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drifting with yellow attention to cups – a hydrofeminist visual essay on an artistic process as a figuration

Abstract
drifting with yellow attention to cups started as an artistic practice in 2018 as picking up discarded yellow single-use cups from the streets to pay attention to discarded things and beings. The open-ended process drifted into forming yellow ceramic cups based on the design of the single-use cups. By reading posthuman feminist theories, especially by Astrida Neimanis, while sailing in the Finnish archipelago, it drifted the artistic practice with yellow cups closer to watery themes.

This feminist artistic research is a visual essay, where images and writing are juxtaposed to map an artistic process from the middle through a hydrofeminist lens. The main aim of the thesis is to reflect on what drifting with yellow attention to cups does by being a visual essay. This thesis is situated at the crossing of contemporary art, posthuman feminism and Finnish Environmental Art Education. The visual essay is divided into an introduction, two essays, one poem and an epilogue, that are in dialogue with the archive of the artistic practice with the yellow cups.

The essay figuring drifting with yellow attention to cups is divided into three parts to elaborate on this artistic process as a posthuman feminist figuration. Firstly, the yellow cups are written as containers with the help of Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction by author Ursula K. Le Guin and artist/researcher Özgül Gündeslioğlu’s embodied practice with clay. Secondly, the yellow cups are written in relation to Astrida Neimanis’ figuration bodies of water. Thirdly, the artistic process with the yellow cups is figured through poetry with intentional drifting beyond terracentrism and the unfinished conceptual performance on disappearance, In Search of the Miraculous, by artist Bas Jan Ader.

In the essay feminist artistic research, different methods and maritime cartographic layout choices are mapping the drift of the process. Methods include walking with a pocket camera, taking snapshots with a phone, poetical writing with fiction and graphical design. Especially the uneven forms of the pinched yellow ceramic cups and the letters in the word cup, have been material metaphors to form the map of the artistic process.

The poem drifting with yellow attention to c, u and p is a fictional maritime map as an attempt to portray the anxious emotions on drifting with the yellow cups in the times of climate change crisis. The format of a poem is chosen to highlight the space between words as a fluid surface of thoughts and affects encountered during this process. The fictive setting of the poem tracks the drift of a sailing vessel in a yellow cup across the depth curves of c, u and p.

The epilogue addresses that in order to embody posthuman feminist knowledges in one’s artistic process, there is an urgent need for more longitudinal, interdisciplinary and collaborative ways and methods of meaning-making. This feminist artistic research may run a risk of navel gazing and emphasize Eurocentric art concepts. Mapping from the middle, fiction and poetry can serve as methods to narrate an artistic process in a more entangled and intersectional way.

Keywords artistic research, visual essay, drifting, mapping, material metaphor, Neimanis, posthuman feminism

Språk engelska
The yellow get lined in plastic and covered by shiny surfaces. Their faces wink at strangers, distribute smirks on a regular basis. The yellow are chosen at random, witnessing exchange of money on counters. Their faces get embraced by human hands, radiating light and safety. Time runs through the air, creating rivers down their yellow spines. A sense of control sweeps in and keeps them upright, navigating the liquids in line. An empty slurp throws the yellow to the ground. They fall into garbage, at streets and corners. They fall at random, like forgotten intentions in rush-hour traffic. They settle down, almost accidently, near construction sites, gas stations and parks. Here, they start to leak into everything, gradually moving into decompositions, soaking in the outside. Occasionally something exciting happens, but mostly just wind and rain.

Excerpt from takeaway_manifesto (2019)
In spring 2018, I took part in a course called *Urban Research Project* led by Henrika Ylirisku at the Department of Art Education at Aalto University. We experimented with *derèvé*, which is an experimental walking theory based on the urban drifting practice by the French Letterists in the 1950’s. We had to come up with a project that would be presented at the end of the course. I decided to pay attention to discarded take-away cups in my neighborhood. I took snapshots of these cups that were sitting on electrical enclosures, rolling around aimlessly on pavements or lying flat on the ground, looking into the lens of my phone. At that time, I felt the discarded cups underlined a problematic single-use culture. The act of producing and discarding the cups on the streets seemed to me as a direct link to a general neglect of the environment.

A certain kind of cup design began to stand out due to its bright yellow color and graphical design. The anthropomorphized facial expressions of the thrown away yellow single-use cups made me feel like they were characters hanging around in the streets. I met them smiling in sewers, winking at me from shrubs and curiously glancing at me from tramway tracks. Sometimes I found them smirking in puddles of water or staring at me at bus stops. Their faces seemed to glare at me and soon I found myself in a trash-deep relationship with these cups.

I started to collect them in plastic bags that I kept in my pockets and carried home. I developed an eye for the yellow cups that were lying around in the street corners, slowly soaking in their surroundings. They could be easily spotted, even from a distance. My eyes got trained by them to pay attention to shrubs, bus stops, electrical enclosures and pavements in hope of spotting one yellow cup. The yellow discarded take-away cups got an Instagram social media account [@takeaway_manifesto](https://www.instagram.com/takeaway_manifesto/), where I uploaded snapshots of cups found lying around close to my home. Collecting and documenting the yellow cups continued after the course ended and little did I know how far adrift this process would take me.

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1 Careri, 2003, p. 88.
2 takeaway_manifesto, 2018.
adrift in the climate change crisis

At that time in spring 2018, picking up trash and sharing it on social media felt like guiding people’s attention to local environmental issues. There was a general concern depicted in news coverages of the climate change that caused rising temperatures, extinction of species and uneven distribution of fresh drinking water. The topics were clearly also trendy and many Finnish artists highlighted the environmental themes in their work during that time. For example the artist duo nabbteeri addressed the fact that installation material is seldom recycled when the exhibitions end\(^3\). nabbteeri usually install exhibitions with local found material. One example is their participation in the Venice Biennale in 2019, where they installed the exhibition with material they could find lying around next to the Nordic pavilion in Venice\(^4\). In 2019 I participated in a group exhibition in Helsinki with the zine takeaway_manifesto, where each issue represented one yellow cup I had picked. Even though I was concerned about material use in contemporary art, I also printed new zines and put them on display next to some collected take-away cups. The text of the zine is in the beginning and at the end of this thesis.

There are no simple individual-oriented nor contemporary art solutions for the climate change crisis. The demand to take political and economic action on different levels is urgent. Also, it is tricky to address the climate change crisis within the contemporary art scene, when the art market is part of the global economy, shipping artworks and flying people across continents. The more time I spent with the yellow cups, the more complex and entangled the phenomenon of climate change crisis had become. Also, my artistic practice in connection with the company’s marketing strategies of the single-use yellow cups is admittedly problematic. I am an activist for intersectional feminism, but I would not define this process purely as artivism, where art is used as activism. Instead, I want to emphasize storytelling and reflection in this poetic visual essay. We exist in relation to other bodies and matters, where stories are always situated and manifold.

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\(^3\) nabbteeri, n.d.
\(^4\) Kiasma, n.d.
shaping clay into cups

In spring 2019, I went on an exchange to Estonian Art Academy in Tallinn to focus on contemporary art in Estonia. I started to think about how the yellow take-away cups could be transformed into stationary cups as in staying still with the break, instead of using take-away cups to optimize time. I took an introductory course in ceramics, *Shaping the Clay*. The clay I used wasn’t considered good enough for quality firing and was a mixture of clays people had used for ceramic mold making. I used a pinching technique, which is one of the basic handbuilding techniques used in ceramics along coiling and slabbing.

Shaping the clay into cups was a meditative practice. They turned out asymmetric and if you would choose to walk with them filled to the brim with liquid, it would most certainly leak out. These cups were glazed yellow and got faces as their discarded single-use cup siblings. This was an intentional choice as in keeping the origin of the cups with me in the process. I also made some yellow cups without the faces and focused more on how the touch of the uneven pinched cups felt in my hands. Instead of calling myself a ceramist who is forming clay, I would say I am an artist and art educator who got formed by clay.

The less attention to the anthropomorphic attributes of the cups I gave, the more focused on the form and touch I became. Me and the ceramic yellow cups participated in one group exhibition ClimATE with the installation and free cafe *COMMODITY CAFÉ // DyeING with coffee* in Espoo and one studio critique and free cafe *COMMODITY CAFÉ* in Tallinn. In these events, I was more interested in creating free spaces for people to meet and drink coffee from the yellow cups than focusing on the cups themselves.

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5 Free cafe, installation and performance.
6 Free cafe, podcast and performance; part of the critique in the end of the Studio Project course at EKA in May 2019.
drifting beyond terracentricism

I had spent the summer 2020 on the sea, sailing around with the student-sailing organization TRIP, Teekkaripurjehtijat ry, in the Finnish archipelago. Drifting could be called a subcategory of sailing. Drifting at sea addresses a similar kind of uncertainty of arrival as the urban walking practice dérive mentioned earlier. It means embodying a movement at sea which is caused by external forces beyond one’s control, according to geographer Kimberley Peters. A close friend encouraged me to use the same methods for my thesis as I use for sailing. Sailing for me is an illusion of freedom, a way of practicing presence on the sea by paying attention to the environment, people and evolving situations. There is a saying among sailors that once you let go of the ropes connected to the mainland, you are already at your destination. There is also a stereotype with Swedish-speaking Finns that we learned sailing in our mother’s milk with boats owned by our fathers. In my case, this is more like a parody as being an art student introduced to sailing as an adult.

The water had in fact already been present in my artistic practice with the yellow cups as in crossing the Baltic Sea with a ferry to embrace posthuman feminist theories and collaborative artistic practices in learning at the seminar THE URGE, THE ECHO – Reverberations of Learning Practices at Index, Stockholm. Also, crossing the same sea to make the yellow ceramic cups as an exchange student in Tallinn, has made drifting an evident theme to include as the locations were chosen at random. The sea and sailing has also surfaced in Finnish contemporary art and art education related environmental projects. Art educator and artist Mari von Boehm and Taina Mannila’s art workshop and sail around Iceland was to raise awareness about environmental issues through an embodied environmental art workshop. Finnish artists Teemu Takatalo, Tommi Taipale and Juha Mehtäläinen built the catamaran Rescue Boat Baltic Herring out of trash and sailed around with it in the Finnish Archipelago in 2010 while inviting different thinkers onboard. Performance artist Antti Laitinen sailed with the Bark Boat, that was inspired by the bark boat design made by children, from Porkkala peninsula to the Estonian coast in 2010. These two latter art projects participated in the same artistic research project and exhibition Capsula Exhibitions in the Baltic Sea in 2011 curated by Ulla Taipale and Merja Markkula.

Drifting at sea describes well the sensations of this artistic process as not being sure where it will take me. To track a drift at sea and an artistic process, one can use navigational and documentational tools. I am not using watery drifting with yellow attention to cups solely as an oceanic metaphor to map an artistic process, but also as a figuration. My knowledge of Western navigational maps is combined with embodied experiences at sea and the yellow cups. The aim of the visual essay as a navigational map is to show this artistic process from inside, challenge the cartographic perspective from the above and the academical tone of writing a thesis.

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7 Peters, 2014.
10 Taipale, 2016, p. 27.
11 Markkula & Taipale, 2021.
12 Ibid.
hydrofeminism and yellow attention

In this feminist artistic research, I am thinking and writing with posthuman feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis’ book * Bodies of Water - Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Sailing with TRIP in the Finnish archipelago and making ferry voyages across the Baltic Sea has drifted me closer to Neimanis’ figuration and embodied concept *bodies of water*. This posthuman feminist figuration was introduced to me at the seminar at Index in 2018 by curator Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris. *Figuration* is a way of linking concepts with materiality, where *theories are always rooted in matter*. Neimanis emphasizes that water invites us to think of ontology as relational ontology, meaning bodies being in relation to each other through and with water. Her figuration *bodies of water* offers suggestions for more ethical posthuman feminist futures. Neimanis’ poetic way of writing of and with water resonates deeply with my artistic practice across waters, the yellow cups holding liquids and my sailing practice being with water. It will therefore be the main discussion companion in this thesis.

The attention I pay to the yellow cups got entangled with an attention to posthuman feminist theories. Thereby I want to call this combination *yellow attention*. I practice paying attention to situatedness in this feminist artistic research, which means being aware of the power-relations of the citations, representations and narratives included in this thesis. Yellow is the most visible colour to the human eye and is used in graphical design to quickly draw our attention for example to traffic signs. In these times of social media and marketing, attention means power, influence and money. *Yellow attention* is a concept to critically reflect on media literacy in this visual essay through a posthuman feminist lense.

Finnish Environmental Art Education is a diverse and entangled field where the human relationship with nature is questioned and challenged since the 1970’s. Artist educator Ylirisku highlights that Environmental Art Education should be reoriented by involving posthuman, postcolonial and feminist theories to rearrange the power structures and human-centeredness in it. Critical thinking of human-centered structures and historical colonial narratives should be emphasized more at the Department of Art Education. Many recent Art Education and Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art (ViCCA) master’s theses produced at the Department of Art, address experimental writing, intersectional feminism, artistic research and posthumanism. One example is Annika Sohliman’s art education master’s thesis on language and manners as tools for taming. Her figuration *bodies of water* offers suggestions for more ethical posthuman feminist futures. Neimanis’ poetic way of writing of and with water resonates deeply with my artistic practice across waters, the yellow cups holding liquids and my sailing practice being with water. It will therefore be the main discussion companion in this thesis.

The main aim of the thesis is to reflect on what drifting with yellow attention to cups make knowable by being a visual essay. I situate this thesis between contemporary art, posthuman feminism and Finnish Environmental Art Education. I aim to critically reflect on my artistic practice, its origin with the commercial yellow cups and on drifting with yellow attention to cups as a figuration. I’m writing for the curious and anxious, for the ones who are adrift and becoming. Can we learn something from the drift? What will drifting in the archive of yellow attention to cups do? Can we find ways of drifting more differently amidst the climate change crisis with the help of Neimanis’ watery posthuman feminist figuration *bodies of water*?

The visual essay is divided into an introduction, two essays, one poem and an epilogue. The essay *drifting with yellow attention to cups* is divided into three parts and highlights the posthumanist feminist figuration of this artistic process: firstly, the yellow cups are written in relation to *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* by Ursula K. Le Guin and artist/researcher Özgü Gündeşlioğlu’s embodied practice with clay; secondly, the yellow cups are written in relation to Astrida Neimanis’ figuration bodies of water; thirdly, the artistic process with the yellow cups are written in relation to drifting as a movement beyond terracentricism and artist Bas Jan Ader’s artwork *In Search of the Miraculous*. The essay feminist artistic research elaborates on the chosen methods and maritime cartographic inspirations in this visual essay. The poem *drifting with yellow attention to c, u and p* is a fictional maritime map portraying the emotions encountered being adrift in this process. In the epilogue, the visual essay is reflected in relation to contemporary art and learning. For those who are more academically inclined, I recommend reading this in a chronological order. For the drifters out there, feel free to move as you please.

14 TBA21–Academy & Art Institute HGK FHNW, 2020.
15 Ylirisku, 2016.
16 Ylirisku, 2021.
In this essay I will contextualize *drifting with yellow attention to cups* with Ursula K. Le Guin’s theory on the carrier bag of fiction, with Astrida Neimanis’ posthuman feminist figuration *bodies of water* and with contemporary art references. I will also decentralize terracentric drifting in relation to yellow attention to cups.
cups as carrier bags

Ursula K. Le Guin’s essay *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* challenges the hero-centered narrative in fiction by emphasizing the narrative of the prehistoric gatherers. I was introduced to Le Guin’s short essay through Neimanis’ book *Bodies of Water*. Neimanis includes the essay as a support for her figuration *bodies of water*, where different bodies are thought of as queer amniotic milieus that hold others. The yellow take-away cups that I was collecting from the streets, now feel like carrier bags for liquids. The yellow ceramic cups are inspired by these single-use cups, both of them holding and moving liquids. I will introduce Neimanis’ embodied concept in more detail later in this chapter.

Le Guin underlines that the concept of the hero is commonly used in fiction where the energy is directed outwards to conquer land, fame or fortune in favour of the hero. Instead of the phallogocentric narrative of the territorial hero that directs his energy outwards, Le Guin’s speculative narrative centers the container, the carrier bag, and thereby directs the energy inwards. The energy is collected and carried around. Le Guin suggests that the hero narrative should be rewritten to emphasize the prehistoric gatherers, who collected materials in baskets long before the hero threw spears into mammoths. Le Guin’s speculation is inspired by Elizabeth Fisher’s *Carrier Bag Theory of Human Evolution* published in 1979, where Fisher is suggesting that carrier bags, instead of spears, were the first tools formed and used by humans. In a way, when I was collecting the discarded yellow cups in plastic fruit bags, it felt like tuning into our prehistoric gatherer roots in an urban setting.

I have been impressed by the story of the hero the same way as I was imagining myself as Harry Potter in my early teens and childhood. It was a magical narrative following the chosen boy Harry, whose actions against the forces of evil were powered by the fuel of friendship. However, I’m not sure if the main character ever fully understood how he was constantly carried by others around him, even at the expense of their own premature death. This is something that is being repeated in real life, where some bodies at the expense of their health support the well-being of other bodies. Especially the coffee stains found in the discarded yellow cups reminded me of the global trade network of the shipping industry. The majority of all the commodities and art works are shipped with container vessels that are burning fossil fuels across vast amounts of water. One can track the routes of these ships that are holding goods in real time, crowded as the sky is with planes or the space is with satellites.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Lancaster, 1982.
27 This anecdote is amusing on many levels, one being that potter also means someone who makes pottery.
To be able to carry on with the system of the global trade, it demands bodies of people, ships, containers and cups that hold it together. Many hands and matters have touched the matters of the yellow single-used cups before they were discarded in my neighbourhood. The labor of holding, maintaining and carrying does often go unnoticed in everyday life and stays in the periphery. Somebody is picking the coffee beans for the coffee poured in the cup; another one is drawing the design of the cup; somebody is throwing the cup to the ground; another one is picking up the cups from the street and shaping clay cups; yet another is continuing to produce take-away single-use cups and shipping coffee beans across seas.

One carrier bag in this process is my friend and artist/researcher Özgü Gündeşlioğlu’s artistic practice with clay. In the exhibition Entropy – An exhibition about ceramic in Turkey in 2018, Gündeşlioğlu exhibited a documentation piece Çömlek-çii-lik / Pot-ter-y. The artworks in the exhibition were made during her doctoral study in ceramics. Çömlek-çii-lik / Pot-ter-y is a part of her artistic research of the throwing technique as an open-ended learning process. The technique was unfamiliar to her and the year-long learning process was documented on video and as an alternative wheel throwing diary. Gündeşlioğlu was interested in how the body and mind synced in a reciprocal process and remained critical towards product based ceramics. The wheel throwing learning process became an embodied practice, where centering the body became as important as centering the clay piece on the wheel. In the beginning, she recalls that her body felt stiff next to the pottery wheel. By imitating, practicing, repeating and getting familiar with how the clay was behaving on the wheel, the preliminary difficulties started to evolve into a skill. After a year of practice, she started to dance with the clay together with the wheel.

According to phenomenologist and philosopher Juha Varto skill is always simultaneously corporeal, sensory and conceptual. Gündeşlioğlu emphasizes in her doctoral thesis, how artistic research complicates the relationship between data and output. She challenges forms of knowing ceramics by focusing on how language, structure, practice and methodology work in relation to each other. Part of the artistic research project at the Venice Biennale 2019 Working with Soil led by Maarit Mäkelä and Riikka Latva-Somppi, Gündeşlioğlu recalls that one needs to be attentive to the materiality of clay to collaborate with the material. The project mapped the soil quality of Venice, handbuilt pots out of local brick clay and used the gathered soil samples as glaze to demonstrate the human-caused contaminated ground.

Yellow cups are made with the pinching technique instead of the pottery wheel. I am not the only one shaping the clay, the clay is also shaping me. The repetitive pinching technique felt like a way to let my hands suggest forms together with the material, making an embodied and meditative assembly line. First, I rolled many pieces of clay into balls and then took them one by one and let my fingers form cups by pressing, smoothing and extruding. Each cup was formed a bit differently depending on my energy levels, attention...
to clay and time of the day. There were times when the light darkened outside the windows and I sat there with the clay, immersed in the process.

The choice to glaze the cups came quite intuitively as I wanted them to become yellow as the paper cups and make cups that could be used again. I had by this point realised that this won’t be a project that tries to recycle clay, because fired clay can’t return to its fluid forms. This got me thinking of the problematic relationship between materiality, energy and contemporary art. Materials and energy are used to make art, but there are still practices that don’t take into account how much energy can one use and if the materials can be recycled after the project ends. In a way, I find the thought of deep time beautiful, that everything will circulate and break down eventually, even these yellow ceramic cups. However, the speed of which things and living beings are disappearing at the moment is concerning.

In 2018 in Tvärminne, I walked with an anchor buoy as an art assignment for a course Art Education, Ecological Thinking and Sustainability held by University Teacher in Art Education Henrika Ylirisku. We were guided to spend a day with one object that spoke to us. When I walked around with the single-use yellow take away cups in my pockets, it reminded me of the short time I spent with the buoy during the course. An established theorist on vibrant matter is political theorist Jane Bennett, who writes about what objects can do if they are considered having their own thing-power34. Bennett shifts the focus from language of epistemology to ontology and elaborates on how matter could be experiences as an active, earthy, not-quite-human vibrant matter35. It is difficult as a human to know if the cups have emotions or sensations when we don’t have a common language. I don’t know if they are eager to tag along in the first place. I wonder if the cups can escape their definition of being functional objects used in everyday life and become something else.

The collected yellow paper cups drifted me to yellow ceramic cups. They again drifted me to Astrida Neimanis’ figuration bodies of water to think and feel the forms of the cup and the materiality of the liquids held by them. I suspect the yellow cups have more agency in affecting this artistic process than meets the eye.

34 Bennett, 2010, p. 3.
35 Ibid.
The design of the faces on the single-use cups made me notice them in the first place, as it makes it easier to imagine them as characters. As emojis are used to express the tone of written language in instant messages and online, so are these faces designed to express certain emotions as a marketing campaign. I wonder what the cups think and feel about all of this.

The material and form of the yellow ceramic cups have grown more important than the designed faces on the single-use cups. By paying closer attention to the uneven forms of the ceramic cups and the separate letters in the word cup, it softens the lines between the conceptual and the material, becoming material metaphor.

Gündeşlioğlu artistic practice and research of form and concept inspired me to experiment with the letters in the word cup. When you break the word apart and zoom in on the separate letters, they look like a collection of different cups:

C

as an empty tilted cup; a potential for liquid to seep in, the sound of seeping when pronouncing c aloud.

U

as a cup that is holding liquids inside, containing a space, sometimes empty; keeping the liquids upright; u as a short version of you, the other.

P

as a tilted cup with its contents pouring down, leaking to the ground; falling with gravity, p pronounced aloud feels like an outward going motion, like peeing.

:c:p :u

:p :U :C

;p

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How is water in and of my body? When I drink a glass of water, where does it go? How does it animate me? Where does it come from? How does water ask me to move, what sensations does it evoke, what affect does it engender, in me and the bodies it connects me to?

Astrida Neimanis

Last summer when I was sailing on the Baltic Sea while drinking different liquids from the yellow ceramic cups, Latvian Astrida Neimanis figuration bodies of water surfaced as an important source to follow. Neimanis has a background in gender studies and situates her work within posthuman feminism. Neimanis feminist and anticolonial figuration bodies of water is a posthuman feminist figuration with embodiment as watery, where the water seeps through membranes, but always differently. The yellow ceramic cups had in fact always been bodies of water as containers of liquids. Both me and them are bodies of water in relation, where we are seeping, holding and leaking differently.

Posthuman feminist theories entangle attention to difference in embodied experiences and critically reflect on colonialism and Humanist relations to more-than-human worlds. By combining my practice with the yellow cups and reading posthuman feminist theories, I want to call this entanglement yellow attention as a tool to practice paying attention to media literacy and material metaphors in this thesis. Figuration is a common way in posthuman feminism to link concepts with materiality as a material-semiotic knot, coined by Donna Haraway. It stems from a deep concern of using metaphors as mere abstractions, as in neglecting the materiality behind ideas. If water is thought of as something that connects us, without taking the agency away from the water itself, it is a way to imagine the world as a network of watery milieus. Neimanis argues that bodies of water hold water and the water holds things in relation by moving around. Thereby, Neimanis emphasizes that water invites us to think of ontology as relational ontology, being in relation. Thereby, thinking about the yellow cups as bodies of water in relation to other bodies of water, we are forming a web of relations with the cups.

Neimanis interpretation of Deleuze brings forth ideas on difference and repetition of water and how our bodies are sensory apparatuses that register these different flows in time. She is pouring together rhizomatic thoughts of Deleuze; embodied experiences of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and thoughts of Western feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Neimanis calls this theoretical mixture feminist posthuman phenomenology.

37 Ibid, p. 5.
40 TBA21–Academy & Art Institute HGK FHNW, 2020.
41 Ibid, p. 47. Deuleuze points out that matter and concepts are meshed, entangled and partly virtual, becoming.
Irigaray has a long history in questioning power structures in phallogocentric, patriarchal, structures in the early 70’s and onwards. Neimanis refers that Irigaray has especially contributed to feminist thinking with the focus on sexuate difference, where the feminine-material is considered as ontology, a way of being. Irigaray’s perspectives on gestationality, watery writings on amniotic fluids and bodies that hold them, has according to Neimanis, contributed as a prefiguration for feminist new materialism. Transcorporeality, coined by material feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo, is to shift the narrative on experience in phenomenology from humans to being in relation to more-than-humans. It is figuring different bodies and things in relation to each other, thereby queering the anthropocentric experience in phenomenology. As also supported by Åsberg, the human body can be understood as a multi-species ecology, where microscopic organisms other than human-animal cell variety stand for 90% of the body. So if I am not 100% human, what is the difference between classifying me as having more agency than the yellow ceramic cups or the liquids inside them.

Neimanis states that concepts can be a way of imagining things otherwise and should always be connected to materiality. Posthuman feminism theorist Cecilia Åsberg points out that if cerebral affairs are prioritized over different embodied relations, it risks re-centering an updated version of the enlightened man. In transhumanism there is an urge to make the human immortal, a hero, missing the critique by posthuman feminism of paying attention to difference, materiality and power structures in bioengineering. One aim of posthuman feminism is not to move beyond the human, but to move away from Humanist exceptionalism and agency. Posthuman feminist theorists argue that transhumanism is biased by western and white ideals as it doesn’t acknowledge the historical injustices of other species and peoples. The term human has never been neutral, but stands for a history of privileges still visible in theories and everyday life.

Even though Neimanis is highlighting that we should pay careful attunement to difference and origin when thinking of posthuman embodiment, I remain somewhat skeptical. I wonder how to know which experience to pay attention to when having been educated within a Western humanist worldview. Thereby this thesis is an attempt to practice ways of being with the cups and posthuman feminist theories by blurring the lines in-between and unlearning old habits. I might not be able to embody a yellow cup fully, but I can play with different perspectives of narration as a practice of paying attention to difference and caring for other ways of being.

The clay consists of water and small grains of soil, having been grained down from bigger objects for thousands of years. When I was shaping clay, the water evaporated in the drying process and left it bone dry after a while. If unfired clay would be put back into water, it would eventually sink to the bottom and become plastic again. Most clay that is used in ceramics is also a commodity as it is mass produced in one area and distributed to another place. Unfired clay embodies different hydrological cycles through time and place. When you fire clay the atoms merge and become solid, but without adding glaze the cup is still porous and forming a membrane for water to seep through. When the yellow glaze was poured over the cups, the liquids in the cup could be held longer. The yellow glaze is quite similar to the plastic lining inside the single-use yellow paper cups, both forming an impermeable membrane for water. Even though glazed ceramics, fired clay and glass, seem to last centuries in soil, they too, will be grained down at some point. This drifting of matter makes it strange to live in the now, when the slowness of movement of these matters can’t be experienced during a human lifetime.

Neimanis suggests that by navigating water as a queer archive of feeling, it helps us to make different kinds of relations with the past and accept the dissolution of human-centeredness in the futures to come. Also, Neimanis emphasizes that the modern water as H2O is quite a new concept as it originates from the Western European and North American industrial times. Water is considered something that is there, placeless, when in fact it is deeply geopolitical. Neimanis states that it is thereby utterly important to give attention to those who sustain, support and care for things and beings. Drifting with yellow attention to cups is an experiment of decentering Humanism and joining the process from the middle of a feminist artistic research, practicing to acknowledge those matters and stories that came before.

Different liquids held inside the yellow ceramic cups, such as coffee and tea, have colonial and imperial roots. To be able to digest them in Finland, their paths of trade have been founded during Eurocentric colonialism as slave trades across the Atlantic ocean and imperialism as sea voyages to the East. These journeys were made with tall ships that were transporting and holding different people and goods across seas. Black feminist scholar Christina Sharpe demands us to stay in the wake of these ships and behind the contemporary container ships transporting goods in the global economy. The atoms of the slaves that jumped or were thrown overboard in the Atlantic are still circulating in the Atlantic ocean as hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, phosphorus, iron, sodium and chlorine due to the time it takes for different matter to move with hydrological cycles and ocean currents.

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44 Ibid, p. 70.
46 Ibid, p. 33.
49 Neimanis, 2017, p. 5.
50 Åsberg, 2018, p. 158.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid, p. 159.
54 Neimanis, 2018, p. 189-198.
56 Sharpe, 2016.
57 Ibid.
drifting beyond terracentricism

At times, in these times, I feel very much at sea.

Astrida Neimanis

When I began collecting the discarded yellow take-away cups from the streets, my prac-
tice could have been called urban derivé. Architect-researcher Francesco Careri highlights
that drifting in Western art history is connected to the Situationists International, previ-
ously known as the Letterist International, in the 50-70’s post-war Europe. They coined
drifting as derivé, where for example the city of Paris became a stage for the art collective
to create situations instead of just being mere consumers of things. The Situationists
were not only interested in movement itself, but also in psycho-geography as in what
kind of knowledge the process of drifting reveals for example about social structures and
hierarchies.

Pedagogic theorists Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman criticize the fact that derivé
origins from a practice by white and able-bodied Western-European male bodies, which
leaves out the experience of other bodies for example women, people of color and ani-
mals. By including walking methodologies, one should take in consideration the other-
ness of different bodies in the walking experience. I am not interested in mapping where
the yellow single-cups have been found nor pointing out those who threw the cups to the
ground. Instead, it became more interesting to take a closer look at these cups, how they
have become collaborators in this process and practice ways of drifting with them.

The Naked City by French Situationist Guy Debord, published in 1957, is a map of the
city of Paris as a liquid space. Careri underlines the idea that the map made by Debord is
depicting an urban archipelago, an amniotic fluid, where the solid buildings are the city-is-
lands, spaces of staying and the in-between spaces the sea for the pedestrian to wander
within, spaces of going. In this map, there are many references to the sea as a metaphor
for the urban space: islands, currents, vortexes etc. The word derivé in an urban setting is
also metaphorically linked to drifting in maritime navigation, which means losing control
of the steering and floating with the currents. I would like to stress the importance of
paying closer attention to metaphors and their connection to materiality.

Geographer Kimberley Peters is highlighting how drifting is often used as a terracentric
metaphor and method, even though it was originally borrowed from the sea. Instead of
only projecting something from an oceanic context into an urban setting as a visualization

60 Ibid, p. 49.
61 Ibid, p. 90.
62 Springgay & Truman, 2018.
63 Careri, 2003, p. 104.
64 Ibid, p. 21.
65 Ibid, p. 104.
67 Ibid.
of an idea, I would agree with Peters and drift further away from only using the term for terracentric means. This would include embodying and experimenting with drifting with yellow attention to cups as a watery material metaphor in combination with Neimanis’ figuration bodies of water and my sailing experiences on the sea.

The liquid spaces of the urban cities are in fact leaking out into the oceans as microplastics68. Also, they leak out mid-way on crossings as in 1992, when part of a container ship’s cargo got swept away in a storm on the Northern Pacific Ocean. Some of the lost containers included around 29,000 Friendly Floatees—yellow ducks, red beavers, blue turtles and green frogs—bath toys for kids that were set adrift and were washed up on different shores in the world years later after the incident69. Oceanographers Curtis Ebbesmeyer and James Ingraham used these washed up bath toys to track the surface ocean currents, which proved to be more efficient than the 500-1000 drift bottles they usually used in research on flotsam movements in oceanic currents70. The pieces of yellow take-away cups could be leaking out into different bodies of water as we speak, following the currents, drifting, connecting land and water in cycles, leaking back on land inside mass-harvested or farmed fish71.

According to Peters, drifting can be divided into an intentional or unintentional movement with certain speed by external forces72. Intentional drifting at sea demands skill, control, knowing how to use the sea drift as a route, seafaring knowledge of planets, winds, ocean currents and stars73. Perhaps one could call this kind of drifting psycho-oceanography as a reference to urban psychogeography. The motion of the drift is caused by ocean currents, wind and lack of friction etc74. According to Peters, pre-modern seafarers and imperial captains and their crews when caught up in the drift, would simply let the vessel float along with it, because it would more likely take them towards land and safety75. The Atlantic triangular slave trade used intentional sea drift according to American scholar Christina Sharpe76. Unintentional drifting means losing control of steering and being at the mercy of external events77. Contemporary vessels can still get lost when an external force outweighs the strength of the vessel, even though they are equipped with high-tech GPS and computerized navigational instruments78. One can however, track location when drifting involuntarily. By following texts by Neimanis, it led me to her co-edited book Thinking with Water, where architect Cecilia Chen writes about how to map a watery place. Chen elaborates on how mapping is a human practice, based on apparatuses, such as sketching,

languages, technology etc., which are collecting information79. A sonar, an echo of sound, is used on modern vessels to measure the depth of water and as a navigational aid for positioning. Navigational methods or apparatuses will also be used in this essay to keep track of the drift of the process.

According to Neimanis, we are not drifting equally80. The psychological sensations of experiencing being adrift may cause anxiety and frustration due to the slow motion and uncertainty of outcomes81. The Dutch conceptual artist and experienced sailor Bas Jan Ader’s set sail from Chatham, Massachusetts in 197582. The sail was supposed to form the second part of the trilogy In Search of the Miraculous, that was an artistic inquiry on disappearance83. His intention was to sail across the Atlantic in a small sailing boat S/Y Ocean Wave that was named after the sea shanty A life on the Ocean Wave, a poem composed into a song in the 1830’s84. Somewhere in-between this voyage, Ader was lost at sea, never to be found again. Ocean Wave drifted with the Atlantic currents until she was found half-submerged 150 miles outside the West coast of Ireland, ten months after Ader had embarked on his journey85. She was taken to La Coruña, Spain, joining the waves of 70’s feminism that were crashing on the shores of Europe. Ocean Wave disappeared shortly after being found and has not been seen since.

68 Pietiläinen, 2019.
70 Ibid.
71 Parker, 2019.
72 Peters, 2014.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Sharpe, 2016.
77 Peters, 2014.
78 Ibid.
79 Chen, 2013.
81 Peters, 2014.
82 Dumbrăzie, 2013, p. 125.
83 Ibid, p. 93.
84 Ibid, p. 117.
85 Ibid, p. 129.


drifting with yellow attention to cups is a feminist artistic research, because the aim is to critically question the power relations of Eurocentric contemporary art conceptions visible in this artistic research. These are presented as waves of feminist topics and issues throughout the visual essay. I place myself on the same level with the yellow cups without giving them a specific agency. The focus of the research will be on paying attention to the material metaphors connected to the yellow cups.

I would like to stress the importance of paying closer attention to metaphors and their connection to materiality as posthuman feminist figuration. I chose to use yellow attention to cups, instead of attention to yellow cups, because the color yellow has been the one directing my attention to global trade and material cycles connected to the cups. As yellow is the most visible color for the human eye, yellow attention questions the power structures embedded in that attention and what we are directed to pay attention to. I also felt I was slowly turning into a yellow cup myself getting dressed in yellow clothes, a yellow body of water. yellow attention is a way to practice paying attention to posthuman feminist theories in this artistic process.

This visual essay is called an artistic research, as I am looking at phenomena from within my artistic practice. Finnish phenomenologist and philosopher Juha Varto is defining artistic research as researching art from the inside, where speaking from experience and artistic skill is evident86. My intention is to visualize and write from the inside of the phenomena drifting with yellow attention and matter as in working with yellow cups. By using Varto as a reference for this feminist artistic research, I also want to challenge and stretch the definitions of an artistic research by calling myself an artist without a professional educational background. As an art educator/artist, I find it strange to write definitive statements of who is allowed to call their research artistic. Especially when having in mind the posthuman feminist theories that question power structures and human centered knowledge.

By being an artistic research, it demands writing this practice in relation to the contemporary art scene, the criteria of artistic research and viewing other artistic research as reference. I situate my contemporary art practice in the middle of conceptual art, performance art and media art. As art references for drifting with yellow attention to cups, I brought up contemporary ceramic and artistic research practice by Özgü Gündeşlioğlu, *The Naked City* by Guy Debord from the 50’s French Situationists and Dutch performance artist Bas Jan Ader’s piece *In Search of the Miraculous*. These works were chosen as they emphasis and embody the themes of drifting, figuration bodies of water and carrier bags. These form a web of relations, where the emphasis is placed on embodied and watery situations.

By Merleau-Ponty and rhizomes by Deuleuze with gender studies to figurate posthuman feminist phenomenology. I am mixing Varto into my own feminist artistic research to stay with the troubles of the power relations behind definitions of an artistic research. Koivisto argues that artistic research is done by sensory and corporeal experiments and not by reading theory only87. When embodying this through a posthuman feminist point of view, where ideas are never separated from their materiality, this statement becomes problematic. Feminist new materialist artistic research is referred in Ruukku, a Finnish journal for artistic research, as forming constellations between practice and theory88. It meshes together ways of doing, making, feeling, thinking and conceptualizing. They continue that knowledge and practice work in relation to each other with careful attentment to matter. In this visual essay, I want to practice paying close attention to form, embodiment, materiality, care and situated knowledge.

Especially sharing theories and practices with the collective SKEP (Situated Knowledge, Embodied Practice) founded by facilitator, editor and researcher Maria Villa Lagarcha89, has been a platform to dive into feminist new materialism and posthuman feminist theories in company with others. In this group we have shared tools on how to embody post-human feminist theories by discussing texts together, living with paradoxes of each other and embodying theory as physical rehearsals. This group has also been a support structure in my thesis meaning-making process, when academic structures have been too narrow.

I am not fond of creating divisions and want to practice ways of living with paradoxes and frictions to support more caring futures. Neimanis is meshing theories of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty and rhizomes by Deuleuze with gender studies to figurate posthuman feminist phenomenology. I am mixing Varto into my own feminist artistic research to stay with the troubles of the power relations behind definitions of an artistic research. Koivisto argues in their art education MA-thesis, an analysis of artistic research made at our department between 2010-2015, that artistic research needs a reciprocal relationship between experience and conceptual theorizing to create critical and reflective artistic research90. Koivisto continues that one should not be too focused on how art fits into research criteria, but to make sure that the focus remains on art90. Varto adds that using technique, skills, intuition, chance and the subconscious can be called methods in an artistic research91. Association and professional skill is combined to sort out the irrelevant from the relevant. These form the criteria for exclusion, so that the essence of the work is highlighted and the rejected data is reflected as a process of selection92.

I will elaborate on the process of choosing the apparatuses of the visual essay below.

86 Varto, 2018, p. 58.
87 Varto, 2018, p. 72.
90 Koivisto, 2016, p. 54.
91 Ibid, p. 85.
92 Varto, 2018, p. 67.
93 Ibid, pp. 82–83.
visual essay – writing with images

A visual essay is a carrier bag of images and words, where they are mixed together as equals. The word essay originates from the French word essayer, which means to try. According to artist Remco Roes and cultural theorist Kris Pint, the visual essay is a bastard genre as it is criticized by artists that it is utilizing art in the service of scholarship and attacked by academia that it is lacking a clear methodology. The main aim of choosing a visual essay as the format of this thesis-making is that it serves as a way to communicate the associative leaps in this process and leave more space for affects by using a poetic style. This visual essay is an attempt to map associations derived from this artistic practice with cups and the phenomena of posthuman feminism and climate change crisis from within the process.

This visual essay contains two different styles of images: snapshot and digital image. A snapshot is defined as an informal photograph taken without preparation, usually with a handheld camera. A digital image is a graphical design made in a digital editing program and does not necessarily have the rectangular shape as the snapshot. The digital images used in this visual essay are designed based on sketches on paper drawn during the thesis process. The sketches form the map of drifting with ideas in an archive of yellow cups. The arrangement of images and words can be thought of as a digital installation.

I want to liquefy the categories between images and words in the same way as water is permeating through different membranes. The letters of c, u and p become images of cups as the images of cups become the word cup, both holding information. One could view the letters as sculptural, becoming the form of a cup. The drawings of the cups become lines that become puddles of water. In this way, this visual essay is an attempt of being in-between, as drifting between words and images. Instead of choosing to write a reflective essay on the planning and execution of the exhibitions that the yellow cups participated in, I wanted to make an visual essay that views the thesis process as a posthuman feminist figuration.

I would call the methods used in this thesis more like apparatuses or techniques as feminist theorist and co-founder of WalkingLab Stephanie Springgay suggests or apparatuses as Chen mentioned what is used when mapping watery places. The apparatuses include drawings, writings and snapshots of cups. These are documented with the help of notebooks, a digital diary located in the clouds, phone and a pocket camera to film walking and thinking aloud, being in dialogue with myself. The free writing diary has been a separate document located on the side of the actual thesis writing document, where I have written ideas on sailing, collected snapshots of drawings of cups, post-it mindmaps of keywords and anxious thoughts on failure.

94 Merriam Webster, 2021.
95 Roes & Pint, 2017.
96 Merriam Webster, 2021.
97 Springgay & Truman, 2018.
98 Chen, 2013.
When gathering and selecting notes and sketches, it has been important to emphasize affects and embodiment together with conceptual thinking. By spreading the notes on the floor, drinking from the yellow cups and moving between them, the navigational map becomes a web, where my body matters in relation to the cups, snapshots, pocket camera and pieces of paper. The miscellaneous notes and the yellow ceramic cups are installed as three-dimensional maps in space to form constellations of meaning. By looking at and re-arranging these constellations and reading with Neimanis and drifting with other watery sources, the materials are slowly turning into a navigational map of the process.

Detail of installation and performance takeaway manifesto in the group exhibition Moving Manners in Helsinki, 2019. I wanted to make the zine formed as a cup: one zine issue represents one yellow single-use cup I gathered from the streets of Helsinki.
Documentation of installation, free cafe and workshop COMMODITY CAFE // DYeING with coffee in the group exhibition ClimATE in BetaSpace gallery at Aalto University in Espoo, 2019. I had dyed found fabrics with used coffee and was curious about how we can let go of things we take for granted when the future climate might make things we love disappear.
The pocket camera has accompanied me on walks in the same neighborhood where the single-use cups have been found. By walking with the pocket camera, it embodies the motion of walking like a take-away cup, moving as a body of water. During these regular walks, for one year in 2020, I filmed my feet and talked about whatever came into my mind of the thesis process. Recording the talks has made it easy to go back to them later, forming dialogues with past and present.
catching the drift with writing

The trouble is, we’ve all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

Ursula Le K. Guin99

To be able to form the figuration drifting with yellow attention to cups, it demands a handful of fiction. The archive of cups, posthuman feminist theories and a selection of art references are supporting the figuration as a speculative drift inside a yellow cup. WalkingLab co-founder and researcher Sarah E. Truman emphasizes how writing needs to be considered for what it does as an ongoing affective-material process instead of merely focusing on what it means100. By speculating with the figuration yellow attention to cups, it is a way to write with material metaphors in a fictive framework. I have chosen to play with scale, perspective and fiction as tools to stretch the experience of the drift during this process with the yellow cups.

I believe sometimes storytelling is a stronger technique to portray the affects and themes encountered during the drift than telling them as a raport. As Ursula K. Le Guin is referring to storytelling as a carrier bag of fiction that holds things together, so will this drift inside the cup be a way to hold this eclectic experience of gathering matter, feelings and thoughts into this visual essay. I situate myself in the middle of the cup instead of being the one holding it. I started with figuring cups as islands in relation, but it transformed into a figuration of drifting inside a yellow cup together with a sailing vessel as human skin can’t stand water for long before getting soaked. Positioning oneself simultaneously in the middle of a yellow cup and looking at it from above, is a way to practice ways of mapping a process and doing Western cartography differently with the help of poetic fiction.

By paying closer attention to the separate letters forming the word cup, they become small containers holding space on this page. The font Times New Roman is one of the recommended fonts for writing a thesis, which forms a frame to work within. The font style originates from the 1930’s and is commissioned by the British newspaper The Times101. Varto argues that when writing about one’s artistic practice, the art should be visible in the text by using pauses, associations and different rhythms as in poetry, merging the text with the artistic practice102. Poet Craig Santos Perez explains how he sees words as islands on a sea of blank paper where the reader navigates around the contextual and historical meanings103. I like the fact that this font has a serif typeface, which means that the end of each line of the letters are formed wider. This resembles the form of the yellow ceramic cups, that move unevenly outwards instead of forming straight lines upwards. I find this zooming as a portal between the abstract and the material. I have chosen to keep this font

100 Truman, 2016.
101 Mann, 2014.
when experimenting with the letters c, u and p, because it underlines an everyday academic font as a portal for fiction in this visual essay.

Educational theorist Elizabeth St. Pierre defines post-qualitative inquiry as reading and writing with theory as a process of meaning-making. To write with theory, writing aside and letting the reading process be the guide, has helped me to focus on the process of thesis-making. I would not call this a post-qualitative research, but I have most definitely used advice from St. Pierre to let the text and theories guide the process by letting the reading move the process forward and writing with and aside my theoretical text. A slow reading of Astrida Neimanis’ book *Bodies of Water* has been a source to think with and functioned as a carrier bag for the figuration drifting with yellow attention to cups. The writing journal has been a separate document called free writing/stream of consciousness, where all happy typos, accidents and not so happy anxious thoughts of the process have been stored. It is a document based on improvisation, where associative leaps of thoughts are tried out beyond the academic structure of the thesis.

I have also used a more efficient technique for writing called Pomodoro, where writing time is measured in intervals of 25 minutes and breaks of 5-10 minutes. The aim of the intervals is to maximize productivity. Italian Francesco Cirillo came up with the method to stay more focused on writing assignments for his university studies. It serves as an instruction on how to write more efficiently with the Aalto University instructions for writing a thesis in ARTS. The criteria of writing a master thesis is juxtaposed with experimental writing as a way of living with these paradoxical demands of productivity of academia in contrast to an open-ended experimental writing process.

**Navigational maps of images**

> When the perceived order of social norms is achieved through a selective editing of an otherwise messy world of infinite and therefore dangerous potential, the act of denying the intelligibility of certain phenomena helps to maintain the status quo – it is from disorder that new social and conceptual patterns emerge.

Cecilia Chen

I have chosen to visualize this process as a visual essay containing snapshots, digital drawings, navigational methods from different cultures and notes on fragments of theories read. These are aligned as disordered maps from the middle, instead of portraying an objective picture of the process from above. The snapshots together with posthuman feminist theory and the navigational wayfaring methods are combined into a figuration of drifting inside a yellow cup. Neimanis fabulates with water as a queer archive, where memories are getting dissolved and reappear differently as waves.

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107 Aalto University, 2018.
The stains of coffee and beer in and between the yellow cups resemble the depth curves in modern maritime charts, a cartography depicted from above.

These dried up puddles were left by people that participated in drinking coffee together in COMMODITY CAFE in the exhibition ClimATE110 at Aalto University in November 2019.

Hasdemir & O’Reilly, 2019

Copyright Traficom, 2021.
Curator Stephanie Hessler was inspired by the mnemonic Micronesian stick-charts as a guide when editing the book *Tidalectics*, as the seafarers were positioning themselves within the space through storytelling, not above it\(^\text{111}\). The book is a collection of texts addressing the oceans from different perspectives, forming a contextual, interlinked map from the middle\(^\text{112}\). I was introduced to this book in the seminar at Index in 2018, before I knew about the writings of Neimanis. The image depicts one *rebbelih*, a chart for navigating between groups of islands, originally made on the Marshall Islands\(^\text{113}\). The chart is stored in California in the Hearst Museum of Anthropology and donated by Roy F. Thurston\(^\text{114}\). I don’t know how Thurston got the chart nor who originally made it.

\(^{111}\) Hessler, 2018, p. 34-35.  
^{112}\) Ibid.  
^{114}\) Ibid.
The tactile wooden map of Ammassalik is carved out of three driftwood pieces found lying on the shores of Greenland. It takes the shape of the eastern shoreline of Greenland and is made by the Inuit hunter Kunit, who gave the three wooden pieces to the Danish explorer Gustav Holm in 1885. It is important to note that the tactile map was not commonly used as a navigational instrument by the Inuits in Greenland. Only European explorers needed maps as they were unfamiliar to these shores.

These examples show alternatives to colonial oriented cartography, where the perspective is often from above, through an objective gaze from the sky. In these examples, the places are not mapped as an objective piece of territory, but in tactile and narrative ways of embodying movement at sea. By showing images of the rebbelih from the Marshall Islands and the wooden map of Ammassalik, the aim is not to include them in my own artistic practice as I am not part of these cultures. Instead, I want to highlight other embodied and narrational maps of watery places to learn more embodied ways of mapping places in Western sea charts. Contemporary Western maritime maps seldomly portray sensations and feelings of being on the sea. I would like to map this fluid artistic process of drifting from the middle, entangled in mapping and writing as an experimental and fictional maritime map.

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115 Weiss, 2019.
When taking a closer look at one liquid filled yellow cup, the shadows form a gradient of depth along the uneven forms of the cup. The darkest shadow is the deepest.

Drawing uneven circles that are following the shadows in the cup, starting from the outside and going in. The lines are visualising areas as in a Western maritime map that is showing the curves of depth.

What if the depth curves were named with the word cup, instead of being measured with a number? By using the letters c, u and p for the three different depth curves in the cup, they form variable areas that are addressing this artistic process. Depending on which area one is positioned, the theme changes:

**C as seeping**

as a tilted cup, potential for liquids to seep in. Seeping as in taking in knowledge and collecting yellow cups. Seeping as a discarded take-away cup, slowly soaking in the environment, breaking down in particles.

**U as holding**

as a cup holding liquids, containing a space, sometimes empty. It takes energy to hold something and sometimes it goes unnoticed to the ones in power. Holding as facilitating and creating spaces and situations for learning as an art educator. Holding as forming a cup out of clay and clay holding me.

**P as leaking**

as a tilted cup with its contents pouring down, leaking to the ground. Leaking as in not being able to form a compact container of a thesis, leaking outside art education. Leaking as an uneven yellow ceramic cup.
We as readers need a prosthesis, a fictional sailing vessel, to be able to drift in the cup. We need the boat to avoid dissolution, because our skin is fragile in this liquid archive. The name of the boat is *yellow attention*, as it is the filter through which we are embodying this archive. One can track the position by listening to the songs of the sonar located in the hull of *yellow attention*, as she echoes back c, u or p. There is no hierarchy between the depths, they all include a risk of drowning.
I wanted to make the depth curves black as the words in this text. The soft round brush was chosen as a softer alternative to the sharp borders of the text font. Also, the blurred line could represent the flow inside a material metaphor, between the material and the conceptual. When you zoom close enough on the lines, the space between the squared pixels reveal themselves. The drawn depth curves are always porous, enabling movement across the lines.

By positioning us adrift with a sailing vessel inside a yellow cup, I took away our agency of being the one holding and moving with the cups. Instead, we are getting moved inside the cup, drifting as if not being in full control where the currents will take us.
The power and risk of disordered chaos lurk at the margins of social order like medieval sea-monsters swimming at the unmapped edges of the known (or knowable) world.

Cecilia Chen117

The sea-monsters in this case lurk as ethical issues with the thesis process. As this visual essay contains fiction and poetics, one has to question the liability of the anecdotes and stories. The facts are entangled with fiction as the setting is a fictional space of drifting inside a cup. Even though part of this essay is situated in fiction, the themes and issues are encountered during the artistic process as leaps of associations and reading texts in connection to Neimanis’ book. The poems in this visual essay have been chosen to leave more space to drift with material metaphors than just reading an academical text.

Also, another ethical issue is how this thesis connects to the marketing strategies of the company selling the yellow cups. The design of the single-use cups is made by someone else and appropriated by me in this process. On the other hand, the same company has used an idea by graphical designer Kasper Strömman in their marketing campaign in 2020118. There is always a risk that this process with drifting with yellow attention to cups has involuntarily become a free commercial for the company. My artistic practice with the cups started on a naïve ground, but has evolved into a critical reflection on tensions and phenomena connected to it. I can’t escape the field of marketing nor the connections to the original yellow cups that have been the initiative for this process. However, I have chosen to work with these tensions as a practice to live with the sea-monsters of attention economy and posthuman feminism.

I could have included more diverse sources from different backgrounds in this thesis. For example the Swedish art student group of colour, The Brown Island Collective, demands the Swedish educational art institution Konstfack to pay attention to the white power structures embedded in it119. The Brown Island Collective emphasizes that it is important to create spaces for and by people of colour within art institutions, as brown islands in a white sea120. Late in the thesis process, my supervisor introduced me to archipelagic thinking, which addresses embodied knowledge as an archipelagic network, being in relation121. It differs from network theory, systems theory, assemblages and oceanography as it is situated in geopolitics and addresses topics through colonial and imperial perspectives122. As an art educator and artist I need to practice paying more attention in the future to the power-structures of Western economical, educational and contemporary art systems and history that I function within and get affected by.

118 Niemi, 2021.
120 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
drifting with yellow attention to c, u and p

Drifting in an archive of yellow cups, practicing hydrofeminist figurations, with a sailing vessel called yellow attention.

yellow attention keeps us afloat, as we are following ideas in flow, drifting along currents of anecdotes.

I ask the yellow cups for permission, to scope up memories from the past, the word cup forms a map for fabulation:

C as seeping
as a tilted cup, a potential space for liquids to seep in

U as holding
as a cup holding and containing liquids

P as leaking
as a tilted cup with liquids pouring out

C, U and P are variables of depth, yellow attention measures our position, by singing sonar songs into the archive.

I record the tones with care, locate and map our emotions, being situated adrift in this cup.

No yellow rim in sight, the weather is calm, the wind is vague and her sails are flapping, she tells me that the fuel has run out.

Our frustration of the current situation is shared.

Holding emotions inside.

Many cups on the deck today, waiting to collect rainwater, if a cloud happened to pass by.

The faces on the yellow cups, make them feel like characters, drawing attention to money.
Holding my breath under water,
our human bodies have forgot,
their oceanic and fishy beginnings.

Heard on the VHF of a container ship,
that was blocking the Suez canal,
holding commodities still for a while.

One small cloud glides across the sky.
While taking a leak, it got me thinking,
of peeing as marking territory, mapping,
these maps able a gaze from the above.

What if maps could only be experienced,
in an embodied way like situated in place,
what would happen to the puddles of pee?

Holding hope high as the sun crosses the sky,
I feel a thirst creeping in, finding no shadow,
the watermaker is making weird sounds.
I ask the cups if we should change the filter,
the salinity levels are dense, they say,
I wish the cups could stop smiling.

No clouds in sight today either.

Words are leaking out in waves,
writing black lines on blanc pixels,
across the surface of a fictional map.

Thinking of all the plastics in the seas,
becoming shards, becoming splinters,
becoming particles, becoming molecules.
The water is slowly seeping into yellow attention, we organise the memories in yellow buckets, of different sizes and forms, hoping to survive. Maybe we are a small grain of microplastic, if viewed from above, zoomed in from space. Can we disappear into the yellow archive?

If C, U and P are drawn as depth curves, they form areas of hydrological cycles, of seeping, holding and leaking:

...cup cup cup...

These carrier bags, these yellow cups, becoming bodies of water.

Holding a yellow cup in my hand, looking into the empty horizon, thinking of dear things and people. The cups are also holding me, and I am extremely grateful, not to be completely alone.
What if tetherlessness was another way of getting free?

By hanging out with the yellow cups, walking, talking, drinking, holding, writing and drawing navigational maps, these have been apparatuses on how to pay attention to an artistic process in a fluid way. By practicing ways of embodying posthuman feminist knowledge, it became a way of practicing living with paradoxes. As the Ammassalik wooden maps weren’t commonly used by the Inuits, as they knew their shorelines by heart, these maps of my artistic process are made for others. These hopefully explain this artistic process with the help of poetic narration. This process has been for me a way to get more in tune with my body in relation to the yellow cups with the support of Astrida Neimanis’ figuration bodies of water.

This started as an assignment in a course and I find that thought inspiring as a graduating art educator. There might be times in the future when I can inspire someone to find ways of thinking differently and encouraging them to trust the drift of the process. I believe contemporary art and art education should be more process-oriented. The exhibitions and art objects all support the global economy and run with the help of fossil fuels. When the fuels run out, the art scenes as we know them have to change. By practicing care for different stories, it can serve as a way to let go of the old story of an artist being the hero. It is a practice of learning how to move with the drift of matter, beings and ideas as a flow instead of standing still and accumulating fame, attention and wealth. To endure drifting and uncertainty in a constructive way is a valuable skill in an artistic process or in a learning situation as an art educator. I have learnt something important in this process as how experimental writing and mapping can be ways to portray an open-ended artistic and learning process. This shows how important facilitation is for learning, when at its best it can create open spaces for exchanges, set people adrift in their projects and show collective ways for sharing knowledge.

This artistic research runs the risk of navel gazing as I am looking into my own practice. It is a tricky genre as I have been simultaneously actively experimenting with the archive while writing about the process as an art educator and artist. As this is a visual essay, it is an attempt to balance words and images into a story on drifting in an artistic process. I have felt it takes the double amount of work compared to a written thesis. At this point, I am still uncertain if this can be called an artistic research by others. I think the strength

of an artistic research is when it directs the attention to unexpected perspectives and communicates clearly the artistic process and skill to the reader. It is important to highlight how one was working with materials, concepts and embodied situations through different phenomena and what it does. I learnt two important things in this process of making a visual essay: firstly, I became more aware of one’s situatedness in connection to knowledge and secondly, how material metaphors can form navigational maps to communicate a longitudinal artistic process.

Poetic writing and navigational maps

It feels a bit paradoxical that even though my topic is to carry, contain and drift in an archive of yellow attention to cups, the writing process has been brutally lonesome. Even though all matter has its own vibrancy, the thesis is not written by itself. If I would start this process again, I would write this thesis as a collective. Probably also part of the reason why it has felt this way is because I haven’t practiced reading with theory, writing essays and learning from feedback as much as I could have. I suspect also that this could be developed in our program, but a visual essay on drifting with material metaphors as a feminist artistic research.

It has taken me some time to write this thesis, but on the contrary I think there is value in slowness. It serves as a way to challenge the old efficient demands of writing a master thesis at Aalto University by letting things flow, ideas change and live with uncertainty during a long period of time. If I would have made this thesis in 2018, it would have been a study in activism; if made in 2019, it would have been focused on new materialism and vibrant matter; if made in 2020, it would have focused on taking coffee breaks and criticizing neoliberalism. One could argue that including a three-year long artistic process should have been saved for a PhD. The included material in this visual essay is curated from a vast archive of snapshots, drawings and notes. This thesis is not an overview of the process, but a visual essay on drifting with material metaphors as a feminist artistic research.

A careful selection has been practiced when deciding what stories from the archive to include in this drift. I am critical of the amount of hours and the workload I have put into this thesis, as it is way beyond the 30 ECTS that is assigned for this thesis project. I hope if any students read this will understand that this process started in 2018 and the ideas have had a long time to brew and morph into new ideas and ways of making. However, I find it difficult to address posthuman feminist theories as a feminist artistic research within the outcome-based demands of writing a thesis in ARTS, Aalto University. Perhaps a more open-ended and entangled learning, making and writing process is needed to grasp the complexity of the phenomena of posthumanism and encourage people to write as in collectives. Also, the academic language structure is required when writing a thesis. This is something that hopefully will be challenged in the future by art education students for example with poetry.

The choice to write in English, instead of Swedish or Finnish, is because the majority of my artistic practice with yellow attention to cups has been communicated in English. I could have made this thesis in Swedish, but let this be a gentle example on how little Swedish can be heard in the department of Art Education at the Aalto University. On the other hand, feminist and critical posthumanist Rosi Braidotti124 considers that her work as a theorist has no mother tongue and is adapted, translated and displaced by turning events as nomadic multilingualism. I can relate to Braidotti’s statement and want to let languages move, dance and stretch in this visual essay instead of pointing fingers.

The speculative navigational map on drifting with yellow attention to cups show how ideas and materials float in, around and between us. The most important part of drifting in the yellow cup is to move affects and creating space for atmospheres. The cups have taught me skills and things I would not have known without them. I’m also thinking about how ethical it is to use a design made by another person, now appropriated by me in this project. On the other hand, the process started with the discarded cups and the faces on them, but has slowly turned into an attention to posthumanist feminism, material metaphors and the different shapes of the yellow ceramic cups. By appropriating the graphical design of the paper cups and making something outside the monetized system, it may also serve as an anarchist gesture of appropriating capitalist agendas in an artistic research.

Beyond Eurocentric explorer attitudes in learning

I think the biggest issue with my thesis is that the majority of my sources and references are made by white and western people. Even though almost all of these sources are encouraging and vouching for anticolonial thinking, I think there is more work to be done to make space for more diverse words and worlds. I would like to think of unlearning my white privileges as hiccups that I have to face and take care of by drinking enough water, perhaps at the expense of my own freedom of expression. It matters what kind of matters you pay attention to as an art educator and artist and this is something I want to continue to pay attention to and work with in the future.

Including all these assumed white European male artists making solo art performances across seas has been a way to place this project in dialogue with the narrative of the hero. Crossing seas and embarking on a journey to test the limits of one’s body is in the end a privileged act as you most often have the choice to turn back. There is a risk that I have been romanticizing drifting as my point of view is from a white, western and middle-class background. There is a huge need to hear more diverse stories on drifting in an artistic process by others. After this, I want to continue reading about archipelagic thinking, as it was something that I was introduced to late in this thesis process. It reasonates well with the directions, collective work and discussions I have been participating in so far.

Even though the ceramic cups, yellow attention, Astrida Neimanis, drifting and I have been the ones more present in this process, there has been an enormous heap of friends and things supporting us on the drift along the currents of thesis-making. I have mostly used the pronomen I in this visual essay, but it includes a web of ideas, people, situations and events in relation. After the last exhibition *Point of No Return. Attunement of Attention* in Narva in the summer 2021 with these yellow ceramic cups, I want to give the yellow cups to these support structures. The cups can have a life with someone else for a change and drift in another phase. I will continue to drift and love, write and pause, drink and pee in relation to others. All these circulated liquids and yellow containers, all this life. I’m wondering how to be able to seep, hold and leak without the help of the yellow cups in the future. The yellow single-use cups lying on the streets are now accompanied by thrown-away single-use face masks due to COVID-19 and we are encouraged to take everything away. I empty the last drops of liquids into this cup formed thesis, put some more yellow attention in my pockets and carry on drifting. This time the drift is into the unknown, but most certainly not alone.

125 Lillepuu & Vaikla, 2021
Why are we repelled by the thought of carrying the filth of our habits with us? Can we make us stay by taking away the lines between the constructed and the natural, merge into a coalition of things?

An issue of slow-breaking yellow transforms itself into a collection of issues on yellow. Collected for you to take away as in keeping the yellow material in motion.

A yellow collection of twitching eyes, containing a calm surface of recurring blisters inside. We slit up throats of passivity and demand the structures to back down.

We need a re-birth, a holy reincarnation of matter. A fluid way of wording worlds, making matters and letting the outside soak us dry.

I nod, bend down and let one issue of yellow be my guide.

Excerpt from takeaway_manifesto (2019)

[These sources below were printed in the original zine in 2019, hence different footnote system]


list of photos by others

p. 12  photo by Alvar de Wit

p. 18  photo by Kemal Tızgöl of Pot-ter-y, leftovers tiles from a construction site, glaze, indirect print (above)

p. 18  screenshot from video Entropy by Ömür Yıldırım (below)


p. 39  photo by Elka Lupunen

p. 42  photo by Jouko Antere (above)

p. 42  photo by Hillevi Lassas (below)

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