to her fellow facilitators because they share more than just moments of levity, **they share their sadness in the face of a world that is going wrong**.

Being plural to change the world

As for the **benefits of being in a group**, Charlotte and Aurélie are unanimous: it is **essential** to them.

"*I wouldn't know how to do anything on my own, but by relying on the enthusiasm of others, that's how we can do great things.*" Aurélie told me. For example, Charlotte wouldn't see herself taking on the challenge of bringing ecological issues to business leaders alone. In the same way, Aurélie would never have dared to join the civil disobedience movements without meeting people who were already doing it and who reached out to her. She tells me today that she is very happy to have access to this mode of action to express herself.

Conclusion

"There is a study that was done by people who support people at the end of their lives, and which consisted of systematically asking this question: "What would you have liked to do differently in your life?". The answers that came back in the vast majority were: "I would have liked..."

...Working less and spending more time with the people I love"

...Living the life I really wanted to live rather than doing what was expected of me."

...Having the courage to express my feelings."

"It really left a mark on me, and I think it's something that remains a bit like a compass for me."

Aurelie

The ingredients of a beautiful life

*"As John Lennon would say, 'Love is the answer. What was the question?' For me, a successful life is love. But love is much more than just a romantic relationship between two people, it's really about **cultivating gratitude**, the recognition of being lucky enough to be alive."*

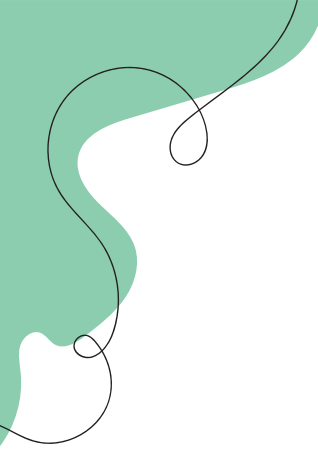
Charlotte

Love

Life

*"And actually, another answer is life. What is a successful life? It is **a life lived**. Just living is a success. It is a miracle that humans exist on this planet."*

Charlotte



Food for thought and advice

Here is the discussion that Charlotte and Aurélie had when I asked them what advice to give to people who, like me, are in dissonance with their studies or their daily activities:

Charlotte: Going on a trip, not necessarily to the other side of the world, it could be hitchhiking in your country. **Testing yourself with minimalism and letting go** is quite an initiation and it allows you to see which culture suits you, which atmosphere suits you. I think there are as many cultures as there are groups, so you can feel your way.

Aurélie: For me, too, the important thing is to **surround yourself and meet people who do things that inspire you**. I have made a lot of progress through meetings and experiences.

Charlotte: And then, **the sooner you get started, the better**, because the journey is long. Exhausting the best of your energy, your brain juice on things that don't make sense, is a complete waste. Today I'm 38 I clearly no longer have the same energy as I did at 22, I no longer have the same capacity to take risks and do tiring things. So make these forks in the road as soon as possible when you have the physiological and nervous resilience to go and confront the elements.

The sooner the better, and at the same time, **respecting your own rhythm**: always listening to what calls you, because that's where it brings you joy.

Aurélie: I agree with Charlotte on what she says about **following the guide of joy** because that's where we are alive and therefore that's where we have energy.

What also comes to me is a bit of a thing of perhaps saying to oneself "*there is something wrong with me if I do not find my place in this business world, in this economic world*". I would just like to reassure people that **it is normal not to find one's place in a system that is completely absurd and destructive**. The problem does not come from people who feel abnormal for not finding their way, the problem comes from the system. I would invite you to welcome this, to listen to this, because this is what will make you make good choices.

Some resources to go further

In connection with the activities of Aurélie and Charlotte

- the Work that Reconnects, so central in the lives of Aurélie and Charlotte

Aurelie

- Le Ty village, tiny-house village in Saint-Brieuc (Brittany)
- The ecological redirection agency 21-22

Interesting initiatives related to Aurélie's story

- The Oasis Festival organized by the Oasis Cooperative promoting collective eco-places
- Hameaux Légers which supports the creation of eco-hamlets and leads transmission and awareness-raising actions through the organization of *Week-ends of Possibles* in particular
- The “Archipelago” of cooperative collectives La Bascule with which Aurélie participated in the *Year-Off*
- The Château Pergaud eco-place
- Our low carbon lives: association for which Aurélie carries out a training mission for french state officials, as part of her work at 21-22

Interesting initiatives related to Charlotte's journey

- The Amanins woofing farm
- Fert'îles, a school of cooperation and commitment whose contributions seem essential in Charlotte's eyes to function as a collective

