# A Year Long Picnic

*Emma May Clear*
*Master's Thesis*
*2023*

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Title of thesis:  A Year Long Picnic
Programme:  Visual Culture, Curating and Contemporary Art
Major:  Visual Culture, Curating and Contemporary Art
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Date:  31.10.2023
Number of pages:  156
Language:  English

**What transformative processes might emerge while navigating grief?**
How might feminist food studies inform grief processes?
And how might such processes evolve, through practices of care and gatherings with food?

**Can skills learned during personal grief-work translate to broader grieving processes?**
How might such skills be applied to the emotional impacts of global crises, such as for example, the climate emergency?

# ABSTRACT

*This text is an analysis of the processes of grief work and resilience strategies through the lens of feminist food and care practices. The thesis is divided into four seasonal picnics which transverses personal writings, reflections and critical analysis of care practices as I navigated the loss of my father during the first year of my studies on the Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art Masters programme. It journeys through the experiences of grief, isolation and pain felt during the recent pandemic and the fatigue of living in climate and social unravelling. This text questions whether what was learned during my personal grief journey could be translated into more broadly applicable strategies for building resilience in difficult times.*

*Beginning in July 2020, the Summer Picnic is an invitation to a Microbial Picnic. Here, strategies of leaning-in to the support of others are introduced. Leaning in was introduced at my father's wake to help keep ourselves standing in unsteadying times. Later at the Microbial Picnic, this strategy is expanded to include picnic companions that are most often overlooked and yet crucial to our ability to digest and entangled in our liveability: the microbes. Here, we acknowledge the transformative effects of fermentation and microbial contributions to our ability to build resilience.*

*The Autumn Picnic navigates the forest and my garden. The Mushroom Gathering is a strategy for building empathetic bonds through the process of attuning to our surroundings. I was searching for memory of my father's voice but also a sense of calm within me. This was approached with fungal companions. Decay, death and life are explored through the life ways of fungi. As I attempt to come to terms with dying and death processes, I can see how life begins anew in the compost and relations that remain intact. Deeper Listening practices assist in relational attuning and opening to the cycles of life, death and decay, aiding in a movement from darkness.*

*A long process began during the cold months of winter. The Winter Picnic is an invitation to Afternoon Tea. At my father's Memorial Gathering tea was served. Confronted with feelings of shame about contributing to commemorations of colonial acts, I respond by expanding the stories that have made up my world view. I do this with bovine grief stories and stories of an afternoon tea ingredient: Milk. Multispecies storytelling has opened possibilities of gentler practices with our cohabitors. Broadening the stories that are told has great potential for more careful learning and gentle co-existing.*

*The Spring Picnic speaks of collaborative processes and the importance of carefulness in our interactions. Care was needed as we commemorated my father on the shoreline. Care was needed too, as a group gathered on Partiosaari island for a retreat to help build resilience. Carefulness was practised on watery edges. It is an essential ingredient in our abilities to work and live collectively. As careful interactions developed around shared food; in the kitchen, around grills and picnic tables, a recipe book for care and resilience was formed to help us to navigate difficulty.*

*Here are strategies for care through how we gather with food—a personal journey of grief that has transformed into knowledge about our potential to live well together.*

***Keywords:***
*Grief work, Feminist Care Practices, Feminist Food Practices, Resilience Building, Multispecies Acknowledgement, Collaborative Coexisting, Carefulness, Multispecies Storytelling, Deeper Listening, Empathy building.*



# Acknowledgements

*This thesis,* this book was long in the making, and so many contributed, with warmth and kindness, to its contents. Firstly, I extend immence gratitude to Lucy Davis, my thesis supervisor, who has been a constant support for me during the difficulties and challenges I faced while studying and producing this work. Her kindness and generocity allowed me to continue the programme to this end. Her hand on my shoulder helped me steady in unsteadying times. Thank you. And to Hanna Tuulikki for taking on the task of assessing this work. I would like to say how grateful I am to my partner Dorian Logue, who endeavoured to gather and cultivate mushrooms with me. Who has encouraged me to keep going regardless of the challenges and always given me the love and space to do so. Thank you to Patricia Clear, my mother, whose unrelenting support and care have inspired and encouraged me throughout this process. To my sister Sarah Clear for her wisdom and kindness, allowing me to lean into the support of loved ones and reforming thoughts that felt lost in the dark. To my sister Niki Clear, whose support for me, her patience and the love and caring for our multispecies cohabitors has changed the way I live. Her strength and conviction have always been an inspiration to me. Thank you to Keith and Sandy Logue for creating space for me to continue this process and push on to the end of the work. To Stella Martino, I am so grateful for your words of encouragement and the dedicated time spent on the text to help make it what it is now. Thank you, Pete Inkinen, for the beautiful book design. You listened to and deciphered my complicated ideas to create this presentation. To Dana Neilson, for your unyeilding warmth, friendship and support. For being an ear. For wading through the early stages of grief with me and reading through this text at the end of the process. To Yvonne Billimore, I am so grateful for your boundless support and wisdom, your friendship and recommendations. Thank you for being an wonderful support to a grieving friend. I would like to extend my thoughts to Maria Villa Largacha as a collaborator and friend who will always encourage me to dig deeper into myself and seek further knowledge. I give my deepest gratitude to Maria Paloma Velázquez for inspiring gentleness and strength in my everyday interactions. Thank you for sharing time storytelling with me, and your vast wisdom and warm friendship. I am so grateful to you, Marjolein van der Loo, for encountering plants as I listened to mushrooms, beginning a journey and a deep love for these alien organisms. Your endless support and encouragement have kept me going. Thank you, Petronella Grönroos, for listening and reading and sharing the depth of your knowledge and your warmth. I would like to mention each of the members of the recipes for care and resilience in the climate emergency recipe book working group: Stella Martino, Selina Oakes, Heini Uusisilta-Immonen, Elina Priha, Tuula Vehanen, Mónica Celeste, Martta Nieminen, Bailey Polkinghorne and Florencia Pochinki. Your gentle and persistent practices of care and nurturing sustained the project throughout its creation. The Partiosaari retreat group, with special mention to Lucy Davis, Julia Lohmann, Sanni Saarimäki, and Mari Keski-Korsu, for having the courage to allow our opening up. We found ways together to navigate difficulty and still come together with care and with delicious food. Thank you, Anu Korhonen and Janna, for teaching Dorian and me to identify and gather mushrooms. This practice has changed our relationship with our environment and our food. I am so grateful to my extended family, who I will not name individually but who have contributed to this work independently of one another and as a loving, warm family group. You have all been so caring and supportive during these difficult times. We have shared much love, many laughs, and much pain. Thank you all for helping me on this journey.

*To my father. I miss you so much.*

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

*It has often been commented upon, that I wear my heart on my sleeve — that I am very open. I feel that this openness has been received from my father and has been intrinsic to my personal, relational expressions. Not wishing to deny myself this inherent trait, here in these pages I act no differently. Working with and being open with my personal experiences has long been embedded in my artistic practice. A way of digesting processes of thinking through relating by meandering through my internal world to help me connect to what is around me and to process/process-with what is there. There has often been critique about sharing the personal in academic spaces/writings; that there is no room for it, that the personal is not objective or academic. I advocate for openness and 'the personal' as always situated in within working practice. With this belief I look to writers such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, Donna Haraway, bell hooks (amongst others) as they work with the personal within academic worlds and incorporate experience and perception in professional practice and academic writing, I have these eyes, and it is through this lens that I experience the world, through this lens that my perspective and interests form. Imagining, questioning and relating beyond myself is how my perceptions and perspectives change; how I process changes; how I expand my scope and understanding; how I transform. At times it might seem that I am being 'too' open, but in my experience, openness has the potential for more open-mindedness. There is room in this openness for careful learning, feminist care practices, empathy cultivation and resilience building. I open myself and share my experiences with conscious thought and consideration, with discomfort and disquiet in order to process living changes and the complexities within, to learn and relearn ways of becoming within my grief and ours.*

*This text is not a discussion on the ways our environment is being dismantled and destroyed. The scope of this thesis could not broaden so far. I felt that there are many avenues within which to gather this information and that my contribution would not have been given with the depth of knowledge and insight with which others have contributed. This work instead holds reflections on a journey through my personal grieving experiences and care practices that come from difficult work. Working with grief has been a painful process. It is painful to be so open about it. Never-the-less I entangle with my experiences of grief after losing my father to cancer in August 2019. I tangle with the mourning and grief experienced through the recent pandemic and the long-standing grief that accompanies the dismantling of global ecological systems, the destruction of species diversity and ruination of worlds that ensues. I wonder whether what I am learning from these experiences can be translated beyond to larger political, social and activist works, as ingredients (as strategies) for approaching the difficulty we face and finding the resilience to cope. I speak about care, caring practices, and living well together. To be clear, when speaking about 'living well' I do not intend to associate this phrase with the Wellness movement and corresponding capitalistic practices that go along side it. (I believe sharp critique is necessary when assigning blame/responsibility solely to individuals to get themselves out of a 'rut' and 'living clean', when largely these types of responsibility lie beyond an individual's control). Instead, I use this phrase as a way of highlighting a movement of living closer to my ethical standpoints, which includes my ability to respond and hold accountability, while practicing more gentle ways of living. Mourning has shown me the power in gentleness at a time when sharp pain (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) overcame me. When using 'our' in this text I speak to those reading that share my feelings of fatigue and exhaustion from living with grief. I speak of personal grief, but I refer also to the collective grief of living through times of ecological ruination and social unraveling. My journey through mourning and grief has opened me up to possibilities in careful ingestion, digestion and gatherings with foods — a journey of feminist food practices of care in times of grief.*

*The work questions who we grieve with, who are considered grieveable, how we might grieve and why. Having gained a clearer picture of what we are facing I wonder how to build resilience from here. It is a lot to hold and can be daunting and even debilitating at times, but it holds possibility for change. With focus on resilience, I ask the questions:*

***What transformative processes might emerge while navigating grief?***

*How might feminist food studies inform grief processes?*
*And how might such processes evolve, through practices of care and gatherings with food?*

***Can skills learned during personal grief-work translate to broader grieving processes?***

*How might such skills be applied to the emotional impacts of global crises, such as for example, the climate emergency?*

*These questions are digested with food, through a series of four seasonal picnics held over the space of a year: A Year Long Picnic from July 2020 to June 2021. Within each chapter is an invitation to each seasonal picnic and collaborating agents. I share my personal journey through the funeral/memorial gatherings and grieving process with personal diary entries during the experiences of the picnics. Each picnic is described in the project sections. Reflections on practices (green panels), Analysis informed by theory (pink panels) and Psychological states (blue panel), bringing all the seasonal picnic ingredients together into context and relativity with one another. These panels at times flow between writing styles meaning that they are never rigid in content but fluid in structural frameworks. Marinading together like a nourishing recipe for careful learning and resilience building.*

1. Emma Clear
*Ingredients*
2023
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of vegetal ingredients with digital paint application

## THE SUMMER PICNIC

*introduces the Microbial Picnic. This is a chapter asking the question:*

***How might our understanding of complex relationship with microbes contribute to the innate need to find reconnection from feelings of isolation experienced during times of grief?***

*This chapter thinks through the importance of (re)connection. How isolation and feelings of separateness can devastate our abilities to form bonds and relate to others. In the funeral traditions of the Irish Wake, the grieving are not alone but in 'waking' with the deceased; with family, friends and food. I discuss the disconnection felt during the early days of the grieving process and how feminist embodied practices help rediscover bodily connection. I discuss the importance of leaning-in to the support of others in times of grief. An action, to assist us when holding the line against difficulty and pain (internal and external). Leaning-in as a movement, not just transforming personal grieving but creating our first ingredient in this journey of resilience building towards overcoming emotional fatigue. I think through the perception of being always in relation with others through bodily ecologies of microbial companions. Here are processes of leaning-in to the more-than-human collaborators of living systems, in constant and ever-relationality with the minute. Process incumbent to the porousness of our bodies in our microbial/more-than-human relations, always in interconnected bonding to others. I explore how feminist fermentations create space for co-creating, co-hosting and (re)connecting.*

*I dedicate this chapter to my sister Sarah who brought us together in challenging times with her wise words and caring nature. My collaborators and agents for transformation in this microbial journey are ones that I was in direct contact with: my mother and sisters and extended family and friends. Those I worked beside such as members of Situated Knowledge and Embodied Practice group (Henceforth known as SKEP) initiated by Maria Villa Largacha. Those I thought with: Kyla Schuller, whose work was pivotal to the formation of the Microbial Picnic; the activists of Consejo Ecológico de Puchuncaví in Chile, whose ideas of holding the line require careful connection with one another; Astrida Neimanis, who dissolves boundaries, showing the porousness of living systems within waters; Lauren Fournier's work with the transformative project 'Fermenting Feminism'. And centrally the multitudes of the minute, the more-than-human agents of transformation: the microbes*

## THE AUTUMN PICNIC

*delves into the world of fungi with Mushroom Gathering. Attuning to the systems of life, death and decay cycles is central to this chapter. Attuning creates room for empathetic bonding to form. It asks the questions:*

***What bonds and transformational process form through fungal and companion co-existence? Can the death and decay of fungal processes help us attune to and find acceptance of life-death-life cycles?***

*It is immensely challenging to face the breaking of loving bonds. It was too overwhelming to face the pain and I fell into darkness. However it is possible to digest the loss of loved ones through acceptance of life and death cycles. I needed to digest processes of dying and i had been avoiding it but eventually I looked at decay to assist me. Fungi digest the forest litter, they live in decay and death processes, reconstituting matter into nourishing humus ready for new life to begin. Dying processes are transformed through fungal life-ways and assist in my processing the aftermath of death and loss. Symbiotic relationships are formed with fungi below our feet and these bonds sustain life. I look to the multi-ways that fungi process with surrounding ecologies to help build empathetic bonds*

*Here the agents of transformation and my collaborators start with my partner, Dorian Logue. This Chapter is dedicated to him in response to his enduring patience. Essential in this process are the collaborations of the mycelial networks (wild and cultivated) that I forage, feast and form steadiness with. They include the people who mourned with me at my father's repose and the funeral. I mention collaborators in Self-Organised-Practice, initiated by Yvonne Billimore and Petronella Grönroos and their introduction to deep listening practices with the work of Pauline Oliveros, Dr Alex Martinis Roe and Lucia Farinati. Anna L Tsing and Merlin Sheldrake help in my unpacking of the knots and tangles in the fantastic world of fungi, as the Queer Death Studies Network form multi-perspectives on whose deaths are recognised and accounted for. Jennifer Mae Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis show the importance accounting for the many that compost feminist practices of care, referring to both Kimberlé Crenshaw and Donna Haraway in their intersectional approaches. The edible fungal world of mycorrhizal, saprophytic and parasitic fungi is assisted by Paul Stamets. The unwieldy non-human fungal collaborators allow for empathy to flourish. Fundamental to this process are the organisms that live below our feet in the darkness or damp soils. Mycelial networks bond.*

## THE WINTER PICNIC

*invites you to Afternoon Tea bringing a question formulated in the early winter months:*

***How might the stories we re-tell about the ingredients of our food contribute to finding resilience in our grief? How do the stories of ingredients matter?***

*I pondered these questions throughout the long snowy months of winter, until what would have been my father's birthday in early April. The ingredients of afternoon tea mattered in the ways their stories. Acknowledging reality matters to how we live in this world. This is a chapter where the impact of the ingredients of our grief are brought to the fore. As Donna Haraway has told us: It matters what matter we use to tell stories with.*[1] *How stories matter, matters. A storytelling project brought a question for me that could only be approached in the Afternoon Tea project. There is a need to face the realities of our grief stories. The histories and narratives that have been told about our ways of living require our dismantling and re-learning. More stories need our telling. This is a tracing back to find new stories within the ones I had been taking for granted. Facing the reality of what we are going through is a vital ingredient in our capability to build resilience as we navigate grief. To acknowledge reality is an act of demolition and courage before a transformation can occur. Without facing reality, we cannot move on. Whose stories we tell has great impact on the ways in which we live. Here, within a larger project I had undertaken, I bring us on the journey with one contributer: A grieving mother, not human but other-than, a being whose labour and loss is intrinsic to a central ingredient in Afternoon Tea: Milk. Here our bovine companions take a central role, allowing for transformations to occur throughout cold months.*

*This chapter is dedicated to my sister Niki Clear and her capacity for deep empathy towards our more-than-human cohabitors. It brings together as collaborators and agents of transformation: my family, my extended family that attended the memorial afternoon tea at our home in August 2020. Maria Paloma Velázquez was my collaborator in the Remote Storytelling sessions held during lock-down, that brought storytelling further into my practice. Without the lecture by Albina Hipp, in the Feminist Food Studies course held in April 2021, I would not have been confronted with the importance of acknowledging the reality of my participation in colonial enactments. Elspeth Probyn navigates me through shame as I wondered about its influence in our ability to face real and all-too-often untold stories. Donna Haraway, Ursula K. Le Guin, Robin Wall Kimmerer start my telling of hidden stories. Looking at what the ingredients of a story are and how they matter within our living and dying narratives. Through the skill of non-verbal/non-linguistic storytelling of Andrea Arnold, I was introduced to Luma and a harrowing story of milk, bovine mothers and their calves. Holly Cleever furthered these stories by sharing a mother's 'Sophie's Choice'. Breeze Harper and Greta Gaard taught me bout grieving mothers and milk politics. It was through the artistic practice of Ida Bencke that I explore multispecies feasting and 'm/other becomings' as multispecies storytelling practices to acknowledge all those sitting at our table. Here is Without acknowledging these stories, how can we change course?*

## *THE SPRING PICNIC*

*brings into light Recipes for Resilience and Care. A collective feast. Here is the discussion on the importance of carefulness in our approach. Asking the question:*

***How do we use the ingredients we have collected to help create careful and compassionate transformations in our interactions and collaborations with others?***

*These are collections of caring practices; with connection, empathy and the courage to face reality we can move more carefully with others. This chapter examines caring, how our way of phrasing 'care' can have an impact on how we care. With unconsciousness, under the guise of kind acts of 'minding' another for their own good, we have the potential to rob another of their self-determination. I consider that without the work of being careful in our caring practices we could succumb to taking autonomy from others. Here I propose a linguistic change as a strategy for building and maintaining autonomy in collaborations and processes of caring. I wonder about the messiness involved and the complimentary/contradictory elements of caring about others. It is with these concepts that I conceive of the concept of replacing 'caring for' in favour of 'caring with' others following the vein of becoming/becoming-with so spoken of by Donna Haraway. Taking care and being careful with others (with ourselves) allows space for recovery. Holding one another up, leaning-in to support creates strength through sharing in the pain. These feminist care practices are central to our efforts to build resilience in ruination and to finding ways of living well, more gently and with careful consideration together.*

*In this final chapter I bring into the fold my now smaller family — my mother, sisters, brother-in-law, my partner and myself. This chapter I would like to specifically dedicate to my mother as she navigated the challenges of practicing self-care in difficult times. The more-than-human Partiosaari island inhabitants and the retreat visitors of 2021 created room for building resilience in difficulty and careful interactions around kitchens and feasting tables. The recipe book group (Selina Oakes, Stella Martino, Heini Uusisilta-Immonen, Elina Priha, Tuula Vehanen, Martta Nieminen, Mónica Celeste, Florencia Pochinki and Bailey Polkinghorne) was formed there and each of these participants worked with me to create our recipe book. Lucy Davis, Julia Lohmann and Sanni Saarimäki held the space for us around the edges, in the kitchen, in gentle quiet spaces between. Mari Keski-Korsu calmed our spirits and our minds with gentle practices with vegetal collections and collaborators. María Puig de la Bellacasa and Donna Haraway complicate care within my understanding. Carefulness is navigated with the work of Dr Alex Martinis Roe speaking with Helena Reckitt and in particular in shifting spaces for unforeseen perspective changes in collaborations with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga. Together these agents help in shifting perspectives allowing space for more careful inclusion with those we are grieving with.*

*As I navigated grief, I experienced processes that allowed for movement towards resilience and recovery. Often these processes occurred through writing and confronting difficulty. More-often-than-not they occurred at tables with food or in gathering edible ingredients together. These picnics transformed my experiences of living in this world, creating more room for careful co-existing.*

*Summer Picnic*

# THE MICROBIAL PICNIC

*10th JULY 2020*

***How might our understanding of complex relationship with microbes contribute to the innate need to find reconnection from feelings of isolation experienced during times of grief?***



# AN INVITATION TO THE MICROBIAL PICNIC

## *Connection – Leaning In*

What is it to gather, to host a gathering, to hold space together? With whom are we holding? Separation in the form of necessity during a pandemic and unconscious emotional protection during personal crisis has brought great pain. But it has also brought to the fore the deep value of connection within the communities that live around, within and upon us. During times of personal crisis, like the loss of a loved one, feelings of separation can be at once symptomatic of feelings of trauma as it can be problematic for finding paths through to resilience and recovery. Isolation breaks our bonds of connection, but expanding our sense of community has potential for transformative reconnection. Community need not be about sameness, nor be species dependant. Instead, community can be thought of here as encompassing human and more-than-human kin. Our expanded community creates connection through leaning in to the support of the multiples involved in our living processes. At the picnic table I think through the inter-connectivity of shared grieving spaces and multi-species ecologies and multiplicities. How thinking with our collaborators — leaning into the support of this vast community — could be a source/vision for movement towards healing practices and processes of building resilience during personal anguish and through global ruination and the grief that encompasses these actualities. I invite you to come and share the food of multiples with me at the summer picnic. The Microbial Picnic.

2. Emma Clear
*Fermentation 1*
2023
Pencil drawing,
digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of Lactobacilli colony isolated from sweet potato curd on MRS agar medium, with digital paint application.

# COLLABORATORS AND AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

multitudes of the minute, the more-than-human agents: the microbes
my mother and sisters - special mention to Sarah Clear
my extended family and friends
members of SKEP, especially Maria Villa Largacha
Kyla Schuller
the activists of Consejo Ecológico de Puchuncaví
Astrida Neimanis
Lauren Fournier
the artists of 'Fermenting Feminism'

# Funeral Gatherings

Diary: 19th August 2020

*Not pain, but numbness.*

Numbness takes over and even though the immanency of his passing was not a shock, it was utterly shocking to my body. This numbness would later evolve into the disconnection I felt from it and the wearying inability to allow feelings of pain — or in fact any bodily sensation — to come to the surface. But it was not the time to fall into darkness, not then... There were gatherings to consider. My father's life to honour. We had time to prepare through his illness and ask him his wishes. After the phone call, on my long journey home to him, I had time to prepare what I was going to say, what my sisters and I could say together as we hosted the Wake, the Repose, the Funeral: The Gatherings.

***"It is your hands that we remember most. My first memory is of your big hands gently cupping my small ears, holding and comforting me when I was in pain... Your hands embody the essence of creation for us. They made beautiful things; they made us feel loved and held and protected. They drew us in and kept us there beside you. When the strength was leaving them, you still moved to hold our hands firmly, drawing us in, keeping us there for as long as you could. The achievements your hands created inspire so much in us. With your hands you showed each of us how to love and care and give to others. What you have taught us, lives with us and as we hold the hands of those around us, we share your many teachings."***[2]

There is a holding that occurs in the initial moments of grieving the loss of a loved one. Time is held in suspense and yet, curiously, the minutes move past at high speed. Commemoration is important in Irish culture and like with our way of speaking and of being, it happens rapidly, loudly and in gathering together. There are mere days between a passing and the gatherings in Irish funeral tradition. On the first day I received the phone call telling me of his passing. By the second I was traveling home — I saw him then. On the third day we held the Wake. To experience an Irish Wake is to understand the complex interplay of emotional states during the sadness of early grief. Family and friends gathered, there are so many of us, a bustling and loud interconnection of a multitude of voices and raw emotions. Being together helps to bring the laughter, the deep and tearful sorrow, anguish and humorous nostalgia through song and storying, feasting to honour a loved one.

We hosted, embraced with the care and loving gestures of our extended family and close friends. They nourished us with their offerings as they catered our gathering. We found it difficult to care for ourselves but we needn't worry, the food was brought with love to our home and shared out by the younger members. Special care was given to my mother as she would have forgotten to eat if left to herself. They kept her nourished. An abundance of homemade pastries, tarts and cakes, Moussaka and other savory dishes, salads and finger foods, meats donated from a cousin's boss, vegetables from family gardens. His favourites. The recipes that reminded people of him. Of course, there were Gummy Bears and Liquorice Allsorts. These sweets were by far my father's favourites and everyone knew about them. I was struck by a memory of times towards the end of his illness, sneaking him extra sweeties in bed when we were not supposed to. What would it have mattered but for the enjoyment of life and the pleasure of seeing him savor the sweetness. So many people brought packets to the house that night. Now these sweet treats filled a multitude of bowls all over the house and we gathered handfuls of them, sneaking again, tucking them in beside him, deep into the coffin's satin ruffles. I gathered handfuls, but I did not consume them, instead I tucked them in beside him like the rest. Food that day was for sentimental nostalgia as it was for nourishment and to keep up strength through the long hours of waking beside him.

We came together, my mother, sisters and I, before the wake began. "Lean in" my sister Sarah said. "We cannot do this alone. We need the strength of each other. Face inwards, we can hold each other up. They will hold us at our backs." Holding one another up, being held in a caring embrace, there was a sense of belonging in the gathering of family and friends — of kin. We were there in difficulty together, embracing one another, bracing each other. We leaned, we held, we gathered. We sang through tears by his side in our family home; The home where he was born and where he now laid. According to tradition he must not be alone during the wake. We were in vigil, 'waking' with him throughout the night and into the following day. Songs sung through the night, stories told into the early hours, lamentations for his loss.

*He was not alone, but neither were we in those hours.*

# Leaning In

## *REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

Sharing space and grieving alongside loved ones during the Wake; Being together in difficulty; This is the traditional Irish funeral practices of 'waking'. Within this experience a phrase emerged: 'Lean in'. My older sister Sarah gave us the gift of this phrase. She is a person full of deep caring for others and here she was teaching us a practice of caring through group support. Leaning-in to one another a concept for resilience building beyond our 'waking' to form. Leaning-in as others held our backs; helping us stand when weakness overcame us; keeping us going. In moments where I could not hold myself up alone, I was being held by the loving embrace of others. I watched as my mother was being held and cared or in those hours too as food was handed to her. It was comforting to gather with others during these initial days of grieving. Leaning-in to the support of one another allowed for my family to brace ourselves, strengthening our resilience to the overwhelming feelings of loss while we hosted.

Thinking about why we hosted a gathering for grieving loss was to think beyond a Wake, a Repose, a Funeral as being solely for the commemoration of a loved one's life. Hosting the grieving required us to open ourselves up during our most painful and vulnerable moments. These were times full of the uncomfortable and profound feelings of a lack of control, of emotional turbulence, of deep and weighty grief. It was painful to open ourselves and our home but without their company we would not have understood that our feelings of loss were shared. We were not alone. There was not just sadness in our home but love and laughter and song. A wake allowed for a multitude of emotions to co-exist, halving the weight of loss by sharing it. Leaning-into support. I envision this as the strength of many pillars using collective force to counter the weight of the world being held up. Supporting each other in times of grief — not just mine but ours. This is the practice of Leaning-in.

## *ANALYSIS INFORMED BY THEORY

Funeral traditions are for the living; a way of commemorating our intimate connection to another through gathering with those that share our experiences. Collective commemorative rituals differ through cultures and individual groups but acknowledgement of collective loss and sadness appears to be universally practiced. And it does not appear to be bound to humans alone. We see this in the journeying of elephant herds to places of loss and in the touching of bones. We see it when a mother orca carries the body of her young with the pod for days after their passing as the group supports her. Funeral traditions/mourning acknowledgements create an opening for the painful feelings to shift and change, breathe and become lighter. Collective grieving creates room for the movement of overwhelming emotions when the weight of holding them alone could break an individual. I wonder if this is the reason for collective rituals of mourning — I wonder if this is why we were in waking.

Sharing food is deeply rooted in traditions of hosting and gathering together. In times of grief (as in times of celebration) we gather around food. We often seek others to help hold the burdens we carry. The need for 'leaning in' to the support of others extends beyond familial bonds and grieving traditions to countering the fatigue and exhaustion felt while grieving the loss of our environmental and social stability. On the front lines of environmental and social activism, the capacity of individuals to continue holding defense against the destruction and devastation is not limitless. People become exhausted, overwhelmed with the weight of it. The line cannot be held alone with the vulnerability of one, as with grief. When I could not hold my mind and body together, I needed our gathering of loved ones to sing together, to hold one another up, to be held by the funeral gatherings. The activists of *Consejo Ecológico de Puchuncaví*[3] in Chile have come to understand that activism requires coming together through practices of care and support, listening to the lamentations, the grief and the grievances of its members. Staying by one another's side, holding space with one another as stories are being told and retold, becoming embedded in memory and fresh in mind. Strength to hold the line, strength for movement to occur, for action to be taken can only happen in places where we can lean-in to the support of others. Otherwise, how can any individual keep going while hitting into such resistance to change while witnessing the devastating changes that are occurring all around us?

Our systems of life are being destroyed at alarming rates. We needn't grieve alone for the decimation of species, ecologies, environments, traditional ways of living in cooperation with living diversity. It is an unfathomable loss at in-comprehendible pace. It is a pace that is difficult for some to understand as it is not directly moment to moment but in relation to yearly cycles, cycles within decades and lifetimes. These are systems that we are intrinsically related to, inseparable from. Might hosting gatherings for the commemoration of this occurring loss help us to face the devastation? This is what I believe the meetings of Consejo Ecológico de Puchuncaví do when they come together to tell and retell their experiences. Wounds are tended to through the supportive practices of gathering and caring together.

> "Puchuncaví has been un-carefully treated. 'We are alone'"[4] to soften a devastating aloneness, communities collect at monthly evening meetings in lunchrooms in Quintero Bay in Puchuncaví. In May 2015 Manuel Tironi and Israel Rodríguez-Giralt attended with the activist organisation ASOREFEN. The meeting, as with each monthly gathering previously, is an unfolding of stories of damage and remembrances of pain are recited and re-sighted in their retelling. These are careful acts of remembrance of loss. "A feeling of solidarity envelopes the meeting […] ASOREFEN is also an affective space in which its members look for the attention and recognition denied by Codelco and the state at large: a space where ASOREFEN members care for themselves and in so doing persevere in their search for justice."[5]

This is a gathering for support. A leaning into community and common/collective need. Leaning in here is a movement; a practice of care with others. A supportive act for aiding prolonged activism.

# Grief: Disconnection

*Diary: 30th July 2020*

*I am absorbed in my attempts to find a sense of resilience in these difficult times.*

I have been overrun and seeking stability, as my mind has been scattered with overwhelming thoughts and emotions; fraught-ness and unsteadying frantic movements. My body fully disconnected. My mind racing between disrupted thoughts and un-thought-out actions. Panic lives with me and has done for a year now. In the midst I have manage the stress and the emotional difficulty that arises from facing the devastation of the fraying of the now-living and dying systems and the turbulence of a loved one now not-living.

I remember joining Situated Knowledge and Embodied Practice tentatively in January. I had been enduring the disconcerting experience of not being able to feel beyond the numbness of my body and was deeply worried about not being able to connect to it again. More terrifyingly — I was afraid of what might happen if I do. I was, at that time, holding on by a fraying thread, worried that I might break with even the smallest glimpse into my internal emotional landscape. I had been ripping apart, utterly disjointed after my father's passing. My mind was an uncontrollable menace to me — but I could not feel anything beyond. Separation from the immense pain happened as a form of protection and without a conscious decision being made on my part. A stress response. It had left me worrying and wholly believing that I could never connect again, that I should never connect to that dark raggedness. I was hesitant to join the group to be sure.

*Curiously, however, I did.*



# Reconnecting

## SEPARATION

> "Listen to your body: Our feelings live not only in our mind but also in our body. Western culture has a long history of questioning the importance of overall physicality. Listen to your body and provide time to meet its needs for movement. What part of your body feels which emotion? And how does movement help with the flow of emotional energy? Our body is also a bridge to nature, and spending time in nature helps to ease eco-anxiety in many ways."[6]

The feeling of separateness from my physical body was countered by a feeling of togetherness during the funeral gatherings but the darkness set in, numbing me. Separation from sensation was utterly disorientating. I was isolated from bodily sensation and my ability to commune with others. I did not feel alive in the ways I had before my personal sadness. This sense of disconnection was mirrored in the isolation necessary during the pandemic. My attempts to rejoin 'normality' were futile. I was not functioning. Embodiment was terrifying to me when initially introduced. How could I possibly allow myself to connect when I was in such pain. The awkwardness and sickly-ness of physical sensation compounded disconnection. But I was being brought into the fold by Maria Ville Largacha and the project Situated Knowledge and Embodied Practice (SKEP). This was a working group where philosophical text, personal writing/creating and bodily movement were brought together to encourage and explore new ways of learning and immersing ourselves with concepts within the texts. The topics brought forth by Maria on this project were often topics and concepts I was not immediately familiar with. Maria's ability for explaining nuances within dense texts and finding dynamic ways of embodying the premise of the concepts through movement were complex notions that soon became more approachable and digestible. As a working group SKEP was initiated in October 2019. The process was described by Villa Largacha in her invitation to participants from cross-disciplines within Aalto University students in October 2019:

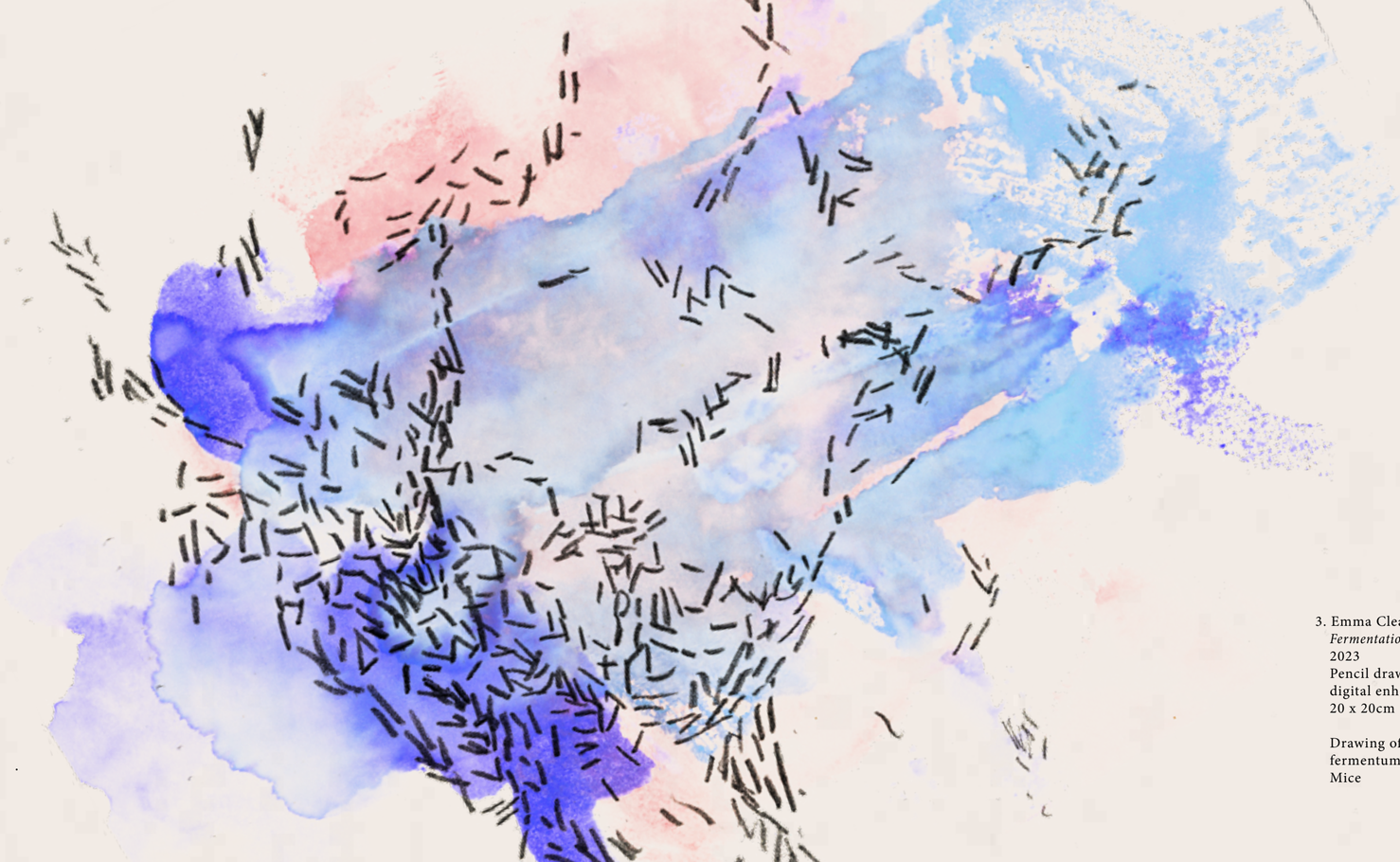
> "This group is proposed as a seminar-workshop for peer learning where embodied experience is essential. […] How might individual barriers of trust erode to give room for other forms of seeing, meaning making, collaboration, caring, creativity and engagement with each other? What kind of knowledge(s) may emerge of such a process?"[7]

In SKEP I was being invited to feel my fingertips and my toes, feel the presence of others and move and dance with them physically, emotionally, intellectually; like a conversation in sensation grounded in critical theory. Word, action, thought, perspective, response, feeling, responsibility, sensation - all entangled in collective practice of movement. I made all the actions for connection but was not wholly present; the jerkiness and discomfort of movement felt like a beckon being lit stating my separateness from self and other.

After initial SKEP meetings we were all jerked into separateness with the pandemic lock-down and my personal feelings of separation became a shared global experience. There was a slowing down, vast distance felt and attempts to connect digitally were awkward at first. For me this intensified my feelings of isolation. However, as time moved on and SKEP adjusted and persevered, I realised that there were other modes of connection, slow-connection, shared experience through distances, leaning in to one another, holding space even when we were not physically sharing space with one another. With SKEP an opportunity opened to help find my reconnections

## *PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES

Living can be perceived simultaneously as interconnection between species and systems and as Dr Robert W. Firestone, suggests. His article discussing psychological defense against separation states: “Human existence, or life as we know it, can be conceived of as a succession of separation experiences that make us increasingly aware of the fact of our aloneness and eventual death.” Firestone says how we manage our defense against these anxieties can “determine the course of our emotional lives.”
For me social isolation, loneliness and loss manifested as unhelpful internal narratives. Fraught thoughts and frantic reactions to the perception of my failings to live well. The need to disassociate from these thoughts and feelings, manifested as dissociative behaviour from physical sensation. It was too painful to stay connected. In times of high stress, abilities that normally allow us to create meaningful relationships, such as opening to the vulnerability necessary for closer bonds and being perceptive of bodies within shared space, are turned on their head and perceived as threatening. Distances are created as protection from a perception of danger. I separated from my body to protect myself from the overwhelming emotional weight of grief. I separated to survive the arduous months of his illness and the initial months after his passing. It was internal isolation.



3. Emma Clear
*Fermentation 2 (detail)*
2023
Pencil drawing,
digital enhancement.
20 x 20cm

Drawing of effects of Lactobacillus fermentum on Lipid Reduction in Mice

# PROJECT: THE MICROBIAL PICNIC

*SKEP Meeting: 10th July 2020*

When thinking about coming together as a community of people to consume delicious foods and spend time together, thoughts come to me about those organisms that participate along with us, often without us knowing or paying attention to them. The community is far broader than I considered when I initially invited you all. In fact, these organisms are inseparable from us and so, I send an invitation to each of you — human and non-human alike. I am happy to have you all at my home in your various forms. The idea of a microbial picnic came from discussions we had much earlier in the year around collaboration, contamination and collective practice. I would like to highlight our broader selves with a Collective Microbial Picnic. Although it will not be necessary for you to read texts (or watch videos) before you come to join, I have attached some works that might be of interest. Feel free to browse these and read as much or as little as you like. The main focus of these works involves research into microbiomes within and outside our bodies. The microbiome of our gut systems and its complex effects and intrinsic links to the nervous systems, hormonal and immune systems, affecting sensory and emotional experiences — affecting how we experience the world. Within the text ***The Microbial Self: Sensation and Sympoiesis,*** Kyla Schuller discusses the nervous system as being a member of a vital ecology, that subject and self-constituting sensations emerge within a network of interspecies interdependence. She draws on the writings of Donna Haraway, Kath Weston, and Eva Hayward "that erodes humanist paradigms of the self-possessive individual by emphasizing the multispecies entanglements of which species are constituted"[8]

## *Outline for the Day*

*We will begin the day with the Microbial Picnic in my garden. It might be nice to read an excerpt from a text as a way of welcoming all guests to the picnic. I am happy to prepare an excerpt from one of the text below. We will sync up with those joining remotely for this section as a listening exercise. I would suggest this will take an hour or so.*

*Then a short break to gather ourselves and then we can begin our walk together. I would say that this could take about 30 to 45 minutes, as we would need to walk to the forest from my cabin. The Forest Meditation exercise will begin when we settle into our surroundings. We will reconvene then with remote participants. Those joining remotely can of course eat in the forest or take their own walk of their choosing or in their homes - as you wish.*





# *Picnic Ingredients*

*We each bring a dish of fermented foods that can be shared between us in my garden.*
**Please do let the group know if you have any allergies and dietary requirements.*

***Kombucha*** - Jessica suggested that she might be able to provide this for us.

***Sourdough*** - I will make sourdough from Maria's family Juuri
RYE SOURDOUGH: https://breadtopia.com/sourdough-rye-bread/
https://www.alsothecrumbsplease.com/sourdough-starter/

***Sauerkraut and Kimchi*** - I am excited to try making this
SAUERKRAUT: https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/simple-sauerkraut
KIMCHI: https://fearlesseating.net/simple-kimchi-recipe/

***Probiotic Yoghurt*** – Might someone be able to bring this?
VEGAN PROBIOTIC YOGHURT: https://veganheaven.org/recipe/vegan-yogurt/

***Miso*** - This is a great recipe – any volunteers?
MISO IDEAS: https://simple-veganista.com/orange-roasted-tempeh-asparagus/

***Tempeh*** - If you have not come across this it is a fermented soybean block that is sliced and cooked.

https://www.veganfoodandliving.com/features/most-delicious-vegan-tempeh-recipes/

***Beer or Wine*** - for those who would like to have some alcohol and are not driving of course.

THE REST OF THE FOODS WILL INCLUDE SALADS FROM MY GARDEN AND MY LOCAL SHOP.

***For Remote Participants*** *- I suggest you to create a picnic for yourselves with some of the recipes above. And we could share a lovely hoppy beer together too!*

4. Emma Clear
*Microbial Picnic Documentation 1* (detail)
2020
Digital photograph
Photograph of the fermented foods at our picnic

# Forest Meditation Walk

*Here I propose that we take a walk in the wilderness with the organisms that inhabit the spaces outside our skins, helping us to draw our awareness to our more-than-human companions - often forgotten in our daily activities. This will be the point of departure for thinking about meditation with the forest. With our bellies full of microbes, new and old, and in an environment of complex living organisms, I will guide us through a meditation for connection.*

***Instructions:***

A one hour walk which will include a 15min meditation in the forest. I will prepare the meditation for this purpose. We will convene with remote participants at this point. If there are any issues with phone reception, have no fear, I will be preparing a sound recording of the meditation and upload it to the drive for remote listening. I will share the link to it (and our timetable) next week.

At this stage we can consider either following from our last remote outing where we revisited the writing exercise by either sharing the writing or doing a new one together or we could just enjoy the forest in our individual ways through silent walking, singing, or discussion.

Then back to my place or your own home for a good cup of herbal tea!!

## Meditation Recordings

***LISTENING TO FOREST COMPANIONS***

**https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mxeOlqGB1_mujrcR6nuq3e8cSjwleWSc**

*This link contains a recording and transcript of the meditation for remote participants to use while on their own walks*

5. Suvi Baloch
*Microbial Picnic Documentation 2 (detail)*
2020
Digital photograph

Documentation of meditation by the river at Itälankoski, Laukkoski. 10th July 2020





## Picnic Reading

***THE MICROBIAL SELF: SENSATION AND SYMPOIESIS, KYLA SCHULLER***

Kyla Schuller, 'The Microbial Self: Sensation and Sympoiesis', Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities 5, no. 3 (2018): 51, https://doi.org/10.5250/resilience.5.3.0051.

## Further Reading

***GUT FEMINISM, BY ELIZABETH A. WILSON***

Duke University Press Books (2015) | PDF | Major Depressive Disorder | Antidepressant', Scribd, 2015, https://www.scribd.com/document/343453389/WILSON-Elizabeth-a-Gut-Feminism-Duke-University-Press-Books-2015-Copy.

https://www.makemag.com/gut-feminism-by-elizabeth-a-wilson-2/

***MATTERS OF CARE: CHAPTER 5: SOIL TIMES, The Pace of Ecological Care***

María Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds, Posthumanities 41 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017)

## Watching

***ROB KNIGHT: HOW OUR MICROBES MAKE US WHO WE ARE, 2014***

TED Talk:(17min:16sec) https://www.ted.com/talks/rob_knight_how_our_microbes_make_us_who_we_are

***THE HUMAN MICROBIOME: A NEW FRONTIER IN HEALTH, 2019***

(1h:22min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCaTQzjX2rQ.

***THE RHIZOSPHERE: AN INTERACTION BETWEEN PLANT ROOTS AND SOIL BIOLOGY, 2017***

(4 min:10sec) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvA7CWSIbTc.

# Attempts to hold it together

## SKEP AND THE SUMMER PICNIC

In the summer of 2020, we met at my house. I was so grateful to have our small SKEP group together at my home after so much isolation. It created room to think about our living spaces: the space my body occupies, the space it shares. How to navigate our boundaries and edges compassionately and consensually in constantly negotiated and renegotiated spaces. These are places that are not just 'mine' but bleeding into 'ours'. Here is space to think about self as non-singular but cascading tangles of multiples; as community. Thinking not of me as singular, but instead, multiples of us. Human and more-than-human entangled ecologies of existence.

We arrived as human and more-than-human collaborators in the hot sunlight. I got lost in time as the food was enjoyed in the dappled light of oak tree shadows. After food was ingested, as we digested, we walked. It was on the journey (to the tree lined river rather than the forest) where the essence of the ideas of gathering together with multiples and more-than-human transforming agents came into its own. In conversation with the group rather than in stronger structured readings or scheduled times, where knowledge was shared. And by the gurgling river with guided meditation, it was easier to extend our thoughts to those we do not often notice and yet are so intrinsically connected to. It was easier to remember our relations. We remembered that new ones were in our bodies through the food we had ingested, that there were ones on our hands as they drew bread to mouth and leaned on rocks and mosses, leaves and pine needles. We were bleeding one into another, hearing the murmur of my voice and that of the rivers as the meditation lulled us into a reminder of connection. We parted ways for home after that.

How we share space together in complex interplays of entangled shedding and gathering has the essence of storying that involves camaraderie and uncomfortable companionships; not always mutually beneficial but integral to living together. Hosting a picnic for the multi-species that are involved in our co-existing was the aim of the microbial picnic. The picnic was a movement towards leaning-in to the existing connections for more conscious living bonds. Four people, including a little toddler, two remote participants, my partner, our two cats and the abundance of organisms accompanied me on our Microbial Picnic. I was host, we were hosting, we hosted multiples together.

## ISOLATION

The perception of separation, of isolation from others can have profoundly detrimental effects on mental health. Physical separation from the loving embrace of a caregiver in early development has been linked to insufficient development in brain matter, connectivity and cognition, and in ability to connect and relate with others. In extreme cases, especially for the very young, and very vulnerable isolation can be fatal[9]. The need for connectivity in these instances can quite literally be viewed as a life and death situation. As we move into adulthood the effects of isolation can be extensive. Affecting our behaviour, our feelings of success or failings, our physical wellness and our ability to relate. These effects are linked to our situatedness: our social status, our cultural norms, our 'acceptability'.

> "As demonstrated by a review of the effects of perceived social isolation across the life span, co-authored by Hawkley, loneliness can wreak havoc on an individual's physical, mental and cognitive health (Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, Vol. 370, No. 1669, 2015). Hawkley points to evidence linking perceived social isolation with adverse health consequences including depression, poor sleep quality, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function and impaired immunity at every stage of life."[10]

Dissociative behaviour can manifest as disconnection between body and mind, between relations with others, between groups. The work of embodied practice within SKEP was an attempt to decentralise emphasis on our minds as the primary point of processing knowledge. The purpose was to encompass an understanding of the complexity through multiple sensory experience and navigating the spaces between bodies. Having been taught to ignore bodily language in order to conform to societal norms; I learned at an early age to dissociate from painful experiences. I am not alone. Our bodies have been disquieted, silenced in the dominant structures of 'western' thought. We have been taught that our bodily movements must be controlled and morphed to appease societal norms. Embodied practices are an attempt to deconstruct this falsity and to come back to our bodies, to learn multi-sensorially. Our bodies hold a lot, they have a lot to share. Within this living systems it is understood now that our experience of our emotional world and our mental health is not just through brain processing alone, but is shared system wide. We get gut feelings.

The connection between depression and our gut microbial health has been extensively explored in the last decade. "My argument is not that the gut contributes to minded states, but that the gut is an organ of mind: it ruminates, deliberates, comprehends."[11] Processing occurs through connection between gut microbiome and the brain and here with the Microbial Picnic we acknowledge this. These once supposed separate systems are fundamentally linked, bound together. They are bound across species. We are multispecies. How we process life changes, traumas, emotional complexities are, without doubt, a multispecies collaborative experience.

## *EXTENDING SELF*

Feasting has allowed for our communities to grow stronger, form bonds, create kin. Within our bodies these bonds have already been formed millennia ago. Through a co-existing, co-evolving biota and interspecies relationality, we co-habit, merge, are ingested, digested and shed with others. We mingle and form essential relationships across time and species. Relationships that extend the notion of 'self', 'personhood' and 'ownership'. Redefining the borders of what we consider to be mine and yours. When in balance with one another we learn to work with, maneuver around, be in opposition with and collaborate with one another in a dance of co-existing. 'Self' (as individual entity) loses all meaning when we consider the majority more-than-human DNA that constitute what we call our bodies. We are vast body ecologies beyond the boundary of human skin. We are host to a multitude of multiples within on and around our skin that merges into the surrounding environment. We are not alone in this body. We are quite literally a community, an ecology.

## *HOSTING*

Our bodies host. Hospitality as a word in its etymological context has origins in both the exchange of host and guest but also in the ideas of stranger, enemy, alien.[12] Hospitality sits both with 'hosting' and with 'hostile'. Hosting the gathering of multiples within our body is complicated. Not all within the community are benevolent and assist human needs. Living in relationship with others is not easy or comfortable but immensely, beautifully complicated. Within our bodies 'hosting' moves beyond the dynamic of guest and receiver to further decenter anthropocentric ideas of good/bad or beneficial/impeding. Instead making room for the combining the needs and ways of multiples, in a fuzzy, fizziness[13] of unbounded life ways. We imagine our human autonomy and do not think that there could be many drivers. Not all bacterial or fungal introductions and cohabiters benefit human bodies but yet they are introduced, live, survive and thrive on, around and within us. Discussions of disease and parasitic combinations and multi-species communities in Kyla Schuller's *The Microbial Self: Sensation and Sympoiesis* sheds light on just such a co-habitation. Through discussion on Lyme's disease and the entanglements of Borrelia burgdorferi, the bacteria that causes Lyme's disease, with our bodily systems, Enlightenment theories of individual autonomy are disassembled in the process of finding ways of living with and attempts to ease disease, pain and (human) involuntary bodily movements, experienced by those in cohabitation with Borrelia burgdorferi. Disease, bacterial and fungal infections, parasites, cancers (and more) live with us in flux within systems of living and dying together. The hosting body is not always benevolent, nor are those being hosted. As with my father, there is the capacity for these combinations to kill the host body. The 'hostile' can unbalance the capacity for one to live with another. The is not conflict but an over flourishing perhaps, of systems not in-check. Like a bloom of algae in a Finnish lake showing that aquatic systems are out of balance. Or a difference in life ways. It is important here too not to forget that sometimes the death of one means life for another. Not hostility but cycles of living, flourishing and dying, on with and within others. With this work I began to see beyond my body alone.

6. Diane Phillips
*The End of Sourdough (detail)*
5 May, 2020
Photograph
Cucina Divina (Blog)
https://cucinadivina.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-end-of-sourdough.html

Photo of sourdough mother

# Leaning into 'us'

## INTIMATE RELATIONALITY

Donna Haraway references the work of Lynn Margulis in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, describing symbiogenesis and the importance of 'intimacies of strangers'. Haraway proposes 'good enough' connections and entanglements that have world-making possibilities, where worlds of multiples are in the constant flux with one another.[14] The 'intimacies of strangers' allow for connections without necessity for knowing, or for definitive understanding. It refutes a need for perfect relationships when in entangled world-making/living processes. Instead creating space for multiple possibilities and emerging complexities in processes of leaning-in to the uncertainty of co-habitation. Without the boundaries of what is mine or yours, but in fuzzy edges and mingling merging uncertainty. These connections created room for my recognition of living processes, at a time when feelings of debilitating separation overcame me. It helped to think of not being human alone, but a rich ecology. This thought created room for me to imagine my connection to the multifaceted ecology of me. It allowed me to imagine the whole host that would be joining us at the summer picnic.

The boundaries of what is mine and yours are undefinable (indistinguishable) when we think with 'porousness': acknowledgements, responsibilities and a leaning-in to connection as visited by Astrida Neimanis' works. I was not intimately acquainted with the relations of an 'us' of my bodily space. We are intimately connected and have been constantly.

> "Referring to the always hybrid assemblage of matters that constitutes watery embodiment, we might say that we have never been (only) human (Braidotti 2013: 1; Haraway 1985, 2008). This is not to forsake our inescapable humanness, but to suggest that the human is always also more-than-human.[15]

To pay attention is to understand the responsibility of doing things differently because we now look at things differently; consuming differently because we see beyond an individual self to our responsibility with others. Our ethics extend to acknowledge accountability and responsibilities. Within Neimanis' writing in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* is the call to see differently, take account responsibly, think beyond the human-centric and normative considerations of 'stable and sovereign bodies'. Asking us to consider what is valuable and worthy of our attention.[16] Attention is given as Neimanis meanders us through the seeping and leakiness of watery bodies, reminding us that boundaries are always leaky, water always fluid and ever moving through bodies and beyond socially constructed boundaries, as are our intimate relations to multiples.

It seems poignant that I would work with *Bodies of Water* in our SKEP sessions as I was also facing deep feelings of disconnection and separateness. With these experiences I consider fluidity of watery bodies: water as synonymous with holding, around us (keeping us buoyant) and within molecular composition. Water as synonymous with vast expanse — of global bodies and interconnectivity of waters. Wateriness as synonymous with the depths of our emotional worlds and capability for emotivity. Watery movements, turbulence, unbridled power and force. There is no holding back the torrent of water, no stopping the leaking, as with the torrents of the emotion and tears of grief. I had been attempting to hide feelings of devastating disconnection, but it had been leaking through me. Figuring out ways of coming to the surface. Neimanis is figuring out (what Donna Haraway calls) SF figurations with waters[17]. "Figuring as mapping the complexity of influxes"[18]. Figuring with our microbial companions mirrors the watery worlds of Neimanis' works, mapping connections and complexes within, upon and outside the skin 'barrier'. Figurations I understand to mean an embodiment of response and responsibility and the vast complexity of living. Figuring with microbes: "The focus is on 'collaborating' with microbes and other soil biota involved in intimate material relations of eating and feeding from each other"[19]. This leads me to the concepts of fermentation. A process of food transformation, preservation and assemblages through introductions of multi-microbial species[20] and processes of feminist figurations and entanglements of holding response-ability[21]. Fermentation speaks of collaborative processes of stronger living bonds. Leaning-in to co-creating.

## FERMENTING CAREFULLY

Fermentation is a practice of nurturing with microbes that contribute to human and more-than-human cohabitation. Fermentation is the metabolic process of micro-organisms in which carbohydrates, (i.e., starch and sugar) are converted into alcohol or acid. Our bodies are a host of biota and often this process has positive effects on human gut-biome health by introducing diversity to the population. Fermentation is a care practice of slow and gentle movements that matter (materially and intrinsically). Those who ferment, work with the minutia to cultivate communities of multi-species caring, collaboration and cross-species consideration. Creating environments that nurture those that contribute to well-being(s) while diminishing environments that might foster an imbalance or hostile state for bodily communities. Every entity within the process of fermenting foods has an involvement in the process of its mattering. Human and more-than-human interaction create living transformations from air to surface, hand to 'mother' in the creation of food. Through the processes of fermentation, foods are transformed from what might otherwise be indigestible to our bodies or even dangerous to our systems. This is a process of creating an introduction of new microbial entities to our already diverse community, in states of constantly becoming hospitable with. It takes time to create nurturing surroundings. It takes patience, and skills to notice the subtle changes of the fermenting environment. This is careful work. This is an act of leaning-in to one another.

## FERMENTING FEMINISM

Within the project and exhibition series *Fermenting Feminism*[22] (undertaken in 2016) Lauren Fournier curated the work of multiple fermentation artists and practitioners in various locations as they bubble with multispecies and intersectional feminist practices. Beginning with a oublication the exhibitions/project expanded in scope, diversity and location. *Fermenting Feminism* allows preservation and transformative processes to permeate with intersectional approaches to living in global upheaval. In Fournier's words, "they [the collaborating authors and artists] theorize the ways fermentation taps into the fizzy currents within critical and creative feminist practices. With its explosive, multi-sensory, and multi-species resonances, fermentation becomes a provocation for contemporary transnational feminisms"[23]. Location is central to the composition of fermentations, as is who is present in the process and actioning the introductions. Fournier explains further that "the fermenting body takes in bacteria and yeast from its environment and integrates it into its constitution, becoming something different than it was before"[24]. Hence, the exhibition created site responsive works that transformed as the event location changed. What was preserved and what was transformed, mirroring the fermentation processes in its situatedness, its holding of histories and transformative responses to the processes of feminist discourse. Situatedness, patience and careful interactions are as pivotal to the fermentation process as it is to our taking responsible action in these difficult times, to find actionable ways of resistance to political, economic and social systems of oppression and global devastation; To creating accessibility and practices of care, of 'self' and of multiples. "Approaching the world around us and within us through material processes and speculative metaphors of fermentation encourages us to consciously inhabit a world of mutual interdependency and finitude, in contrast to neoliberal capitalist views of infinite limits and self-directed striving. *Fermenting Feminism* queers dominant conceptions of care as well as the relationship between care work, intersectional feminisms, and community."[25] In these ways the works of Feminist Fermentation, their location and situatedness, fizz up the lines, fermenting with one another in physicality and socio-ethical practices of feminist processes.

7. (left) Rachel Topham
*Installation views (11)*
Fermenting Feminism
Access Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
September 13 2019
Documentation photographs
httpslaurenfournier.netFerment-ing-Feminism-Vancouver

8. (right) Rachel Topham
*Installation views (4)*
Fermenting Feminism
Access Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
September 13 2019
Documentation photographs
httpslaurenfournier.netFerment-ing-Feminism-Vancouver

Fermenting Feminism.
Access Gallery, Vancouver, BC. September 13 - October 26, 2019.
Group exhibition featuring work by Andrea Creamer, Eleonora Edreva & Leo Williams, Alanna Lynch, Sarah Nasby, Walter Scott, Christine Tien Wang.
Curated by Lauren Fournier

# SUMMARY: SUMMER PICNIC

***How might our understanding of complex relationship with microbes contribute to the innate need to find reconnection from feelings of isolation experienced during times of grief?***

Gathering and hosting is introduced in this picnic as collections of companion species, those we consider now to be kin including and beyond bloodlines, towards more-than-human interconnections, intersections and interplays. Separation in times of loneliness creates a perception of our singularity, individuality and separateness from others. In the Microbial Picnic of July 2020, I wondered about the experience of body, of self, as beyond individuality through to the plurality of communities. These communities being micro and macro, merging into one another, affecting how we live. I wondered if perception of broader togetherness and relationality could be a site for building resilience to feelings of separation. The emotional 'ecology' of being in mourning with others moved to seeking connection through more embodied practices with the SKEP group and to togetherness through perception of beyond human-centric interactions. In fermentation processes the use of hands is critical to the transformative process of digestibility and preservation. Every iteration of the fermentation process is unique. Each iteration and introduction of fermentation collabortors require the conscious introduction of the ecologies on skin to the process of formations of new microbial digestable ecologies. The use of hands in this process permeated with the memories of what I had learned from my father's hands. The careful consideration of how we share our physical contact with others had become a complexity in pandemic times where we are required to be careful with our physical interactions. Attempting to be with my body in its vulnerability expanded to realisations for the need to open myself to the vulnerabilities inherent in relationality, our responsibilities and capability to respond within the vulnerabilities of being in community with multiples. The Microbial Picnic created a palette for me to consider that I am not here alone but am part of something constantly. That I am not responsible just for myself. I can lean-in to the embrace of multiples — of the many.





## Endnotes

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*Autumn Picnic*

# MUSHROOM GATHERING

*21st OCTOBER 2020*

***What bonds and transformational process form through fungal and companion co-existence? Can the death and decay of fungal processes help us attune to and find acceptance of life-death-life cycles?***

# AN INVITATION TO THE MUSHROOM GATHERING

## *Empathic Bonds / Attuning*

The un-groundedness of grief and loss shook me off my feet. These were daunting times; unique and unprecedented times that came back-to-back. Family crisis meets personal crisis, meets global crises. Entwining with each other, un-steading my foothold. Death had touched my life and taken a loved one away. It had come too close, unravelling my living process, my life was fraying. So, I stood still...for months. Then took slow steps, quietly collecting mushrooms. Their transformative power drawing me back, grounding me.

I invite you to join me in slow and gentle movements through cycles of death, decay and life to learn and form more empathetic ways of understanding grief through attuning to our environmental co-creators. Come with me as we gather mushrooms; Ones from the forest and those cultivated in our 'mushroom village' during the Mushroom Gathering, the Autumn Picnic. Here is the opportunity to search for transformative processes through life-death-life cycles through opening and attuning in order to build empathetic ways of co-habiting

9. Emma Clear
*Shiitake*
2020
Acrylic and pen on paper
35 x 20cm

Painting of Shiitake created by me for our mushroom business Sieni Fungi in December 2020.

# COLLABORATORS AND AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

the mycelial network of mushroom producing fungi: the Mycorrhizal, Saprophytic and Parasitic fungi

my partner Dorian Logue

those who paid respect at the repose and the funeral

María Paloma Velázquez

Self-Organised Practice working group, especially Yvonne Billimore and Petronella Grönroos

Queer Death Studies Network, especially Mariette Radomska Tara Mehrabi and Nina Lykke

Anna L Tsing

Merlin Sheldrake

Paul Stamets

Pauline Oliveros

Dr Alex Martinis Roe and Lucia Farinati

# Funeral Gatherings

Diary: 12th October 2020

*We held hands outside in the hospital car park, my sisters and I.*

We did not know how to act. We just held one another, bonding as we waited to go to the meeting. Time slowed down to standing still. It felt to me like hours, it was not so long but time was elongated. He looked shook as he emerged from the room with my mother, we hugged him and walked past to the consultation room. A doctor told us that there was no hope for recovery. My heart broke, my body closed down, my mind clouded. The rest is a blur.

"What do you think happens when we die?" He was asked months later as they lay on the bed together, his body getting weaker by the day. "Energy is neither created nor destroyed" he had said. It simply transforms — I hope he believed. This is before his struggle to comprehend and much before his voice rattled like old metal, as he spoke his last words down the phone to me and my sister. We were not by his side but the rest of my family was. "I love you" were the last words he spoke to us. It was hours later that the phone call came — we had been in anticipation of his death and now it had come.

The fourth day after his passing was dedicated to giving space for others to say their farewell: The Repose. We had been by his side all night, 'waking' with him. Now, we would need strength for what was to come. Strength for creating room for others to say their farewell. The funeral directors would be coming soon to take my father to the funeral parlour. His loved ones brought his coffin through the passage-way, over the threshold, passing from his home, from our home, for the last time. We needed strength. However, in the midst to death, life was present around us, through family and friends and the gathering of commemorators. A Repose is a public gathering, a place for community to show esteem to the deceased and condolences to the grieving family. The queue was long. People passed through, holding hands, sharing compassionately. I made unconscious greeting gestures and spoke words without feeling the breath move past my lips. I have no memory of anything passing my lips. I could not eat that day.



On the fifth day the funeral was held. My father loved to sing. He would sing at every available opportunity, and all too often at the most inappropriate times. In the early years his singing would bring a chorus of loud protest from my siblings and I. In our adolescent awkwardness we were mortified by this openness and willingness to share his great talent so freely. But the booming bass of his voice needed unleashing and we came to expect it when we grew older as an intrinsic part of living with my father. As the lid of the coffin was being placed over him, his sister began a lamenting song of home. A song so familiar that the words rolled from us all. The song that was always sung at the end of the night. We came together through song here too connecting to past and present, forming bonds with one another through sounds and lamentations.

***"I have been longing to hear your voice. I have missed it. It was such a familiar and comforting sound for me that its absence has created a void in my soundscape. I have been searching for your voice. I can't hear it. I have been searching my memory to hear its quality; its tone; its nuances, the sounds that made your voice such a unique and powerful element in my life.***
***Your voice has been the materiality of your presence for me while I have lived far away. The sound on the other end of the phone — steering me in the right direction when I felt lost, sharing your wisdom, comforting me, connecting with me.***
***Your voice has been the teacher for me; sharing the wisdom of life-skills, of hand skills, of linguistic skills full of colourful obscenity. Even when we didn't understand their meaning, you taught us the best combinations for optimal effects and we will never forget them.***
***We sing because you did. We whistle because you taught us how. We laugh from our bellies because that is what you did. There is a hollow left when your bass is not heard. We have been longing to hear you. We have missed it."***[26]

The funeral gathering was full of beautiful voices, lamenting, singing and speaking in remembrance. A sense of a lost tradition of 'keening' as his loved ones mourned. Family and friends shared memories of a life lived in joy.

*Our sharing bonds spilled over to the funeral meal and we ate together then.*

# Bonding life and death

## THE KEENING

Where there is life there is death. However, where death is, life forms through bonds that exist and persist. To share in the vast pain of grief we come together in difference and similarity as we open up to one another. I had been trying to connect to him through the memory for his voice but I was struggling to recollect its timber. His voice was layered over with the unfamiliar rattle of illness; disguising his true soundscape from me. During the funeral gatherings we sang because he had always loved to. His choir sang in his honour. His voice was not present but we sang to fill the void that his bass had left. Singing at the funeral was a way of affirming the connection between his lived presence and the feelings of the loss his death instilled. The choirs of people needed to sing to lament the pain. Keening is a ritual artform beyond lamentations in Irish traditional ways. These are the funeral calls of old Gaelic peoples. Sounds lost to time, lost to misunderstandings, oppressions of traditional artforms by colonisers. This was the work of the unique voices of elder women — often three working together at the coffin-side or graveside to help the souls pass on. A non-linear singing, a wailing for loss. In traditional ritual, without their aid the soul could not depart. The caoineach [*quee-nock*], the crying, would begin and be passed from one keener to the other, over and back. There was no definitive melody, no way of knowing how long the keening would last. It lasted as long as it needed and with 'whisst'[27] it ended. The breadth out at its conclusion to give permission for the departure. Their voices carried souls from our realm to the next.[28] The wailing voices allowed for the empathetic coming together during the emotional weight of loss. With keeners mourners connected to one another through reverberations and lamentations, allowing for the parting of soul from the body. They gave voice to the grieving, touching souls that are in pain, connecting us to our inner landscape and that of our grieving loved ones. We needed keeners at my father's funeral but they are long gone. We sang instead opening to each other in grief.

## DEATH STUDIES

It is devastating to be faced with death. This is experienced across our species and has been observed on many occasions in our more-than-human kin. Death Studies has attempted to bring together interdisciplinary research methodologies and approaches to further understand the cultural and individual aspects of death-related attitudes and beliefs. This field of research seeks to document and explore death, dying and bereavement since scientific focus began in the late 1960's and early 1970's. However, this approach has shown a notable lack of diversity in its representation and focus. Consideration about who we grieve for and how death and dying is approached is not evenly distributed by this field of research, nor is it by the attitudes laid down in the social hierarchies of the dominant cultures of 'Western' (Northern-hemispheric) cultures. Here some deaths are proposed and supposed as more grievable than others[29]. Namely white, middle and upper-class, cis-gendered family members. This describes my family situation and coming from an upbringing in this social structuring, growing up I had the privilege of death being entirely removed from my narrative and distanced from my living processes until it was entirely present.

## DISSOCIATION

When dying processes engulfed my life it was challenging to digest the reality of them and created a distancing in me from the emotional capacity of it. Dissociation is a common response to stress. Our bodies adjust to stressors by moving from its relaxed homeostatic balanced state to one of tension and hyper-vigilance — from the parasympathetic nervous system (relaxed state) to activation of the sympathetic nervous system (stress-responsive state: hormonal changes flush through our bodies heightening senses, raising heart rate, body temperature etc.) making us respond acutely to the stressor. This movement from one state to another is vital for existence. But when stressful experiences (whether physical, mental or in expectation of) are prolonged these states can have profoundly dangerous results for bodily functioning and well-being. To feel the prolonged effects of stress (or any other emotional state that activates either the sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous system inappropriately over long periods of time) can makes us more susceptible to illness and disease and more susceptible to unconscious behaviour, such as dissociation from our surroundings over long periods of time. We develop responses to stress through bodily make-up and from learned social behaviour, but these responses require our care and attention as we navigate the world. They require careful tending, mending and updating to allow room for adjustment and considerate change, without which our behaviour can devolve into harmful and unconscious actions. Dissociation closes us down from bonding with others. Opening requires conscious attention and re-learning how to cope with stress. Opening means a re-bonding with those that share our world.

## *QUEERING DEATH STUDIES*

Queer Death Studies (QDS) attempts to mitigate the effects of closing down to the multiple ways that death, dying and mourning intersect with social and species oppressions.

> "Queer Death Studies, as we [Marietta Radomska, Tara Mehrabi and Nina Lykke] conceive it in this special issue, and in our broader network of activities within the area, builds upon different kinds of reframings, mainly characterised by the linking of death to: (1) overall societal necro-powers, structural mechanisms that systematically allow certain bodies to die; and (2) queering, a critical consideration of and resistance to the normativities constraining death, dying and mourning in modern society." [30]

QDS research and practices have been aligned through the work of the *Queer Death Studies Network* (QDSN)[31] — launched in 2016 at the G16: Swedish National Gender Research Conference in Linköping. In these working methods queering is a practice of multi-meanings, referring simultaneously to reframing death processes in the context of queer communities and bonds (queer as noun and adjective), while also using queering as verb and adverb by critiquing normativities and binaries in approaches to death, dying and bereavement studies. QDSN merges multi-perspectives and approaches as they combine methodologies from researchers, artists, students and activist. The ability to combine such approaches creates room for non-chronological and non-conventional discussions on who grieves, how and for whom. Taking questions posted by Judith Butler about whose bodies are considered grievable[32], the QDSN formulate research that create opening to non-normative death cycles while disrupting contradictions in normative responses to death. As example, in relation to non-human others, QDSN confronts the blatant (and yet often un-addressed) contradictions:

> "While natural sciences emphasise the interdependence of human and the environment, Western cultural imaginaries keep drawing a dividing line between humans and nonhuman others, particularly visible in relation to death. In such a context, dying is perceived simultaneously as a process common to all organisms and as an event that distinguishes the human from other creatures (cf. Schopenhauer [1844] 1969; Heidegger [1953] 2010; Calarco 2008)".[33]

Human-exceptionism in our death and dying ritualisations is questioned alongside gender normativity (through the highlighting of queer deaths that go unaccounted for), racialised deaths (that include contemporary discussions on counting racialised deaths and dying alongside historical racial deaths), colonial deaths (the unaccounted-for numbers in colonial history along with the repercussions of colonial activities on social behaviour and status in dominant cultures —as exampled by "Tasmanian scholar Greg Lehman (1997) emphasises, for indigenous peoples death has remained "life's quiet companion" since the very outset of the colonial conquest."[34] Life's quiet companion sits beside those who's life and death have not been accounted for in conventional cultural norms and in the studies of death. Here queering 'the norm' allows for the bonding of the lives and deaths of the often unsung for, the ones who have been quietened. It is with this approach that I formulate my thoughts with decaying and dying processes.



10. Emma Clear
*Shiitake II*
2023
Pencil drawing,
digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of shiitake with
digital paint application



# Grief: Quietening

Diary: 21st October 2020

*The fear of death and grief comes from somewhere.*

It does not live in isolation. I am sitting under a blanket in a small armchair by the fire. It crackles a little. Outside I see smoke moving low over the garden. It is kept low to the ground by the process of change in seasons during these colder days, creating a blueish haze as it disappears slowly into the trees surrounding our home. The sun beams through the silvery-blue smoke making for a beautiful autumn afternoon framed through the window of the cabin. It is only the middle of the day but the temperatures have dropped dramatically since the beginning of the month. It is "Ruska" in Finland — the name for the short period of time when the leaves change to their rusty reds and oranges, bright yellows and browns. These beautiful golds, reds and oranges flutterings dance through the air and land softly on the ground.

However, I do not want to go outside into this immense beauty. I am so very tired. I have been experiencing this deep sense of exhaustion for weeks now. I had been keeping myself running frantically for such a long time, not listening to the alarm bells ringing, the urgent signalling to slow down. I had needed some sort of permission to allow myself to stop and needed to ask someone I trust to give that to me. I could not give it to myself. But now it has come regardless of my wanting it. I wrap myself up and sleep for days. Every bodily sensation and feeling are physically and excruciatingly painful. The cold on my skin is like needles through my body; movement, like daggers in my bones. Any exertion that extends my breath feels like carrying lead weights through my gullet. I cannot allow myself to feel the cold so I wrap myself in woollens and blankets by the fire. Layers and layers of protection against the pain... of feeling grief. Here I begin to sit with the fatigue and the emotional exhaustion of living in these times. Not just my personal experience but beyond, to the fatigue faced by living in collective devastation.

Worry takes over my mind and blinds me from seeing a bigger picture. The darkness is setting in. Death and decay are all around and I need help. Immobilised by grief, I am held motionless.  It is not comfortable for me to stop, or to slow down. My body is doing it anyway, without my conscious contribution, or my mind's willingness. So much worry accumulating and piling. I have not been taking care of myself — I have not taken the care needed to stave off and sooth a hostile and over-baring mind. The hosting and gatherings of the funerals are memories now. They ended long ago. Hosting and gathering are not possible anyway, not with the global crises at hand, not with internal hostility holding me hostage, motionless. It is however, accompanied by my fierce mental resistance to it. If I slow down, I will have to remember the raw agonizing pain. These memories hold me in the ending. In the cusp between aliveness and death, the memory of his life is held.

Motionlessness is painful in an entirely other way. A stiffening of my muscles and ligaments mirrors my emotional and mental state. My partner suggests I come outside for just a little while, out into the woods behind our home. Just to see if we can find some mushrooms out there — even for half an hour. The Autumn Picnic was a gathering with my partner in slow movements through the forests, collecting, gathering, harvesting, breathing deeply, seeking out hidden connections.

*We came together then to carefully gather and to feast with fungi.*

# Embracing what is dying off

## IN DARK PLACES

I wanted to close myself off from that painful memory and living through death of a loved one. I had not been careful with myself and it brought me to a fearful place, and one of deep exhaustion. It was immensely uncomfortable to feel. The pain of it was excruciating. Profound change can feel excruciating. For me it was excruciating to imagine life without my father. The dying of one way of living and the birth of another with someone so important to me now gone, was a very painful transition. Others around me were feeling loss too — of a spouse, a father, a brother, an uncle, a cherished friend. Profound changes to our sense of mortality and abilities to live in ruination can feel excruciating too. There is so much to mourn in these times of environmental unravelling. "Autumn is a time for embracing what is starting to die off. "[35] In conversation with my friend and colleague María Paloma Velázquez, she said "There is so much to learn from organic [more-than-human] communities."[36] I now see that Maria was talking about the permanence and impermanence of death and life. The contradictory and yet inevitability of life and death cycles. Here I could open to these changes, accepting the shift in life-death cycles without resistance, creating movements towards resilience requires slowing down and attuning.

They live in dark places. Not the ones in my mind but beneath my feet in soils and leaf litter: our mycelial life giving and taking companions. They bond with multi-species and share life-giving nutrients. They share their fruits of labour, breaking down rock into compounds and exchanging them with their companions. They digest and ingest the litter, re-constituting the decaying into life-giving humus. They digest the living and the dead, creating room for more life and death after. They live with the bonds of death, life and decay in mysterious and unfamiliar ways. I was closing off to the relations around me, not able to feel the nourishing relations until I slowed down and joined my partner in gathering mushrooms. In the darkness I could try to embrace what is dying off to find empathy. Attunement beyond-human is to embrace unfamiliar life-ways. Empathy builds when we tune into what is actually happening around us in our constantly changing worlds.

## DECAY

Embracing what is starting to die off is a challenging prospect when this process encompasses the slow process of dying of a loved one. It took eight months from diagnosis to passing for cancer to invasively kill my father. This was a slow process of life's vitality draining from his body. Cancer is the abnormal growth of cells in the body. Cells grow uncontrollably and invade other cells in the body. In normal cell growth signalling tells cells when to grow and when to die off. In cancerous cells this signalling is ignored or absent as they grow exponentially. Typically, cells stop growing when they meet other cells adjacent to them but when this process is out of equilibrium cancerous cells grow beyond their normal location, invading neighbouring cells, travelling around the body. These cells use the bodies systems to aid growth, such as drawing blood vessels closer to growth sites and hijacking the immune system. From the outside we witnessed a dying body as cells within it grew uncontrollably. Drawing life away as signals degenerated. We were witnessing the decay, the in-between of life and death.

Mycelium live in the in-between in entirely different ways. They are the carriers of signalling between species, the carrier of nutrients between the living and non-living. They live with the dead, working with decay and compost materials, creating in the processes between life and death. Decay is a messy place to live in. A writer I encountered described their working processes as messy and ugly until it is churned together in slow processes. I thought of compost, I thought of mushrooms transformability within messy decay. In methodologies of writing, thinking, digesting, processing feminist thinkers are composting with decay and death. QDSN writer Mariette Radomska describes details in her writing process when discussing human and non-human, living and non-living querying with: "the slash [/] in the non/living shows that the living and non-living (and life and death) are not a binary opposition, but are intra-active, dynamic, and enmeshed with one another."[37] Here is a small example of how details in how we write assist in the composing and composting of thoughts. A slash, a thought, a tuning in to the messy ugliness of decaying matters. These changes in our thinking strategies have the possibility to allow for attuning to the ways of companion species. Attuning the experiences of a life lost, the messiness of grief and the beginnings of new ways of living I process through the transformative effects of mushroom gathering at the Autumn Picnic.

# PROJECT: MUSHROOM GATHERING

*Picnic with mycelium: 23rd October 2020*

*"The mycelium is a fabric of interconnected, interwoven strands of cells...this organism can be physically separated, and yet behave as one."*[38]

Fungi are divided into three classifications: Saprophytic, Mycorrhizal and Parasitic. As there are three main classifications of mushroom producing fungi (according to fungal living and feeding habits ) so there are three ways of approaching our mushroom picnic. Three ways we shared time with mycelium, learning ways to tune into their life ways and build empathy towards our more-than-human environmental co-conspirators. I will be sharing my time with my partner, Dorian Logue, and the organisms with which we gather nearby. A picnic with human and beyond-human residents to Laukkoski village in Pornainen. We will be approaching the autumn picnic from each of these perspectives as we gather, learn and consume with fungi.





## Death / Decay: *Cultivating with Composters*

***Saprophytic Fungi***

The fungi that compost, transforming dead materials into living organism. They recycle, digest, and reconstitute the old to transform and rejuvenate; creating the new, rebirthing life[39]. Their fibres weave through, 'digesting' molecular compounds, simplifying complex molecules and reducing organic life to its smallest elements: hydrogen, nitrogen and minerals. Releasing these elements back into the ecosystem for others to avail of. Re-complicating matter, creating humus. These are the epitome of organic life-death-life cycles. They are present at the very end of one organism's existence, working with the ending, to create new beginnings for the next cycles of life.
There are three key groups of Saprophytic mushrooms. Primary Decomposers: first to colonize organic dead matter, fast growing, initial composters (e.g., Oyster mushrooms (Pleurotus ostreatus) and Shiitake (Lentinus edodes). Secondary Decomposers: relying on activities of the primary, grown on composted materials (e.g., Button mushroom and Portobello mushroom (the same species — Agaricus bisporus). Tertiary Decomposers: these are the soil dwellers, their digestive habits are years in the making, the slow processors, where few other fungi dwell (e.g., Orange Peel Mushrooms (Aleuria aurantia).

These three groups exist in the same habitat, overlaying and mixing into one cyclical movement, working with messiness of death, decay, replenishment and rejuvenation. Many are cultivated mushroom species, ones that humans work with to compost, exploit, cultivate, use, share and feast with. To work with these organisms means to attune to their needs and take care to allow for flourishing.

## *Further Resources:*

***COMPOSTING FEMINISMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES***

Jennifer Mae Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis, "Composting Feminisms and Environmental Humanities," Environmental Humanities 10, no. 2 (November 1, 2018): 501–27, https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7156859.

***MAKING KIN BEYOND BABIES - AFTER DONNA HARAWAY, 2020***

(11min:20sec) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UtrXjE9gPQ.

# CULTIVATION PROJECTS

Helsieni *https://www.helsieni.fi/en/mushroom-dowels/#mushroom-totem*

Grow Kit and log dowel outdoor growing instructions. This is a local company that runs classes on cultivating mushrooms in your home and garden based in Espoo. They are an open-source organisation whose ethos is to share and develop collaborations and establish circular economies.

## *How to make an Oyster Mushroom Totem for your garden*

***MATERIALS:***

Birch log, saw, cardboard square, water, spent grow bag (Oyster), Hessian bag, knife.

***LOCATION:***

A shady spot with dappled light, out of harsh winds, somewhere that will get wet in the rain and water will not evaporate too quickly.

***GROWING TIME:***

Between six months and a year for the first flush.

***HOW THEY GROW:***

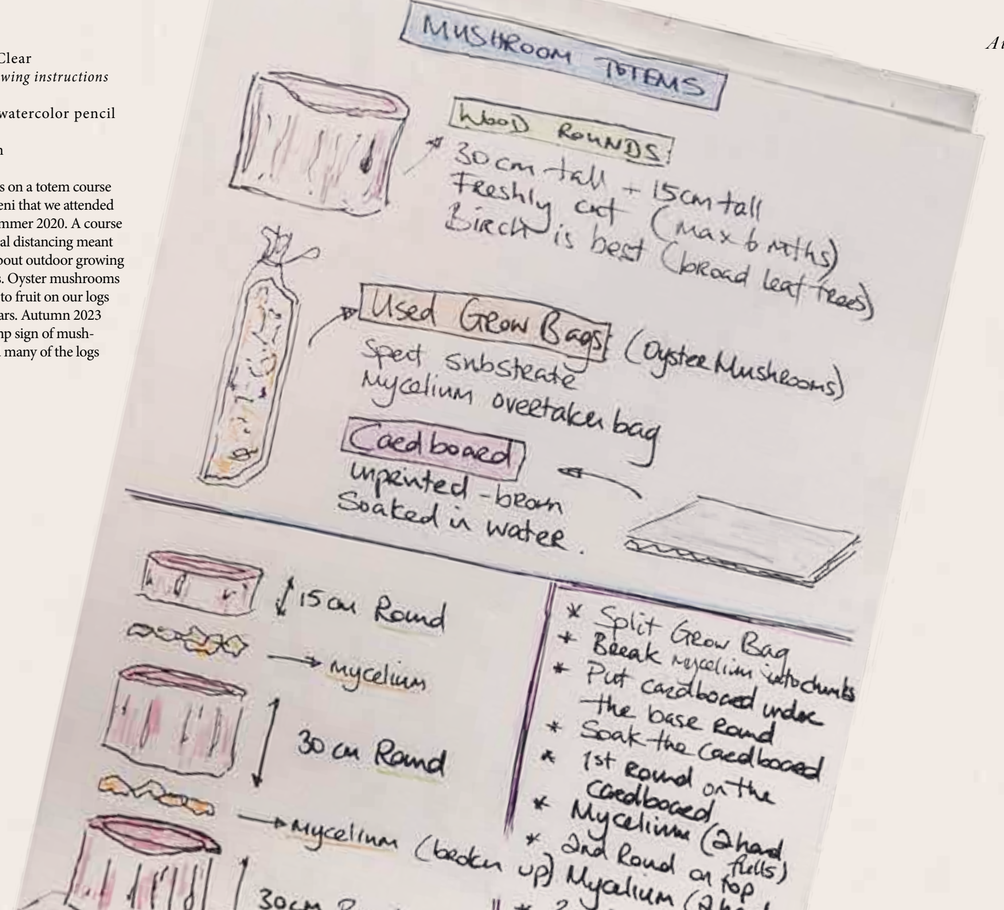
Freshly cut wood is best for creating totem mushroom logs. The wood is then inoculated with the mycelium in winter. The spawn wants damp, warm and dark conditions. As soon as the weather gets colder and wetter in autumn, and the mycelium has taken over the wood, the mushrooms will form. The totems can last up to five years before the wood has been 'spent', eaten by the fungal body and turned into humus.





11. Emma Clear
*Totem growing instructions*
2023
Pen and watercolor pencil drawing,
20 x 20cm

From notes on a totem course with Helsieni that we attended in early summer 2020. A course where social distancing meant learning about outdoor growing techniques. Oyster mushrooms continued to fruit on our logs for few years. Autumn 2023 there was np sign of mushrooms and many of the logs collapsed.



# Sieni Fungi

Sieni Fungi is the name of our small mushroom farm. From January 2021 my partner and I have been constructing buildings, creating environments and nurturing with mycelium in indoor growing spaces. Sieni Fungi now produces specialized gourmet mushrooms for wholesale within the Uusimaa region.

We established our farm in small steps with cold strain Shiitake (Lentinus edodes). Beginning on the 25th January 2021, we converted the small woodshed on the top of the hill beside the mushroom totems. The mycelium arrived from our suppliers and on the 13th March, we inoculated substrate with our shiitake spawn for the first time and placed them into the small, 1.8m x 2m growing room. Shiitake need certain environmental criteria for their growth. We monitored and recorded, humidified, heated and fanned fresh air into the space. transforming and attempting to cultivate the optimum environment as best we could.

On the 6th April (what was my father's birthday) we made three outdoor mushroom beds, inoculating them a couple of weeks later after the snow had fully melted. From here, Sieni Fungi begins its journey to work with mycelium. We seek companionable working practice with more-than-human species to help bring more stability to our lives.





12. Emma Clear
*Sieni Fungi logo*
2023
Pencil drawing and acrylic paint, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Sieni Fungi logo developed for the mushroom business by me

13. (left) Emma Clear
Shiitake Spawning room (detail)
2020
Digital photograph

14. (centre) Emma Clear
Mushroom Totems (detail)
2020
Digital photograph

15. (right) Emma Clear
Mushroom picking 1 (detail)
2020
Digital photograph

Documentation of mushroom village - growing rooms and totems on our land
2020

# *Life: FUNGAL FORAGING*

***Mycorrhizal Fungi***

These form a symbiotic relationship with plant organisms in the environment they inhabit. Creating mutually dependent and beneficial relationships with the roots of their hosts. Within forest settings the abundance of fungi varieties and the relationships with plants, soils and microorganisms are essential and fundamental to the health and biodiversity of species within forest settings. Forming life from the breakdown — of rock and minerals — and exchanging it with symbiotic partners. Amazingly the mycelium single cell hyphae (the thread-like structures that make up the living part of the fungi) immerse with and sometimes fully enter living plant's cell walls. Growing through and between the cells to create relationships of exchange on the micro level. Here water and minerals, oxygen and sugars are passed between the kingdoms. They work with soil microbiota to create huge overarching communities of connections and collaboration for world building habitats.

*"The mycelium is a fabric of interconnected, interwoven strands of cells…this organism can be physically separated, and yet behave as one."*[40]

## *Project Recordings*

***ATTUNING PROJECT I:2018***

**https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1cC1DTEUQnqm8vPi3YWCDk-3GiGjpHCov**

***ATTUNING PROJECT II: 2020***

**https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1MPwbkwemvgbUfnjGAjrLWA8DmEldvdOd**





16. Emma Clear
*Mushroom picking 1 (detail)*
2020
Digital photograph

17. Emma Clear
*Mushroom picking 1 (detail)*
2020
Digital photograph

Documentation of Yellowfoot mushroom picking in Autumn 2020

# The Gathering

As it is mid-October it is the time for Trumpet Chanterelles (Cantharellus tubaeformis) — 'Yellowfoot'. Found in late autumn and up until the first snows of winter, defining features of these mushrooms are the distinctive depression at the centre of the brown cap and their bright yellow hollow stems. The mushroom is commonly hollow from depression to base resembling a trumpet in shape. Like other chanterelle, these mushrooms have 'false gills', appearing as wrinkles instead of the more common and recognisable fungal-spore gills. These features are essential for accurate identification when foraging. There is potential for misidentification of any mushroom and potential for a disaster for sure. Trumpet Chanterelle are distinct yet there can be confusion when these little ones appear beside False Chanterelle (Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca).

### *Hide and Seek:*

These fungi like the acidic soils of largely coniferous forest habitat with interspersed deciduous trees; not too dense, dappled sunlight (a perfect Finnish forest description). They are not hard to identify but they certainly play hide-and-seek with us. They are great at obscuring themselves from scanning eyes. They look almost exactly like the fallen shavings of bark or the leaf litter that scatters the ground at this time of year from Scots pine, Birch and Acer trees. But you can smell their presence in damp air, their earthen nutty aroma as you pass above them. They love hillsides with hollows where damp moss grows thick and spongy like a soft blanket, emerging through the soft green moss. Tuning ourselves to the forest and the mushrooms aids in our search. Dorian is becoming an expert at this as the season progresses, often trekking distances through the forest, slowly moving between potential gathering places. They will grow in the same patches every year and will have many flushes throughout a season meaning you can return over and over, delighting in the bounty. Their expansion happens with mycelium growth from one root system to the next underground. When food becomes scarce, they produce their fruiting body — mushrooms. Grown to release spores that are carried by wind and fauna encounters. New lives come from their formation and other from their messy decay as they return to the soil.



# Symbiotic Partners

Mycorrhizal fungi live in symbiosis with other living vegetation such as spruce. They grow in mutually beneficial association with their companions. "Plant growth is accelerated [by the relationship]. The resident mushroom mycelium increases the plants absorption of nutrients, nitrogenous compounds and essential elements (phosphorus, copper and zinc, etc.). By growing beyond the immediate root zone, the mycelium channels and concentrates nutrients gathered through fungal/plant connections far afield exchanging with multiple plants root-systems creating mutually beneficial interdependencies. Plants with mycorrhizal fungal partners can also resist disease far better than those without."[41] These are slow growing partnerships with other organisms that develop over expanses of time. Relationships take time to form, require mutual acknowledgement of needs and forms of communication. Fungi communicate across multiple species through the mycorrhizal network below the surface. They share information through their hyphae similarly to how human brain networking operates, using electrical signalling through electrolytes. These bonds take time to forge. While gathering Yellowfoot in varying forest settings in our area we realise that there are not as many forageable fungi in younger forests.

# Further Resources

***TRUMPET CHANTERELLE***

Identifying the Winter Chanterelle, Craterellus Tubaeformis, Yellow Legs, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7leujOwKds.

'Craterellus Tubaeformis (MushroomExpert.Com)', https://www.mushroomexpert.com/craterellus_tubaeformis.html.

***MATSUTAKE WORLDS LIVE***

http://www.matsutakeworlds.org/

***HOW FUNGI MADE ALL LIFE ON LAND POSSIBLE***

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsJSzABM-K0&ab_channel=WonderWhy BETWEEN DEATH/LIFE: LIFE MAKERS AND TAKERS

# In-Between: BREWING WITH FEEDERS

***Parasitic Fungi***

Those that feed on others. One hears horror stories of the parasitic fungi (e.g., Ophiocordyceps unilateralism and Cordyceps militaries) that infest the bodies of insects, controlling behaviour, creating zombies walking to their death at the behest of fungal reproductive cycles. These are organisms that utilize host bodies to aid growth and expansion. Parasitic fungi of plant life such as the Honey Fungus (genus: Armillaria). This species 'attack' the roots of living woody and perennial plants. Within balanced forested ecosystems, mycorrhizal fungi will protect a symbiotic relationship with plant life by staving off parasitic fungal attack. In Paul Stamets argues that parasitic fungi may be misunderstood as 'evil' , yet their life ways have more complexity than such judgements. They take life from the living but they have potential to sustain life also, through beneficial (to human) medicinal qualities of fungi and moulds; such as Penicillin moulds, and fungi such as Reishi (Ganoderma tsugae and Ganoderma lucidum) and Chaga *(Inonotus obliquus)*.

## *Reishi* *(Ganoderma tsugae and Ganoderma lucidum)*

live in the dual categorization of parasitic strain and saprophytic strains for tree species such as hemlock and firs (tsugae) and hardwoods (lucidum) moving into saprophytic tendencies after the host plant dies. But these fungi are also cultivated and highly prized for their immune boosting properties in humans. Reishi has long been used in traditional east Asian remedies for long-life, calmness and balance in the body and is now selling in health food stores globally (like in Ruohonjuuri) where Reishi is sold in extract and supplement forms for human uses.

## *Chaga* *(Inonotus obliquus)*

are parasitic to birch trees of northern countries. They are prevalent in sub-arctic and humid continental climates. Entering birch trees through wounds in the bark and digesting the heartwood over decades. They appear like charcoal masses on the trunks of birch, Chaga masses are not the fruiting body but a mycelial sclerotium that cause white rot in the tree, eventually killing the host over decades (between 10-80) years). Their black colour is an abundance of melanin. Inside the black hard exterior, the fungus is soft and bright orange in colour. Beautiful sienna coloured tea is brewed from Chaga and tastes smokey and woody. Harvesting these fungi directly from the truck, these fungi have been used traditionally for their immune boosting properties, and benefits to circulatory systems in areas throughout Russia, Northern Asian and the colder Northern European countries.





# Picnic Ingredients

At first, we are not sure what to make of our bounty. My partner and I have brought together four mushrooms. Trumpet Chanterelle from the forest in and around Laukkoski village, Shiitake cultivated from our mushroom village, Button mushrooms from the local and Chaga mushroom tea from a friend in Iitti (East of Lahti). Working together, we came up with a host of recipes to transform our gathered mushrooms into our picnic.

***Saprophytic Recipes:***

CARAMELIZED SHIITAKE MUSHROOM RISOTTO

https://www.yummly.com/recipe/Caramelized-Shiitake-Mushroom-Risotto-2579932

***Mycorrhizal Recipes:***

SALTED CHANTERELLE ~a wonderful way to preserve mushrooms

http://www.dlc.fi/~marian1/gourmet/4_11.htm

MYCORRHIZAL PIZZA ~ with homemade dough base using dried and powdered chanterelle as seasoning.

https://www.carrotsandflowers.com/vegan-mushroom-garlic-white-pizza/

***Parasitic Recipes:***

CHAGA TEA ~ brewed by a friend.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyr0X5S6POo&ab_channel=DonaldPorta

***These are the foods involved in the Mushroom Gathering. I hope you enjoy the Autumn Picnic.***

# Between Life and Death

Fungi are incredibly diverse, amusing — in their appearance and behaviour — ancient, unruly and delicious. I have not kept it secret, my love for fungi. Not just in the seasonal joy of foraging but in cultivating with these organisms to become part of building future endeavours and stability on the land I am setting roots in. They live in the spaces between life and death. They live with the death and decay of life systems, within transformative change. Withing with the material and messiness left when life ends. They live too within relational systems. Between plant cell they interweave, penetrating cell walls as they seek relations with other species. They form bond, attuning to companions in their ecological habitats. They live with mourning spaces.

Developing a taste for mushrooms and an excited passion for foraging came easily to us both. It was not long before we envisioned growing on our small plot of land. Finland has a culture of wild mushroom harvesting as people meander through the forest from late summer through the autumn months. The taste for mushrooms is already here, but we could see the variety and scope of cultivating as we attempted to attune to our needs and theirs too. In financial instability, created by our personal situation and the global economic downturn during pandemic times, we saw an opportunity to work with what is around us and what skills we have.





# Decay / Death: Saprophytic

## CULTIVATING WITH COMPOSTERS: SHIITAKE

They compost litter, turning it to humus, they become/make great compost for gardens. They compost over and over working with the scraps and the messy, mushy materiality of spaces between life and death. They reconstitute material, transforming it, re-proposing it, making it. I was living in the space between life and death during the process of my father's dying. It was an immensely challenging and ugly place to be. After experiencing dying processes, after my attempts to find reconnection in the summer, the darkness came. Engulfing me in its immobilising grip. I was surrounded by shadow. But shadow is where fungi are. They live within the shadows of soils and organisms, materials and humus. With Dorian's help I began to move slowly, working with the end of former ways of living, processing the decay and mess within myself. We cultivated shiitake at my home. They were living with us, not wildly but dependant on us to help cultivate habitable environments. We needed to attune to their life ways to help foster liveability. To attune with shiitake requires my interest and investment; the willingness to observe, learn, re-learn and research their ways. Think of shiitake in their wild habitats: *shii* - oak, *take* - mushroom. They recycle the dead oak of the forest. When the oak is humus, they fruit and find new ground to feed. Think of shiitake homes: The rain comes regularly in the forest; temperature inversion settles mist low to the ground around trees and logs. Temperatures fluctuate between night and day and dappled and low autumn light. This is the environment we needed to attempt to re-create for our companions to thrive. We did this with mixing rooms (to mix substrate into bags and sterilise them, before introducing mycelium to this food source — inoculation — this room needs to be sterile to mitigate contamination); with spawning rooms (where the mycelium and food source sit for three-five months to grow, digest, popcorn[42] and brown — This room needs dark and relative warmth); in fruiting rooms (where mushrooms require temperate, bright, highly humid environment for twelve hours and cool, dark, highly humid environment for the other twelve — mushrooms form in within five days.

## FROM DECAY TO DEATH

A lot of care is needed to cultivate shiitake and we have not always gotten it right. Losing half the crop during the early stages of the process helped us realise that proper sterilization of the substrate was essential for better yields as the slow growth of shiitake can create an invitation for contaminations of moulds. We realised that having humidity too high in the early growth brings issues with rot and unusual growth patterns. When constructing the room in the cold months of the early year, we had not compensated for the heat that summer would bring. In the hottest part of the year, we realised that our fan was not cool enough to keep temperatures low for the fruiting stage. Equipment failure slowed processes further. It was a long practice of reworking and re-assessing, care and consideration.

Care was needed during my father's dying processes and upon his death, to help each of us digest what had happened. Not everyone's needs were the same. Not everyone's experiences aligned. It was a messy place where change was occurring in significant ways. Within the decay was care practices, we composted caring practices through gentle attunement and consideration.

# Life emerging within decay/death

## COMPOSTERS

Fungi are the composters of the forest. They are not themselves compost, but change-makers. They take the scraps, the fallen, the dying and the dead of the forest and they transform it. Composting has been used within feminist literature as a metaphor to highlight the importance of the ingredients that matter in feminist practices. The 'scraps' that are brought together to create humus. Scraps are often discarded materials, the outer edges and mucky ends of foods. Within *Composting Feminisms and Environmental Humanities*, Jennifer Mae Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis approach the resources and authors that matter together within the processes of the environmental humanities. Taking the mucky edges and often discarded thoughts of unsung thinkers. This work askes the question: With whom do we think and whose thoughts do we think thoughts with[43]. The intersections of oppressions[44] that quieten voices or hide them, obscuring them from view (and review) are highlighted in this text through discussion on citation in the field of the environmental humanities. Here compost is used as metaphor for the collections of multilayered and sometimes mucky thinkers (scraps thinkers) that are involved in the way we form and materialise social and philosophical thought. Intersectional approaches to citation could allow for recognition of more diverse and broad thinking/thinkers. Composting brings the 'scraps' of our foods together in nurturing considered ways (combined carefully in compost bins with worms, and microbes, and warmth). Hamilton and Neimanis propose bringing together the often-unsung thinkers and writers to create more diverse, complicated and nourishing perspectives while disrupting over simplification and narrowing viewpoints.

## FUNGAL COMPOSTING

Fungal ways might assist in complicating our thinking through considering the ways in which fungi compost dead matter. Initial composting fungi (first composters) digest the litter material of the forest. Without the 'shiitakes' of the forest debris would over-take the planet. There would be no soil, no humus without their contributions. They break-down the tough materials of the forest. Working with shiitake takes careful consideration as does working with processes of dying. It is tough work but learning to attune to self and the needs of the living/non-living of our environment can allow for the difficulty of dying and decay to be digested. After the grimy mucky mess of initial composting, the mess of the initial days after death comes grief, the compost begins to form. The second composters work with this compost. These are the 'portobellos' of the fungal world. In grief the process of churning over and over begins. I had initially avoided this through disconnection but in the autumn picnic this process began. I began to move more slowly and sought refuge in the forest with Dorian. These composting fungi work and rework the soil, enriching it, settling it. This process for me took time, working and re-working the emotive compost of grief. Then comes the tertiary composters. The 'orange-peel fungi'. They work with ruination, with slow processes, with re-creative and reforming in the ruins. This thesis is the slow process of my grief-work. I am working the ruins within myself. It has taken time to work with and through. I churn and churn with thoughts, emotions, hoping for clarity, hoping to re-create in ruination. *The Mushrooms at the End of the World*[45] aids in my thinking on living in ruination. Tsing makes vital connections with fungal relations and unruly edges. Here the discussion brings matsutake with human and more-than-human life ways to expand the notion of possibilities of living in capitalist ruination. She does this by following matsutake through ruined lands and exploited peoples with attempts at reforming fungal connections and thereby some re-connection to environment. Tsing is suggesting to start from this point, move on from here with more care and consideration, with more attuned and empathetic approaches. To move from this point in my grief work is to churn with my emotive state, accepting it, tuning into my steps within my environment, whether that is in my emotional world or the physical world I am part of.



18. Emma Clear
*Mushroom picking 3 (detail)*
2020
Digital photograph of
Yellofoot in moss bed

# Life: Mycorrhizal

## FUNGAL FORAGING: YELLOWFOOT

I retreated to the forest to find light in dark places. Slow movements by foot to find nourishing organisms. I was searching for ways of living anew after the decay and death and so I searched for mushrooms with Dorian. With quiet voices we gathered, with attention we attuned to them, seeking out their hiding places, gathering knowledge about their ways.

## ATTUNING PROJECT I: 2018

There was a clicking sound that I was not expecting. I was unsure if it was water moving down the spruce tree that I was beneath in preparation for the winter months freeze. But no matter. Whether mycelium or root system there was clicks in the dark dampness. The white webbing was interconnected to soil whisperings below my feet. I needed to stay very still to hear the clicks. I could not quite distinguish these sounds. I could not label it or tell it apart. I could not untangle it. But I felt their sounds: the white noise of white webs.

## KEEPING KNOTS INTACK

What if tangles and complexities are not untangled? This is a thought I encountered in Merlin Sheldrake's *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our worlds, change our minds, and shape our futures*. The sounds occurring beneath soil that I captured in 2018 with a microphone might not need to be untangled from their environmental soundscape. Sheldrake follows the threads of mycelium (hyphae) in this work, not to attempt unknotting, but to allow space for the uncertainty and possibility that a tangle arises in us. This was initially a deeply uncomfortable premise for me as the tangles of rumination overcame my mind, as grief and darkness were excruciating to bear. I deeply wished to unfurl from it and simplify through unpicking it, but in their nature the tangles were complex and entwined. Instead, attending to the presences below the soil slow process of change occur by using multi-senses to feel bonds that were broken with grief/death. These bonds are still there but are transformed by changing circumstances and situations. I can no longer see or hear my father but his presence is still felt. The knots and tangles are still with me now but attending to them as they are, requires a practice of attuning, of deeper listening to form connections and relations beyond hearing alone.

## ATTUNING PROJECT II: 2020

In October 2020 Dorian and I went to the forest to collect Yellowfoot (Suppilo Vahvero — Trumpet Chanterelle) We moved quietly again wandering off the forest paths. In the hollows between rocks and furrows, on soggy mossy forest slopes, Yellowfoot mushrooms hide. They are hardy and persistent; clinging to the soil and moss on the edge of rock faces, in hollows and holes in rocky and grassy areas in lower ground. Your 'mushroom eyes' turn on and it's as though, like magic, they reveal themselves and they are everywhere around you. Once you bend to pick one up, others seem to come out of their hiding places at your feet. We need to think with our mushroom companions; give thought to their living processes; being careful, conscious and conscientiousness. When the spores (the new fungal life) land in a new and suitable environment they seek warmth and dark damp spaces to nurture themselves. Throughout the summer, protected from direct light and heat, they eat. The hyphae mats and webs as they seek food as they share with their symbiotic companion species. They occupy the area, breaking down the substrate until the minerals are absorbed and the wood is transformed into humus. And in autumn they fruit. They are so alien to human ways that we need to seek knowledge about their living ways to know where to find them and why. We listened to the forest, attuned to their life ways to encounter the companions of our picnic.

## FORMING ENTANGLED BONDS

The kingdoms (soil microbes, flora and fauna, fungi, creatures) interdependent and in collaborative relationships, attune to one another. To form bonds with companions requires deeper empathetic practices of care. It requires our attuning to the ways of another, showing compassion and inquisitiveness to ways of living that are otherwise vastly unfamiliar. Opening up to differences and multifaceted knowledge production. I could try to read about mycology or analyse species, alone from the periphery — or I could encounter with multi-senses. Not just seeing or hearing or touching but immersing physically, emotionally, mentally. Consciously and considerately learning with entangled ecologies with my emotive investment. Attuning to the symbiotic relationships, the relations of ecologies within our environment, could be approached through attention and interest in the collaborating agents and companion species, the non/living that are part of it. An empathetic attuning practice through inquisitiveness and checking[46], sensing and feeling. Slow movements with more careful steps can create space for such sensorial practices. A form or more careful attuning with intent, attention and depth could be enacted through the introduction of practices of Deeper Listening.


19. (left) Tiberio Sorvillo
*To Become Two (installation view)*
arge kunst, Bolzano
2017
Photograph
https://alexmartinisroe.com/To-Become-Two.

20. (right) Niels Moolenaar
*To Become Two (installation view)*
Casco - Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht
2016
Photograph
https://alexmartinisroe.com/To-Become-Two.

To Become Two exhibition series. Exhibition design by Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga. Images retrieved from To Become Two - Alexmartinisroe.com.

# From death comes life

## ATTUNING

How we attune to the ways of another is crucial to how we form empathy towards our cohabiting kin. Empathetic listening is a therapeutic form of reconnecting with others through listening practices that require active participation. Deeper Listening extends this practice to attune to environment and sensorial input from non/living, human/more-than-human encounters. By attentiveness to surroundings, removing distractions, reflecting back and paying attention, *Deep Listening* practices moves beyond a passive act of listening to encompass environmental contributions

> "For me Deep Listening is a lifelong practice. The more I listen the more I learn to listen. Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard, expanding to the whole field of sound while finding focus. This is the way to connect with the acoustic environment, all that inhabits it, and all that there is."[47]

Attuning through deeper listening practices requires slowing down my over-active responses, finding deep sensitivity without reactivity. During the times of decay and death processes, I worked with the collaborative project Self-Organised-Practice, initiated by my friends and colleagues Yvonne Billimore and Petronella Grönroos. In one session we worked with care and gentleness through the introduction of deep listening practices of the artist and researcher Dr Alex Martinis Roe in the project *To Become Two*. A set of six film installations following the genealogy of collective feminist political practices within six feminist groups. From *To Become Two: Proposition #12* Martinis Roe develops listening practice with Lucia Farinati:

> "Listening as an active practice is one that can also open us up to our relational co-becoming with non-humans and our environment. The false dichotomy of nature and culture is ingrained in the universalist ideas of language that have historically, in the West, excluded the uniqueness of the speaker and the listener and the importance of their relation. What has been excluded is the body, the voice, the vocal chords, the ears, the brain, and the organs that have constructed and continually reconstruct and inflect our language. And this exclusion of the body and, more broadly, nature from our concept of language is what has caused our destructive relationship with our environment. Excluding the feminine from culture has both justified and caused the treatment of women as objects, and similarly the definition of culture against nature has justified and caused the exploitation of natural resources. It is with this conceptual habit of isolating subject from object, ignoring their relationality-for example, that human culture is part of larger ecologies, not separate from them that violence and destruction operate. In this way, feminist and environmental activism are one project, since the causes of the violence they seek to redress are ultimately entangled. The practice of active listening opens up the possibility for understanding our experiences and responding to them in ways that challenge the self-other dichotomy."[48]

Martinis Roe and Farinati created a listening project focused on the relationality and embodiment of resonance of voices[49] as fundamental to attuning and empathetic practices of co-existing. They negotiated speaker and listener relationships as creators of meaning and an intrinsically relational and reciprocal experience. In such ways through the slow processes of attuning to co-creators, mycorrhizal fungi attune to relational needs. To tune into this, for us to encounter them, inquisitiveness of their life ways is needed and conscious careful consideration of relational bonds is essential.  For Pauline Oliveros Deep Listening practices are intentional and considered. "Deep has to do with complexity and boundaries, or edges beyond ordinary or habitual understandings […] Deep coupled with Listening or Deep Listening for me is learning to expand the perception of sound to include that whole space/time continuum of sound […] Such expansion means that one is connected to the whole of the environment and beyond."[50] To attune more deeply to the processes of death and decay is to encounter life that comes from it. I approach attuning practices from the perspectives of QDSN writer Marietta Radomska: "Processes of living and dying, and growth and decay are not approached here as binary oppositions, but as complex interwoven phenomena."[51]  Listening intently and consciously has the capacity to open worlds of knowledge with gentle consideration. It has the capacity to deepen empathy and shift perspective to the ways in which decay, death and life tangle deeply in our worlds. We do not need to untangle these complexities, unpicking them, separating them from each other and the greater environment, but encounter them where they are and where we are within them. To form bonds is to allow these entanglements to remain intact and to approach with empathetic consideration to the multi-ways of life and death cycles. Attuning to multiple ways in grief and life and death.



# In-between: Parasitic

## BREWING WITH FEEDERS: CHAGA

Mycelium webs with my thoughts as I attempt to navigate darkness while gathering and picking, cultivating and nurturing with, becoming-with[52] my grief. They live all over: within us and without us, in undisturbed and highly disrupted places. They allow for (and create) necessary changes in our surroundings. When we think of autumn as a time for "embracing what is starting to die off"[53] it is fungi that comes to mind. They transform and compound and matter. They matter in their importance, in environments and biodiversity, they matter materials from one form to another. They exist in the transition between living and dying. Their hyphae are fragile enough to breakdown and disconnect in extreme climate fluctuation and yet can break down solid rock to extract nutrients. How they matter impacts greatly on our liveability and our decay and death. How they metamorphize has transformative possibilities for attending to grief processes. Their ability to live in ruination has the potential for us to find ways to build resilience to fatigue from the emotional weight of climate breakdown. They are the ones that live in changing and disrupted environments. Like the so called "weeds" and "pests" of the planet, fungi live in disturbance, often human made disturbance, adapting to the changes made and finding ground within it. Tsing uses this ability to live in ruination to broaden our view of what is possible in environmental disaster in *Mushrooms at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Through the complexity of contamination and relationality, Tsing works with fungal encounters, intersects, responses, consequences of living with death, decay and life that comes from them.

## CONTAMINATION AND MEDICINE

Some fungi contaminate living hosts. The parasitic fungi: digesting live tissue and fibres in processes of death and dying. We often regard their horror as unpalatable but that is it put all into the same category. There are those in this in-between state that render medicine for human benefit. Here I think of Chaga (Inonotus obliquus). This fungus, when brewed or ingested as supplement has been associated with human tissue inflammation reduction. As remedy it is thought to boost the immune system and have cancer fighting abilities. Slowing down cancer cell growth through antioxidant qualities. These speculations are not deeply researched but this mushroom has been brewed in Finland and other places for generations. This is a fungus that lives in the space between life and death for multiple species; killing host trees in ten to eighty years; being host to the multitude of organisms that live on and within the cracks that the fungi form on their host. When harvested they have the potential to extend life for human bodies while slowing the life of cancerous cells.[54] I think of chaga while digesting my grief of loss from cancer in particular. In-between life and death, decaying processes overwhelmed my emotional being and my body. I drank Chaga brew to stave off bodily inflammation from the stress of grief, I drank it to calm my mind.

# SUMMARY: AUTUMN PICNIC

***What bonds and transformational process form through fungal and companion co-existence? Can the death and decay of fungal processes help us attune to and find acceptance of life-death-life cycles?***

I was searching for the bonds of love, the sounds of his voice, in dark times but I could not find them. The rattle of illness overwhelmed his soundscape obscuring it from my grasp. A form of keening was present in its absence. Singing together to fill the void his base had left. After gatherings, during autumn months grief overcame me in the darker days. Beauty was all around but the shadows were engulfing my mind. I slowed down and attempted to tune into the gentler bonds happening below my feet. I was seeking bonds with fungal strands.

We mourn the end of nurturing bonds. We mourn the endings of our bound eco-system, as I have been morning the bond with a parent. We mourn endings but fungal companions show the cyclical nature of existence through their life ways. They live in dark places beneath my feet and are forever in transformative relations with companions. Living in the between spaces of life-death-life cycling. To attune to this relational system has potential for transformative strategies for resilience to form. Here fungi work with decay, they compost difficulty, tough materials and elements and reconstitute them to nourish again. They rejuvenate and create nurturing soils for growing foods and plants and trees. I attempt to bring the scraps together to reconstitute difficult feelings with thinkers and writers that help me re-imagine my bonds with others. In our home Dorian and I work with the composters to find stability in our living situation and in my emotional world.

Fungi create relations with others in wild spaces. Beneath my feet in darker times, I went to the forest to gather their fruit. They attune to companions in entangled life-ways that nurture and bond with one another. Here are relations human/more-than, fungal/more-than, working in symbiotic relations in carefully constructed companionship. Attuning for me happened in Deeper Listening practices as I worked with the dying process of my father's life. Attuning here allowed for empathetic flourishing with multispecies cohabitors. When stress overwhelmed my body, I brewed fungal tea to calm spirit and nourish my tired body.

In processes of decay, life and death cycles are potential for conscious composting and empathetic careful practices of attuning. In between is the possibility for calming overwhelmed minds. Here is where mycelium live and decay and die; here life starts again.





## Endnotes

26 My father's Memorial Letter. Written by me in August 2020 after a year of searching for any recordings that I could find of him before he got sick. Sadly, I was not successful in my search and his voice remains in my memory alone.

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40 Paul Stamets, Growing Gourmet & Medicinal Mushrooms: Shokuyō Oyobi Yakuyō Kinoko No Saibai]: A Companion Guide to the Mushroom Cultivator. Berkeley, Ca: Ten Speed Press, 1993, p 15.

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42 'Popcorning' is a stage in the process of shiitake cultivation where the blocks create nodules from where the mushrooms will eventually form. This looks like hard popcorn within the bag. Between popcorning and fruiting the block will change colour from white to a rusty dark brown. The blocks are then hit with the palm of the hand simulating the stump falling. From then the mushrooms will begin to form at the site of the popcorn nodules.

43 Donna Jeanne Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

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*Winter Picnic*

# AFTERNOON TEA

*21st DECEMBER 2020 - 6th APRIL 2021*

***How might the stories we re-tell about the ingredients of our food contribute to finding resilience in our grief? How do the stories of ingredients matter?***

# AN INVITATION TO AFTERNOON TEA

## *Acknowledging Reality – Storytelling*

The distance I wanted to put between myself and the uncomfortable reality of my naive participation and complicity in perpetuating rituals of colonialism was intensely felt. But it was there in front of me. I understood then, with a veil lowered, that the uncomfortable ingredients of afternoon tea needed my careful attention and my willingness to face the reality of my ignorance. I had not given the ingredients, these rituals, their due before this point. Reflecting on the gathering with my family for my father's memorial in August 2020, on our ceremonies of grieving and tea, I began to see that there were ingredients for unlearning and re-framing, distressing histories that I needed acknowledging. These histories are ingredients for the deep grieving that spans my personal life, global and generational traumas, and to lived experiences beyond human grief. Afternoon tea is not an innocent gathering but one full of 'airs and graces', full of uncomfortable, disturbing histories and fringe storying needing to be told. Here are mournful events — ingredients of deep grief. I am inviting you to Afternoon Tea, to sit with me in uncomfortable yet essential re-storying as I move towards resilience and living more carefully. Here I introduce many ingredients, but we follow one in particular: a mother that contributes to transformation and acknowledgement of our impact on others.

# COLLABORATORS AND AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

**my mother and sisters — with special mention to Niki Clear**
**extended family at the memorial afternoon tea**
**Albina Hipp**
**Elspeth Probyn**
**Maria Paloma Velázquez**
**Donna Haraway**
**Ursula K. Le Guin**
**Robin Wall Kimmerer**
**Andrea Arnold**
**Breeze Harper**
**Greta Gaard**
**Holly Cleever**
**Ida Bencke**
**and especially Luna and her unnamed child,**
**representing bovine mothers and their calves**

21. Emma Clear
*Afternoon Tea (detail)*
2021
Pencil drawing, tea, milk and food on cotton tablecloth
160 x 160cm

Feminist Food Studies course project. This is a detail of the tablecloth where drawings of the ingredients of tea are arranged as the tablecloth decorations. Stains of milk, tea, blackberry jam and sugar water became rancid over a short period of time. The table cloth no longer exists and digital documentation is the only evidence of it

# Memorial Gatherings

*Diary: 11th April 2021*

*"That's disgusting"*

I love the person that said this to me very much. I do not love what they said when they saw me pour oat milk into my tea. The sting of discomfort and internal fragility was a sharp pang in my heart. I felt the harshness of the comment in my bones on a day when I was already experiencing immense vulnerability. I wanted to find the bravery to respond but couldn't. I did not want to create an uncomfortable atmosphere, not then, not on that day. Instead, I laughed it off and subtly left the table, quietly mouthing a generic excuse and got more tea for the people gathered. I served them where they sat and placed the teapot on the table. Returning again after a few moments to pour more milk into the jugs on the dressed tables beside vases with cut flowers and delicate tea cups on the crisp cotton tablecloths. I love dressing the table, especially for afternoon tea. Since I was a child, this has been my role for any celebratory event in my family home. I have always enjoyed the ceremony of afternoon tea: beautiful cotton embroidered tablecloths that my grandmother crafted; bone-china cups and saucers, side plates, silver spoons and cotton napkins; two milk jugs (one with a "milk" label and one with "mylk"— so that people won't get mixed up). My dad loved tea from china cups as his family loves the demure and sophistication associated with afternoon tea. I have loved the ceremony too — until I think about it more intently.

It was a year since my father's passing. The restriction of global upheaval had meant that we were held in suspense and unable to intern his ashes until the year after his passing. Waiting and holding (it together) was agonising in the preceding months and the yearning for my mother, sisters and I to come together had become frantic in the lead up to that emotionally turbulent day. But we were together now and wanted to commemorate his memory after the internment at his family grave where a portion of his ashes now lay. We brought his siblings together with food, holding afternoon tea in our garden in the hot August sun. Afternoon Tea in a middle-class garden in Limerick, a city in the southwest region of Ireland.

Here were grieveable ingredients and mourning : Barry's tea (an Irish-owned brand), cotton embroidered and lace-crocheted tablecloths, bone china cups, milk and 'mylk' (oat milk), white granulated sugar in bowls, three different scone types (vegan, gluten- free and 'normal' (all labelled), cream (clotted and whipped — the vegan oat cream was left inside so that people wouldn't get confused), jam (shop bought strawberry and homemade blackberry), multiple litres of water, numerous flies, ants, wasps, butterflies and many more I did not register, cut flowers (some from the garden, some brought to us as memorial bouquets — helping to attract more insects to the tables), aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends; partners, sisters, my mother and I. The tea and scones were served to my father's family by my two sisters and I in order to create the most appropriate bodily distances for people during this short respite from coronavirus restrictions. We washed our hands frequently and disinfected anything that would be used between people. Some people wore masks outside as well as in. There were 15 people in the garden, absentmindedly swooshing away insects with napkins in the hot sun. It was a beautiful day and we relished each other's company but this day held a lot of pain.

*Not only mine but the pain of many.*

## REALISATION

I was so taken with a lecture given by Albina Hipp from the Åbo Akademi University's Gender Studies Department. The lecture was titled: "Human, Animals, Land and Colonisation". A slide showed a Victorian afternoon tea table laid out in all its grandeur. It posed a question: "What drove and helped sustain European political and land expansion globally?" The slide filled the screen and my attention, as reality hit me with a blow. It filled my mind with memories of afternoon tea in the garden; of my father's memorial gathering. The feeling of immense uneasiness within me was immediate and disturbing. I wanted to close my eyes to the shame of my complicity in perpetuating rituals of colonialism. Afternoon tea is a ritual flaunting the treasures of colonial exploitations: the cotton, tea, sugar (etc.) came from violent and oppressive origins. The ritual of tea, a gendered and classes affair. A boasting of pillage and global exploits. Here too are exploitations and grieving beyond human-centricity. There are many ingredients here at the afternoon tea table that feel uneasy. I might have attempted to block the discomfort. I could have tried to excuse myself or stay quiet. But that would not have helped. That would not have allowed for grief to transform. The veil needed lowering and I needed to face the reality of my ignorance. Reflecting on the gathering with my family, on our ceremonies of grieving with tea, I could see that there were ingredients for unlearning innocence narratives and acknowledging distressing histories that had been shut out of the dominant stories told. Here, sitting in discomfort, was a possibility for change. Not as a brave act — the action with a hero — but one of humbling shame recognition, an essential act to de-colonising thinking for more careful living.

Irish people drink tea in times of difficulty. We gather with tea. But we do not question where it comes from. We do not think about why or how this comes about. We tell ourselves stories about how we have no hand in harmful acts. But then we put milk in our tea. We don't question it. We don't think about those that contributed to these ingredients. Where did the milk come from? How did it come to be on our table? We don't think about the grief involved in our grief gathering. It is difficult to face shame as it is difficult to face loss.

## SHAMEFUL

Shame sat with us as we drank tea at the table, making others comment, keeping me silent. It sat heavy with me as I watch the screen fill with images of Victorian afternoon tea. Shame is endemic in Irish culture (as it is often in cultures that have a heavy catholic influence) and when stressors in our lives over-come us, shame has the propensity to over-whelm our internal narratives. But shame is not culturally bound. It is a shared experience with far reaching repercussion. Shame relates to our perceptions of self and it tangles with the ways in which we situate ourselves. Feeling ashamed is deeply uncomfortable and intensely complicated.

With the cold sweat of dread, shame overcomes us. It clouds our mind and sends us into stress responses (or more accurately, reactions). Obvious reactions to shame can be: needing to flee from distressing feelings, to lashing out at others and creating distance through pushing away our own responsibility onto others. It can be to close down to the world and hide from discomfort, coddling ourselves, or to justify our actions/inactions by creating innocence narratives and excuses, to make ourselves 'right'. (As my sister Niki once told to me: "There are always reasons for bad behaviour, but never excuses for them". We can be compassionate to the reasons while denouncing the behaviour and calling for better.) Shame has the power to erode our sense of self, our compassion, our relate-ability and our relationships. When employed as a mechanism of social control it has the capacity to erode comradery that would create room for social changes towards equity for all. This has occurred with devastating consequences for marginalised communities throughout the development of the society of which I am a part — a 'western' capitalistic culture grown in patriarchal, white supremacy. Shame has the power to separate us from one another, create internal anguish and externally to create individualism, binaries and divisions. Shame has the power to overwhelm our sense of empathy and compassion towards others, creating judgments and assumptions about others that can be deeply harmful. Shame creates structured narratives while closing us off to nuance and complexity in the stories of our lived experiences.
However, shame has many guises and it seems with the aim to shed the generational shame inflicted on marginalised bodies, paradoxically, shame has been employed as a tool for social change. Acts of boycotting, calling-out and calling-in[55] and cancelling have been employed as tools in our digitalised world for initiating change through public and institutional shaming. These acts have the potential to have extreme divisive responses both as a beneficial tool for activists working towards equity and a tool for creating deeper and more polarising standpoints.[56]





22. Emma Clear
*Afternoon Tea (detail)*
2021
Pencil drawing, tea, milk and food on cotton tablecloth
160 x 160cm

This is a detail of the mother and calf drawing that was the central design of the tablecloth. Milk stains decayed to a bright yellow rapidly before documentation of the tablecloth commenced. The tea stains also contained milky tea with one spoon of sugar

## *POWER IN SHAME*

Re-visiting Niki's thoughts, "denouncing the behaviour and calling for better", is where shame can have the propensity for deep change. It is deeply uncomfortable and distressing to feel ashamed and the discomfort is universally felt. Jill Lock in her work, *Shame and the Future of Feminism* found that "Jennifer Manion describes shame as a "self-reflective emotion of negative global assessment, [which] involves a painful, sudden awareness of the self as less good than hoped for and expected, precipitated by the identification ... of a seemingly significant character shortcoming."[57] There is little dispute within the literature that being ashamed is an awful feeling.[58] Rightly I believe, Locke discusses the oppressions of marginalised groups through shaming as being gendered, racialised, classed. Locke's writings suggest that shaming is not an adequate tool for change as it often perpetuates oppressions on the already oppressed, whether by being shamed by another or internally scrutinising. When experiencing traumatic shame, I agree that the weight of shame is often a debilitation. Traumatic shame requires gentleness to help move through. However, when reading Elspeth Probyn I can open to other forms of shames as having possibilities to assist in changing the stories we are telling to ourselves and to others.

When we experience shame, it can shake our beliefs in who we are to the core. But this core might need to be shook up sometimes. The personal reckoning that can accompany our feelings of shame when confronted with new perspective and narratives has unbounded possibilities for transformation were we to be open to uncomfortable feelings. What we do at this point can determine whether lasting change occurs. Do we stay in comfort and protect our narrative at all cost against disruption, or do we dare to meet the challenges? In *Blush: Faces of Shame*, Probyn expresses that:

> "Shame is not subversive. Shame just is. How it is experienced and theorized varies, but nonetheless it is a fact of human life. It is productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, societies, and human interaction. That shame is both universal and particular, universalizing and particularizing, should be a resource, not a point of division. Shame raises questions of great and enduring interest concerning what it means to be human. Shame also demands that big questions be asked in a modest way."[59]

The productive potential of shame, Probyn explains in interview, is framed as generative and not in the confines of 'good or bad'. When she talks about the productive potential of shame she dives into the restorative and ethical work of self-reflection and disturbing narratives to move closer to our ethical ideas of who we are.[60] Shame highlights interest Probyn suggests. And the generative effects of interest is what holds the argument in Blush: Faces of Shame, and keeps Probyn is so engrossed when it comes to shame's productivity and transformative potential. If we were not interested, we would not feel so ashamed. What we do with it, is what holds the potential.

I have been interested in storytelling and the stories that are told. The generative effects of interest, of shames potentiality has allowed for my opening to the untold stories of Afternoon Tea.





23. Emma Clear
*Afternoon Tea (detail)*
2021
Pencil drawing, tea, milk and food on cotton tablecloth
160 x 160cm

Sugar cane and blackberry bush cuttings radiate from the mother and calf central design.

# Grief: By the fire

*Diary: 5th January 2021*

*The slowness and darkness continue to descend throughout the wintery days.*

The impact of the reality of the changes to my life weigh heavily on me in the gloominess. Memories flood my mind as my body stills. I hold memories like stories unfolding before my eyes as I attempt to recover from distraught feelings. I tell, recall, retell stories of final moments; stories of what could have been, what will never be.

How I tell these stories impacts my framing of them. How I tell stories creates the framework of how they embed into my memory. How I tell these stories is vitally important to how I remember him. I fill in gaps in the narrative. I was not there with him. I was here. He is not there anymore but he is here with me in my memories. He is here in the unfolding of my grief. Here I can recall the details of his life and his connection to me. I want to honour these stories.

I stoke the fire, placing another block of wood over glowing embers. There is no way to deny the reality of what has happened. There will be no new memories made with my father now. There is instead only the recalling of the past, of what has been before. He is not here anymore.

*I am here. stoking embers. telling stories. recalling history.*





# Remote Storytelling

## REMOTE TRAILS FOR NATURAL CONNECTIONS

We started the Facebook group[61] *Remote Trails for Natural Connections* as the pandemic hit Finland. Like everyone else at the time, we were making attempts to keep connections with our colleagues as our whole world isolated from one another and shifted to the digital realm. Maria Paloma Velázquez had been my companion through these remote connections for months (between March 2020 and December 2021) and here we told stories. With her guidance and comradely, we searched and foraged for stories, sharing them back and forth via open Zoom sessions: *Remote Storytelling* — for deeper connections. For me this was a lifeline in dark times. Keeping me attached, as I held on by a thread. Storytelling has always been a part of my life but it was at this point that I understood how it can hold connections and form bonds. The earliest sessions were a challenge for me to find different and more diverse stories. I have many folk tales in my collection but these stories are often the same normative narratives: of a hero defeating a monster, of shame and a moral message of redemption, a fear of a terrible 'other' who can steal your humanness away, of punishment for inquisitiveness and curiosity… It took some guidance and some foraging to find new perspectives. Maria and I sought out some very beautiful others: Ones portraying movement from human living to vegetal existence,[62] visual storying of queering animal/human mythologies,[63] stories of the dead and the bones,[64] and so many more. Each of these enriching a movement away from the dominant narratives of redemptive hero or fragile heroin, of human centrality. Here we engaged with 'the carrier bag'[65] and unpacked its contents as we gently held space together. On Monday 21st December at 17:00 we hosted the *Winter Solstice Remote Storytelling Session*. This was to be our final session which brought Turtle Island origin story[66] (of indigenous American indigenous origins) with a movement through arboreal perspective. That evening we danced in our gardens. I told the stories by my hearth. The stories that were told were brought together with wintery snacks and drinks: Glogi, trail mix and vegan ginger biscuit recipe suggestions were shared in the invitation to the solstice event.

On Sunday 17th January 2021, Maria and I gathered for walking, trail mix and storying.[67] We met in Ruoholahti to walk by the frozen waters in Lapinlahti. Along our walk we had each collected trail mix ingredients for our journey. "'Trail mix as a journey companion through life" Maria suggested. The process of digesting and consuming information, knowledge sharing, nourishing and energy giving back and forth. As we walked, we were walking stories together. Storying our trail mix ingredients: fresh to dried, salty to sweet, nutty to tangy, soft to hard. As we shared each other's mix, we shared each other's words, creations and collections. Our reasons for including these specific ingredients: I want to bring diverse the ingredients together to create broader nourishment. Things that are not often put beside each other, that do not grow together, can come together to nourish us as we walk and think and talk. Maria's ingredients were brought together from ingredients that could be grown here in Finland. Foods that can easily be sourced, ingredients that most people can get in their local shop. Popcorn and cinnamon, walnuts and dried fruit. The expense of walnuts can be balanced against the relative inexpensiveness of popcorn kernels. That cinnamon is synonymous with Finnish baking — Maria's mix was delicious; sweet, spicy and satisfying. I hadn't anticipated the colonial and plantation histories of my ingredients. How colonial histories are embedded in access to a base ingredient of trail mix, peanuts. Brought through the slave trade to places all over the colonised world from its origins in South America. And here posed difficult questions: What of local and global ingredients? What of globalism, nationalism and localism? What are the ingredients of these ideologies? What are the stories of these ingredients? I could not unpick that there. I needed to understand more and so I joined the Feminist Food Studies course, an open course held by the University of Tampere, Faculty of Social Sciences, with Maria in March 2021. This led me to Afternoon Tea. It's not easy to tell difficult stories. It's not easy to hear to them. But I must.

# PROJECT: AFTERNOON TEA

*Feminist Food Studies: 23rd April 2021*

Tea is integral to my mother culture and during times of vulnerability, tea is overflowing. Coming together with tea as event, as substance, as ingredient, is intrinsic to how my family have gathered. It is part of every event, big and small, every visit and happening. In vulnerability, coming together with tea invokes comfort and familiarity. It warms the belly, filling-in feelings of hollowness or anguish. But it is layered with complexity and complications. Ladened with complicated ingredients. Afternoon Tea feels heavy and stained with spillages of colonialism, privilege, unconscious consumption, status, family, bias and grieving processes that permeate and percolate. I work with the ingredients of Afternoon Tea in order to digest the stains of it, the connections and mapping of it. Afternoon Tea is and drawn and painted tablecloth, digitalized and deepened with a collection of quotations, thoughts and memories connected to drawings and stains of tea ingredients. The tablecloth showing multiple maps of the grieving involved in Afternoon Tea. A collective ceremony of complications and collaborations and complications of comforting and discomforting elements. Here is a collection of quotations from me and others, tangling words together; allowing for multi-storied perspectives on the ingredients of afternoon tea.

## *Link to Project*

***AFTERNOON TEA TABLECLOTH***

**https://prezi.com/view/62vuAibInlF5RXYvLdC0/**

## *Published on*

***FEMINIST COLLECTIVE RESEARCH PRACTICES: SITE FOR HOLDING***

**https://fcrp.cargo.site/Afternoon-Tea**

24. Emma Clear
*Afternoon Tea*
2021
Pencil drawing, tea, milk and food on cotton tablecloth
160 x 160cm

The full tablecloth design as presented in the online project

# CONVERSATIONS:
# On Afternoon Tea Ingredients With Tea Companions

## On the Table

### *Grieving with Tea*

***Me:***

The kettle went on so many times that day that we had to get a new one the following week. The moment the kettle was boiled we filled the nearest empty tea-pot up again. Tea drank at the levels they were on that day happens during times of grieving. They happened in the same way upon his passing the year before. Irish communities drink strong tea in times of vulnerability. We were grieving one loss but not the many that exist in this moment. One is overwhelmingly present; the other was too overwhelming to be present that day. Both now ever present as time has passed.

***Marie-Louise Muir:***[68]

'Having gone through it with [the funeral of] my own father — and this is not to sound crass — but you're also strangely euphoric because you've gone through a lot. To be in a room where your father breathes his last breath, you've never experienced that before. Then everybody, your family, the community piles in on top of you for a Catholic wake. Pots of tea and sandwiches are brought in. There's almost this party atmosphere. Everybody's dropping by. You're giddy with lack of sleep, with grief. Everything's upended because you're having a party but the main person isn't there. To bring keening into the middle of that must have felt like you were breaking some kind of trance. That was in a way why it was so harsh — it must have been hard to penetrate the grief.'

### *Colonial Grief*

***Me:***

I heard myself say between their laughter "I'm not British, I am Irish". They hadn't heard me the first time so I had said it again but the laughter continued over my words. I let it go. It was an attempt by me to distance myself from a colonial empire. It was mortifying to be placed alongside it and I felt ashamed. The laughter came in conversation, in context through the statement that "it wouldn't be fair to blame you, Emma, for the colonisation of the Americas just because you are a British person." The fact that I am not British seemed unimportant in the end and I didn't bring it up again. But it stayed with me into the following day. In the



25. Emma Clear
*Mother and Calf*
2023
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of a newborn calf as the mother licks their body simulating both bodily functions and intimate bond between them



laughter that had intended to ease my mind about the vast privilege I carry. It had instead created a complication in me that I wanted to unpick. I felt complicatedly mortified, shamed, affronted and responsible. I felt like I wanted to untie myself from it. How much were the Irish involved in global colonial actions? I think that it has been difficult for Irish culture to come to terms with the facts of being oppressed and oppressing within the same moments and movements. It's an uncomfortable realisation that Irish people are not always 'the downtrodden', the underdog. This narrative is ingrained in Irish identity and it is hard to unpick from a far more complicated narrative.

***Erika Diane Rappaport:***[69]

'Slavery was abolished in the empire at virtually the same time that tea plantations were laid out, and over the course of the nineteenth century European beet sugar replaced slave-produced Caribbean sugar, but forced labor remained an important ingredient in the Victorian cup of tea'

### *More-than-human Grief*

***Me:***

Most of us don't hear the grieving of the mother as her offspring is being taken away. My sister described to me the reason for her choice to become vegan happened when hearing the grieving of bovine mothers. It happened when she saw them chase after the truck that took their offspring away.

***Greta Gaard:***[70]

'Although animal science scholarship provides ample documentation of the distress this separation produces for both mother cow and calf — "vocalizations" averaging more than 120 calls during twenty minutes for the calf, and "increases in vocalizations and activity" for the mother cows — the abstractions of the words used to describe this distress shield us from the images of the cows and calves themselves. Bovine resistance to commercial milk production is concealed in these animal science studies and requires a critical animal studies approach to uncover. […] For too long, the dominant culture has childishly projected its own gendered image onto nature as selfless and self-sacrificing mother...or onto other mammal species, requiring the female bovine to symbolize maternal nature: mindless, patient, slow-moving, lactating. If we set aside this stereotype and look into her eyes, what can we see?

# Afternoon Tea

***Me:***

The smell is subtle and sweet. It is comforting to my vulnerable body and mind. It holds deep nostalgia of all those times we have been together. Distractedly we drink our milky sweet tea. We absentmindedly spill and try to save the decorated cotton cloth from staining, saving the heirloom, saving that history from stains. The smell attracts insects, we do not want them around. They interfere and bother us as we distractedly drink. We heedlessly swat them away. We are not thinking about them — any of them. We are enjoying the garden with bloom and lush vibrancy, swatting away those who are involved in its making. Not thinking that without them there would not be any tea, milk, or sweetness, no nectar or nourishment, no luxury or leisurely opulence. There is a hint of dis-ease in the aroma, the berries are beginning to turn sour. I can smell that sour, sickly sweet scent and the rounded unsavory scent of milk on the turn, souring in the jug in the heat of the summer afternoon.

***Albina Hipp:***[71]

"Victorian Table - tea drinking. How does this relate to the protests in Kenya three weeks ago. Victorian Tea with a table displays of opulence and refinement — exotic and rich. To feed, to entertain. Has this changed? We meet again over tea. The decorum of tea drinking. What is the materiality? What happens when the ingredients meet each other?"

# Gendered Tea

***Me:***

My sisters and I were serving the tea and scones to my father's family in his remembrance. Serving tea is something that the women in the family do. It is assumed that when people come to the house, they will be offered tea. This is normal. The men sit at the table and start conversation, the women put on the kettle. When my sister was asked by a guest at my father's wake to get them tea, she refused, frustrated at the person's insensitivity to her grief. I grew angry and wanted to say something to them for being so thoughtless. It was not appropriate then to say something. We let it go.

***Etsuko Kato:***[72]

'Macha Tea ceremonies (chanoyu) the long tea ceremony: Today, approximately 90 percent of tea ceremony practitioners in Japan are women, of whom at least half are in their late forties or older, and most of whom are supposed to be married […] in the postwar period, one of the 'non-dominant social groups' was women, especially those in urban areas. In the postwar Japanese society preoccupied with economy and education, which accelerated both the demographic flow to cities and people's ambition for higher education, the majority of women in urban areas were led to the role of housewives and were expected to support their husbands' and children's professional or business success, rather than to pursue their own. This role led a lot of women who had fulfilled their family duties back to their premarital activity, the tea ceremony, in a search for the meaning of their lives





# Tea Ceremony

***RITUALISTIC TEA POURING: JAPAN*** ***Beverly Dubrin*** [73]

'The most elaborate tea ceremony is the Japanese Zen Buddhist Chanoyu — "the way of tea" — which dates back to the sixteenth century. Tea master Sen Rikyu developed this version of the tea ceremony, which is still practiced and studied by Zen monks and tea scholars today. The general philosophy behind chanoyu is that the spirit, man, and nature come together in a serene setting, in which knowledge can grow into wisdom. Participants experience the four principles of an enlightened life: tranquility, purity, harmony, and respect.'

***RITUALISTIC TEA POURING: IRAN*** ***Temporary Bride (pseudonym)*** [74]

'When you order tea in Iran the silver tray arrives with not one, or two, but three kinds of sugar […] The first sugar is called 'qand'. Qand is a kind of smooth, white sugar torpedo that is chiseled with an ice pick until it shatters into small, jagged pieces. Each piece is dusted with powdery sediment and sizzles just slightly when you place it on your tongue. Next to the qand is 'nabat'. Clear, saffron-coloured rocks of sugar, nabat looks like stack of amethysts waiting to be polished for the fingers of the wives of desert princes. […] Finally, next to nabat is humble granulated sugar. Pass. Now comes the tricky part: an elegant little two step called the clamp and sip. The tea drinker selects the sugar and carefully places it between the front teeth. Biting down with just the right pressure, a glass of tea is then raised to the mouth and sipped through the sugar which sweetens the tea as it passes through the lips. A little noise is permissible but slurping, drooling or gulping most certainly is not.'

***RITUALISTIC TEA POURING: MOROCCO*** ***Beverly Dubrin*** [75]

'Each guest has three glasses, into which the tea is poured. The pot is raised high above the glass while pouring. This is not only for effect, but also to aerate the tea, and it results in a bit of froth on top of the tea. Guests are served one glass of tea at a time, throughout the course of the meal. With each subsequent glass of tea, more water and sugar are added to the pot, but no more tea. The first glass is said to be bitter, like life, the second glass is like sweet, like love, and the third glass is gentle, like death.'

***RITUALISTIC TEA POURING: BRITAIN*** ***Me*** [76]

Afternoon Tea at 4pm, the essence of elegance and demure refinement. Hold your cup 'just so' with saucer underneath. Bone china, silver spoons, golden tea. Tea before milk, it indicates highbrow dignity, as does the delicacy of the brew. Tiered miniature accompaniments of sandwiches, scones and cakes, jams, butters and creams and delicate delights. Scones as light as a cloud. Delicate conversation, delicate ladies. Always the picture of refinement.

***RITUALISTIC TEA POURING: IRELAND*** ***Me***[77]

- "Are you okay?"

- "I am not doing great actually"

- "Hang on, I'll pop the kettle on and we can sit. A good cuppa-shcald[78] will settle the nerves. So, tell me…"

# On the Tablecloth

## *Ingredients of a memorial afternoon tea*

TEA (Barry's Tea, an Irish brand)
COTTON TABLECLOTHS (embroidered and lace-crocheted by my father's mother)
BONE-CHINA CUPS
MILK AND 'MYLK' (labeled to avoid mistakes)
WHITE (bleached) GRANULATED SUGAR (in glass bowls)
THREE DIFFERENT SCONE TYPES (vegan, gluten free and 'normal, all labeled to avoid mishaps)
CREAM (clotted and whipped — vegan oat cream also, which was left inside so that people wouldn't get con fused and was taken as needed by my sister Niki and I between serving others)
JAM (shop-bought strawberry and homemade blackberry jam from berries picked in Co. Kerry where we spent our childhood summers)
MULTIPLE LITRES OF WATER (to make the tea, frequent hand washing and to do the washing-up)
INNUMERABLE INSECTS (being swooshed away with the cotton napkins)
BIRDS (at the distant end of the garden feasting on insects)
CUT FLOWERS (some from the garden, some brought to us as memorial bouquets - helping to attract more insects to the tables)
AUNTS, MY UNCLE, COUSINS, MY SISTERS, OUR PARTNERS, MY MOTHER AND I (15 people in total - the lock-down quota)
OUR COMBINED GRIEVING PROCESSES BREWED OVER THE SPAN OF A YEAR



26. Emma Clear
*Afternoon Tea (detail)*
2021
Pencil drawing, tea, milk and food on cotton tablecloth
160 x 160cm

Close up of the ingredients decorative drawings showing all the ingredients on the cloth.

# Barry's Tea

***Me:***

We drink Barry's Tea in our house — The quintessential Irish tea blend. These leaves have been shipped to Irish waters from an unknown number of estates and plantations in many countries. These blends have been shipped far and wide to Irish ex-pat teapots throughout the countries of the world. A taste of home for the nostalgic and the homesick. Sometimes shipped to the countries of the leaves origins as a homesick remedy. Leaves traveling to-and-fro.

***Lois Kapila and Azera Rahman:***[79]

'There might be a clue to that [the origin of the leaves] on the wall of a Barry's office canteen, which shows a photo of the Behora Tea Estate "one of their tea plantations in India", according to the website of graphic design agency Copper Reed. […] At the Behora Tea Estate in Assam on a summer day earlier this year, a woman took a wicker basket, brimming with green tea leaves, from her back and took a break from her work to share a tumbler of black tea with her fellow female workers, and to check on her five-month-old baby, asleep on a mat under the shade of a tree. She said she was 20 years old, but looked younger – as do most women and girls who work in tea gardens in Assam, where there are high levels of anaemia and girls are often married in their teens. (We haven't named her, to protect her livelihood.) One of the major reasons for low haemoglobin levels in women from communities who work in the estates is poor nutrition. The young woman with the wicker basket, who lives and works in Behora Tea Estate, says that they cannot afford nutritious food with the amount of money they earn.'

# Milk & Mylk

***Me:***

It is difficult for me to understand the judgmental comments of making food choices with more-than-human living and dying considerations. Considerations of separation and grief that move beyond our species to multiple kinships. While grieving with loved ones, who do I consider a loved one? Is the judgment expressed a reflection of our culture or a lack of reflecting?

***Greta Gaard:***[80]

'Animal science research can thus be used to undermine or to advance animal industry and technology, and influence interspecies relations. The dance of infant cry and maternal milk letdown is biologically and behaviorally encoded, but the code can be broken; in 2012 animal scientists are selectively breeding cows that seem indifferent to separation from their newborn calves. "How do you break a wild animal?" asks pattrice jones. "The key can be found in the word itself: You sever connections. […] Inside each glass of milk is the story of a nursing mother separated from her offspring. To justify and feel comfortable in "breaking" the bio-psycho-social bonds that join mother and calf, dairy scientists, dairy farmers, and dairy consumers alike must deny the web of relationships that defines healthy ecosystem"'





# Table Cloth

***Me:***

Embroidered and crocheted by my father's mother, these cloths are brought out only on very special occasions from drawers and cabinets that she would have used when she and my grandfather were alive and living in this house. She was a very sweet woman I am told and someone who was very talented with crafts. They let me work on some of her cotton crochet pieces, "creating new heirlooms" my mother said.

***Ciarán Ryan:***[81]

'For over 120 years, clothing was manufactured at this [Limerick]city centre location. A young entrepreneur born in Scotland, Sir Peter Tait, noticed the demand for military uniforms and in 1850 established the Limerick Clothing Factory [...] When the Crimean War ended in 1856, the demand for British army uniforms dwindled. However, the American Civil War of 1861-65 provided Tait with a new opportunity, and uniforms were provided for both factions. In late 1863, an order came from the Confederate government for 50,000 caps, coats, jackets, trousers, shirts, blankets, boots, stockings and haversacks. Sir Tait purchased three ships that would regularly traverse the Atlantic Ocean, departing from Foynes [County Limerick] and docking at Charleston Harbour in South Carolina with a full cargo of Limerick-made uniforms for the Southern forces. The ship would return each time with cotton that was in turn used at Tait's factory on Lord Edward Street. The success of the plant saw manufacturers come from the UK to study the techniques at Tait's factory, and also led to him becoming one of the most popular figures in the city, elected as Mayor of Limerick three times.'

# Water

***Me:***

Tea drinking happened that day in a way that happens so often in Irish homes — some of the biggest tea drinkers on the planet. The electric kettle was on every fifteen minutes over the space of four hours. That's sixteen fills of one and a half litres of water — twenty-four litres of water just in the tea pots, without thinking of the washing and other uses during those hours. We consumed two tea bags per teapot, over fifty tea bags as an estimate (but I suggest not an inaccurate one).

***Water Scarcity Atlas (no author name mentioned):***[82]

'Water Stress: As water use increases, it becomes more difficult to access the resource sustainably. Water users need to handle conflict or cooperation, as well as avoiding breaching 'planetary boundaries', and eating into 'environmental flow requirements. Globally, water stress has been increasing over time, mainly because of increasing water consumption, especially for water-dependent products such as food. Irrigation is the largest water user globally, and in most regions. Water stress can be thought of as demand-driven scarcity, while water shortage is population-driven. Stress can occur even with a small population if water use is sufficiently high and water availability sufficiently low.'

## Sugar

***Me:***

Jelly Babies were his favourite, along with Licorice Allsorts. Throughout the wake there were bowls and bowls of them throughout the house. Each of us secretly stashed the sugary delights with him in his casket, stealing the sweets for him as we often did when he was with us. When the illness was taking over, his propensity for sweets grew and we had to hide the sweet packets from him so he would not scoff them all in one go. He passed his sweet tooth onto us.

***Khalil Gibran Muhammad :***[83]

"'White gold" drove trade in goods and people, fueled the wealth of European nations and, for the British in particular, shored up the financing of their North American colonies. "There was direct trade among the colonies and between the colonies and Europe, but much of the Atlantic trade was triangular: enslaved people from Africa; sugar from the West Indies and Brazil; money and manufactures from Europe," writes the Harvard historian Walter Johnson in his 1999 book, "Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market." "People were traded along the bottom of the triangle; profits would stick at the top."'

## Blackberry Jam

***Me:***

We picked blackberries as children on the lane-way ditches where bramble bushes knot and weave together forming a tangle of impenetrable thorns. Pinky-purple stained fingers, picking out the thorns from fingers, buckets that should have been twice as full if we hadn't eaten so many of the delicious berries on our route thinking our parents couldn't see. They always knew — how can you hide the stained lips and tongues? We continue to pick blackberries as adults in August and September, utilising my mother's knowledge to make sweet home-made jam for the table.

***Marion Seier:***[84]

'Since the Galapagos Islands were discovered in the 16th century, humans have introduced many species of plants and animals. Some of which have become invasive, such as blackberry (rubus niveus). Introduced in 1968, this non-native species is considered one of the worst weeds affecting the islands. It has now invaded most of the wetter parts of the islands and is estimated to cover more than 30,000 hectares (around 21,500 football pitches). Dense spiny thickets of blackberry can grow up to 3 metres tall, affecting farmland and also preventing the unique native forest dominated by the endemic daisy tree (species from the genus scalesia) from regenerating.'

***HERE IS A COLLECTION OF INGREDIENTS THAT MADE THE AFTERNOON TEA MEMORIAL EVENT IN MY GARDEN IN LIMERICK 19TH AUGUST 2020***



## MIRRORING AND COUPLING

The intention of a story is to engage us emotionally, to allow information to be passed on and retained, by penetrating through to our long-term memory and informing our processing of our experiences of the world. It is theorised that storytelling engages a system in our bodies that help us experience empathy and connection via a process called 'neural coupling' [88]. This is the theory that during storytelling the brain activity between the storyteller and the listener synchronises. While listening to a story that can be linguistically comprehended and engaged with, the listener's brain begins to fire in similar areas to that of the teller's. The regional activity begins mirroring that of the teller and becomes synchronised as the story unfolds. Neural coupling can produce anticipatory activity in the listener's brain as they are fully engaged in the narrative. This is but the edges of how storytelling affects us physiologically. Storytelling also activates parts of the brain that allows the listener to connect the story to their own experiences through 'mirror neuron'[89] activity in the brain: listeners empathise with the storyteller by comprehending and reciprocating interest. Chemicals such as Dopamine activate the pleasure pathways in the brain during emotionally charged situations making it easier to remember with greater accuracy, allowing the experience of storytelling to be long lasting in our memory. These emotional states and behaviours are thought to facilitate effective human interaction and communication. Creating stronger connections and bonding through the action of telling stories. Allowing information to be passed between people and intergenerationally. Basically, when we listen to stories, we become emotionally connected to them, engaging fully in the narrative as we anticipate where the story goes based on our framing and past experiences. The stories then become part of the framework for processing the world we live in and so a cycle is formed. With this information, it is crucial to acknowledge the ingredients that are baked into our stories. How a story is told, in what language, by whom, in what context, what is being tied together, what is being omitted, who is being omitted? This matters![90]

## THE DETAILS MATTER

"The details link actual beings to actual responseabilities."[85] They matter: the ingredients, the equipment, the mixing vessel, the situation of stories. The lens matters; the viewpoint; what is at the centre and around the edges/the fuzzy fringes; the appendages (and minds) of the makers, all greatly matter to the story that is told. 'Matter' is such a beautiful word when we can involve it in the tangles of caring, of involvement in and our response-ability[86] to storying and history conjuring. Matter is material-mixing, humus-making, composting, fermenting, infusing, bonding in uncertainty. When I felt ashamed about my complicity in colonial acts, it was because it mattered to me. When the shame mattered, it grew my interest and generated the will to change the stories I engage with. Shame mattered with the dominant normative stories told to me, infusing with afternoon tea, and they transformed my narratives. "[C]ommon thoughtlessness […] an astonishing abandonment of thinking"[87] has been responsible for many atrocities being enacted, upon our living world. We are all involved in the living and dying processes, but how and with what weight we hold responsibility is not the same all over. We are not all equally responsible, for all of it, or all of the time. But we hold responsibilities. If stories engage our brains in similar ways; synchronising and anticipating as the story unfolds — activating our emotional centres and our long-term memory, becoming part of our thinking process — then the ingredients of the stories of our lives matter. They inform our lived experiences. That (and how) I am responsible and response-able is important. With which stories I tell milk stories, holds weigh. What is needed to live more carefully? Re-framing, re-mattering stories: acknowledging reality. Donna Haraway's play with words and meanings helped in changing the narratives of my mind. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, introduces Ursula K. Le Guin's re-mattered origin stories of weapons and tools to re-centre vessels. The shift from hero focus to holder, container, allowed for more ingredients to be held in a story; more connections, more space for multiple storying, in my own ones. There is not just a carrier bag in a carrier bag story. Here there is room for many; for shape, texture, density; for porousness; for organic beginnings and endings (and beginnings…); for intersectionality and entanglements; for uncertainty, comfort and discomfort. Here we can shift perspective to allow our telling of other stories.

# More-than-human Grief

## MILK ON THE TABLECLOTH

There are many ingredients of the Afternoon Tea Memorial ceremony that I could talk about: tea or sugar, water, or cotton. All with their stories; all needing to be told; needing my attention. The Afternoon Tea project was a reflection on storying and re-telling. A physical table cloth decorated with the ingredients of colonialism and speciesism and stained with their remnants. The tablecloth no longer exists as the stains became rancid and disintegrated the cotton. It exists not digitally only as a collection of disparate quotations. A conversation between my thoughts and the words of collaborators (regretful ones for me and also companions in my storying struggle). This work centres other perspectives on the stories I had been fed from childhood. I attempted to follow them, to map them, to show them on my tablecloth. Here though, I follow just one of those ingredients: Milk.

## RAISED BY MILK

Practices of care that create room for the stories of many involve respecting another's perspective and needs for living and flourishing. Robin Wall Kimmerer winds us through stories of a natural propensity towards gift-economy practices in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. These practices are between human and more-than-human companions. Like that of plant and fungi gifting minerals and sugars; human and plants gifting clearance for new growth and nourishment; fungi and human gifting of medicine and spore distribution. Her work is a practice of care through remembering her ancestral American indigenous teachings that had been quietened in the past, in an attempt to live with carefulness. This is not gifting as giving 'free things' but rather a movement back and forth. "In a way, I was raised by strawberries,"[91] she begins a section on strawberry gifting. Kimmerer moves patiently and gentle through re-framing and re-telling stories of how we could live well together. Her work is influential to me in my learning how to re-telling. But my stories are different. I was, instead, raised by milk in an Irish county dedicated to dairy farming, Co. Limerick. However, these are not stories of wonder and gifting. It does not involve practices (and living ways) of ecological 'string figuring'[92] — of holding and passing response/responsibility back and forth. Nor is this story of reciprocity. Here, instead lies stories of hidden grief and facing shameful acts perpetuated with ignorance, against our non-human companions. These are stories of holding in my hands the grief of others without recognising it, without listening. This is an Irish tea ingredient.



27. Emma Clear
*Luma*
2023
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Portrait of Luma from film clip. Luma had a distinctive small black patch over her right eye.



## LUMA

She did not want to eat. Her head hung above her food as she looked around with slow movements. The others were eating heartily on both sides of her but she was not hungry. She swayed her head to the side, leaning it on the shoulder of her companion. Leaning into their warm body. They continued to eat but she was not hungry. It had not been long since they took her little one away. She had called out for her and searched in anguish and in vain. She never saw her again. She was not hungry after it all.

*Cow* (2022) is a powerful documentary by Academy Award winning director Andrea Arnold. It follows a birthing cycle in the life of a dairy cow, Luma, as she faces the challenges of living under the weight of the milking industry. This is a non-verbal film (largely). There is no narration or explanation. We 'hear' Luma's story through watching the scenes the director shows us and through our interpretation of Luma's movements. The only spoken words are that of the farmers speaking English in their farmyard in rural Britain. They call Luma by name as they usher her here and there, between milking stations, fields and the various pens with their various purposes. This is the fifth time that Luma has been through the process, the yearly cycle of milk production and it has taken its toll. We meet her as she gives birth to her female calf, licking her tiny body all over, starting her calf 's circulation, her bodily functions and facilitating their brief bonding. We follow her as she is separated and immediately milked with afterbirth still coming from her body. We watch her standing beside her little calf as the farm hands stop her from getting too close, while they bottle feed her baby in front of her. I believe that has the benefit of facilitating lactation in Luma and at the same time beginning the separation of the pair. We watch as she is shooed away from her female calf forever. We watch her cry out for her baby. We watch her mourn for her little one.

## *THE LANGUAGE OF OUR STORIES*

For me to follow milk stories I must first pay attention. To tell milk stories requires me, as Kimmerer suggests, to question the language I tell the story with. It is necessary to question a language when there are confines within it that defines certain humans as the only 'animate', feeling, conscious being that receives a pronoun and with that, one that deserves the respect of empathetic responses and to have emotive and powerful stories attached to them. Within this structure *he*s, and sometimes *she*s, have complex relationships and deeper complexity in behaviour. In a white-supremacist, patriarchal, human-centric world, certain *he*s, and maybe some *she*s, are the ones who deserve respect and care, autonomy and rights to live well. *It*s and anything *'other-than'* do not benefit from such 'luxuries'[93]. Let me be clear that to define in such a binary way is to confine, ignore and violently discriminate with words. In English we, human/normative/'animate', have been defined (and confined) as 'him' or 'her'.

> "English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an it, or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a he or a she […] Saying it makes a living land into "natural resources." If a maple is an it, we can take up the chain saw. If a maple is a her, we think twice […] It's all in the pronouns."[94]

An *it* has no feelings. An *it* doesn't care, *it* can't because *it* has no (or deminished) feelings. We can take what we need from *it*, it won't matter. These supposed 'inanimate' can be identified by the words used to describe them. They do not have complex emotional stories told about them. This does not mean that they have no stories, quite the contrary, just that they are not often spoken of or acknowledged. When we hear of complex stories of the grieving, whose grief are we being told about? Do we hear the grief stories of genocide or enslavement when we do not see the traumatised as animate? Do we hear the grief stories of a mother being separated from her babies, over and over throughout her shortened life if we see them as *it*? In each glass of milk do we hear her crying?[95] I was raised by milk, but I did not hear real milk stories until I opened to stories not often told and began to listen.





# Milking it for all it's worth

## *EXPLOIT*

When I look up the word 'exploit' in the dictionary, I find the word 'milk'.[96] They are synonymous. As Greta Gaard describes it in *Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies*: "In vernacular English, to "milk" something is to take it for everything you can get — but that is an adult's slang. For newborn mammals, mothers' milk is a priceless gift: it offers nutrition, hydration, and affection, ecologically packaged at the right temperature."[97] More-than-human milk grief stories are histories and entangled stories of exploitation; restrictions; environmental destruction; fabricated, partial or skewed narratives; shameful behaviour and hiding shame by shaming. Fabricated or partial narratives inform us of the health benefits and cleanness of milk. That white liquid is pure and innocently consumed. Not often told are the racialised parallels of purity in the milk drinking white folk of the Jim Crow era, a time when the America's dairy industry was being expanded in the 1930's. I was also told stories of purity in white liquid as a child. Strong bones, healthy teeth — "Them bones, them bones need calcium"[98]. Milk and dairy produce were the only way to get this calcium according to the story. These stories are based heavily on information from aggressive advertising and political lobbying from the Irish dairy industry. An industry that sees the Irish countryside patch-worked into mostly dairy and beef farming (especially in the central basin of the country, the area that I come from). In conversation with Maria Paloma Velázquez on the subject we wondered what percentage of global land is given to agriculture. According to *Our World in Data* website, half of the usable land on the planet is dedicated to various forms of agriculture "This leaves only 37% for forests; 11% as shrubs and grasslands; 1% as freshwater coverage; and the remaining 1% – a much smaller share than many suspect – is built-up urban area which includes cities, towns, villages, roads and other human infrastructure."[99] In Ireland the percentage is much higher, with 64% of Irish land potentially dedicated to agriculture.[100] Of this agricultural usage, there are 18,000 dairy farmers in the counties surrounding and including Limerick County.[101]

The disgust directed towards my 'mylky' tea choice, this shaming, was in my view an act of distancing; a resistance to looking at the difficult reality behind the stories about eating habits and cultural norms in food consumption. The disgust shown towards mylky tea comes on the back of the economic weight of this industry in a country whose economic viability hangs on agriculture. Even as an animal lover, growing up it was not part of my conscious process to feel compassion or sorrow when passing the fields of 1.5 million cows[102] that we take this life-giving liquid from. I didn't think of the individuals' loss and heartbreak then. They are farm animals and milking is what they do! Most of us don't hear the grieving of the mother as her offspring is being taken away. My sister, Niki, told me her reasons for becoming vegan happened over time. But triggers occurred while living in close proximity to a dairy farm. The process of change happened upon hearing the unrelenting and harrowing moans and cries of the grieving mothers. Change occurred when empathising with the grief of bovine mothers and children. Since early childhood, Niki showed and responded to a deep empathy towards our more-than-human kin. The writings of Breeze Harper and Greta Gaard helped me to digest my own grief with afternoon tea ingredients by centering the grief of others. The third chapter of the book *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, is titled: "Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption: Food for Thought". In this essay by A. Breeze Harper are discussions on veganism as anti-racist, anti-speciesism, decolonial acts for social justice and a movement towards ways of living that are more compassionate and care-full. Harper writes:

> "If non-organic and non-sustainable animal farming is causing this much pollution and jeopardizing the water supply to the point that 3.5 billion people will be struggling to find clean water, why should we stand for such environmental racism, degradation, and pollution in the communities of colour and working-class communities in the U.S. and abroad?"[103]

We are being navigated through lesser told narratives and the hard numbers involved in our food consumption. Here is a call to action to rethink, to acknowledge the reality of our foods and its impact.

# In each glass of milk

## BREAKING BIOLOGICAL INTIMACIES

From the position of the main stream narrator on milk: the National Dairy Council produced a PDF brochure on *"Common Dairy Myths"*, in which they speak of animal welfare. Answering the question why they separate calf from mother:

> "Once a calf is born, it is at immediate risk of picking up infections from the calving environment, the cow or any other animals in the same space. Therefore, it is best practice for disease prevention to remove the calf from the cow immediately after birth. Calves are moved to a clean, freshly bedded area in the company of other calves. It ensures that the calves can be fed the right amount of the nutritious colostrum, in a more hygienic setting. Calves need to consume 8.5 % of birth body weight in colostrum to encourage good immunity. This can be ensured by taking the calf from the cow and feeding the correct amount independently. When the calves grow and are strong enough to graze the fields, they will re-join the dairy herd."[104]

Here Gaard sheds light: "Inside each glass of milk is the story of a nursing mother separated from her offspring"[105] (quoted in More-Than-Human Grief section of the Afternoon Tea project). Disavowing mother and calf intimate biological relations is the only mechanism by which milk production in the structure it exists in today would be justifiable Gaard suggests. Even when the calls and vocalisations are so frequent and researched as to undeniably show great distress at separation, dairy advocates 'myth-bust' by imagining human interjection is the only 'safe' alternative action for calf health. Justifying severing relational bonds to feel comfortable drastically over producing milk at the expense of bovine life. Cow's lives are dramatically shortened by dairy production, going from natural life spans of approximately twenty years to between merely five or six years.

> "[R]esistance to commercial milk production is concealed in these animal science studies and requires a critical animal studies approach to uncover. Animal activists confirm that cows separated from their calves' bellow and appear to grieve for days afterward, sometimes ramming themselves against their stalls in attempts to reunite with their calves. News articles report the "amazing" feats of cows returning across miles of countryside to nurse calves from whom they were forcibly separated."[106]

Extensive in its reach and connectivity in milk stories, Greta Gaard's text, *Towards a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies*, guides us through stories of lactation asking questions such as: is taking the milk of another mother — whether a human mother or a cow mother, goat, sheep, or elephant — to be appropriately described as "gift," "wages," or "theft""[107] Enslavement is traumatising and grief inducing generationally, of this there is no question. How often do we centre our non-human kin in these stories of grief?[108] Do we recognise the pain a mother went through when they gave up one twin to save another, if this mother is not human. *"A Bovine Sophie's Choice"*[109] Holly Cleever, a dairy veterinary practitioner, describes it as when she witnessed the mother's attempt to hide one calf while giving up another. This cow remembered the other losses she endured in earlier years. She attempted to save her little one from separation but tragically was discovered by the vet and the farmer and both calves were lost to her. In this glass of milk, the story is half empty with the weight of grief, and half full of shame.



# Multispecies Storytelling

## INCLUSION

In *Cow* (2022) I found a 'new' story. Not new to Luma or the millions of dairy cattle ensnared in the milk industry. But new to my perspective and my focus. Transformative to my empathy building. Correspondingly, Ida Bencke's curatorial works focus on repositioning the human in storytelling. Within the work of Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, Bencke formed the project *Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices.*[110] Bencke describing the process of multispecies storytelling as a tentative and "hesitant proposal"[111] for re-imagining semantics, symbiotics and linguistics beyond human language. A "speculative endeavour"[112] on how to include the multi-tales, multi-perspectives in storying of the world. Breaking down the line of human-centrism this series embarks on species inclusivity to help in the movement towards carefulness in co-habitation. In a barn at the artist led farm Kultivator, a multispecies feast was served. At this table were farm cohabitors: sheep, cow, horse, human and the multitude of unseen and unrecognised. They shared food at a round table covered in a white tablecloth. Later at the conference in Linnæus University, the second site of the project, leftovers — "mammalian bacterial leftovers"[113] — were brought with the table and the tablecloth, contaminating the sterility of academic spaces, crossing species in spaces that seek observation only. Allowing for cross contamination of both species and storying perspectives. Playing with human words to encompass the other-than-human collaborators, brings together gatherers and ingredients of multi-species storying without linguistic words. Bencke created space at the table for the breaking down of sterility in sterile academic spaces through sharing mammalian non-human with human traces. Re-telling, untellable stories beyond human words "but also the vital nameless spaces-between that brim with significant exchanges."[114] During the exhibition at Växjö Konsthall, these in-process traces were shared, along with other forms of communication like singing, conversation, reading and workshopping ways of multispecies storytelling with human and more-than-human participation. Three days of conferences at Linnæus University followed the exhibition. Negotiating pitfalls and potentials of species inclusion in the stories that are told. Bencke's work is far more extensive in its reach and focus than the elements of milk in my Afternoon Tea project. It hold inspiration for multispecies storytelling.

We speak of the stories in history with only human protagonists, as if history and the past are only for humans. We speak with just that one narrative, linear and clear. But we know this position of singular perspective not to be true with human stories about humans and we know if not to be true beyond human centric scopes to stories told with more-than human kin. This work can be seen as an endeavour of acknowledgement, a 'what if' potential: If we acknowledged the stories and realities of another (life, species, perspective, death) what if we listened, what might we learn? We might find stories of resilience to help us face the reality of our losses?

28. (left) (photographer unknown)
*Kultivating Mother Tongues*
A collaborative Workshop
2019.
http://www.labae.org/project.

29. (right) (photographer unknown)
*Kultivating Mother Tongues*
A collaborative Workshop
2019.
http://www.labae.org/project.

Kultuvating Mother Tongues, A Collaborative Workshop Between Kultivator And The Rural Alchemy Workshop (R.A.W.) in 2019. Documented by Retrieved from 'Projects' on Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology. Accessed 21 September 2023.

# SUMMARY: WINTER PICNIC

***How might the stories we re-tell about the ingredients of our food contribute to finding resilience in our grief? How do the stories of ingredients matter?***

The ingredients of afternoon tea sat uncomfortably with me at the cloth covered tables. I was sitting with shame and it was deeply disconcerting. It was not at the memorial that the feelings of discomfort found a way of dissipating or even that I had the capacity to acknowledge the stories beneath the surface. It was later that there was space for transformation. It can be immensely painful to face reality. Acknowledging the reality of loss requires space and a great mustering of energy that can only happen as grief journeys through. I was not yet in that journey at the memorial. It was in April 2021 that I was able to find the capacity to face the reality of my father's loss, that he will never return and the reality of my participation in acts of trauma through afternoon tea. I had not given attention to my complicity in so many others' perpetual grief. The ingredients in what nourishes us have histories and stories of their own. Mine is but one story, one perspective in the complexity of our living together. If I think only from this singular direction there is the possibility of causing great pain through complacency, neglect, ignorance and apathy. If I do not think of these ingredients, these agents, as having life of their own, of having animacy, I might not consider their having stories to tell or knowledge to impart. It was not easy for me to face the shame of my ignorance. I needed to name the ingredients to do so. Knowledge through searching for other stories: the act of storytelling itself is a healing brew.

The Afternoon Tea project was wide in its scope but within was a story of a mother called Luma. It was a painful story to come to terms with. But at the table her grief and mine brewed together on crisp cotton, stained cloth. I wanted to stay with her until I understood the wider tale. To face the cold wind of complicity and embrace the knowledge that is imparted on it, is to awaken and rejoin attempts to live well with others. To find resilience in the knowledge that transformation is possible.





## Endnotes

55 "Calling in is an invitation to a one-on-one or small group conversation to bring attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior, including bias, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination"
"Calling out is bringing public attention to an individual, group, or organization's harmful words or behavior"
"Note: Calling in and calling out are not mutually exclusive strategies. Depending on the situation, calling out could precede calling someone in for a follow-up conversation."
Hana Omiya, 'Calling In and Calling Out Guide', Harvard University: Diversity Inclusion and Belonging. Pamphlet, n.d.

56 Evidenced by diverging views on 'cancel culture'. Of this I do not want to go into detail as it needs a thesis of its own to unfurl.

57 Jill Locke, 'Shame and the Future of Feminism', Hypatia 22, no. 4 (2007): 146–62. p 149

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. p xviii.

60 Elspeth Probyn, Blush: Faces of Shame (U of Minnesota Press, 2005).
Elspeth Probyn et al., 'Productive Faces of Shame: An Interview with Elspeth Probyn', Feminism & Psychology 29, no. 2 (1 May 2019): 322–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353518811366.

61 (https://www.facebook.com/groups/507560633219960)

62 'The Sleep of Plants' by Anne Richter, translated by Edward Gauvin

63 'Swim Thru Fire Pt. 8' by Annie Mok and Sophia Foster-Dimino. https://hazlitt.net/comics/swim-thru-fire-pt-8?fbclid=IwAR0hy7jfShxihiRb7GBYMx3TpSJZw-mL7Hq66KQHl3XVjCY7r1UL3LrO_6LQ

64 'Skeleton Woman' from Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype by Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés

65 The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, written by Ursula Le Guin in 1986, decenters the hunter man as central to storytelling origins. Instead looking to the carrier bag and gatherers as origin story.
'Le Guin Carrier Bag Theory Fiction PDF | PDF', Scribd, accessed 20 April 2023, https://www.scribd.com/document/479737263/Le-Guin-carrier-bag-theory-fiction-pdf.

66 Skywoman Falling:
Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: Milkweed Editions, 2013), pp 3-5 http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aalto-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1212658.
Direction of the Road:
Ursula K. Le Guin, Direction of the Road: A Story (HarperCollins, 2017).

67 I had the intention of including these two events and my reflections in this chapter's project invitation. It became apparent however, that this was only a step in the larger questioning, which revealed itself to me through trail mix and its ingredients. I felt it was important to mention the sessions as part of the storying of Afternoon Tea.

68 BBC presenter Marie-Louise Muir spoke with the Irish Examiner Newspaper (2016). Muir recently explored the death of the tradition in Ireland in a BBC Radio 4 documentary, Songs for the Dead. Quoted in:

'How the Keening Tradition Died out at Irish Funerals'. 2023. IrishCentral.Com. 9 July 2023. Accessed: 31 July 2023. http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/how-the-keening-tradition-died-out-at-irish-funerals-videos.

69 Erika Diane Rappaport, A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World, 2017. p 162

70 Greta Gaard, 'Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. p 612

71 From my personal notes on the Feminist Food Studies lecture: 19.4.2021: Albina Hipp from the Åbo Akademi University Genders Studies Department, lecture titled "Human, Animals, Land and Colonisation"

72 Etsuko Kato, The Tea Ceremony and Women's Empowerment in Modern Japan: Bodies Re-Presenting the Past (Richmond, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p 1. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aalto-ebooks/detail.action?docID=200401

73 Beverly Dubrin, Tea Culture: History, Traditions, Celebrations, Recipes & More. (Charlesbridge Publishing, 2012). p.21

74 'Iranian Tea Drinking 101: A Symphony in Sugar | Iranian.Com', 2 January 2010, https://iranian.com/main/blog/temporary-bride/iranian-tea-drinking-101-symphony-sugar.html.

75 Beverly Dubrin, Tea Culture: History, Traditions, Celebrations, Recipes & More. (Charlesbridge Publishing, 2012). pp.22/24

76 Personal writing

77 Personal writing

78 To 'scald the pot' is to temper the teapot with hot water before brewing the tea. 'Shcald' is a colloquial term for tea in inner-city Limerick

79 Lois Kapila and Azera Rahman, 'Where Do Barry's Tea and Lyons Get Their Tea From?', Dublin Inquirer, 25 October 2016. Accessed 2 April 2021. http://dublininquirer.com/2016/10/26/where-do-barry-s-tea-and-lyons-get-their-tea-from/.

80 Greta Gaard, 'Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. pp 611-612

81 Ciarán Ryan, The History - Tait's Clothing Factory. Limerick Life, p.14, 7 September 2016. accessed 2 April 2021. http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/lcf05.pdf.

82 'Water Stress', Water Scarcity Atlas, accessed 28 July 2023, https://waterscarcityatlas.org/water-stress/.

83 ‘The sugar that saturates the American diet has a barbaric history as the ‘white gold’ that fuelled slavery’

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, ‘The Barbaric History of Sugar in America’, The New York Times, 14 August 2019, sec. Magazine, accessed 22 February 2022 https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/sugar-slave-trade-slavery.html, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/sugar-slave-trade-slavery.html.

84 ‘Controlling the Invasive Blackberry on the Galápagos Islands’, CABI.Org (blog), accessed 28 July 2023, https://www.cabi.org/projects/controlling-the-invasive-blackberry-on-the-galapagos-islands/.

85 Donna Jeanne Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). p 29

86 Ibid

87 Ibid p 36

88 Greg J. Stephens, Lauren J. Silbert, and Uri Hasson, ‘Speaker–Listener Neural Coupling Underlies Successful Communication’, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 107, no. 32 (10 August 2010): 14425–30, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1008662107.

89 Simply put, this is the process by which neural activity occurring in the brain of a performer is mirrored but the observer of the activity. Amazingly, while storytelling occurs neural mirroring is also activated.

90 Donna Jeanne Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

91 Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: Milkweed Editions, 2013). p21. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aalto-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1212658.

92 SF – string figures, indigenous games of response between players. Holding stories and cultural practises of responsibility. The shape of string figures must be held and carefully brough back and forth between hands in order for new shapes to form and the game to commence. Haraway uses this as a metaphor for collective ecological responsibility.
Donna Jeanne Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

93 Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: Milkweed Editions, 2013), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aalto-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1212658.

94 Ibid p56.

95 Greta Gaard, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618.

96 ‘Definition of EXPLOIT’, 3 May 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exploit.

97 Greta Gaard, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. p. 599.

98 Advertising the value of milk by the National Dairy Councils of Ireland and the UK. Aired on various television stations in Ireland and Britain in the early 1990’s: Kazimann, Dir. Them Bones, Them Bones, Need Calcium (TV Advert), 2007. accessed 24 May 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygf0gRQsUb4.

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102 ‘Dairy Factsheet’, Irish Farmers’ Association, accessed 6 September 2023, https://www.ifa.ie/dairy-factsheet/.

103 A. Breeze Harper, Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society (Lantern Books, 2009). p.26.

104 ‘Dairy Myths - National Dairy Council Ireland’, 24 March 2022, https://ndc.ie/dairy-myths/.

105 Greta Gaard, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. p 612

106 Greta Gaard, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. p. 612

107 Greta Gaard, ‘Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, American Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2013): 595–618. p. 599

108 “Perhaps, more than the loss of favored dairy products, I dreaded the sickening feeling of complicity that emerged when I finally confronted, and rejected, dairy.” Lisa Kemmerer, ed. Sister Species (University of Illinois Press, 2011), p53. http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.aalto.fi/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1xchz9..

109 Holly Cheever, ‘A Bovine Sophie’s Choice - An Animal Rights Article from All-Creatures.Org’, 2011, (Accessed 26 May, 2023) https://www.all-creatures.org/articles/ar-bovine.html.

110 “Multispecies Storytelling’ is a speculative endeavour asking how we may represent, relay and read worlds differently by taking other species serious as storytellers in their own rights. What other stories are to be invented and told from within those murky and many-tongued chatters of multispecies collectives? Could such stories teach us how to be human otherwise? And how do we stay with- and cultivate such stories, knowing that they are as full of endings as they are of becomings? In a collaboration between The Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, Linnæus University and Växjö Konsthall Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices took place in 2019 at three different sites: As a pre-conference in a barn at the experimental cooperation and artist driven farm Kultivator, as a conference at Linnæus University and as an exhibition at Växjö Konsthall. It was generously supported by The Seed Box, Linköping University.”
Dea Antonsen, Ida Bencke, and Andrea Fjordside Pontoppidan, ‘Projects’, Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, 2019, (accessed 10 May 2023) http://www.labae.org/project.

111 ‘Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practises’ - Interview with Ida Bencke and Jørgen Bruhn, 2022, (accessed: 10 May 2023). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-KmQhzptcg.

112 Ibid.

113 Dea Antonsen, Ida Bencke, and Andrea Fjordside Pontoppidan, ‘Projects’, Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, 2019, (accessed 10 May 2023) http://www.labae.org/project.

114 Ibid

*Spring Picnic*

# RECIPES FOR RESILIENCE

*31st MAY 2021*

***How do we use the ingredients we have collected to help create careful and compassionate transformations in our interactions and collaborations with others?***



## AN INVITATION TO FIND RECIPES FOR RESILIENCE

*Caring for / caring with – Collecting / collective processes*

We call it 'minding' someone: taking care of someone or the process of caring for another. We care about them and so we care for them. We minded my father as his strength left his body and his mind began to unfurl. He needed our care and after his passing we began minding each other. But minding can have potential to take autonomy, hushing as power is shifted away. Supportive acts become acts of encroachment. A power persists over another. Initiated with the intention to perform caring acts but without the gentleness needed to keep stave off power imbalances. How might we show the carefulness needed in our supportive actions? Beyond caring 'for' is potential for caring 'with'. Here is an invitation to a collective feasting and 'caring with' others. Attention and linguistic changes create potential for transformative practices of care. This is a picnic full of recipes for careful co-existing. Here is a collection of recipes for resilience building through gentle collection, gathering and collaboration.

Carefulness is crucial to our ableness to live and respond well with others. Without this work, lasting transformation may not be possible.

# COLLABORATORS AND AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

my mother and sisters - with special mention to Patricia Clear
Partiosaari ecology: Island inhabitants and retreat visitors
the recipe book working group
Lucy Davis, Julia Lohmann and Sanni Saarimäki
Mari Keski-Korsu
María Puig de la Bellacasa
Robin Wall Kimmerer
Dr Alex Martinis Row, Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga and Helena Reckitt

30. Emma Clear
*Island Edges (detail)*
2020
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of Partiosaari island drawing produced from photograph titled *Peace, at last* (digital photograph) by Tuula Vehanen

# Memorial Gatherings

Diary: 17th June 2021

*A slight misty rain touched our faces as we walked to the shoreline.*

The sun was not visible but the sky was a warm pale blueish-grey in the evening light. The haze blurred the watery horizon as the calm sea bled into the steely grey sky. We were glad for the rain as it meant that we would be alone on the beach. We had wanted to invite many people to our gathering but had become so overwhelmed with emotions that we had to stop it all in its tracks and instead have it be us there alone together; our smaller family. We walked into the shallows. I read my poem, we sang his songs and scattered his ashes into the ocean.

The rain created gentle rings on the glittering waters. Our little handmade driftwood boats bobbed together in the tide. Memorial messages adorned each boat. Their candles reflecting, shimmering, dancing lights onto the surface of the calm waters. With care we parted with them, lighting their candles and gently floating them out to sea. But they stayed close-by, as the tide was turning and danced together around our feet for a while. Playing with us as they followed streams of currents between pools, lapping onto the rocks along the shoreline. We were so taken with their endearing gentleness, watching them until their wax candles extinguish. We felt great caring towards these little wooden boats. We felt touched by them and their staying with us for that short time. The tide turned, they moved away. We let them go out to sea. When the light faded, we walked home and ate together around the table.

*Our small group gently moving and conversing, eating slowly and with care.*



# Consideration

## CONSIDERING OUR CARE

We had wanted to — intended to — open ourselves up to sharing his first anniversary with many others (again). We had waited with his ashes for a year as the world locked down. We had intended to create spaces for shared grief with extended family and friends on the beach where we spent all of our childhood summers, a place he loved dearly. Here we would let go of his remains and hand them to the ocean. But we were completely exhausted. Emotionally spent from the weight of his loss and the carefulness needed memorialising him with so many, in such complicated ways. It was just days after the afternoon tea in our garden in Limerick and pandemic restrictions were challenging in emotively challenging times. We were exhausted from pandemic restrictions and so many vulnerable people needing careful consideration. It was far too much for my mother especially. She had been holding onto a deep worry but finally, the day before the events, she took my hand and expressed her distress. It was all too much. I was relieved that she had found the strength to express this anguish. In the midst of caring for others and planning for pandemic necessities, we had lost sight of our own needs and our capacity. My mother did not know it at the time but she was helping us to take steps to be careful of ourselves. Self-care is not something that comes easily in a culture that values selflessness so highly. It is challenging to face such expectations and not meet them. On one hand I was taught to put other's needs above my own. Self-care in these situations is often associated with arrogance and an unwillingness to put personal needs aside for the collective 'good'. This is not a familial teaching but a social one. On the other hand, self-care can be associated with a 'wellness' movement that capitalizes on personal health, to the detriment of an individual and assigning blame without breaking down problematic structuring. Here we would not meet expectations of selflessness, instead this self-care was for gentler times together when we were already in so much pain.

My mother was being careful with herself and by extension with us. My sisters and I rallied around her, encircled her, reassured her that we needed this tender time together and the intimacy of just us. We cancelled our plans, got in the car and drove away, towards places that held memories of him. We took the wine and picnicked on familiar ground. Later we formed ideas for softer ways of memorialising on the edges, where water lapped on land; taking candle adorned boats and words, songs and memories with us; walking through soft rain to the edges of the ocean. There we held the final memorial gathering as we scattered his ashes in the bay. This was what we needed. With our feet in the warm shallows we created gentler times with one another. When there was overwhelming emotional weight baring down, we retreated to the edges, created more gentleness and careful tending to deeper needs. A softer release, a gentler sharing.

## LIVING WELL

Allowing for carefulness is no easy task in the harshness of the environmental and social collapses we are facing. Being careful with ourselves is challenging when we care so much about others. Sometimes we over extend ourselves. This might be the starting point for the beginning of a wellness movement. Exhausted from hitting walls outside of one's control it makes sense to put focus inside and make the changes that feel possible or plausible. But the possibility of accessibility to the wellness world is limited. The wellness movement is imbued with problematic hierarchical structuring, exclusionary practices and creation of hyper-individualism.[115] This movement troublingly assigning responsibility of our health to individuals alone. Stating that without 'optimising our health' we will be unsuccessful and therefore without value for our society. This focus on the individual as solely responsible for their well-being (as if eating well, taking supplements, skin care and physical and spiritual exercises will solve all our problems) negates the responsibility of the social structures that create barriers and reinforces he problematic notions of able-bodiness as wellness. [116] It negates the financial stability needed to upkeep such a lifestyle and ignores the often gendered, racialized and binary stereotypes of who looks well and who does not. It is with care that I write the words to 'live well' in our cohabitation. These words are not in alignment with the wellness movement but instead a movement towards living closer to my ethical conviction. Words matter. They matter in the interplays and intersections of life-ways. It feels becoming that the definition of wellness is "the condition of being sound in body"[117]. The dual meaning of the word sound feels closer to my meaning of living-well. To live with, hearing within my body, my environment, my situatedness and my situation. Carefulness feels very important in the process of living-with.

## CONSIDERING CARE

We cannot easily give without caring. If we don't care, how can we show more empathy and compassion? Without caring apathy brews. But as we experience care, as we read about its history and structure, we realise how loaded and weighty 'care' can be.[118] Care is full of expectation, assumption (when gendered, for example); sometimes regret, shame or loaded with resentment when given without respite. Care is assigned, limited and limiting (when consent has not been given). Care can be human-centric, racialised, classed, gendered and weaponised. Care is not equally distributed to those that need it more and it is often withheld entirely from the most vulnerable. This can be seen clearly in the human world with political movements against marginalized communities, such as anti-LGBTQAI+ legislation and book bans in the US in recent years. In the beyond-human world the examples are endless. Alexandre Antonelli, the director of science at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew recently described examples of devastating carelessness towards our environment as:

> "First, it's land use change; mainly for agriculture, but also for urban development, roads and mining. Second, it's the direct exploitation of species, such as timber felling and the illegal trade in threatened species. The third is climate change […] there's a race against time because we also know that we may be losing species before we even notice or describe them."[119]

Without care we tread too heavily. Maybe it is also too weighty to hold so much care alone. Sometimes we need to let go of holding this weight solely to allow for more careful consideration in collaboration with others. My mother created room for more caring when she asked to cancel our memorial plans. It was no easy task and yet so welcomed by me and my sisters. It was a brave act to be so caring with ourselves. It is not always easy to go against the social grain but it is so crucial to find the courage to sometimes.





# Grief: Around the edges

*Diary: 9th July 2021*

*The island was small but vast and rich in experiences.*

I had waited to join this retreat for a year as pandemic restrictions scuppered earlier plans and so I was excited about the idea of this group forming after such a long time. But I was not feeling well in myself. I had exhausted myself in the early spring trying desperately to rejoin life and work, study sessions and classes. By the end of it all I was bewildered, burned out, empty of energy. Frantic exhaustion had ignited overwhelming anxiety in me and I had destroyed myself inside and out. On the facade I was doing better, but it was pretense — I was not. The night before the retreat I asked for help from my sisters. "Rest", they told me. "Take care of yourself." But, regardless, the next morning I made the journey to the island. Arriving at the water's edge by the dock I was alone in the morning light. Glittering water lay between me and the wooded island, its mysteries still hidden behind a veil of green leaves. As the first people arrived, I surprised myself with the ease of conversing. I was rusty and awkward, but there was possibility to be there with others.

I often give the impression that I feel strong when speaking in public (it is not so) but I have learned that I can project that even when I feel vulnerable. My openness about my vulnerability is an attempt to show the potential for strength in vulnerability. Opening with such readiness has become part of my expression. It is sometimes very painful but I open to that pain willingly. However, in island introductions, I opened more than I was expecting. Mention of my father's death and working with my grief shattered me. Even now when I write about him, I feel the warm mist of tears and the tightness in my throat. Maybe that will never go. Maybe when I open to my emotional world my bodily responses show my honest feelings. There on the island I opened to those raw, honest emotions. I stumbled over words; my breath caught on sounds. I had not anticipated that I would faulter. I wasn't expecting it and so was not taking care in the lead up to it. I was thrown off my feet so I couldn't gather myself together easily. A mist came over my mind. Warmth and caring acts brought me back. A gentle reassuring hand on my shoulder and warm energy around the table showed kindness and care. Others shared their stories of caring, emotion, complication, pain. It was not always an easy space to be in. We shared with one another throughout those days: food, time, vulnerability.

*We shared island community.*

# Field ecology intensive

## *SITUATED HEALING PRACTICES & RESILIENCE STRATEGIES*

(Co-devising methods for staying with the trouble without going under or running for the hills)

***Week Long Workshop. 31 May-4th June 2021***

"The spirit of this particular iteration of the Field Ecologies course is about a situated slowing down and seeking time out to reflect on collaborative practices of care and solidarity amongst humans and with non-humans. […] The objective of this experimental workshop is to place the urgencies on hold for a few days to draw together a community of practice to share threads and therapeutic skills that each of us may be developing towards a compassionate, ecological practice. We seek space for community healing and humour while generating resiliencies for action. The content of this workshop combines practices of psychology and psychotherapy, art and design and will involve a series of guest inputs. Readings, meditations and workshop exercises support our longer-term objective to co-devise collaborative multi-authored and open-source methodologies."[120]

It is on the edges of the island that learning happened on Partiosaari. We convened together on the fringes, tangling and untangling with one another there. The island shores held us when the centre became too dense. It was by fireside that we laughed and sang (I sang) and told stories. It was with food that we found solace in one another's company and nourished upset bodies with collaborative kindness and caring. Food held us together. Food created from island ecologies and collective hands. Laughter and joy in a large kitchen and by the BBQ embers created nourishing recipes for resilience building. We faced difficulty together, we learned together. We leaned-in to one another for support, empathised with differences and histories, faced the reality in front of us. We faced difficulty together. We moved carefully, creating room for the multiple voices. We brought ingredients with us and combined them with field ecologies in our recipes for resilience. We feasted together on that small island. Over time we created our recipe book: recipes for resilience and care in the climate emergency





31. Emma Clear
*Island Edges (detail)*
2020
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Partiosaari island drawing in full. In hidden corners where I began the writing I shared in the book.

# PROJECT: RECIPE BOOK
# recipes for care & resilience in the climate emergency

*FIELD ECOLOGIES WORKING GROUP: 8th June 2021*

*I wish not to work through difficulty alone.*
*To face the insurmountable hardship we seek one another's strengths,*
*to help us stay standing when we are too exhausted to hold our own weight.*[121]

*[Book introduction by Selina Oakes and Emma Clear]*

## What is resilience?

It is a word that has swirled across disciplines in recent years; a word that has sought to provide us with strength, comfort and agency in what is often called 'troubling times.' But, what does resilience look like, behave like, in the everyday? We conversed lately about the multi-faceted folds of resilience: it is not, to us, neither a noun nor something static – an end result. It is, rather, something that dwells in motion; a force, either vast and vigorous or slight and gentle, which pushes and pulls. Like the tree pollen that meshes with the viscosities of water(s), resilience is part of a negotiation; a doing and undoing of matter(s) which keeps us moving or softly lilting, despite – or in spite of – the darkness ahead.
In early summer 2021, a group of transdisciplinary Aalto University students and faculty came together with invited artists and practitioners on Partiosaari – a small island in East Helsinki, Finland. This was an opportunity to gather together after so much time apart; a chance to learn from one another's experiences and knowledges, and to meander, collectively, through the weightiness of contemporary ruination while glimpsing shimmers of light within it. There we stayed with the discomforts and difficulties associated with the climate crisis in an attempt to navigate the present moment, towards a movement of resilience.



To us, the island became a micro-ecology of environment, emotion and experience; a pause from the vastness of the world's frictions where we could take a moment to reflect. There we gathered together with food, at the table and by the fire. We brought ingredients with us and created recipes for sustenance, care and compassion. What we found was both challenging and nourishing; how we came together was unexpected and unforeseen. This book is a collaboration and combination of our ingredients, edible and experiential. A recipe book for resilience building – for moving with resilience – in difficult times.

Here, in these pages, we put forward reflections, exercises and recipes for food collectively cooked on the island with the hope that you, reader, might find moments of solace but also strength, care and compassion in the time spent holding this compilation of notes in your fingertips – and in the time preparing and cooking some of the food recipes enfolded within. We recommend reading and eating in the outdoors; the place with which these words and images were created and compiled.

*Stay, moving, with this moment.*

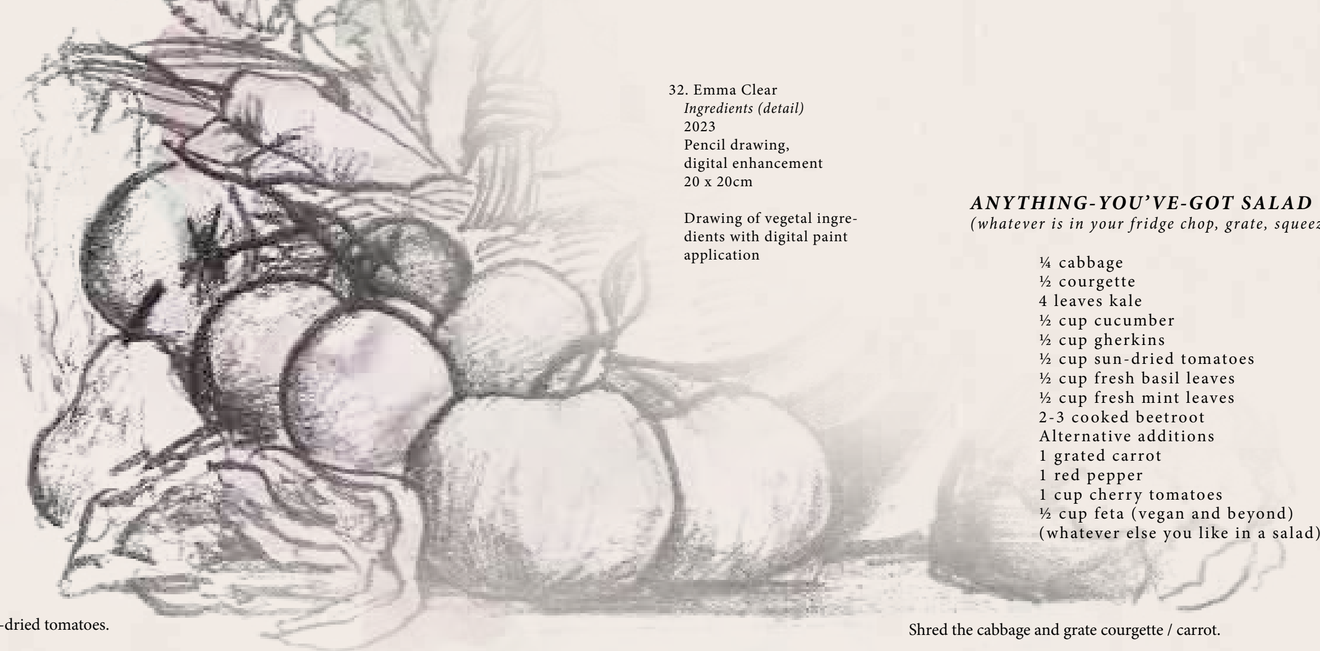
## Working Group

Mónica Celeste
Emma Clear
Stella Martino
Martta Nieminen
Selina Oakes
Florencia Pochinki
Bailey Polkinghorne
Elina Priha
Heini Uusisilta-Immonen
Tuula Vehanen

### *with further contributions by*

Lucy Davis
Julia Lohmann
Sanni Saarimåki

# Collective Recipes
# My ingredients in the pot



32. Emma Clear
*Ingredients (detail)*
2023
Pencil drawing,
digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of vegetal ingredients with digital paint application

## *VEGAN BURGERS*

1 can mixed beans
3 leaves kale
2 mushrooms
10 sun-dried tomatoes
¼ grated courgette or ½ grated carrot
2 tbsp flour
2 tsp smoked paprika
2 tsp dried basil
2 tsp dried oregano
salt
pepper

Drain the mixed beans and mash them in a bowl. Chop the kale finely.
Chop mushrooms finely and add these to the bowl. Add chopped up sun-dried tomatoes.

Grate and squeeze the courgette – squeezing the courgette before adding it is very import-ant otherwise it will turn out like mine and be way too wet.

Add the spices and herbs.

Add the flour to bind and form into cakes.

Fry the burgers to your taste.

Eat the yumminess.

## *ANYTHING-YOU'VE-GOT SALAD*

*(whatever is in your fridge chop, grate, squeeze and fire into a bowl)*

¼ cabbage
½ courgette
4 leaves kale
½ cup cucumber
½ cup gherkins
½ cup sun-dried tomatoes
½ cup fresh basil leaves
½ cup fresh mint leaves
2-3 cooked beetroot
Alternative additions
1 grated carrot
1 red pepper
1 cup cherry tomatoes
½ cup feta (vegan and beyond)
(whatever else you like in a salad)

### *DRESSING*

¼ lemon or ½ lime juice
extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
pinch of salt

Shred the cabbage and grate courgette / carrot.

Finely chop kale (as it can be more fibrous).

Chop anything you think will be tasty (e.g., cucumber, gherkins, sun-dried tomatoes, herb leaves, red pepper, cherry tomatoes) to the size you like and toss the lot together.

Wash and drain cooked beetroot, cube and add to the bowl.

Add the dressing ingredients individually to the bowl (enough olive oil to coat things lightly).

Toss everything together and see what happens when you bring all your favourite stuff together.


33. (left) Elina Priha
*Untitled (1)*
Book Promotion image
2023
Digital Photographs

34. (right) Elina Priha
*Untitled (2)*
Book Promotion image
2023
Digital Photographs

*Writings*

# *A recipe for careful learning*

It was around the fringes that connection happened. At the edges; the spaces where water lapped on land; where rock touched lush green; where day encountered night and night day; where we replenished our bodies with much needed ingredients. This is where my deep learning happened.

We had felt scattered; I had. Moving along the edges with tentative steps at first. A jolting had knocked us over in those first encounters together. A centre too dense to stay in for too long brought us to the edges. But the need to draw us all back in was very strong for me. Instinctively, I meandered through the fringes to gather us together, wishing for all to be near to one another again. It was not easy for me to be comfortable with the separation. So much separation in re-cent times has taken its toll on me. Not only the permanent separation from a loved one but the disjointedness of mutual social separation. The toll of communal stress and the inadequate attempts to comfort from so far away, at-tempting empathetic and loving connection as network connections would break and crackle. And so, here, I felt the need to draw us together.

It is not an easy realisation for me that it was not wholly necessary; that sometimes the space between us can allow for more considered and conscious connection later. But I learned. I learned it there by the edges of the water; on the fringes of my emotional unleashing. What had seemed opposing ideas to me – that of togetherness and separation — was instead a movement. It was a lapping of watery recovery; a bringing together of ingredients and unique ways of self-preservation and protection in order to find ways of holding with each other again. A way of resilience building through separateness and reconnection. An immovable disturbance faced with movement around its fringes.

Holding together happened in ways that were new to me. Not in envisioned spaces of collective conscious experiences and intellectual debate, but through our uniquely individual movements – through discomfort and com-fort. The lapping of watery emotional malaise on hard ground and the replenishing power of nourishing food. Through the tincture of water and herb, fragrance and gentle submerging; the feel of soft watery soil under footstep as we encounter soil connections; the building of embodied learning through ingestion of nurturing plants; the gentleness of soft voice relaying flows of feeling; of storying and telling, listening and quieting; the coming together around the table and the fire.

I learned to hold here, with submerging and the absorption of nurturing and nourishing. I learned the unruly power of uncomfortable and comforting holding together. How it can bring strength again after feelings of utter internal disjointedness. That when we are exhausted it is through this holding with others that we can find ways of standing; replenishing our capacity for care and carefully-living. We were learning how to hold 'caring' space. As Florencia Pochinki says, "This is what living in capitalist ruin is."[122]

35. Elina Priha
*Untitled (3)*
Book Promotion image
2023
Digital Photographs

36. (left) Elina Priha
*Untitled (4)*
Book Promotion image
2023
Digital Photographs

37. Selina Oakes
*Bathing flowers*
2021
35mm Photograph

A photo taken by Selina Oakes, one of the recipe book working group. The foot-bath brew created during the workshop by Mari Keski-Korsu. Much needed care in emotional times.



# Working together

## *WORKING AROUND DENSITY*

We came to the island to find solace in one another as we each attempted to feel ground in un-grounding times. Many of us in pain, each of us needing gentleness and care. Without being careful with others there is great potential to inflict pain outwardly. There is potential to sting and perpetuate cycles of violences (physical, emotional and psychological). There is a possibility of fracturing fragile connections without carefully steps. Delicate collections require gentleness and openness to differences to nourish and enable growth. We learned this when one of the four facilitators showed their ideological rigidness. It was a shock to the system to hear that their views were so restrictive. To hear of reproductive conservativeness, that there are social and species hierarchies and that a person should act compliantly to 'our authorities' without question, was entirely jarring to the group whose practices were based in inclusive and equitable care practices. Our attempt to challenge these views was met with defensiveness and aggressiveness. Those whose courageously spoke up, were hit hard with the emotional weight of confrontation. Those whose sensitivity was near to the surface felt the pain sharply. The centre became too dense; the group retreated to the edges.

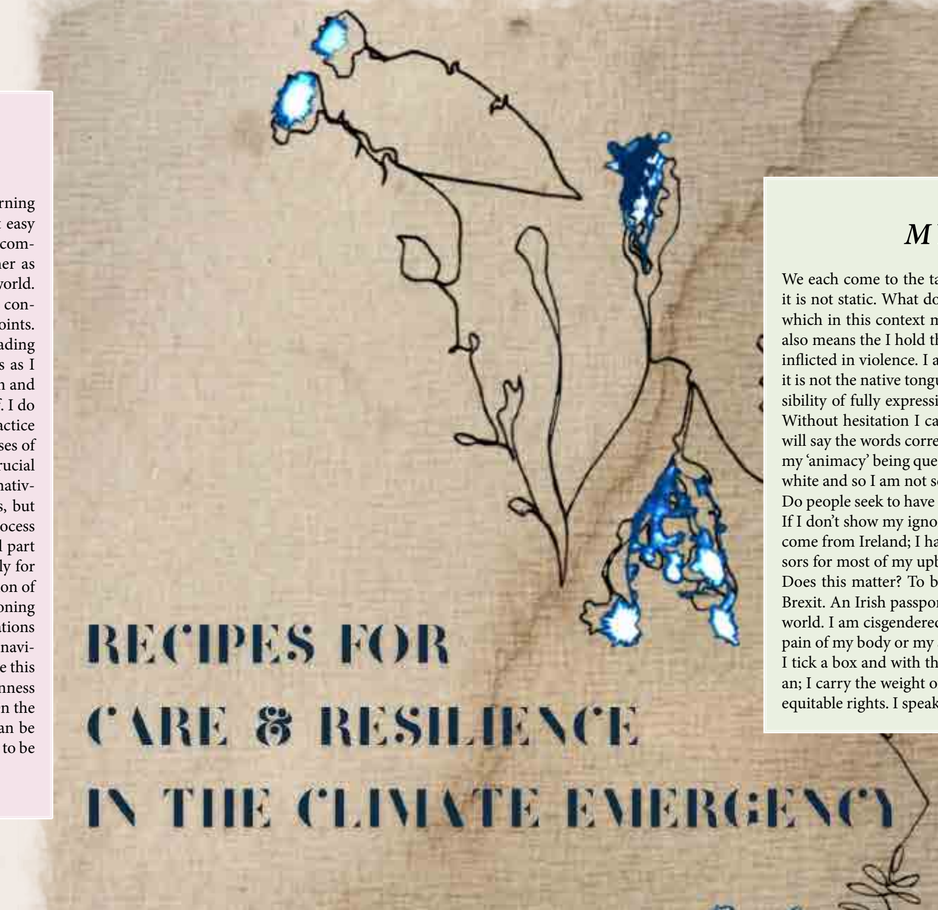
Without the experience of knowing how to manage conflict in group settings, the other facilitators were not able to hold the space together. One moved to the kitchen, another stayed for long periods with those feeling the most affected, the third gently moved through the group throughout the week speaking to each person individually. We were all affected and responded to the conflict with our learned behaviour. To a large degree the daily structure of the course fell apart. External practitioners joined each day and brought us together for collective learning but around these times we retreated again. It was too difficult to stay in the dense centre. In each interaction with her we were met with a full plate where additional ingredients were aggressively discarded. To meet such rigidity was jarring in a space allocated for gentle interactions. In order to protect our vulnerability, we moved to island fringes. My automatic response was to maneuver around the group in attempts to keep us all together but I needn't have made such movements. Connective and gentle caring acts were happening on shores and within lapping waters, by firesides and on the boat that brought us to and fro. Caring was occurring regardless. Connections, ruptured through the centre, formed with more strength around the fringes. Learning happened on the island through natural connections in gentler spaces. We navigated the dense centre by connecting out around the edges of it and finding new ways through. The island characteristics allowed for our re-forming. There were many edges for us to convene in and there was delicious food to share. We worked together by the fringes.

Later in the week Mari Keski-Korsu calmed our spirits and our minds with gentle practices of care and holding: foot baths infused with elements of our environment and singing with calming lilts
Combining ingredients with care became the healing we needed during the workshop with Mari Keski-Korsu. A foot-bath with song and collected ingredients. Some instructions and structure were given to aid gentler movements for restorative care practices:

~ gather the plants that you feel drawn to (they are calling to you for a reason)
~ never take a part of an unhealthy plant (their energy is needed for their own healing)
~ take from the plenty not from the few (as Robin Wall Kimmerer has described — only take half, never the first you see and never the last[123])
~ gather gently (with gratitude, respect and carefulness).

## COMING TO THE TABLE

When I think about collaborative processes I think of the richness of learning in messy spaces; nourishing, supportive and uncertain spaces. They are not easy sometimes. They can be full of uncertainty. Starting points (our situations) becoming interweaving tangles, mingled ingredients, bubbling and baking together as they transform into something else. It is through these eyes that I view the world. I come to the table with them. Sometimes standpoints can form barriers to connection but with careful movements learning can occur creating starting points. I was introduced to situatedness with the works of Donna Haraway. In reading groups and working circles, this concept infused into my working practices as I began to understand what it meant to acknowledge the reality of my situation and the environments, ecologies and entanglements that I am intrinsically part of. I do not wish to take things for granted or make assumptions. Instead, this is a practice of naming and facing where I have come from and from where I start processes of change. It is an essential part of working in collaboration with others and crucial to creating safer spaces that allow for vulnerability and challenges to normativity. Creating safer spaces is not solely following a protocol or making rules, but guidelines of carefulness constructed within collaborative settings. This is a process of navigating collective spaces with respect and inclusion of others A crucial part of this process is creating equitable environments for participation, especially for those with quieter voices and those from marginalised groups. This is a creation of respectful behaviours through discussion and agreements, navigation, questioning and adaptability. Working in groups often proves to be challenging and in situations where agreements for behaviour have not been outlined it can be painful to navigate. Free movements and discussion require structure and one way to provide this is through Safer Space Guidelines. Safer Space Guidelines allow for more openness and the possibility for gentle movement through complex communication. On the island this practice might have mitigated the conflict we faced. Resilience can be found within complicated connectivity, within vulnerable fragility. This needs to be supported with safe structuring. With this in mind I situate myself.




## MY SITUATEDNESS

We each come to the table with our situatedness. We have our starting points but it is not static. What do I come to the table with? My situatedness: I am European which in this context means that I do not need to pay fees to be educated here. It also means the I hold the privileges and the histories of generations of oppressions inflicted in violence. I am English speaking; I am educated in English even though it is not the native tongue of the country I reside in. This means that I have the possibility of fully expressing myself with all the vigour and vocabulary in my grasp. Without hesitation I can open my mouth and not need to contemplate whether I will say the words correctly or be understood. I am white; do not face the weight of my 'animacy' being questioned based on my skin tone. I am an immigrant; but I am white and so I am not seen as a threatening foreigner in a country I now call home. Do people seek to have me removed from the country because I was not born here? If I don't show my ignorance for the Finnish language I may not even be noticed. I come from Ireland; I have been taught that I should fight against empirical oppressors for most of my upbringing, but many of the people I know think I am British. Does this matter? To be Irish is to hold a golden passport in the times following Brexit. An Irish passport these days allows access to so many countries all over the world. I am cisgendered, straight and use the pronouns she/her; I do not know the pain of my body or my sexual identity being questioned and politicised against me. I tick a box and with that I am easily categorised on the form. I identify as a woman; I carry the weight of unequal representation, pay and objectification; I fight for equitable rights. I speak loudly to be heard; I can speak. I am able-bodied. Without difficulty I can navigate the structures around me — in physical, political, and social spaces. I come from a middle-class background but live under the poverty line; I have lived in countries that have a welfare safety net. I have never gone without even though I have had to juggle and ask for help. I am literate; although with the difficulty of dyslexia. I can understand and listen; which means I can broaden my understanding of my situatedness. I have suffered from serious mental health issues at varying points in my life that have been debilitating, including these grieving times. However, I have had the resources to get the crucial support I needed and this has enriched my life and ability to live it. It has given me space to move beyond my internal struggles to allow for greater compassion and empathy towards others. I care; it is through the emotional work I am doing, with support and influence of others, that I have developed an ability and the capacity to care.

This is what I bring to the table when I collaborate with others. It is a list that does not describe all of me or the privileges I hold. It is not all encompassing or a full description of the complexity of my emotional world, but it is a starting point. So, it is from these eyes that I view the world but I openly seek to broaden my view by bringing into the fold the perspectives of multiples. I knead them and work them together, creating better recipes for cohabitation and collective processes. On Partiosaari we each came to the table with our enrichments and our ingredients. We combined and brewed as we sought to learn how to begin our journey of building resilience in difficult times. The book we created is our recipe book of perspectives and approaches for resilience and careful living. It is the food that we enjoy making, sharing and eating these dishes with others. The making of the book took a long time as there were many ingredients to consider, and so it should have. It took time for those ingredients to marinate and come together.

38. (right) Emma Clear
Launch Poster
2023
Poster series. 5 x A3 offset prints, 10 x A4

## *REIMAGINING COLLECTIVE SPACES*

Acknowledging positioning and our situatedness while constructing safer guidelines allows for the discourse of difference to bubble and simmer, like a slowly simmering cooking pot. Discussion and ideas become marinade and mature in such a pot. Working with difference allows the rich flavours of our ingredients to fuse and complement/complicate one another but it requires tentative steps. Not everyone is willing to tread carefully or have the resources necessary to facilitate careful steps. I often hear about communication breakdowns and encounters that result in conflict from friends and colleagues that work with group. Changes in structure and communication, or lack thereof, can often lead to conflict in collaborative spaces. Conflict is almost unavoidable in the emotive situations that are imbued in transformative group work. How these conflicts are navigated is challenging but aided by creating careful interactions. In this, we each come to a group with the personal responsibility to act respectfully and a group responsibility to create respectful guidelines and structures. Nourishing spaces are complex and carefulness creates space for this complexity to flourish into transformative processes. In the creation of nourishing spaces, I am brought back the work of Dr Alex Martinis Roe.

Specifically of interest to me is processes in their work in *Our Future Network*. This work focuses on navigating shared space and the commitment that this group, and Martinis Roe's work in general, puts on collective support, intimacy and caring in shared spaces. Through exploring the experience in (and potential for) working in loving and cared-for lived-spaces[124] are questions on how our environment influences our collaborative interactions. Martinis Roe works with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga to navigate intimacy and conversational change by rearranging the seating in their recreational space inhabited between the group's other workshop sessions. They seek to explore the possibilities for changeable intimacies within groups through shifting the physicality of a space. In interview, Helena Reckitt describes her experiences while participating in these group sessions:

> "This attention to relational intimacy resonates with an aspect of the project that I particularly appreciated, which was your collaboration with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga. Every time we visited the cafeteria during the workshop, Fotini had rearranged the tables and chairs to set up different social encounters. Sometimes you found yourself at a long table, sometimes you sat at a round table, sometimes you were only able to sit across from one other person. This everyday organisation of space and mise-en-scène really matters, although it's not usually foregrounded in politicised discussions."[125]

These are carefully considered alterations to create space for transformations in collaborations. My interest here lies with their willingness to question how a space might aid or alter collective practices and interactions. Knowing that collective work is challenging they stay with difficult and explore potentials within it. On Partiosaari, we had started with discussions of our situations and moved faster than anticipated into places of vulnerability. This vulnerability was met with harsh rigidness and so retreating was wholly necessary but connections occurred at fringe meeting points. Shifting and rearranging to accommodate our vulnerability, collaboration and learning occurred on the island regardless. This may not be the arrangements we first imagined but it happened naturally in the encounters by fire side, kitchen counter and watery edges. Mostly though they happened with food and while picnicking together. Interacting in ways that are supportive of complexity allows for re-formations to emerge in visceral ways, held together by intimate and respectful caring practices. Then the cooking pot can boil and simmer as the collection of ingredients mature together, forming a delicious nourishing meal.

Gathering with care adds nourishing/nurturing ingredients to our cooking pot. Gathering with care with our companions and collaborators celebrates differences. It does not require sameness. There is much to blend in the cooking pot. Experiences that intersect oppressions and the power that opposition and differentiation can offer are rich in flavour. Collaboration in supportive spaces enhances the strengths imbued in difference. Carefulness can allow for the flourishing of difference within intimate relationships and collaboration and allows for collective practices to steep over time.





# Careful Words

## *IMPORTANCE OF WORDS*

The words we use are important. I do not wish to analyse every syllable or have over-cautiousness silence me. I seek instead to be careful with the words I use. With consideration, I look at the word 'carefulness'. Carefulness is a noun that describes a quality of responsiveness. A quality described as "giving a lot of attention to what you are doing so that you do not have an accident, make a mistake, or damage something."[126] Mistakes are inevitable and in their potential for shifting perspective are embedded in transformative processes. And accidents happen whether we want them to or not (no matter how careful we are). Acts of carefulness are attempts to mitigate the impact and learn from the consequences to allow for careful connections and empathy to build. Robin Wall Kimmerer show us the importance of our works throughout Braiding Sweetgrass. [127] The words we use create our framing. It impacts our approach and our perspective. Were I to conjugate the verb 'care' for example, would I say to 'care for'? I cared for my father when he was ill. I brought him multitudes of pills to his bedside and made sure he ate at least something small. Would I say to 'care about'? I cared about him so much that I put my personal cares and needs aside as I cared for him. What if I say instead, to 'care with' him? When we were lying on his bed together, we did not speak of the future but of what is important to us in the here-and-now. When he needed some light-heartedness, I snuck Liqurice Allsorts into his hands and watched him gobble them all up like a naughty one about to get caught. I wonder how do these linguistic distinctions matter? What might be the consequences of a transformation from 'caring for' to 'caring with'?

## *TO CARE ABOUT*

I care — but how? The speculative ethics involved in care are entangled in María Puig de la Bellacasa's book Matters of Care. The complicated tangles in this work, in my view, enhances the complexity involved in caring about bio-political, ethical and feminist perspectives when thinking of the labour involved with and intrinsically connected to care work. This text shows me that caring is messy and hard work. It takes time and energy to care about what is important to us. The interest is there to showing caring but how care is implemented has consequences. Within Matters of Care these questions on how and what consequences might look like are entangled. Here are speculations on the vast connections of care that are responsive and responsible to environment whether that's physical, social, mental or emotional. These connections are often hidden, sporadically harmful and corrosive to relations while also continually nourishing. Why we care seems like a straightforward query on the face of it. Would the answer not be: we care because its vital/embedded within relations? From the first lines of the book, Puig de la Bellacasa outlines what is involved in care: "Most of us need care, feel care, are cared for, or encounter care, in one way or another. Care is omnipresent, even through the effects of its absence. Like a longing emanating from the troubles of neglect, it passes within, across, throughout things. Its lack undoes, allows unraveling. To care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress."[128] We care because we have interest, we love and empathise and are willing to stay with the relationship. But it also sits with obligation. It sits with necessity or forcefulness or a lack of opportunity to break-away and take care of ourselves. How care is manifested and given so often begins with positive intentions, however this can persevere into regret and resentment, a gross over-extension of our capacity to remain empathetic. It can persist into impatience and unwillingness to wait for consent/participation and move instead into the realm of oppressiveness and revoking of autonomy. There are

times in prolonged care-work where monotony can cloud our vision or apathy can eat away at compassion. In these circumstances we forget that there is a being at the other end of our caring practice. There were times when I forgot to go in to go to his room and say 'good morning' to my father and instead I sat at the table in the early morning counting out a myriad of coloured pills into the assemblages of the daily boxes. I only realised my lack of attention when I saw that he had been staring at the ceiling above his bed having already been awake for an hour.

How we phrase the way we care has potential to shape how we care. To 'care for' can mean to have caring about something. To care for (as in 'about') is to pay attention and show interest. 'Caring about' involves a willingness for connection, empathy building and the courage to share in the stakes. These words feel like having care around our subject, encompassing it/them with attention, focus and gentleness. Without 'caring about' the potential for apathy can persist. That is not to say that we should be (and have the capacity for) caring about everything, or at all times. This would not be sustainable. There is room in the conversation on ethical caring practices for resistance through indifference. "It also doesn't mean that to care should be a moral obligation in all situations, practices, or decisions. Virginia Woolf spoke compellingly of the power of cultivating indifference as a form of quiet revolt, the disruptive power of choosing not to care about what we are enjoined to (Woolf 1996)"[129]. With whom and what we care for/about (or don't) is ever situated in histories, presence, environment, political and ethical standpoints. 'Caring about' is not just a wholesome feast of connection, empathy and willingness to show up. There is more to it. In a hierarchical power structure, we often start from caring about those close to us, our family members maybe, or friends; our neighbours or colleagues; our team etc. However, limitations are encountered. Does caring extend only to those in our geographic area or religious sect? Those that look like us? Those that love like us or have the same capabilities as we do? Those that eat like us, digest like us, those of the same shape and species? Caring about can be limited. It can limit us to false oppositions or only caring if we are 'similar to'. Caring about requires our work and attention to break-down imbalanced structuring and nourish caring about differences, indifference, nuances, the consequences and the stakes.

## TO CARE FOR

The common meaning for the phrase 'care for' is "to take charge of especially on behalf of another".[130] We are looking at the maintenance of caring. Caring for has a complex set of responsibilities, assumptions and expectations associated. When given with obligation it has the potential to exhaust empathy and build resentment. It can have an emptying effect on compassion. For a receiver of care a power imbalance is weighted against them. There is potential for a greatly diminished capability for autonomous input. Caring for and being cared for can run the knife edge of ethical practice. Puig de la Bellacasa assists my thoughts here:

> "Again, the heart of the doing is in the how we care rather than the intention or disposition to be caring. Too much caring can be consuming. Women especially know how much care can devour their lives, how it can asphyxiate other possible skills. And care can also smother the subtleties of attention to the different needs of an "other" required for careful relationality. It can be said then that it can also consume the cared for, leading to appropriating the recipients of "our" care instead of relating to them. […] In other words, thinking driven by love and care should be especially aware of dangers of appropriation."[131]

Caring for another requires careful navigation. Were it to happen with automatic reaction, without thought or consideration, it might mean the decaying of carefulness and openness to another's way. In Ireland, people refer to 'caring for' as 'minding' another. This phrase is not often scrutinised linguistically or as an act. If I think about the phrase more closely, I would define it as 'putting my mind to another', showing attention to their needs. But it could also be 'putting my mind upon another', imagining that I know best for them. In order to mitigate this set of potentials in acts of caring I propose a shift in perspective through a linguistic change to 'caring with'.



# Caring with

## WORKING AROUND THE EDGES

On the island of Partiosaari we were coming together to wonder how to build resilience in the multiple challenges we face. In gentler spaces we spoke with one another and shared tentatively and with gentleness. Natural connections happen in gentler spaces. When I think of connections happening regardless of challenges, I am reminded of neural connections. When events occur in the brain that forever damage synapses, neuronal connections and assemblages of new neural pathways form to sidestep the problem. Like water manoeuvring around an obstacle. When we have not got what we need we find a way around. This happens with individuals that live with epilepsy for example. Another example was explored in February 2021. A paper was published in the journal Experimental Brain Research, called: *Perception of Body Shape and Size without Touch or Proprioception: Evidence from Individuals with Congenital and Acquired Neuropathy.*[133] The experiments looked at how the brain compensates with individuals with Somatosensation — people who have the complete inability to sense touch or bodily movement within an environment. Two individuals were studied as part of the research. One had lost the sense of touch after an autoimmune illness in early adulthood and the other was born without the sensory nerve fibres that would allow them to feel their body. This case study theorised the brain's adaptability and ability to re-orientate the sensation of embodiment. It did this using the sense of sight as compensation. In the case of the person who lost sensation in adulthood, the brain compensated using sight and conscious learning to orientate the body. They needed to focus on where they were, paying deeper attention, learning embodiment again over time. In the case of the person born without the ability to sense touch, they compensated unconsciously using sight as their anchor.

## CARE WITH

Our brains have the ability to learn around the fringes, re-situating ourselves. Whether we lose something intrinsic to our ways of living or never had it in the first place, it can be painstaking to re-orientate but it is possible. Learning and connection happens in our brains regardless. How it occurs lies in our ability to open to the possibility of transformation. 'Caring with' is painstaking. It would be so much easier to not put such labour and efforts in, but this is a false comfort. It is not possible to act in more sustainable ways without doing the work of acting more carefully with others in mind. "How to care will require a different approach in different situations of thinking-for. Some oppressed "others" do need caring witnesses to act as their spokespersons—for instance, tortured animals in a human dominated world. Caring for the "oppressed" is not an evident commitment."[132]

Writing has allowed for my perspectives on grieving to transform beyond my personal experiences. Linguistic shifting and changing, playing, picking up and putting down, has allowed for more careful imaginings, beyond what has been told to me by a fixed societal and normative perspective. Writing about carefulness has opened up the possibility of autonomy in grieving processes beyond solely normative imaginings. I write to move my sight beyond the fog of grief to seeing what is around me and what I am part of. Recognition, autonomy and consent are essential ingredients in our attempt to live well, collectively and collaboratively with less harmful impact. To speak and act for another requires tentativeness. When others cannot speak or act for themselves even more care is needed by those who can. When we cannot speak ourselves, we need other's gentle inclusive support. In collective spaces caring with others necessitates carefulness.



## Proposition #15 & #17
## The Practices of Taking Time and Taking Care
## developed by Svenja Engels and Janneke Koers

During the *Our Future Network* meeting, two contributors, feminist scholars Svenja Engels and Janneke Koers, decided to change both of their prepared contributions that they had developed with me, merging into one they felt was urgent. Their proposition is that in a feminist meeting it is crucial to take the different positionalities that each participant brings into account, including their different needs, abilities, and desires, and that this is something that needs to be taken into consideration from the outset in the way events are structured and the kinds of expectations that are implicit. This is also the kind of planning that needs to be adapted and invented continuously, in response to arising needs during an event.

What Janneke and Svenja proposed is something that is relevant for many meetings and projects—that is, *time*. They proposed that as a group we take time to discuss our different experiences of the situation, so as to adapt it in order to accommodate and acknowledge the differences in the group. This proved to be an exceptionally valuable exercise and though this process we arrived at a number of useful starting points, which could be useful in other situations:



— Allocate time in the schedule for a group meeting to give space for each member's different experiences and positionalities, and to collectively adapt the group process and tasks to accommodate different needs and desires.

— Make all pre-planned activities inclusive, in order to make it comfortable and welcoming for everyone to decide for themselves if and how they will participate.

— This should include suggesting different options for participation, so that it is clear that different kinds of participation are welcome and will be facilitated by the group.

— That also means that pre-planned activities should be explained as much as possible in advance, so that everyone is supported in making informed choices about their participation.

— Of course, it is not possible to make sure in advance that no one will encounter discomfort or difficulties at some point, and indeed group work is usually not so easy. So in addition, it is really important to have support structures in place, like having allocated people to provide reassurance and support.

39. (left) Alex Martinis Roe
*Our Future Network*
film stills of Proposition #3 - Archeticture for Encounter
2016.

Developed with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga in 2016: Our future Network. The film stills show group interactions and spacial layouts during the workshops

40. (right) Alex Martinis Roe
*To Become Two: Provocations for Feminist Collect Practice*
Book pages 243-244
Berlin: Archive Books
2018

*Practices of taking time and taking care* are propositions for carefulness in collective collaborations. As the writings here say "this proved to be an exceptionally, valuable exercise", creating care practices within the group work on care.

# SUMMARY: SPRING PICNIC

***How do we use the ingredients we have collected to help create careful and compassionate transformations in our interactions and collaborations with others?***

Carefulness was enacted by my mother in her ability to say “no” when things got too much. We understood that we needed gentler times together while saying goodbye to the endearing floating candles on the ocean where we scattered his ashes. Carefulness was enacted around the edges of the island when the centre was unworkable. Our collective practices and learning happened regardless of the interior struggle. Carefulness was enacted (and so often is) in spaces where we share food. We find solace and companionship at picnic tables; we find our kin in the kitchen. Hands collaborate to nourish bodies, ideas carefully form as food is prepared, stories are shared as we eat to release pain and gain support and tales told to lighten hearts. Caring with others is enacted through careful and respectful behaviour while collaborating. Carefulness occurs for me in gentler spaces in my mind, when I am not resisting the pain and hurt of love and loss. Gentleness and strength simmer together in a nourishing environment of careful learning, allowing me to steep in my emotional world unafraid. Complex ingredients bubbling together, allowing for transformations towards recovery. Carefulness gives space for letting go. Letting go can be difficult and allowing ourselves to lean in to the support of those around us requires us to trust, without knowing the outcome. Uncertainty is difficult to navigate when we are holding on tight to our stories. Listening deeper to the nuances of each situation is full of effort and discomfort. It can feel like battling against the immovable ‘norm’. But when viewed from a broader perspective these efforts feel more at ease with our greater environment. It feels like essential ingredients in a delicious recipe of care, full of the nourishment that surrounds us. Carefulness gives space enough to find change within, like the bubbles formed by a yeast. Carefulness is a base ingredient in moving through grief: kneading connection, empathy and acknowledgement in the mixing bowl and baking it together into a well-risen act of change. The bread accompanying the stew in our cooking pot.





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41. Emma Clear
*Ingredients (detail)*
2023
Pencil drawing, digital enhancement
20 x 20cm

Drawing of vegetal ingredients with digital paint application of colour

# CONCLUSION

***What transformative processes might emerge while navigating grief?***

*How might feminist food studies inform grief processes? And how might such processes evolve, through practices of care and gatherings with food?*

***Can skills learned during personal grief-work translate to broader grieving processes?***

*How might such skills be applied to the emotional impacts of global crises, such as for example, the climate emergency?*

*These questions navigated me through my personal journey of practices of care and their positive impact on my grieving process as I faced the impacts of mourning my father's death. These processes of care brought me closer to equilibrium after such an emotionally turbulent and unbalancing time. It is because of this learning that I write this thesis. I wondered if what I have learned (and am still learning) can be translated beyond my personal experiences to the grief and loss we face globally as our home and our multispecies companions are dying. Can these practices of care help in living with social and emotional unravelling? This thesis was written largely during the global pandemic of late 2019 to early 2023 when people mourned a universal health crisis, countless deaths and the loss of social interaction and intimacy. It was written as we are facing global environmental ruination, social injustices and wars. It has taken time to produce, far more time than I had expected, but grieving and caring-with takes much time. Time to process and consider, to learn and enact, time to see beyond the fog of emotional overwhelm to a space where possibility and relateability can be nurtured. I am grateful that I have been able to give it this time, to approach it carefully. Carefulness is foundational in building resilience; I can see that now.*

*Nourishment is essential to the survival of living organisms. Nourishment of my emotional world can provide an essential realisation of the inter- relatedness and intrinsic responsibilities to the multitudes involved in our survival. Living together is not easy or comfortable. It is complex and complicated, sometimes very painful, often confusing, full of hesitancy and doubt and, sometimes, a wish to hide away from the reality of it all. But with attention, attuning and careful interactions, living together can move through gentle and caring processes to create space that includes our beyond-physical essential needs, to nurturing a deeper sense of belonging, cultivating our living-well together. Living well follows a process of transformation to be in states of constant learning and re-learning, of constant becoming-with*[134]*, caring with and coming together.*

*In the Summer Picnic, I learned through the experiences of the wake and the work with SKEP, that I am not alone but always within response and responsibility with others. That it requires my attention and conscious thought to remember that I can lean-in to the support of multiple others. The microbes of this first picnic aid in my digestion of multi-species food and caring beyond human relations alone.*

*Through mushroom gathering and cultivations in the Autumn Picnic, I learned to face the processes of dying, acceptance of death cycles and that life has possibility within ruination; the emotional ruination in the depths of grief and living in a dying time. I learned that composting is a process of working with the decay and reforming nourishing beginnings again happen in fungal worlds and they can happen in ours. Through symbiotic relations bonding occurs. Bonds that felt lost in grief can be found again through deeper attuning Deeper Listening Practices. This approach creating space for more empathetic bonds with our surroundings.*

*We tell stories that carry weight inter-generationally and inter-species. At the Winter Picnic, I learned with the Remote Storytelling group and Feminist Food Studies course that facing reality and telling other stories is difficult especially when we are culpable in them. When we are already exhausted shame might make us turn away from such difficulty, but facing it is crucial in transformative actions. Multispecies storytelling opens our perspective to the many involved in our co-existing. Shifting perspectives can be hard and yet it is essential to resilience building. To make necessary changes I needed to seek the lesser-heard stories. Grief in more-than-human companions are embedded in our conveniences, our histories and our food and without hearing them, how can we change their course and ours?*

*The phrases and words we use to care with have consequences. This is what I learned from the Spring Picnic. We 'minded' my father as his illness progressed and his body lost mobility, functionality and the autonomy to move on its own. He needed our care then. This care was physical in its maintenance and its labour, emotional in its pain and yearning for it not to be happening and the deep desire to mitigate suffering. It is mentally taxing, spiritually challenging in its inner questioning of the permanency, the irreversibility and the inevitability of its coming. This is a process of facing an ultimate transformation and an unknowable one. I realised in the spring that carefulness is central to transformative practices and to finding resilience.*

*Without carefulness in the processes of grief, it's hard to let go of it. Without carefulness I would not have been able to do any of the work that has come since, including this thesis. I would not have been able to lean-in to the support of others allowing for a shared holding up, a sharing of the weight. Carefulness is intrinsic to learning to attune and build empathy. It is embedded in the storytelling of the unheard. To care-with others allows for their autonomy and perspective creating richer interactions and delicious recipes. Carefulness allows for transformation to occur in grieving processes.*

*We have now shared the food and ingredients of* ***A YEAR LONG PICNIC****. I brought some and you have brought others. I have written and you have read. Your histories and stories have brewed with my own (even though I have not heard them directly). We have shared time and emotional weight and together we have combined the ingredients in the book and baked the recipes for building resilience. My hope is that it has not been too painful. My hope is that my pain is moving through. Grief is so painful but holds so much space for transformation.*

*"Mourning is about dwelling with a loss and so coming to appreciate what it means, how the world has changed, and how we must ourselves change and renew our relationships if we are to move forward from here"*[135]

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*These pages are kept for you to include your recipes of care*
*May you enjoy the picnic with many...*