

EDUCATION AS A COLLECTIVE PRACTICE TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

INTRODUCTION

*In *The Divine Within*, Aldous Huxley writes that “although for hundreds of years we have been talking about mens sana in corpore sano, we really have not paid any serious attention to the problem of training the mind-body, the instrument which has to do with the learning, which has to do with the living. ...We pour this verbal stuff into them <children> without in any way preparing the organism for life or for understanding its position in the world – who it is, where it stands, how it is related to the universe. Moreover, we do not even prepare the child to have any proper relation with its own mind-body.”*

The work of Foresta Collective explores the notions of the ecological from a variety of perspectives, aspiring to contribute to the emergence of a mindset grounded in human embodied and embedded nature, acknowledging our uniqueness (while unlearning our mastery and exceptionalism), interconnectedness and deep entanglement with the more-than-human worlds. Our ecosystems are changing and our bodies are changing in relation to them. We are ecologies within ecologies.

In May and June 2020, amid the first wave of the Covid crisis, when all our planned projects were suspended, we initiated an online series ‘Ecologies of Attention’. For this series, we

invited friends and strangers to explore cultural narratives in a variety of domains of life, and together to imagine living otherwise. Primary to the series was the doubt as to whether an embodied and embedded approach to learning could find its place in the virtual. We dove in, and discovered a great potential to connect embodied and sensuous experiences through an aspiring exchange over long distances that produced a quality beyond being a substitute to real-life encounters.

Central questions guiding the series were: *How do we re-invent stories we live by, personally and collectively, not only theoretically but also as a living practice? How do we attune to the manifold realms in which our wellbeing and the wellbeing of our surroundings unfold? How do we collectively create new stories for togetherness and living well?* Rooted in ecosystems thinking, the series aimed to provide a nourishing soil where visions can grow supported by inspiring impulses, creative practices, and embodied awareness (“mind-body relation” as referred to by Aldous Huxley).

The series’ primary aim was to expand awareness, intuition, thinking and imagination beyond the established perceptual logic of the current cultural paradigm, linking large-scale reflections to the immediate reality of everyday life, and all steps in-between. We sculpt our lives through the ways we pay attention, imagine what’s possible and express it in the world. Often habits and established ways of perceiving and making sense of things may shrink our awareness, presence, and imagination on individual levels and impede movement towards societal renewal on collective levels. During the series we explored attention as a practice of intimacy, of coming closer to the ecologies we inhabit: ecologies of everyday life.

**IN A VISUAL
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LOOKING AT CHANGES

We are born into a world that is not fresh for us to start. We come into the world with its history and established ways of doing things. Often we end up embodying and reproducing systems that pre-exist us, when in fact, we need to consciously sort this inherited baggage out: what can stay and what needs to go. Times are changing, and it is clear that the “factory model” of education doesn’t fit into our contemporary world. This text explores what education could be if it were to become an ally in creating a healthy, sustainable society and fostering each person’s wellbeing in a broader sense of the word, as well as acknowledging human interconnectedness with the more-than-human.

Knowledge speaks to us in various ways through multiple senses and channels. We insist that education’s role can be to embrace that, to teach to notice those divergent ways. To engage into collective learning where disciplines are interrelated and not separated into departments, and where personal learning paths unfold within a flexible structure, supporting people to discover and trust their unique ways of being, thinking and perceiving while staying attentive to the surrounding living worlds.

Briefly summarized, the current education practices do not fit into our contemporary worldviews anymore for several reasons. One is a lack of fulfillment. Even those who feel supported by the current model often still do not live fulfilling lives. Educational paths people go onto help them develop specific skills or fill them with detailed information but fail to contribute to a more balanced individual becoming, influenced by their own hopes, talents, fears, passions, and aspirations. An approach to personhood that is more integral, wholesome, organic is often missing. In the standardized model, we are obsessed with productivity, also when it comes to human beings. People are trained with instrumental concerns in mind, to “produce” this or that kind of person.

LOOKING AT
CHANGES
OVER TIME,
ADOPTING A
PERSPECTIVE
OF THINGS,
PERCEIVING
FLOWS,
MOVEMENTS,
AND
DYNAMICS



In reality, we don't produce human beings. Human beings grow, evolve and become, continuously. They are their own agencies. What we can do is support this becoming. With a more or less severe impact in each individual situation, a further problem with the instrumental approach to human potential is that many people feel alienated by standardization practices and are left behind. Such alienation, displacement and non-belonging also have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole (that may be reflected in the levels of unemployment, depression, anxiety, and other ways of a deep lack of well-being...). Talents of many are not being acknowledged and supported; they are often not even recognized by the value systems of the standardized educational practices.



Such a predominant educational model also neglects the body. Learners are taught to look at their own and others' bodies in reductionist ways that undermine the embodied intelligent nature. We are trained to argue about abstractions or to make decisions to please others much more than to learn to listen to our intuition or to be attentive to other beings in genuine ways. For this listening and attentiveness to happen, the view of the body needs to change. The embodied perception is one where physicality, emotions, spirit, intellect, and connection to the environment are unified. Embodied cognition science changes our basic assumptions about our own nature, about human intelligence. It shifts the view from the little "I" inside one's head who rules the whole organism and gives it orders to a much more holistic perspective of a body being an interrelated system and all the inner players being equally important (the whole organism is a self-organizing system). The ways in which people act in the world around them has everything to do with how they engage with the world within themselves.

Another issue with the standardized educational approach is that it tends to be predominantly de-contextualized and universalized, not only homogenous for each person's unique developments, but also by referring to external and unspecific contexts. One's position in the world is almost entirely abstracted. Unique experiences and encounters within the world tend to be considered invalid sources of knowledge, where senses and intuitions are not to be trusted. Essentially, qualities such as empathy and attention, which are the foundation for perceiving and taking part in site-specific and place-responsive situations, are not being valued as a practice in the mainstream educational systems. Not to say that scientific models and systematic analysis should not have space in the creation of knowledge. Rather they should not be seen as the legitimate form of knowledge above all else per se because the latter is spatial and reality is contextual - or in other words, all information and matter are in relative interdependence with the location (and velocity) of

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the observer in space (according to Einstein).

The above described elements of standardized approach to education reproduce and perpetuate a mindset of unsustainability, segregation, and de-contextualized knowledge. As integrated body-mind organisms in space, we contain ecosystems within us and participate in larger ecosystems in an interconnected complex world. As humans, so well equipped technologically, but disconnected from our own inner worlds and the living world of our planet as a whole, we are becoming evermore capable of making this planet uninhabitable for living beings, including ourselves.



PLURALITY OF WORLDS

“As human beings, we all live in two worlds. There is the world that exists whether or not you exist. It was there before you came into it, and it will be there when you have gone. This is the world of objects, events, and other people; it is the world around you. There is another world that exists only because you exist: the private world of your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, the world within you. This world came into being then you did, and it will cease when you do. We only know the world around us through the world within us, through the senses by which we perceive it and the ideas by which we make sense of it.”

Ken Robinson, Creative Schools

There is an inherent interrelatedness between human inner and outer experiences. In fact, the two worlds that we have learned to separate (objectivity and subjectivity, attributes and values, thinking and feeling) are entirely interconnected. *“How we think about the world around us can be deeply affected by the feelings within us, and how we feel may be critically shaped by our knowledge, perceptions, and personal experiences”*, Ken Robinson writes in his book Creative Schools. Conventional education pays very little attention to the learners’ inner world, as it is almost entirely focused on the world around them. As Anais Nin once said, *“I do not see the world as it is, I see it as I am.”* What we contribute to the world around has much to do with how well we belong in the world within.

Norms become forms, into which life has hardened itself. Transformative processes and any attempts to melt down old structures might be chaotic, but are still better than the dead order of a rigid doctrine. Ken Robinson, in the same book, Creative Schools, describes education as a living process and compares it to the cultivation of plants. *“Gardeners know that they don’t make plants grow.”* He proposes to look at education from the four principles of organic farming.

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- The first one is health - holistic wellbeing, including being well intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially.
- The second one is ecology: the interdependence within each student and with the outer world.
- Thirdly, Robinson speaks of fairness - cultivating the individual talents and potential of all students.
- And the last principle is care - creating optimum conditions for students' development, "based on compassion, experience, and practical wisdom."

Our values emerge from the roots, asking questions, like: *"what do I care for?"*; *"how am I present in my environment?"*; *"where am I going?"* and *"who am I walking with?"* Often there might be a correlation between the states of stress, anxiety or depression that people suffer from and the mismatch between their natural inclinations and ideas they learn to be guided by, that are disconnected from or even contradicting their own felt sense. When disconnected from our roots in such ways, we might become confused or get out of touch with the inner clarity of our true needs. We might feel the urge to consult experts for every step, trusting in the somewhat restricted notion of intelligence, which we usually identify with logical, verbal and quantitative measures, while laying our own instincts and embedded/embodied knowledge into a dormant state. Losing touch with our inborn compass, we become disempowered.

While sometimes we find ourselves at an impasse, unable to change the conditions around us, we believe that the ability to be receptive and adaptive to a constantly changing world is crucial. From our point of view the purpose of education could be to generate an extensive "portfolio of capacities" for the learners that would allow them to be better equipped, to be tuned to the changing world, around and within. Such education would include intuition, imagination, attention, rationality, and somatic awareness, as crucial components that can inform our decisions and point us to new practices. In such an approach, those who teach or guide the learners must be also continuously learning.

**LIGHT AND
SHADOW
ARE BOTH
PARTS OF
THE WHOLE:
INTEGRITY
IS A FULL
PICTURE.**

Ecologies of Attention evolved as an attempt to bring these educational philosophies into an online format, while still being rooted in embodied culture and creative making as proposed ways to reconnect to the innate multiple intelligences and imagination, as well as in personal and collective inquiries around such questions as *what are the cultures we wish to co-create collectively about? What are their common denominators across and beyond different “departments” of society? How are the ecologies we inhabit connected? What is the link between personal and cultural transformation? How do we expand our attention and focus energies?*

Ecologies, in this context, designate interconnectednesses beyond their meanings in biology, but in a broader and more inclusive way as co-existence and interaction between multiplicities of organisms, human and non-human agents in plural contexts.

In 20 sessions structured around 6 thematic modules participants were invited to join zoom meetings and to follow and engage in the proposed methodological setting. Around 100 people joined this experimental journey in spring/summer 2020, connecting from Arab Emirates, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Denmark, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Latvia, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, UK and USA. Different virtual modes, further described in the methodology chapter, allowed us to confront a variety of different perspectives. Embodied and situated exercises opened doors to the particular realities of participants and permitted drawing unexpected connections.

INSIGHTS FROM INQUIRIES INTO PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL ECOLOGIES



CHAPTER 1

PERSONAL ECOLOGIES

"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."

– Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is,
Infinite.*

*For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro'
narrow chinks of his cavern."*

– William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

In our understanding, an ecological mindset includes our ability to live with attention towards manifold layered experiences within personal and relational spaces. So much is happening in our inner ecologies that is invisible to the eyes, hidden from our awareness. Paying attention to what is often colonised by the impersonal instruments of translating the real into some quantitative facts, *Personal Ecologies* invited to explore the often overlooked inner qualitative experiences. *How do we live inside ourselves? Do we feel at home and well there? How do we learn to take care of the inner forests... ?* This module of *Ecologies of Attention* pursued multiple aims: to expand attentiveness to the body, to question the basic assumptions we have around perception and agency, to explore the wisdom of the body and its connection to inner multitudes and indeterminacies. Human consciousness is a mystery. Worlds in our perception

may shrink and expand without any apparent change in physical reality. William Blake's poem inspired many to a psychedelic view of perception as an enigmatic and exotic, mystical and intoxicating experience; Aldous Huxley's book "The Doors of Perception" or Jim Morrison's band "The Doors" are some of most known examples of a similar view. However, a less dramatic and risky mode to expand perception resides in increasing awareness to and through the body. Expanding perception in such ways opens up a potential to re-tune ourselves towards greater planetary wellbeing as well as a more sustainable vision of the infinity in the midst of which we live.

The first session of the module, exploring the squeaking doors of perception with Eylam Langotsky, conceptualised how attentive convergence to the body can unify our thinking with all senses. Our experiences within and around unfold in a directly perceived space-time continuum, and a natural map of 'coordinates' is unfolding through bodily experiences, where sensations continuously emerge. The realm of the 'mental' meets the 'physical', where they open to the 'perceptual'. The awareness of the perceptual field can be navigated as attention at will, through a powerful experience of re-bonding with the body.

We then continued with actually diving into the experience of how perception happens on different levels, together with Benjamin Vandewalle. In our visually-oriented culture, we mainly think of perception in terms of looking or seeing with our eyes. In actuality, our whole being is involved in the act of perceiving. The way we are present in the body manifests and shapes our sense of self and relationship with the world. The way we are present in the body defines what we are able to notice: regularly repeated positions become bodily habits and form postures that shape our patterns of perception and being.

Often we form our sense of self through conditioning that is influenced by habits rather than by a genuine connection with what matters most to us. In the session with Sabina Enéa

**ZOOMING
IN AND OUT:
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Téari we explored possibilities of letting go of the habitual established ways of being in our bodies to shift towards other perspectives, deeper listening, flexibility, and openness, as a door to feel more at home in our own perception and presence, not just as an idea but as an embodied sense, as a lived experience.

Bringing the threads together, we attempted to experience the body as an intelligence, as a source of wisdom, as a potential path towards integrity and interconnectedness within personal ecologies. The body has a long history of neglect in many contemporary cultures, which goes back thousands of years. Though more and more, also in scientific circles, we see a growing acknowledgment that the human body is not just a mechanistic device carrying the almighty brain to places and being trained, fed, and rested in return. Body is an embodied movement and stillness. Space and time. Past and future. Body is a consequence. Intuition. Memory. Home. Body is an earthly organism, deeply involved in coevolutionary exchange.

We explored approaching the body as an integrity of our material and immaterial being on earth. We could say body-mind instead, to make it clear that we are talking about a holistic organism, with powerful self-healing capacities, with an inborn inner compass to help us navigate through life in wise ways, with emotions and critical thinking being part of its modes of decoding reality and living with more meaning, care, and joy.

Documentation of an impulse “The Squeaking Doors of Perception” by Eylam Langotsky: <https://vimeo.com/249466269>



COLONIALISM, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, IS MORE THAN ABOUT CONTROL OF LABOR AND LAND. IT'S CONTROL OF IMAGINATION, OF STORIES WE BELIEVE IN AND LIVE BY. STRUCTURES THAT WE OFTEN CARRY UNCONSCIOUSLY. THEY ARE IN OUR WORLDVIEW AND ALSO IN OUR BODIES. WORKING WITH THE BODY OFFERS A WAY TO START TO DECONSTRUCT THE OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS WE'VE INTERNALIZED, OFTEN WITHOUT A CHOICE. THE BODY PROVIDES TOOLS TO CHOSE FROM TO GO THROUGH AN EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER 2

SPACE IN RELATION

JOURNEY TO THE UNKNOWN

WE ARE IN MUTUAL DEPENDENCY WITH MANY PLACES IN THE WORLD. WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT THE REMOTE LANDSCAPES WE ARE LINKED TO THROUGH OBJECTS THAT SURROUND US?

"And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!" "Have you used it much?" I enquired. "It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."

Lewis Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno Concluded

We have already stated that our inner world affects how we perceive the outer world. In other words, we can constitute that what we see around us is what concerns us, all the while it is very difficult to see what we are unaware of, to reveal to ourselves our own blindspots. Thinking in a direction we are not so familiar with, this statement becomes exponentially true for remote things, far away, off-shore - both literally and figuratively. While we do have the means to 'see' almost any part of the world through satellite imagery and other primarily technological means, when we do not train our imagination we become ignorant of Blake's 'Infinity'. With all material and

information at hand, we are nonetheless more distanced to those aspects and parts of the world we are unaware of (or that are hidden away from us). Any search for contact points with the unknown can be guided by following paths into what we know not to know. The starting point can be simple, like the physical implications of many familiar processes in our daily lives: writing an email, ordering a product, or watching a house being built.

A physical world that we can live in, almost entirely in ignorance of the resources it takes to maintain this world, will also be described and represented lacking any references to its actual and complex composition, its organic and non-organic materiality. The relationship of body-mind and matter cannot be found through extensive exploration and exploitation, but rather through how we name things and make sense of them. Relationships develop by keeping materials circulating and transforming mentally, making links through imagination with the matter circulating around the world in trucks, pipes and cargo-ships. In this way, the former world that floated like a mirage in front of a booted and seated man, whose worldview and ways of knowing we were indoctrinated and hence adopted, could start to gain a more physical and concrete expression and connectedness. In this session, together with Mascha Fehse, a map was created, assembling impressions from participants' personal surroundings, objects that could be companions on a journey to unknown spaces. In the classical sense of cartography, a territory was mapped. However, this map depicted an unconventional territory, drawing paths taken by materials and resources. Connections of any sort - resemblances, associations and physical movement - were drawn and invited the users of the map into the newly invented intermediate space. If compared to a map of the Alps, the latter could only be read in the context of a body or its projection in the space it refers to. Somebody who is not in the Alps has never been to the Alps, maybe even never has been or heard of any mountains at all, might not see the significance of the information it draws - every peak and slope in a conventional

Alpine cartography being typically represented as a series of abstract lines which have meaning for a body climbing the altimeters. The session experimented with ways of embodying and reenacting paths, to find what matters to matter and finally to navigate in the hybrid personal-virtual experienced-inorganic space that was mapped. All information on the map was read by each participant differently, each one departing from their own spatial experiences at home.

HOW TO RELATE TO THE WORLD IN POETIC AND SENSIBLE WAYS IS PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT THAN A DEGREE OF RELATIONSHIP PROVEN BY BIOLOGICAL RESEMBLANCES. IT'S NOT WHAT CONNECTS US, BUT WHAT CONTINUES TO KEEP US TOGETHER (EDUARD GLISSANT)

CHAPTER 3

FOOD LANDSCAPES

Our world is shaped by food. As Carolyn Steel puts it, *“the way we eat shapes our sense of community and identity, while the way we produce, trade, consume and waste food influences everything from our bodies, habits, politics, and economics to our cities, landscapes, and climate.”* Through revaluing food, we can divert ourselves and communities toward healthier and more resilient lives. Exploring subjects such as food transparency and the implications of different food production systems on human and planetary health alongside writing recipes as poetry, supports us in rethinking some basic ideas around food.

In our contemporary world of ‘busy’, food often becomes almost invisible, almost an obstacle standing between ourselves and all the things we want to do, almost a waste of time. Food, as a life-sustaining process that shapes us and our worlds, becomes taken for granted. We rarely ask ourselves the questions: *Where does our food come from? How and where did our food grow? Who tended it? Cultivated it? How did our food travel to our plates? How will our food affect our bodies?* and so on. We rarely ask for food transparency. So what if we put food back into the center of our thinking? Thinking about food transparency, we are actually thinking about how we want to live; what really matters.

Eating is an ecological and political act. Each time we take a meal, we act in the world, we support particular ways of being and doing things. Three times a day (at least), 21 times a week, 90 times a month, 1095 times a year, we support specific systems of beliefs and production year after year. Food is power. Food is also poetry, friendship, memory, ceremony, energy, medicine. Food is a conversation between people and nature, seasons and landscapes, seasonings and

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senses.

Food is at its essence a relationship: agricultural, economic, affective, cultural. It is a connection between those eating together, and a link to ourselves, our own senses, and embodied experiences.

To recognize food's influence and consciously engage in restoring its actual value in shaping our lives, it was essential for us to explore theoretical grounds with Carolyn Steel, Stephanie Ries, and Olga Graf, as well as to actually touch food, cook, play, and taste. Elisabeth De Coster shared glimpses into the life of an organic farm in Italy, its seasonal living and sustainable food practices, as well as an invitation to cook together, fermenting vegetables and preparing a zero-waste soup. The module culminated with an artistic exploration of recipes as poems and other forms of creative writing with Inês Neto dos Santos, inspired by Gertrude Stein's surrealist storytelling as well as contemporary food writing by Thom Eagle.

Documentation of an impulse "Sitopia: Rebuilding Our Lives Through Food" by Carolyn Steel: <https://vimeo.com/424341437>

CHAPTER 4

INTERSPECIES

Ecologies cannot be reduced to a single meaning. We understand ecologies in broad and inclusive ways as the co-existence of multiplicities of human and more-than-human agencies in plural contexts. We are searching for new ways of thinking about togetherness and cohabitation and a renewed relational perspective to reorganize and expand our cultures of sense-making towards a more ecological mindset that we see as a crucial transformation in the age of the Anthropocene/Technocene.

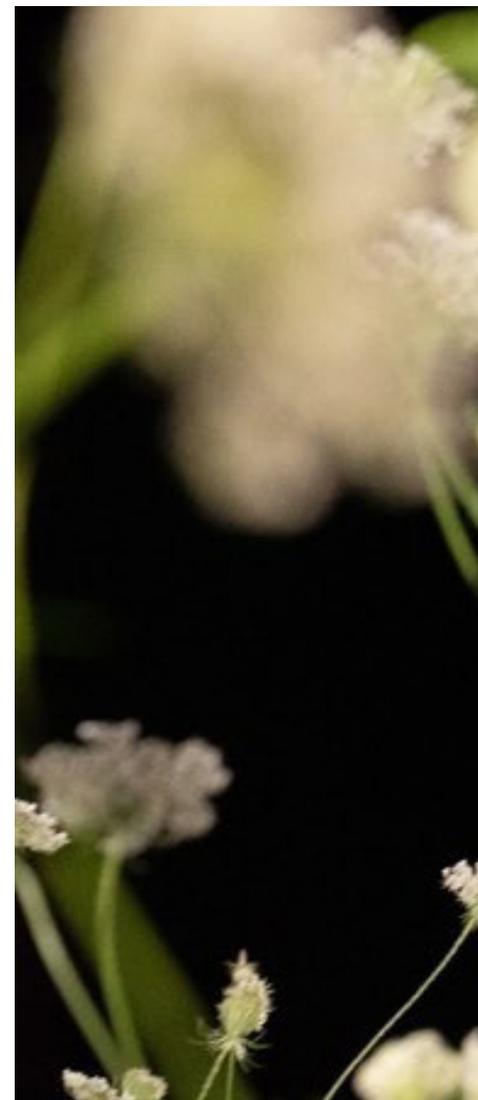
How do we expand our perception of animals, plants, and other beings inhabiting this Planet, bonding back into the tissue of direct embodied experience of other life forms? This module of Ecologies of Attention attempted to examine the roots of the old ethics of human disconnection and domination over nature, questioning the cultural perceptual and discursive approach to animals, and inviting us to find our voices in the Big Choir of affective ecologies we inhabit.

Animal-human-plant relations are complex. Despite our conviviality and shared membership in the Earth's biosphere, histories of sacred rituals, and sensed interdependencies, many people experience physical and symbolic alienation from other species. These dynamics (especially in the contexts of extinction and industrial farming) have a substantial impact on the wellbeing of our shared environments. Being used to look at other species as our entertainers, decorations, companions, objects of studies, fictional characters, or a stock of resources to be appropriated for our purposes and desires, we are often surprised about discoveries being made of their cognitive and perceptual abilities. We continue to assume superiority and self-assigned rights to manage what we call 'nature'. Human exceptionalism has alienated the vast majority of us

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from the ecologies within which we dwell and are part of. In the first session of this module, together with Eylam Langotsky, we questioned these dynamics and pondered what it may mean to be connected to one another and other species within an ecosystem, not standing above, but being deeply interrelated. Journeying to the bedrock of the heritage of separation we revisited some myths and religious beliefs that gave rise to the old ethics of domination and the view of a blind and mechanical Universe that can be exploited for profit. Potential futures are calling for our collective healing and learning to make amends with ecosystems within our human bodies as well as with other bodies within the Earth.

To remember our fascination and affection for other life forms, to reconnect with stories and imaginative ways to engage with other species, we explored vocal landscapes around us and searched for our voices as part of the larger earthly choir, singing together with Cansu Tanrikulu. Glimpsing into perspectives from indigenous cultural talking stories (i.e. Zapotec civilization), various language and literary perspectives (i.e. Japanese haiku poetry) and working with recycled materials and self made clay, we were dreaming connections into forms while the forms were dreaming through us. To move away from abstractions and objectifications, through and beyond the ecological consciousness, towards instinctive empathy, connection, and multi-species perspectives, during this module we tried to encourage reciprocal exchanges between humans and other species inhabiting the planet.



**BEWARE OF THE LOGIC OF BAD CONSCIENCE!
THOSE PLASTIC BOTTLES SELLING YOU WA-
TER AND TELLING STORIES ON THE ETIQUETTE
ABOUT HOW THEY SUPPORT POOR CHILDREN
SOMEWHERE CLOSE TO WHERE THEY STOLE THE
GROUNDWATER IN FIRST PLACE**



CHAPTER 5

PEDAGOGY OTHERWISE

Partnering with Free Home University, Pedagogies module offered to reclaim and explore a broader ecology of knowledges, asking a question “*What is there to (un)learn?*” and accentuating a need for a radical shift to revise the education project as central in the call for a societal transformation. Several impulses offered to creatively decouple us from the conditionings reproduced by a dominant western neoliberal educational system and to explore radically different ways of learning, where knowledge (re)production is not separated from bodies, actions, and considerations of how life can be lived, by humans and other than humans, in respect of our interconnected and interdependent relations.

Alessandra Pomarico shared insights from her experiences as part of the pedagogical and artistic experiment of Free Home University and the eco-justice learning movement Ecoversities Alliance. Both are autonomous learning spaces, collaboratively organized, in which prefigurative praxis and reflections, artistic, community and land-based knowledges, pedagogies of entanglement and re-existence are oriented to re-imagine our social fabric within a more holistic and regenerative approach, stemming out of an ongoing experiment at the intersection of art, pedagogy, activism and community building.

The collective Chto Delat offered a screening of their learning film *New Dead-End Street #17: Summer School of Orientation in Zapatism* (2017), followed by a circle of conversations with artists, co-creators and everyone present. The film reflects on the process of being together, on how the Zapatistas’ way of life could be practiced and questioned outside of their indigenous context – eventually, it is to ask how we as Europeans/Russians, with all the weight of our political

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and cultural histories, could imagine a change in our lives and society. Realized in the Zapatista tradition of anti-culmination, and with a great deal of irony of the Zapatistas, well-known from the texts of Subcomandante Marcos, those who are depicted in the film participated in an investigation into the meaning of progress, how to live in harmony with the earth, and the ramifications of the famous Zapatista slogan “For everyone, everything. For us, nothing” (Para todos todo, para nosotros nada).

In another session, Barbara Toma offered a somatic practice with an attempt to transform the mediated experience of the screen, to establish a deeper contact with the body, to also re-assemble and re-member our collective body, and to play and expand on our forced domesticity. And last but not least, Nikolay Oleynikov led a hands-on workshop to build masks with simple recycled materials. The session was inspired by the poem of Paul Laurence *Dunbar, we wear the mask*. It explored the different uses and functions of this cover in multiple cultural traditions: from rituals to theatre, from political struggles to professional application, including the disposable sanitizing device appearing now on every face, the mask has always represented alterity, a filter, protection, a disguise, a way to be more visible or invisible, as a way to transform or transcend.

See the documentation of an impulse by Alessandra Pomarico and collective Chto Delat: <https://vimeo.com/167039116>



CHAPTER 6

REINVENTING STORIES

WE LIVE BY

How do we re-invent narratives of our relationships with the natural world, inner and outer? How do we articulate our imaginations in stories that feel real to us, individually and collectively? This last chapter has been our initial attempt to enliven the imagination, emergence, and articulation of other kinds of narratives. What stories would we choose to live by if we embodied more-than-human perspectives?

Natural environments are at the origin of the world. Inhabited by millions of life forms, multitudes of species, witnesses of the cycles of time. Some have been here for a very long time. Each species carries their own untold stories. *Or are they told but unheard? Did we listen?* When species disappear, they do not only stop existing as a group of organisms; their stories disappear too, their particular perspectives on the world.

Teaming up with Rita Alaoui, we experimented with drawing scales and textures of found organic objects. Supported by Lucia Pietroiusti, we looked into how art and ecologies can come together.

The body can be a door towards opening up sensitivity, shifting perception, widening awareness towards previously unnoticed presences, towards embodying more-than-human perspectives. Along with researching the life of a plant, a stone, an insect, or any being one may choose to follow, as well as turning to folklore and myths, we tried to weave in practices for a more embodied awareness, to strengthen the imaginative powers, to observe and listen to the infinitely distant in the seemingly familiar, to the ephemeral and poetic in what we may hold as the already understood.

Our ongoing experimentation is also concerned with language: whatever the medium through which we choose

to tell our stories, spoken or written language is often a part of it in one way or another. Language comes with a set of worldviews and mindsets. It is organized into discourses that, once accepted and interiorized, are taken for granted. Discourses, in the sense given to the word by Foucault, are ways of expression that encode a particular model of reality. To tell new stories, taking for granted the assumptions of old discourses, we will not be able to go very far. In one of the sessions of this module Tomm Moore shared his experiences of making animation films, rooted in ancient stories transformed through personal lived experiences.

Re-imagining the dominant models of reality encoded into our language and embodied into our tissues, in our view, lays a foundation for a mindset shift towards more attention, integrity, and care. We are our own storytellers. *So how do we tell stories so that they enliven us, resonate with our deepest values, and invite us to walk into new landscapes? How do we rehearse the What until it becomes the How?*

Experimenting with ways of storytelling that depart from a close connection with the surrounding world and a process of self-discovery, what we wish to get away from is the discourses of a disembodied culture: a habitual erasure of the more immediate and sense-based reality. In the words of David Abram, in the same way, we find ourselves situated in the land, with its transformations and cycles of change, we can find ourselves located in stories, where perhaps *“the earthly world itself is felt as a vast, ever-unfolding Story in which we—along with the other animals, plants, and landforms—are all characters.”*



BECOMING IS A WAY TO FOSTER UNNATURAL PARTICIPATION IN THE EXISTENCE OF ANOTHER BEING THAT GOES BEYOND EMPATHY BUT IS A PERCEPTION THAT GOES DEEPLY THROUGH ONE'S BODY AND MIND. IT'S A TECHNIQUE THAT CAN CREATE CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN AN INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD AND STRONG TIES TO VERY DISTANT PARTICIPANTS IN GLOBAL MATTERS.





METHODOLOGY

Online sessions were offered live in thematic modules and structured around 2 types: an impulse and a working session (online workshop). Each session generally lasted around 2 hours and offered a space to expand attention, question, reflect, unlearn, widen perspectives, find and deepen inquiries, get inspired, embody, and express. These were the building blocks for sessions:

Personal Inquiry

Rooted in the traditions of critical reflection, phenomenology, and our Woods in the City series, learning begins with personal questions, with finding an honest concern, with the process of identifying, prioritizing, and deepening personal inquiries. Pursuing an honest inquiry invites us to move from comprehending something or talking about it towards a kind of understanding that extends and links to the demands of everyday life. We offer an ecosystems-thinking framework as a tool to ground, expand, and then focus attention; as a space for questioning, re-rooting, and creating a personal learning path in-tune with one's inner drive.

Thematic Impulses

Impulses are structured around a concrete subject such as the ones outlined in the chapters above and are designed to share knowledge, inspire and engage, question the dominant discourses existing within unsustainable societies, and seek alternatives that support human and ecological well-being. Impulses are offered by artists, researchers, and practitioners: people from diverse walks of life, whose work unfolds within the context of personal and societal renewal. Forms and formats of these transdisciplinary impulses vary depending on the focus of a specific session.

Art Thinking & Making

Creativity is the key to any process of change. It gives space to imagination and experimentation around questions of how we want to live. Art has transformative powers. We involve art thinking and making as ways of re-inventing learning processes, acquiring and organizing knowledge differently, accessing subjectivity and intuition, inviting more poetry and curiosity into learning, claiming freedom and openness to experiment, embracing diversity and the unknown, empowering creative confidence, identifying connections and participating in the process of conscious creation of culture. We understand creativity, arts and crafts as ways of finding expression to the immaterial, as practices of thinking through making, as tools of perceiving, transforming, and expressing inquiries, as ways of questioning the established narratives and creating own stories that are not only verbal but which involve the use of imagination and hands to create artifacts of personal and collective meaning.

Embodied Culture

All sessions are rooted in what we describe as embodied culture, as part of our continuous inquiry into how bodies as subjects of experience rejuvenate our awareness of the worlds, inner and outer, and enhance our abilities to transform them. We cannot shift habits of thinking and change our minds with our minds alone. As part of every session, in nuanced ways, we reconnect to the body and its multiple intelligences through subtle and straightforward practices of paying attention. By arriving toward a more holistic presence and exploring interconnections between body, mind, perception, and thinking, we expand awareness, open space for new perspectives to reveal themselves and allow for fresh ideas to surface. Bringing the body back into the center of cultural conversations is a continuation of our research-in-public series *Body Matters*, as well as an inquiry into a metaphorical, archetypal, and poetic layer of human embeddedness into the earth body.

**WE NEED
CATEGORIES
TO COMMU-
NICATE WITH
ONE ANOTH-
ER, BUT WE
CAN ALSO
LOVINGLY
DISTRUST
THOSE
CATEGO-
RIES, QUES-
TION THEM,
UN-CATEGO-
RIZE, PLAY,
FIND NEW
WAYS TO RE-
LATE.**

Coming in Contact

Investigating the surrounding space and environment, adopting new perspectives, creating and acquainting necessary tools to draw relations between fragments of perception (which could be a location, a view, a page from a book, an article, an object, food, etc.) while moving through space enable us to adopt a dynamic and evolving perspective, which is the opposite of a standpoint. We cannot know even a fragment of everything, and we have to face our constant forgetfulness. Therefore, diving into the origins of fragments, which we encounter, to then bring their convergence into meaningful relationships is a means to stay capable of acting in this world without believing in human all-mightiness, but by seeing allegories between what we experience and what we know not to be able to know.

* Highlighted in color gradient are statements taken out of the different sessions. Condensed to short main theses they try to resume the essences of exchanges and exercises.

MAPS CAN BE PRODUCED TO CARTOGRAPH TERRITORY AND ANY KIND OF SPATIAL TRANSLATION OF RELATIONSHIPS, PHYSICAL AND IMMATERIAL. THE CARTOGRAPHY IS ALWAYS CONTEXTUALIZED THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF A SPACE.

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Editors of this publication: *Sabina Enéa Téari, Mascha Fehse*



**QUESTION OUR ALMIGHTINESS AND OUR
DILETTANTISM >> INSIST ON TAKING UNKNOWN
PATHS AND ENVISION WHAT WE DON'T WANT
TO SEE AND CANNOT CONTROL >> NOT ALWAYS
THINKING IN SYSTEMATIC RELATIONSHIPS,
JUSTIFICATIONS, CORRELATIONS, SCIENTIFIC
MODULES.**