

Becoming Moss

*Reimagining Vitality by Thinking and Making-with
Moss in the Seasons of Finland*



Eline A. Gaudé

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by Thinking and Making-with Moss
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Master of Arts Thesis in Visual Culture, Curating and Contemporary Art

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To Niti, who has taught me to weave knowledges with grace,
and in memory of my grandmother, Maj-Inger Hanses,
whose spirit permeates these pages.

Abstract

Recently, there has been a growing interest in exploring the relationships between humans and the more-than-human world, particularly in the field of art. Through this thesis, I seek to contribute to this discourse by exploring the potential of interdisciplinary artistic research and creative practices as a means of fostering a deep relational attunement with the living being of moss. Its proliferous and proteiform being entered my life in subtle shades of green, whispering of an ancient and unfathomable connection to time and to the origins of life itself. It has elicited in me a desire to develop bonds of intimacy and understanding with its ecology, temporality, and spirit, encouraging an artistic inquiry which will form the base upon which this thesis stands.

This inquiry draws on the posthuman, and new materialist turn in the arts, which emphasizes the entangled and dynamic relationships between humans and nonhumans, as well as the decolonial lens that seeks to challenge the Western-centric worldview that has contributed to the exploitation and destruction of the earth and its inhabitants. By examining the potential of artistic practices to foster a renewed sense of relational attunement with more-than-human life, as well as their vitalist and animistic underpinnings, this thesis will attempt to contribute to ongoing efforts towards ecological and social justice, and the cultivation of more ethical and sustainable ways of living in the world.

Becoming Moss is structured around four seasonal chapters and a concluding section exploring future research directions, each centered around a distinctive artwork, project, or medium, where thinking and making come together in a symbiotic dance to inform my mossy worldings and theoretical reflection on vitalist perspectives. It draws on the theory of wonder as a pathway to the fascinating world of moss and examines how the incorporation of the scientific study of moss has been reflected by shifts in my language and understanding, leading to a weaving of knowledge. Each chapter will be linked to my temporal encounters with moss over the course of a year's seasons, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of moss's ecology, temporality, and spirit over time. Through interlacing sections of creative writing, practice-led research, and transdisciplinary inquiry, I hope to offer a new way of seeing and experiencing the world of moss, one that is grounded in a deep appreciation of its temporal and ecological complexity.

This thesis situates itself within the socio-cultural and ecological landscape of Finland, which has informed my artistic drive and practice, as well as upcoming collaborative endeavors.

Keywords: moss, vitality, creative practice, interdisciplinary artistic research, weaving knowledges, wonder, science, temporality, ecology, spirit, posthumanism, new materialism

Seasonal Table of Contents

Bibliography p.115 Introduction

Acknowledgements p.113

Closing the Book of Seasons: Reflections on Moss, Time, and Vitality p.111

Three Sisters: Reconnecting With the Land, Our Communities, and Ourselves p.105

A Weaving of Knowledge and Understanding p.101

Returning to Calendar Time p.99

Becoming-With Moss p.97

The Lost Touch: Mourning-Through-Making p.87

Embracing Impermanence p.80

Fall p.77

Infinity is but a Moment in Time p.74

Reimagining Vitality: Vibrant Matter in an Interconnected Web of Beings and Processes p.73

(Un)familiar Pathways: An Renaturing Exercise p.66

Porous Boundaries and Sparks of Resistance p.63

Summer p.60

An Elusive Spark of Vitality p.57

Research direction(s) p.2

Situating my Practice in the Socio-Cultural Landscape of Finland p.4

An Absence Observed p.5

Reclaiming Practices of Attunement to More-Than-Human-Life p.6

Chapters as Seasons p.8

Notes on Language p.11

Winter p.13

On Seeing the World Through Moss-Colored Glasses p.16

Resilience: A Temporal and Material Resonance p.20

A Bryological Inquiry p.26

To Think With Moss is to Ponder Deep Time p.30

Spring p.33

Recollecting Pirkkola Forest p.36

Anima Silva: A Story of Significant Occurrences p.40

Moving Towards a Politics of Vitality p.48



May 2nd, 2023

As I tread familiar trails in Otaniemi, I find myself drawn to the woodland path behind the church. My feet take me up the steep slope while my eyes wander, jumping from tree, to flower, to bird, in one swift and sweeping motion. Further ahead, a hushed stillness arrests my gaze: rocky silhouettes stand out against the forest floor, their flanks covered in a lush foam of green. Moss. 'What a short name' I think to myself, 'for such an expansive being.'

Moss has emerged in recent years as a source of awe-inspiring encounters, prompting renewed aesthetic appreciation,¹ ecological awareness,² and even amusement.³ What is it about this small, seemingly inconspicuous plant that attracts me so, tugging, pulling, and claiming for my undivided attention? What magic draws me to it?

A being of ancient origins, moss has been growing at a glacial pace alongside us, witnessing the devastating speed of our human world. What may it reveal about the state of our current ecological relations? What can I/We/You⁴ learn by entering an apprenticeship with moss, and tuning in to its temporal vitality?

¹ From Japan's infamous Saiho-Ji Temple and its moss garden to the recent upsurge of moss-viewing parties, moss has become more popular than ever before. Mako Nozu and Brian Thompson, "What's Behind Japan's Moss Obsession?", *The Conversation*, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/whats-behind-japans-moss-obsession-50500>

² Their beneficial effects on biodiverse habitats across the world are slowly gaining recognition.

³ Type 'moss memes' in your online search engine and see for yourself.

⁴ This tentative formulation attempts to acknowledge that I am only one of many who are seeking out moss's teachings in a time of ecological uncertainty.

Introduction

Research directions

For the past five hundred years in the Western World, we have treated nature as a mere resource and promoted a world view that is very different from that of our ancestors, who, recognizing their dependence upon the natural world and its inherent state of enchantment and animacy, revered it as sacred. Brian Bates, a leading authority on the spiritual world of the Anglo-Saxon and Norse cultures, notes: “[...] Celts, Anglo-Saxons, or Norse, all had a view of nature which we could call enchanted. They ascribed to the natural world a palpable energy called life-force [and] felt that the environment was imbued with spirit in a way that could be manifested.”⁵ As western science is slowly beginning to recognize signs of intelligence and even sentience in vegetal life (from Suzanne Simard’s groundbreaking work on the wood wide web⁶ to the recent discovery that plants emit cries of distress when in anguish⁷) and environmental activism, often led by indigenous peoples, is prompting a legislative turn towards the recognition of personhood in more-than-human entities,⁸ we are witnessing a shift of understanding about the ecological cost of human activity.⁹

Recently, there has been a growing interest in exploring the relationships between humans and the more-than-human world, particularly in the field of art. Through this thesis, I seek to contribute to this discourse by exploring the potential of interdisciplinary artistic research and creative practices as a means of fostering a deep relational attunement with the living being of moss. Its proliferous and proteiform being entered my life in subtle shades of green, whispering of an ancient and unfathomable connection to time and to the origins of life itself. It has elicited in me a desire to develop bonds of intimacy and understanding with its ecology, temporality, and spirit, encouraging an artistic inquiry which will form the base upon which this thesis stands.

⁵ Brian Bates, *The Real Middle-Earth*, 2002, p.9

⁶ In her 1997 PhD thesis, Simard’s research showed remarkable evidence pointing towards forest trees’ ability to share and trade food via fungal networks that connect their roots, allowing them to form societies and look out for their kind. Rowan Hooper, “Suzanne Simard interview: How I uncovered the hidden language of trees,” *New Scientist*, 2021, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg25033320-900-suzanne-simard-interview-how-i-uncovered-the-hidden-language-of-trees/>

⁷ A 2019 study investigating the possibility that plants emit airborne sounds when stressed revealed that plants, like animals, can audibly vocalize their agony when deprived of water or forced to endure bodily harm. Katherine J. Wu, “Plants May Let Out Ultrasonic Squeals When Stressed”, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/scientists-record-stressed-out-plants-emitting-ultrasonic-squeals-180973716/>

⁸ In recent years many rivers have been granted legal rights in order to provide concrete protection, from South America’s Amazon to New Zealand’s Whanganui and the United States’ Klamath River. Chloe Berge, “This Canadian River is now legally a person. It’s not the only one,” *National Geographic*, 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/these-rivers-are-now-considered-people-what-does-that-mean-for-travelers>

⁹ Research by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature found that human activity for food production, infrastructure, energy and mining accounts for 79% of the impact on threatened species, contributing to an ever-increasing destruction and loss of biodiversity worldwide. Simon Torkington, “50% of the global economy is under threat from biodiversity loss”, *World Economic Forum*, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/biodiversity-nature-loss-cop15/>

Inspired by my reading of Amitav Ghosh's book *The Nutmeg's Curse – Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, exploring themes of colonialism, power, and the relationship between humans and the natural world, I have turned to a vitalist perspective¹⁰ to address what I understand to be a loss of vitality in contemporary ecological relations. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Ghosh portrays vitalism – and particularly its political dimension – as a crucial force that can help to counteract the destructive legacies of colonialism and forge a more sustainable and just future. By reimagining my relationship with the natural world and embracing a more holistic and integrated view of reality, I hope to re-enchant our perception of ecological relations. Mobilizing my own artistic practice as an exploratory platform for encounters with the ecology, temporality and spirit of moss through the seasonal rhythms of a year in Finland, this thesis' overarching purpose is to reignite and reclaim a “subterranean tide of vitalism that has lived on through the ages as modernity's repressed Other.”¹¹

This brings me to the guiding question: **How might we reimagine vitalist modes of ecological attunement by thinking and making-with moss in the seasons of Finland?**

This inquiry draws on the posthuman, and new materialist turn in the arts, which emphasizes the entangled and dynamic relationships between humans and nonhumans, as well as the decolonial lens that seeks to challenge the Western-centric worldview that has contributed to the exploitation and destruction of the earth and its inhabitants. By examining the potential of artistic practices to foster a renewed sense of relational attunement with more-than-human life, as well as their vitalist and animistic underpinnings, this thesis will attempt to contribute to ongoing efforts towards ecological and social justice, and the cultivation of more ethical and sustainable ways of living in the world.

Art, I believe, can surface and make visible the hidden and overlooked aspects of our world. From the intricate molecular machines in our cells to the delicate beauty and chaos that exists on every scale, it can bring attention to environmental issues, highlight the complexity of nature, and inspire awe and wonder. This sentiment is echoed by the artist Olafur Eliasson, who further adds that “Art does not show people what to do, yet engaging with a good work of art can connect you to your senses, body, and mind. It can make the world *felt*. And this felt feeling may spur thinking, engagement, and even action.”¹² As I engage with the alterity of moss through diverse artistic strategies, I hope to manifest its hidden vitality and its ability to inspire wonder and attunement to wider ecological networks.

¹⁰ Which ascribes a cohesive view of the world as one living organism in which the property of life is present (but not inherent) in all living things and suggests that there is an intrinsic intelligence to the natural world (including plants, animals, and the human body).

¹¹ Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021, p.241

¹² Olafur Eliasson, “Why art has the power to change the world”, *World Economic Forum*, 2016.
<https://www.behance.net/blog/pay-attention-the-art-of-noticing-rob-walker>

Situating my Practice in the Socio-Cultural Landscape of Finland



Sideby's seascape, summer 2022.

I have been dancing on the edge of a multicultural journey for as long as I can remember. Though born and raised in France, I grew up speaking Swedish with my mother and siblings at home. Through her, we all share deeply networked ancestral roots with the Swedish-speaking coastal community of western Finland. Early trips to my maternal homeland cemented my affinity with Finland over time. Vivid summers spent in the small village of Sideby – my grandfather's birthplace –, taught me to tread forest paths with bare feet, to revel in the cold waters of the Bothnian Bay, and to find joy in the smallest of observations. However, Sideby is more than just a nostalgic memory for me; it has established itself as a grounding space over time, a powerful node of intersection connecting past, present, and future, inspiring me to explore my roots and use my creativity to connect with my heritage. In many ways, *Becoming Moss* strives to honor this legacy. My journey towards developing practices of attunement will therefore be deeply embedded in Finland's socio-cultural and ecological landscape, from Helsinki region's urban natural environments to Sideby's nostalgia-riddled landscapes.

Questions of care and ecological consciousness have long inspired my artistic practice and are beginning to manifest themselves more concretely in my current projects. The recent founding of my artist collective, Sympoietic Society,¹³ and non-profit association Ymmärrys ry,¹⁴ reflects my burgeoning aspiration to open my artistic practice to others and contribute to broader ongoing efforts towards cultural and ecological revitalization. I have developed a particular interest in rural communities, driven by my connection to Sideby and my growing awareness of their vulnerabilities and struggles. Sideby, in many ways, represents a microcosm of the issues faced by rural communities worldwide. Witnessing the village's increasing vulnerability over time has deeply moved me, prompting me to join existing initiatives towards cultural revitalization in the Ostrobothnia region.¹⁵ Through cultural initiatives and creative projects, I

¹³ Sympoietic Society is a pan-European collective of artists, curators, designers, and researchers dedicated to generating critical dialogue on posthuman ecologies through *sympoiesis* (making-with). Our first project, *I.C.E.* In Case of Emergency*, acknowledges the melting of glaciers, rising sea levels, and the disappearance of winters around the globe as an urgent call to think beyond human-centered perspectives. <https://incaseofemergency.earth/>

¹⁴ Ymmärrys ry, co-founded with my dear friend and PhD candidate at Aalto University Niti Bhan in 2022, aims to accelerate societal recovery, resilience and sustainability transformation through creativity and innovation by mobilizing the arts and social design practices. <https://www.ymmarrys.org/>

¹⁵ Such as my ongoing cross-partnership cultural and artistic collaboration with Sideby's local homestead museum, Kilens Hembygdsgård.

hope to bring attention to the distinct value of communities such as Sideby and contribute to their resilience over time.

Throughout my school years, I was often criticized for being overly sensitive, even earning the label of ‘fleur bleue’¹⁶ at the tender age of ten. However, I see this very sensitivity as the catalyst that has drawn me closer to moss and inspired me to immerse myself in this journey of attunement. Looking ahead, I perceive an important role for artists in addressing various gaps of attention in our society. As boundary-spanners,¹⁷ adept at navigating between the tangible and intangible realms, artists can potentially act as mediators in tackling societal and ecological disruptions. Sensitivity, I think, might be the very thing that allows us to articulate observed absences – gaps of attention in a society consumed by ideals of exponential progress and productivity –, and bring them to the forefront of our collective consciousness.

An Absence Observed

“We no longer live with a sensuous intimacy with the wind, rivers, rainfall, and birdsong. For many of us, the voices of the wild world have faded, receded in mind and imagination. [W]e have [...] ceased to register the songs and moods of the singing planet.”

– Francis Weller¹⁸

Becoming Moss originated from the felt experience and mourning of an absence: a loss of vitality in ecological relations,¹⁹ which I have experienced as a yearning for another way of being in relation with Gaia. A phantom pain has taken hold in its stead; the intangible yet persistent knowledge that I was meant to have a life-long engagement with a “beautiful and strange otherness,”²⁰ but that something has been lost, underhandedly taken away from me. This ineffable absence has been witnessed and acknowledged by others too, from anthropologist Philippe Descola’s conviction that the “great divide” between nature and culture in European history – also known as the *cartesian dualism*²¹ – has reduced nature to a collection of objects to be studied, categorized, and exploited,²² to eco-philosopher David Abram’s recognition of “our current estrangement from the animate earth,”²³ which manifests as a lack of reverence for and an absence of spiritual connection to the natural world.

¹⁶ The French idiom ‘être fleur bleue’ literally translates as ‘to be a blue flower’, but is used in the context of describing someone as being ‘naively sentimental’. The expression originated from the German Romanticism movement, and originally communicated that personal inward cognition is possible only through thinking, feeling and contemplation.

Wikipedia contributors, "Blue flower," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Blue_flower&oldid=1150311122

¹⁷ In social science research and organizational psychology, “boundary spanning” is the process of searching for knowledge beyond existing boundaries such as organizational, technological, temporal or geographic. See Michael Tushman, “Special Boundary Roles in the Innovation Process,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22(4), 1977, pp. 587-605

¹⁸ Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 2015, pp. 49-50

¹⁹ Which I understand here as a weakening of our cognizant, lively, and – I dare say – spiritual relationship with the natural living world, its subtle moods and rhythms.

²⁰ Paul Shepard as quoted by Weller, 2015, p.50

²¹ Which sees humans as separate from and superior to nature.

²² Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 78, 2013, pp. 63-66

²³ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Language and Perception in a More-Than-Human World*, 1997, p.x

Rapid developments in modern times, such as increased urbanization and technological change (including a recent boom of online culture and soaring screen time), have led to a progressive lack of personal experience with biological diversity and to a general estrangement from the natural living world. Who, among us, can call the birds singing below our windows by their given name? Or recognize the native plants that are determined to thrive in our human-centered, urban environments? As Robert MacFarlane suggested, a landscape that goes undescribed also goes unregarded, leaving it “more vulnerable to unwise use or improper action.”²⁴ And indeed, I am inclined to think that by losing grip with the names and language of the natural world, we lose our ability to relate to plants, animals, and landscapes, and the possibility of extending the courtesy of care, kinship, and agency beyond the human. We enter a state of ‘crisis of the imagination,’²⁵ resulting in a failure to recognize the importance of ecological relationships.

This progressive disenchantment of the natural world has “enabled a state of nameless anonymity, bringing human people to a condition of isolation and disconnection” that some have called ‘species loneliness.’²⁶ Most often described as a sadness, fear, disability, anxiety, estrangement, and an awareness of our estrangement, species loneliness is a melancholy emanating out of the knowledge of what we’ve done, but it largely exists as a natural response to the impoverished species-specific world we have been creating. The term was first introduced in a 1993 article in *Environmental Ethics* by Michael Vincent McGinnis, an author and editor of books about ecology and bioregionalism. Nearly two decades later, he writes, “Species loneliness in a wounded landscape moves us to want to restore our relationship with place and others, or to put it another way, modern humanity yearns to reestablish and restore an ecology of shared identity.”²⁷

Reclaiming Practices of Ecological Attunement to More-Than-Human Life

“To reclaim means to struggle but also to heal and become able to confront what you struggle against without becoming like it. [...] It would mean that you have connected with other forces, or cultivated the resurgence of forces we were separated from.”

– Isabelle Stengers²⁸

Although Western science has acknowledged the undeniable biological connection we share with other living beings, as recognized by Darwin, I have come to the realization that my cultural background lacks a living tradition that fosters such a connection. Lost are the language of reverence, the choreography of ritual, the ancestral roots that bind me to lively, breathing

²⁴ Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, 2016, p.27

²⁵ The idea of a “crisis of the imagination” was explored by Max Haiven in his 2014 book *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power*, who argues that capitalism has not only ‘enclosed’ our time, our communities and our environments, but has also colonized how we all imagine and express what is valuable.

²⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer and Hannah Eisler Burnett, “Returning the Gift,” *Humans and Nature*, 2021. <https://humansandnature.org/returning-the-gift-2021/>

²⁷ Michael Vincent McGinnis, “Species Loneliness: Losing Our Sense of Place in the Machine Age,” *Santa Barbara Independent*, 2012, <https://www.independent.com/2012/01/14/species-loneliness/>

²⁸ Isabelle Stengers in an interview with Casper Bruun Jensen and Line Marie Thorsen, “Reclaiming Imagination - Speculative SF as an Art of Consequences”, *Nature Culture*, 2018, <https://www.natcult.net/interviews/reclaiming-imagination-speculative-sf-as-an-art-of-consequences/>

ecosystems and to the multitude of beings that inhabit it.²⁹ In an era in which humans have become a dominant Earth-shaping force, defined as Anthropocene³⁰ or Capitalocene,³¹ we know that we must change the way that we live with, think and feel about the natural world in order to avoid catastrophe. There is a growing need for a cultural framework that acknowledges kinship with non-human entities and appreciates the vibrant, untamed processes that are constantly at play, even if not always perceptible.

How can we broaden our perception of kinship to encompass our connections with plants, animals, and other living beings?

In what ways can we reestablish practices of profound attention and care that transcend anthropocentric thinking and encompass a broader community of life forms?

How can I speak of – let alone write about – the underlying ache of a loss I am only just beginning to name?

The agential being of moss may, I believe, inspire creative answers to these questions.

Following Donna Haraway's tenet of 'becoming-with'³² as a proposition for multispecies livability, I propose to engage in a processual thinking and making-with moss. This artistic approach takes inspiration from Tim Ingold's concept of 'thinking-through-making',³³ which argues that creativity emerges from within an ongoing, improvisational process between makers, materials, and other non-human things such as tools and the physical environment. These non-humans, as Ingold suggests, play an active role in influencing the thought processes of the maker and vice-versa. The creation of objects and learning therefore transpires from within complex and reciprocal relations between these forces. This approach establishes grounds for reciprocity between moss and myself, acknowledging that my artistic process is embedded in a

²⁹ A loss described by psychotherapist Francis Weller as "what we expected and did not receive" (i.e. a rich and sensuous relationship with the earth and communal rituals of celebration, grief, and healing that keep us in connection with the sacred), 2015, p. 54

³⁰ Introduced by Paul Crutzen, who argued that the current geological age—overlapping with or, increasingly, after the Holocene—is a period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Crutzen & Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'", *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*, 2013, pp. 479-490

³¹ Alternatively, Jason W. Moore proposes Capitalocene as a more complex reading of our current era, which 1) recognizes a longstanding literature on the relationship between capitalism and the remaking of the natural environment; 2) acknowledges the environmental destruction through the use of fossil fuels in the production and distribution of commodities, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups who experience higher levels of pollution; 3) and carries with it the possibility of imagining the end of capitalism, and therefore a radical change in the way human beings relate to the natural environment. Though Anthropocene is the more compelling – debate-inducing and fuelling – term, I believe that Capitalocene more aptly conveys the systems at play in our current climate crisis rather than opting for a representation of humanity as a 'homogenous acting unit.' In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, 2016.

³² 'Becoming-with' as a form of worlding grounded in connection rather than separation, moving away from human exceptionalism. It can be understood as an ecology, where becomings are openings into the responsive capacity of all earthly life, with important implications for ethics. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008.

³³ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 2012.

constant dialogue with outside forces and energies. In *Becoming Moss*, reflection and practice commingle in a porous and intimate exchange, bringing me closer to moss than ever before.

Addressing the ecological crisis and its socio-cultural underpinnings has prompted the need for innovative approaches to imagining and enacting more sustainable and regenerative futures. *Becoming Moss* is a thesis that has emerged from the recognition of this current crisis and its co-constitutive absence/s; it formulates an attempt to reclaim and revitalize practices that acknowledge and foster deeply embedded connections to the natural living world and beyond, and to once again rekindle our intimacy with a vital, radical otherness.

Chapters as Seasons

Following Prof. Lucy Davis' advice, I have been pondering how this thesis might better dance with moss. How might it include bryological³⁴ becomings in an open-ended and mutual creative exchange? How can I engage with moss in a caring and respectful manner that allows it to flourish throughout my textual meanderings?

Some believe that to regain our cognizant connection with the natural world, we must learn how to slow down, to embrace a vegetal – rather than mechanical – pace of life. Among those is Michael Marder, whose philosophical proposal of 'plant thinking'³⁵ provides me with a useful conceptual framework to think about and engage with moss on its own terms. His proposal recognizes the need to acknowledge plants as subjects of their own existence with their own temporal rhythms, rather than mere objects of human manipulation. This, I believe, can help us challenge our assumptions about time and causality, and provide us with an alternative temporal horizon that can help us better understand our relationship with the natural world.

Following the example of moss, I will tentatively slow down and tune in to 'moss time' over the course of a year's seasons in Finland, thus engaging with time as an experiential channel to discuss my evolving relationship with moss. Witnessing the subtle patterns of change in the landscape while thinking-through-making with moss will, I hope, allow me to come closer to its own vegetal temporality over time, whilst grounding my artistic process and theoretical research in a specific time and place.³⁶

Becoming Moss is structured around four seasonal chapters and a concluding section exploring future research directions, each centered around a distinctive artwork, project, or medium, where thinking and making come together in a symbiotic dance to inform my mossy worldings and theoretical reflection on vitalist perspectives. Each chapter will be linked to my temporal encounters with moss over the course of a year's seasons, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of moss's ecology, temporality, and spirit. Through interlacing sections of

³⁴ Bryology is the branch of botany concerned with the scientific study of bryophytes (mosses, liverworts, and hornworts).

³⁵ Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: Toward a Philosophy of Vegetative Life*, 2013

³⁶ This approach is reminiscent of the meticulous study of a single square meter of forest conducted by biologist David George Haskell over the course of a year. See David George Haskell, *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature*, 2013

creative writing, interdisciplinary artistic research, and scientific inquiry, I hope to offer a new way of seeing and experiencing the world of moss, one that is grounded in a deep appreciation of its temporal and ecological complexity.

Although I come from a part of the world and a culture that recognizes four distinctive seasonal segments across the year, it should be noted that Finland's seasons – which display features of both maritime and continental climates – aren't neatly spread out and defined throughout January to December. Winter lasts longer, noticeably so further up north;³⁷ spring is reluctant, until it suddenly flourishes; summers are brimming with energy, swift and ecstatic; while fall surreptitiously returns, draped in melancholy. The structure of this thesis will attempt to reflect my understanding of the seasons of the North using connecting temporal anecdotes between chapters and sub-sections.



We begin in the frozen depths of **Winter**, a season of origins, of overlapping temporalities, and an essential part of life in the northern latitudes. It is a time of the year propitious for gatherings and stories. Exploring wonder as a pathway to the fascinating microcosm of moss and a source of artistic inspiration, I delve deeper into the scientific study field of moss, setting out to uncover the secrets of its resilience throughout the coldest months of the year and over time. Through my painting practice, I immerse myself in deep time, intuiting a temporal resonance between the origins of moss, art, and life itself.

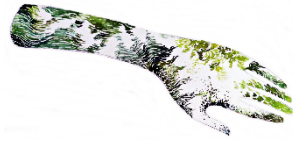


In the nascence of **Spring**, the public debate surrounding the clear-cut of a wooded area – impending the construction of a new sportshall in Helsinki Central Park – and its ecological implications prompt me to engage with matters of environmental justice and the fraught politics of the Capitalocene, straddling on the language and knowledge gained during my minor studies in Creative Sustainability. Sightings of a rare moss near the contested area – the green shield-moss –, introduced the agency of a more-than-human being into the public discourse revolving around the construction site. As a collective of artists engages with the landscape of Pirkkola forest, bringing forth new thoughts and acts of care, the rare and elusive green shield-moss calls for my attention, beckoning me to lean in and listen to the tale of Pirkkola. A homage is paid to the lost woodland by our little community, in the form of a joint exhibition.

³⁷ Where, in addition to spring, summer, autumn and winter, one may also experience early summer (Gidágiesse), late summer (Tjaktjagiesse), early winter (Tjaktjadálvve) and late winter (Gidádálvve), each season reflecting the complexity of a landscape in constant transition, from the stillness of polar nights to the blazing midnight sun. Will Gray, "The 8 seasons of the Sami," *Discover the World*, 2021, <https://www.discover-the-world.com/blog/the-8-seasons-of-the-sami/>



At the height of **Summer**, infinity is just one moment in time, where porous boundaries facilitate musing and uninhibited exploration. As I venture through the familiar woods of Sideby, my feline companion leads the way. I find myself attuning to her sensory perception of the forest floor, and it becomes clear to me that the warming climate has impacted the mossy ecosystem in which we walk. Walking alongside my more-than-human companion inspires me to foster a network of kinship with the other creatures that call these woods home. Through a succession of moving images, I can document this embodied multisensory experience, and bear witness to the agency of the landscape. Ultimately, it is through these experiences that I can reimagine vitality as vibrant matter.



As I embark on a creative embroidery project in **Fall**, one that engages in a bryological symposium, I examine how moss's slow temporality of growth and affinity for surface-level dwelling has allowed me to uncover gentle ways of caring for life in death. The news of my grandmother's passing leaves me grappling with an unspeakable loss; during this time of profound grief, I find solace in the creative process, seeking a way to honor and remember her, and to mourn the passing of her vibrant spirit during my remaining days in Sideby. Through this grieving ritual crafted with moss, I find a way to navigate the complexities of loss, to weave together the threads of sorrow and resilience, and to find meaning and healing in the process of creation.



Returning to Calendar Time concludes my seasonal explorations. Reflecting on this journey leads me to recognize the importance of knowledge weaving in my writing process, and its influence on my artistic approach. I find myself contemplating how this approach can be applied in future research; an upcoming participatory project, conceptualized within the rural landscape of Sideby, allows me to explore how a process of re-enchantment grounded in a vitalist approach can remain inclusive and democratic. As I return to the realm of calendar time in Otaniemi, I reflect on the transformative lessons learned during this thesis and the deep connection I have developed with moss over time.

Notes on Language

Ecological linguists suggest inherent ecological failings in languages, which simply do not have (or have lost) the words to convey certain realities.³⁸ In his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, David Abram further argues that literacy, especially alphabetic literacy, creates a different way of seeing and thinking, abstracted from the nonhuman world. This is because “*the letters of the alphabet, like the Platonic Ideas, do not exist in the world of ordinary vision.* The letters, and the written words that they present, are not subject to the flux of growth and decay, to the perturbations and cyclical changes common to other visible things; they seem to hover, as it were, in another, strangely timeless dimension.”³⁹ How then, could m-o-s-s, a single, four-letter word, fully encompass the experiencing form of another being? How can I, as an artistic practitioner, become fluent in ‘moss’? What language can lay the groundwork for us to coexist and thrive together?⁴⁰

In the words of Nalungiaq, an Inuit woman interviewed by ethnologist Knud Rasmussen early in the twentieth century:

*In the very earliest time
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen could happen—
all you had to do was say it.
Nobody could explain this:
That’s the way it was.⁴¹*

Reflecting on Nalungiaq’s words, I find myself pondering how my language might better reflect a *becoming-with* moss. To address this question, I propose to engage in a rewilding of language;

³⁸ Peter Mühlhäusler, “Talking about Environmental Issues,” *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology, and Environment*, 2001



³⁹ Abram, 1997, p.112

⁴⁰ As opposed to traditional empirical modes of thinking and writing about vegetal life.

⁴¹ In Abram, 1996, p.87. Originally translated by Edward Field, in Jerome and Diane Rothenberg, eds., *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse Toward an Ethnopoetics*, 1983, p.3.

a conscious exercise to increase my ecological alignment with the living being of moss in this thesis. Throughout my writing, moss will emerge as freely and surreptitiously as it does in the forest or in our city streets. Whenever referring to moss, I will replace its given literal name with a visual namesake, a slant gesture of resistance against a taxonomic tradition that seeks to bind and reduce a living, breathing being to a succession of blotted marks/symbols/letters on a piece of paper or on a screen. Every encounter with its being will take the form of a pictogram,⁴² thus reconnecting with an earlier elemental tradition of proto-literacy and challenging the duality of mind and matter (see pictograms below).




After all,  needs not be spelled out in written form to silently form itself and grow in our mind. This may allow me/you/us to reconnect with an impulse of ecological solidarity, where language and animate landscape are no longer estranged from one another, but rather form palpable and evident connections. It opens a space for mutual flourishing, where the potentiality of becoming-with  lingers in every nook and cranny, crevice, corner, and pocket one may encounter along the way.



⁴² A pictograph is a graphic symbol or representation that conveys meaning or information through visual depiction. It is a simple, stylized image that represents an object, concept, or idea, often used as a form of communication or signage. Pictographs are typically universal or easily understandable across different cultures and languages, making them useful for conveying information in a concise and visual manner. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pictograph>

Winter







Winter in Finland is a season unlike any other. It stretches from November to March, making it the longest season of the year. With little warmth from the sun and daylight averaging only six hours around the winter solstice, the reality of early twilight falling in mid-afternoon can be hard to grasp without experiencing it firsthand. However, for many, winter is a time of deep introspection, a period for delving into philosophical considerations and reflecting on the past year. **Winter** holds within its hold a container of stories that are waiting to be discovered. The slowed-down pace of living offers me a chance to explore overlapping temporalities, woven together through the concept of ‘deep time.’ As I delve into this season, I begin to uncover the stories of origin that it holds within its cold embrace, from the humble beginnings of  to the early magic of art, and the emergence of life on Earth. It is a time for gathering, for communities to come together and huddle around the fire, sharing and listening to stories of resilience and renewal that will carry them through the darkest depths of winter.

As I put away my lighter jacket for the season, I run my hands through its lining, making sure that I don't forget anything important. Reaching into one pocket, my fingers brush against a soft, threaded surface. Pulling it out, I'm filled with a jolt of delight - it's , collected earlier in the year. The small patch of  rests in my hand, and I bring it up to my nose. Underneath the leathery scent of the jacket, I catch the familiar perfume of the forest floor, mingled with a slight odor of... wet dog?

Its power over me remains intact, as I cannot seem to let it go. I study its foliage - brittle but still vivid after all this time, losing myself in its complex weave. After a few moments, I finally relinquish my grasp. I carefully lay it down on my desk, intending to draw it later.

 has taken my heart in stride, and I wonder why. What draws me back to it time and again? In pondering these questions, I embark on a journey of wonder, where  establishes itself as an awe-inspiring entity, sparking my creativity and curiosity.

On Seeing the World Through 🌿 - Colored Glasses





From the *Moss Musings* series, ink wash on paper, 2020

Growing up, I nurtured an innate tendency to attribute animacy to the world around me. Ancient myths, legends, and traditional folklore served as a constant source of wonder, instilling in me the belief that a mystical realm lay hidden from view. I felt a primitive and vital connection to this enchanted world, recognizing an indelible link between the visible and invisible and surfacing this understanding through drawings, poems, and stories. My early sketchbooks were filled with such musings, from visions of ethereal nymphs and fairies to mythical beasts, and otherworldly beings. As I matured, my fascination with these fantastical creatures gradually waned, but my wonder-ability remained intact.

I began to cultivate a renewed appreciation for the everyday magic that surrounded me, finding vitality in the wonders of the natural living world. “Magic,” David Abram tells us, “in its perhaps most primordial sense, is the experience of existing in a world made up of multiple intelligences, the intuition that every form one perceives – from the swallow swooping overhead to the fly on a blade of grass, and indeed the blade of grass itself – is an *experiencing* form, an entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different from our own.”⁴³ Solitary hours in my garden in France and the vivid intensity of Finnish summers spent on the coastline taught me how to attune myself to this kind of magic and become more perceptive to it. The scent of wild peppermint, furtively growing in a field neighboring my childhood home, brought me lasting comfort in early heartbreaks; while a constellation of intricately woven 🌿, observed on the mighty stature of an ancient boulder, revealed a vibrant microcosm, a world within a world. Soon, everyday encounters began revealing a multiplicity of experiencing forms, familiar strangers endowed with ways of knowing and being that differed from my own.

⁴³ Abram, 1996, pp. 9-10

Throughout my encounters with , wonder has emerged as a compelling force, encouraging me to slow down and attune myself to its presence. As I have wandered through the forest paths of Finland, I have come to appreciate the ongoing dialogue between the woodland's structure and the blankets of  that cover it. Their delicate beauty has captivated me, inspiring me to delve deeper into the science of wonder and awe.



From the *Moss Musings* series, ink wash on paper, 2020

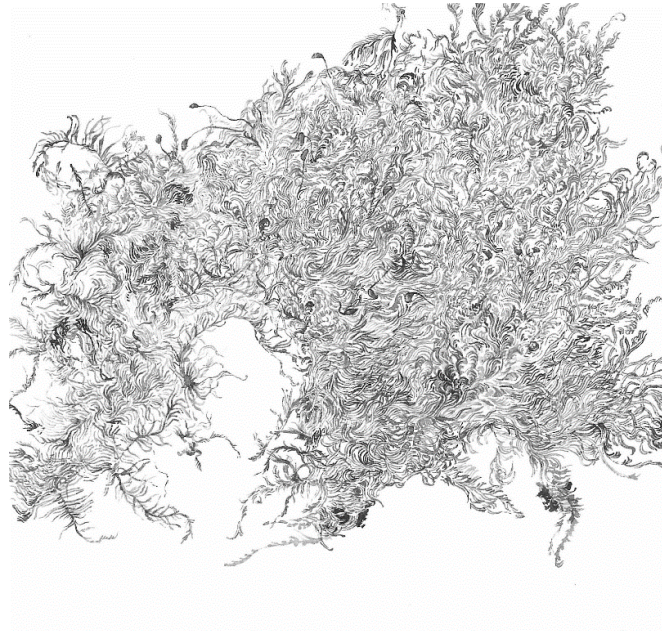
Wonder is often described as a feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar. To me it is an inspiration, an impulse to marvel and seek out what the eye does not reveal at first glance. Indeed, wonder has been recognized by many as a powerful and valuable tool in both scientific and artistic endeavors, as a driving force behind the pursuit of knowledge.⁴⁴

Scientists are motivated by curiosity and a desire to uncover the mysteries of the natural world, and this often begins with a sense of wonder and awe. In fact, philosopher Bas van Fraassen argues that scientists draw on their emotions when dealing with new, bewildering ideas, especially those that sprout up during scientific revolutions.⁴⁵ Wonder can therefore be understood as a necessary component of scientific inquiry, for without it, we lose our sense of the significance of what we are studying. Similarly, in the arts, wonder has long been acknowledged as a key ingredient in the creative process that can lead to the creation of powerful and meaningful works of art. Curiosity and wonder permeates the work of multidisciplinary artist Katie Paterson, whose fascination with what lies beyond manifested as a keen interest in

⁴⁴ Helen De Cruz, "Awe and Wonder in Scientific Practice: Implications for the Relationship Between Science and Religion," *Issues in Science and Religion: Publications of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology*, 2020

⁴⁵ Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance (The Terry Lectures)*, 2004

astronomy;⁴⁶ while the work of textile artist Amanda Cobbett emphasizes art's ability to bring attention to environmental issues and highlight the beauty and diversity of the natural world.⁴⁷



From the *Moss Musings* series, ink wash on paper, 2020

In an era when we are constantly reminded of the urgency of the ecological crisis, wonder may seem like a luxury or a dalliance. However, as H. Emerson Blake, editor-in-chief at *Orion* magazine notes, “[Wonder] might be the thing that reminds us of what really matters, and of the greater systems that our lives are completely dependent on. It might be the thing that helps us build an emotional connection – an intimacy – with our surroundings that, in turn, would make us want to do anything we can to protect them.”⁴⁸

Psychology professor and researcher Dacher Keltner has been exploring the connection between wonder and human wholeness. Thanks in part to his efforts, human qualities we have understood in terms of virtue and spirituality are now being taken seriously by science as elements of human intelligence. His Greater Good Science Center at Berkeley has been pivotal in this emergence, and their research has helped uncover the neurophysiological systems that help us care for others (human and non-human).

Keltner's research has since led him to investigate the primary experience of awe in human life - moments of wonder and mystery that transcend our understanding. These experiences are as

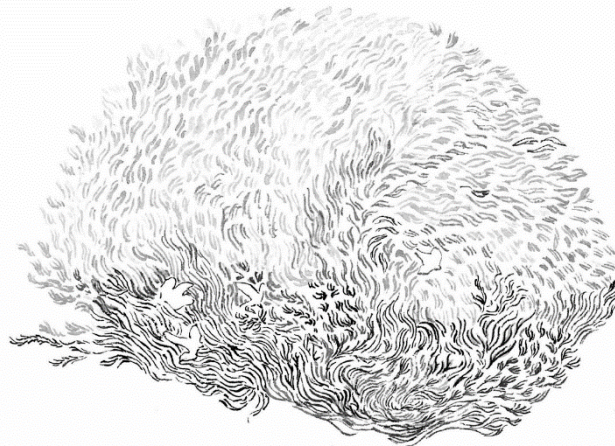
⁴⁶ Katie Paterson in “Message to the Moon: Katie Paterson’s Life in Astronomy”, *Frieze Magazine*, 2019. <https://www.frieze.com/article/message-moon-katie-patersons-life-astronomy>

⁴⁷ In her artist statement, Cobbett describes how she scours the understorey of the forest floor seeking its hidden treasures, creating three-dimensional paper-mâché and machine-embroidered sculptures that mimic the natural world. These sculptures are not only beautiful and educational, but also draw attention to the overlooked aspects of familiar landscapes that might otherwise go unnoticed. <https://www.amandacobbett.com/>


⁴⁸ H. Emerson Blake in *Wonder and Other Survival Skills*, 2012, p.ix

common globally as they are measurably health-giving and immunity-boosting. Awe brings people together and synchronizes our nervous systems, heartbeats, and breathing, even with other bodies around us. Awe activates our brains and bodies, moving us to experience together. When speaking of awe in relation to the natural world, Dacher asserts that our bodies are wired to respond in an open, empowering, strengthening way to more-than-human life and environments, thus reflecting the old indigenous idea that our bodies are part of an ecosystem.⁴⁹

The broader lessons of awe challenge cultural biases that shape science and the idea of a separate self. We all share a capacity for wonder, beauty, sympathy, and kindness, which are inherent in our genes and neurophysiology, even if they were not culturally recognized in the Western world. Other cultural beliefs, such as Buddhism, transcendentalism, chakras, and qi, have long recognized the bodily reverberations of wonder and awe. As Graham Park notes: “Whereas the Platonic-Christian philosophical tradition in the West favours an ‘ascent to theory’ and abstract reasoning, east-Asian philosophies tend to be rooted in somatic, or bodily, practice,”⁵⁰ thus transforming the practitioner’s experience, bridging beliefs and behavior, ideas and action.



From the *Moss Musings* series, inkwash on paper, 2020

A sense of wonder and excitement still guides my journey into the microcosm of , conjuring life and meaning into the vegetal world. My unwavering fascination with the smaller, more intimate realms of existence has taught me to tread forest paths with my bare feet, to let my soles collide with soil, sand, rock, and experience the place of meeting between earth and atmosphere. Following Rachel Carson's intuition that “If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge

⁴⁹ Dacher Keltner in conversation with Krista Tippett, “The Thrilling New Science of Awe”, *On Being*, 2023. <https://onbeing.org/programs/dacher-keltner-the-thrilling-new-science-of-awe/>

⁵⁰ Graham Parkes, “Awe and humility in the face of things: Somatic practice in East-Asian philosophies,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4(3), 2012, pp. 69-88

and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow,”⁵¹ I have kept and nurtured this wonder throughout the years.

These days, I find myself treading the forest ground more softly than ever, searching for flashes of green, copper, and gold. 🌱, I realize, has developed a perceptible presence, a gravitational pull that can no longer be ignored. As I notice it in both familiar and odd places, I often wonder at its unique qualities, how it can bear the weight of human bodies and persist long after we are gone, even in the face of abrupt environmental change, and the way that it appears in unexpected places and envelops everything in its gentle embrace. Its existence suggests a profound adaptability and resilience over time. As I begin intuiting deeper connections between 🌱 and ages past – a temporal resonance –, a seedling of awe sets root in my being.

Resilience: A Temporal and Material Resonance

The world of art theory is complex, and concepts like material and materiality can be quite challenging to comprehend fully. However, when we delve deeper into these ideas, we begin to understand how they can contribute to the meaning and interpretation of art. Daniel Miller defines materiality as extending beyond the physical properties of objects and encompassing the imaginary, ephemeral, biological, and theoretical,⁵² while Ian Woodward also acknowledges the way in which social life is structured by our everyday dealings with objects.⁵³ In the same vein, new materialism scholarship recognizes objects as agents in intra-subjective identity formation within our more-than-human-world, disrupting the Western dichotomy of mind and matter (a topic which will be further explored in **Summer**).⁵⁴

During my BA studies, I was fortunate to participate in a study exchange program at the Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel, Northern Germany. There, I discovered a small vial of bronze pigment at the local art supplies store. I began using it in my watercolor and ink wash paintings, later transferring my practice to other surfaces, including rock and wood. Their dark surface formed a stark contrast with the bronze pigment, and I began noticing subtle shifts in the images I had created when observed in different lights or angles, appearing one moment with luminous clarity and swiftly vanishing the next.

The evasive nature of this medium triggered a variety of connections and meanings in my mind. It surfaced deep subconscious memories of ages past, awakening primal images of men and beast flickering by firelight, as I began intuited connections between my painting practice and Prehistoric processes of image-making embedded in animistic landscapes. It became a conduit

⁵¹ Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder: A Celebration of Nature for Parents and Children*, 1956, p.49

⁵² Daniel Miller, *Materiality: An Introduction*, 2004, p.4

⁵³ Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, 2007, p.55

⁵⁴ See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007

for *deep time*:⁵⁵ a visualization of how, in the Capitalocene, distant pasts flow through the present in all manner of sometimes surprising ways.



Dreaming of a distant past, bronze pigment on pebble collected on the coastline of Otaniemi, 2022

The discovery of prehistoric art in 1881 opened the door for 20th- and 21st-century artists to experience a world of creation that had been completely forgotten for thousands of years. Ancient rock paintings, historians and archeologists tell us, emerged from a shamanistic mindscape, and their source could well lie in experiences gained while in a trance.⁵⁶ These paintings were made for spirits and gods – forces that lived deep in the bowels of the rocks, and were projected onto the rock surface, the membrane that separated the world of men from that of spirits.

A recent study by researchers at the Universities of York and Durham revealed that Prehistoric people of early Europe created art by firelight, suggesting that people 15,000 years ago were creating art around a fire at night, draped in flickering shapes and shadows.⁵⁷ This process would have been a visceral experience, activating different parts of the human brain, as flickering

⁵⁵ The concept of “deep time” dates to 18th-century geologist James Hutton, who proposed that Earth was a lot older than 6,000 years, as most people thought at the time. However, writer John McPhee officially coined the term in his 1981 book *Basin and Range*, saying: “Numbers do not seem to work well with regard to deep time. Any number above a couple of thousand years—fifty thousand, fifty million—will with nearly equal effect awe the imagination.” Today, deep time is generally used to refer to the time scale of geologic events, which is vastly, almost unimaginably greater than the time scale of human lives and human plans. Helen Thompson, “What does ‘Deep time’ mean to you?,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-does-deep-time-mean-to-you-180952603/>

⁵⁶ Le Quellec, J.L. “Shamanism and rock art,” *Arts and Cultures*, 21, 2020, pp. 82-91

⁵⁷ Needham et al., “Art by firelight? Using experimental and digital techniques to explore Magdalenian engraved plaquette use at Montastruc (France).” *PLoS One*, 17(4), 2022

shadows and light enhance our evolutionary capacity to see forms and faces in inanimate objects.⁵⁸

Inspired by these findings, I began painting 🌿 in its myriad of forms and expressions, seeking to convey the image of a time long gone - a deep geological past when mosses first emerged from the waters and began covering the surface of the Earth. As Finnish photographer Heikki Willamo tells us “The pictures in caves have something to tell us, but they speak in a tongue that we do not master. They have emerged from deep in the subconscious, and on some subconscious level I feel that I can forge a connection with them.”⁵⁹ I too, on some subconscious level, felt a connection with a distant mindscape: a temporal resonance with the nascent existence of 🌿.

Beneath the tip of my brush, details emerged in shifting shades of gold across a weathered piece of driftwood. Dainty appendages and tiny shoots spread like a myriad of microscopic stars, while a delicate filigree of 🌿 grew on the surface of the wood, breathing renewed vitality into the venerable material. The process of painting on the weather-beaten driftwood echoed the Japanese aesthetic philosophy of wabi-sabi, which celebrates the beauty of imperfection, impermanence, and incompleteness. Wabi-sabi encourages an appreciation of the passage of time, especially as seen in the transience of nature and in the imperfections of material objects. Qualities such as aging, awkwardness, asymmetry, roughness, and disrepair are all examples of ‘unconventional’⁶⁰ signs denoting beauty, and yet they are highly valued as being representative of a profound awareness of one’s transient presence in the world.⁶¹ This creates an emphasis on process, an invitation to chance occurrences, and sensitivity to material.

The driftwood invited such sensitivity. Under scrutiny, hints of its past could be detected. Over time, the mild waters of the Bothnian Bay had eroded the paint which originally covered its surface. Faint traces of a light cerulean blue could still be seen here and there. It began developing a voice of its own; as I leaned in, listening, I could hear it whisper of the water connection experienced by my forebears, as they carved and painted rocks along the shores of Scandinavia. Shores, research suggests, were envisioned as liminal spaces, where three cosmic worlds and natural zones meet, connecting land, water, and life.⁶² Similarly, the transient materiality of the driftwood spoke of a place in between, a liminal space where life and death meet, suspended in time. It sang the tale of *Chorisodontium aciphyllum* 🌿, a being lost in a millennial dream of ice and snow.

⁵⁸ Dr Andy Needham as quoted in the article “Prehistoric people created art by firelight, study shows”, University of York, 2022 <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2022/research/art-by-firelight/>

⁵⁹ Heikki Willamo, *A Mythical Journey*, 2017, p.60

⁶⁰ Unconventional in the Western sense of classic beauty.

⁶¹ Leonard Koren, *Wabi-sabi for artists, designers, poets & philosophers*, 1994

⁶² Knut Helskog, “The Shore Connection. Cognitive Landscape and Communication with Rock Carvings in Northernmost Europe,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 32(2), 1999, pp. 73-94







Resilience, bronze pigment on driftwood, 2020






Resilience, bronze pigment on driftwood, in "Aukko", Vapaan Taiteen Tila, March 2022

As I walk through the snowy landscapes of Otaniemi, I become more attuned to the delicate nuances of the natural world. Every step requires intention while I navigate the slick terrain and observe the tracks of others who share these paths. The snow transforms the landscape, blanketing it in a hushed stillness that also quiets my mind. In the wintertime, I am often surprised by the sight of ❄️ thriving in the cold. Even amid winter's dormancy, I discover ❄️-covered rocks and ledges that seem to burst with vibrancy.

A Bryological Inquiry

In 2014, a team of scientists reported on the discovery of ancient  that had been dormant beneath a glacier in Antarctica for over 1,500 years.⁶³ After being exposed to light and water in controlled conditions, regrowth was observed in shoots and rhizoids from *Chorisodontium aciphyllum*, obtained from an actively growing bank extending into the permafrost on Signy Island, maritime Antarctic. The scientists who discovered  were surprised by its ability to recover from such a long period of dormancy, stating that it was “basically the first record of anything regenerating of that sort of age.”⁶⁴ They believe that this resilience could provide insights into how other species adapt to changing environmental conditions. As I ponder this natural wonder, I begin to wonder what intricate processes have led  to evolve such resilience and adaptability over time. With this inquiry in mind, I immerse myself into the scientific study field of bryology, reaching back in time to the emergence of  and to the origins of life itself.

Around 445 million years ago most of the planet’s terrestrial landscape was being assembled by plate tectonics into a southern hemisphere supercontinent called Pangaea. The northern hemisphere was almost entirely ocean and most life was concentrated in the sea. Whatever life clung to the exposed rocks in what geologists call the Ordovician period would have been little more than a fine mat of microbes. Rock-hugging green  evolved, a wave of non-vascular plants⁶⁵ that spread over dry land in lush blankets of green. Their emergence and evolution permanently increased the flux of organic carbon into sedimentary rocks, the primary source for atmospheric oxygen. Within 20 to 40 million years, these early land plants had begun to fashion the modern world through the process of photosynthesis, an invisible alchemy that is likely to have contributed to the creation of the stable oxygen-rich atmosphere that eventually allowed animal life, including humans, to evolve.⁶⁶




Chorisodontium aciphyllum has survived in the frozen depths of Antarctica for centuries, waiting for the moment when it would once again see the light of day. I cannot help but feel a sense of awe and wonder at the sheer tenacity of nature. How is it that this tiny , which has spent countless millennia entombed in ice and harkens back to a period of our history that is now long gone, can still cling to life with such fierce determination? What secrets does  hold, what stories does it have to tell?


⁶³ Roads et al., “Millennial timescale regeneration in a moss from Antarctica,” *Current Biology*, 24(6), pp. R222-R223, 2014 [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(14\)00086-4](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(14)00086-4)




⁶⁴ Peter Convey, co-author of the report, as quoted by Jennifer Frazer in “Ancient Moss Revived After Ages on Ice,” *National Geographic*, 2023 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/140317-ancient-moss-frozen-life-biology-science>



⁶⁵ Plants that do not have vein-like systems (i.e., proper roots) to conduct water and minerals. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonvascular>

⁶⁶ University of Exeter, “Humble moss helped create our oxygen-rich atmosphere.” *ScienceDaily*, 2016. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/08/160815185610.htm

 has retained an intimate connection with water over time, for unlike vascular plants, which have specialized tissues to transport water and nutrients throughout their structures, bryophytes absorb water and nutrients through their leaves and must be saturated with moisture for photosynthesis to occur.⁶⁷ This affinity reveals itself in the very design of each of its elements: from the spacing of its leaves along a branch, down to their microscopic surface, each of its features has been designed to attract and entrap water.⁶⁸ This makes  experienced practitioners of porous exchanges with their ecosystem, taking in moisture and nutrients from the air, soil, and even from other plants. Its absorptive and insulating properties have long been recognized by ancient cultures and indigenous peoples. Indeed,  was used by Native Americans to line their children's cradles and carriers, as well as period protection; peat species such as *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. palustre* were also historically used for their medicinal and antifungal properties to staunch bleeding and help wounds heal, even as recently as World War I.⁶⁹

*While most  migrated from the oceans millions of years ago, some have remained underwater, and are even known to thrive along the entire coast of Finland.⁷⁰ Many such species derive their names from the Finnish national epic Kalevala, such as *Fissidens fontanus*, which is known in Finnish as vellamonsammal or "Vellamo's moss", referring to the water goddess Vellamo.*

From the Arctic tundra to the tropical rainforest,  can be found growing in places where water is abundant and, perhaps more surprisingly, where it is scarce. They have adapted over millions of years to survive in some of the harshest environments on Earth. As they slowly wither and dry,  enter a suspended state of animation known as anabiosis,⁷¹ or lack of life. All signs of life are extinguished, and the limits of life and death as we know them begin to blur. Some  can spend a very long time without being in contact with a single drop of water: days, weeks, years, even decades.⁷² But as soon as water is returned, life suddenly begins anew.

 astonishing adaptability to scarcity also extends to frozen environments. In the wintertime, many species of  have adapted to grow in exposed areas where wind and sunlight can reach them, or in crevices and depressions that experience prolonged snow cover. During the coldest months of the year, when environmental conditions become unfavorable for growth and reproduction, these enter a state of dormancy to conserve resources and survive until conditions

⁶⁷ Coxson & Gradstein, "Bryophyte ecology," *Plant ecology*, 2014

⁶⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, 2003, pp. 21-28



⁶⁹ Lorraine Boissoneault, "How Humble Moss Healed the Wounds of Thousands in World War I," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2017 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-humble-moss-helped-heal-wounds-thousands-WWI-180963081/>

⁷⁰ (u.a.), "Underwater mosses in the Baltic Sea", *Marine Finland*, https://www.marinefinland.fi/en-US/Nature_and_how_it_changes/Species/Watermoss

⁷¹ Anabiosis is a state of suspended animation induced in some organisms by desiccation. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/anabiosis>

⁷² Cannone et al., "Moss survival through in situ cryptobiosis after six centuries of glacier burial," *Scientific Reports*, 7(1), 2017

improve; some are even able to photosynthesize beneath the snowpack, thanks to the insulating properties of the snow and the ability of light to penetrate shallow layers.⁷³

Beyond its ability to survive,  possesses an intriguing antifreeze property that helps it ward off the dangers of freezing temperatures. Studies have discovered that  contains a combination of sugars and sugar alcohols in its cells that act like antifreeze, preventing ice crystals from forming and damaging the plant.⁷⁴ Throughout the fall and winter months, these compounds become more concentrated and stop the nucleation process, the first steps in the formation of an ice crystal that would otherwise cause the cell to die.⁷⁵

*When examined under a microscope, the sample of *Chorisodontium aciphyllum* retrieved from a mossy bank on Signy Island demonstrated remarkable signs of conservation: shoots at all depths had retained stems bearing complete leaves and occasional rhizoids, while cell walls remained intact.*

⁷³ Atanasiu, L., "Photosynthesis and Respiration of Three Mosses at Winter Low Temperatures," *The Bryologist*, 74(1), 1971, pp. 23-27

⁷⁴ Kroemer et al., "Abiotic stress response in the moss *Physcomitrella patens*: evidence for an evolutionary alteration in signaling pathways in land plants," *Plant Cell Reports*, 22, 2004, pp. 864-870

⁷⁵ Plant ecophysicologist Sharon Robinson quoted by Hailey Reissman, "The extraordinary Antarctic plants with superhero powers," *TED*, 2017 <https://ideas.ted.com/the-extraordinary-antarctic-plants-with-superhero-powers/>

The contrasting green hues, which starkly stood out from the snowy landscape only moments ago, are now fading in the encroaching darkness. As I reflect on my growing bryological literacy, I am struck by the resilience and adaptability of 🌿. Despite the harsh conditions of its environment, this astonishing plant has managed to not only survive but thrive for millions of years. While I retrace my steps, I am left with a newfound appreciation for the natural world and the intricacies of its ecosystems. The wonders of 🌿 have opened a whole new world of inquiry and exploration for me, where even the smallest and seemingly insignificant elements of the natural world can have a profound impact on the larger ecosystem and the planet.


To Think With  *is to Ponder Deep Time*



“Mosses, I think, are like time made visible. They create a kind of botanical forgetting. Shoot by tiny shoot, the past is obscured in green.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer⁷⁶



Above, Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, 2003

While pondering how to approach moss, I began reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Gathering Moss, A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*. In her writing, she connects bryophytes and their intricate world-building to her own life, writing of their connection to the past as “the most primitive of plants,”⁷⁷ and weaving a symbiotic narrative of human and non-human relationships and stories. Her emphasis on  ancient status in the realm of plants and its vegetal pace inspired me to look deep into its past, revealing unexpected connections in our shared history.

To think with  *is to ponder deep time*, to contemplate the intricate interconnections of life and the ancient roots that bind us all. Reflecting on the teachings of this past season, I am struck by the profound impact this humble organism has had on the evolution of our planet.  paved the way for other life forms to emerge, including humanity itself. Its slow and steady growth,

⁷⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Ancient Green: Moss, Climate, and Deep Time,” *Emergency Magazine*, 2022, <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/ancient-green/>

⁷⁷ Kimmerer, 2003, p. 14

spanning millennia, reminds me of the fleeting nature of my own existence and the vastness of time that surrounds me. From the planet's perspective, our lives are momentary flashes of light on the surface of a lake; briefly bright, but quickly gone. Thinking about deep time can therefore be a sublime experience: astonishing but tinged with the awareness of our own mortality.

My journey into the world of bryology was sparked by wonder, igniting an artistic exploration of the aesthetic beauty of 🌿. But as I delved deeper, I found myself drawn to its scientific complexities and the critical role it played in shaping our world. My painting practice became a vehicle for bridging the gap between the ancient and the contemporary, a means of connecting with the past and exploring the depth of our shared history. Deborah Bird Rose suggests that we are, all of us, “dense knots of embodied time,”⁷⁸ braided from uncountable strands of cross-species actions and giftings. Through my creative process, I entered a knot in time, a liminal space where the threads of past, present, and future interweave. Painting with the bronze pigment on the dark surface of driftwood beca 🌿 window into the density of this knottedness: a complex assemblage of matter, sensation and memory, capturing the temporal resonance and subconscious mindscapes of forgotten times. 🌿, and its primordial wisdom, inspired me to think beyond my own lifespan and to consider the broader context of our planet's history.

I no longer see 🌿 as just a mere organism, but as a living being with its own history, igniting a dialogue between past, present, and future. As I contemplate the spark of vitality revived in *Chorisodontium aciphyllum* after having spent centuries entombed in ice, my attention starts shifting towards events unfolding in Helsinki Central Park; there, another, rare 🌿 species begins calling for my attention, and I delve deep into the fraught politics of the Capitalocene.


⁷⁸ Deborah Bird Rose, “Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time,” *Environmental Philosophy*, 9(1), 2012, pp. 127-140, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26169399>

My thoughts return to *Chorisodontium aciphyllum* 🌿. For all its fragility, it is a survivor. It has weathered countless icy years, endured unimaginable cold and darkness, and somehow managed to cling to life in the harshest of environments. It is a testament to the power of life, to the sheer vitality that can drive even the tiniest of organisms to persevere in the face of overwhelming adversity. It is a story that deserves to be told and retold, for it speaks to the resilience and adaptability that lies at the heart of all life. As **Winter** relinquishes its hold on the land and on my mind, the spirit of 🌿 remains undiminished. Nascent flashes of color emerging from the landscape herald the promise of renewal and the coming of **Spring**. 🌿 has nurtured my yearning for the season to come, and its memory will continue to guide me through the seasons, a symbol of the enduring power of nature and the depth of time that surrounds us.

Spring





As **Spring** hesitantly returns to these lands, I find myself compelled to address what I believe to be a case of failed environmental justice: the construction of a new multifunctional sports hall in Pirkkola, Helsinki Central Park, which sparked protests and public debate in its later stages. My research on this case revealed contradictory views on the future of Helsinki's green urban areas. While some argued for sustainability and "green growth," others made speciesist statements that contradicted the values promoted by Finland's adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes protecting, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, and stopping biodiversity loss.⁷⁹ In exploring this case through my artistic collaboration with Pirkkola forest and my fellow Aaltoans, I have encountered green shield-moss, an elusive and rare  species which has helped me uncover signs of vitality in the opposition movement against the new sports hall. This has led me to consider the potential benefits of a vitalist politics as a way of extending care to wider ecological networks, and how it might help us recognize and value the agency of non-human beings and their contributions to ecological systems.

⁷⁹ See "2030 Agenda – Sustainable Development Goals," Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. <https://um.fi/agenda-2030-sustainable-development-goals>

Our gaze was met by the sight of an empty, unobstructed landscape, now covered with a thick layer of snow, its surface cleared of all signs of vegetation. Discarded piles of tree trunks lay near the roadside, while surrounding woods framed the depleted site, accentuating the absence of the fir, spruces and birches that had until recently populated this tract of land. Trudging through the snow, heavy footsteps on the frozen ground, we attempted to locate the remaining tree stumps, lonely remnants of a once lively ecosystem. Using only our gloved hands, we proceeded to gently uncover them, allowing them to once more feel the gentle glow of winter sunlight. Emerging beneath the snow, the truncated stumps were – for the time being – still firmly rooted in the ground. Some of them even showed signs of life, in the form of solitary bryophytes and lichens lingering at their base. We took our time, shedding tears and mourning for the barren woodland. It is one thing to feel compassion when reading or being told about occurrences such as these, but another entirely to be present, and to actively partake in naming and manifesting the loss of an ecosystem.


Recollecting Pirkkola Forest

The case of Pirkkola forest was first brought to my attention by fellow ViCCAn Leena Reittu. Leena had already ventured to the site, witnessing the transforming landscape and beginning to reflect on the emotional impact brought forth by this event. In January 2021, the two of us signed up for the Art, Environment & Activism course, organized by Aalto University's department of Art Education. As part of our final assignment, we joined clusters, groups formed by shared interests and themes. Ours saw the inclusion of artist photographers Janette Holmström and Dominik Fleischmann. On February 12, 2021, the four of us converged on Pirkkola forest. We returned to Pirkkola regularly, each visit bringing forth new thoughts and acts of care and compelling us to shed a light on the circumstances that had led to this devastation.



The construction site in Pirkkola, March 2021.

In 2014, the City of Helsinki leased an area of approximately one hectare to Pirkkola Sports Hall Ltd (Pirkkolan Liikuntahalli Oy), which was zoned for a sports hall. The non-profit Sports Hall association's aim was to equip Helsinki with long-needed indoor sports and recreational facilities, to be run in collaboration with the gymnastics club Elise, several other sports clubs and the sports-oriented North Haagan Coeducational School. In 2018, the Construction Board submitted a construction proposal to the City of Helsinki; a building permit was granted the following year, with a zoning exception for the new plans approved by the city architect himself. The original zoning permit only allowed for the construction of a modest sized hall, but the new plans saw an increase in size, volume and number of stories; the parking lot near the swimming pool would be expanded, and in addition, the project would cause trees to be felled and rocks blown up in Helsinki Central Park.

In 2020, the Nature Protection Association Pro Luonto ry issued a formal complaint calling for the construction to be suspended on the grounds of the Nature Conservation Act.⁸⁰ Issuers of the complaint claimed that the studies and environmental impact assessments of the area prior to the zoning of the area were insufficient and missing key species values, such as the Siberian Flying Squirrel - a species classified as vulnerable within the European Union -, newly sighted occurrences of green shield-moss  - another rare species -, and the impact of the construction project on bird nesting season. Prior to 2014, an environmental survey of the area had been conducted by the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-Centres).⁸¹ As a result of this survey, it was estimated that the proposed sports hall would not impact the natural habitat of any of the abovementioned species and would therefore not compromise the construction project. Despite the combined efforts of local inhabitants, activists, outdoors enthusiasts and Pro Luonto Ry's appeal to the Helsinki Administrative Court for a ban on the construction project, the opponents' claim was rejected and clearing of the woodland began in November 2020.

The hall, which now stands on a strip of forest between the Pirkkola swimming pool and Hämeenlinnanväylä, was on the one hand seen as a direct response to Helsinki's growing need for indoor sports facilities, and on the other as a threat to Central Park's local biodiversity and a violation of outdoor enthusiasts' use of the area. When asked about the controversy surrounding the project, Kirsi Eräkangas (Chairman of the Board of Pirkkolan Liikuntahalli Oy) argued that it had always proceeded in accordance with normal decision-making processes:

“We consider the allegations of violating the Nature Conservation Act to be unfounded. [...] The project has progressed properly and publicly with many possibilities to appeal against the decisions taken. Opponents of the project have not exercised these rights. Now, they do not accept the views of dozens of experts in different fields, the decisions of city officials with an overall picture, the rejection of complaints, but have clearly threatened to delay the project at all costs.”⁸²

Her statement raises several questions: Whose expertise was considered in the decision-making process? Why did opponents of the project wait until its later stages to exercise their rights? Was the city of Helsinki transparent enough in its decision-making process? Speaking with Jack Raisanen, an environmental and sustainability expert who provided pro bono advice to opponents of the project, shed some light on these questions. According to him, people were not aware of what was happening until later stages of the project; moreover, they were already engaged in fighting against some of the more aggressive 2016 Helsinki City Plan proposals for Helsinki Central Park.

⁸⁰ At its core, the Nature Conservation Act aims “to preserve the diversity of nature in Finland, by ensuring that the favorable conservation status of different natural habitat types and native species is maintained or restored.” Ministry of the Environment, <https://ym.fi/en/nature-conservation-legislation>

⁸¹ The ELY-centres are responsible for the regional implementation and development tasks of the central government. These tasks include the promotion and supervision of nature conservation and landscape protection and working towards safeguarding natural values in land use planning. ELY-keskus, <https://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/ely-en>

⁸² Varpu Helpinen et al., “Helsinki on valmis neuvottelemaan kiistellyn Keskuspuiston urheiluhallin uudesta paikasta – Halliyrittäjä: ‘Suojellaanko mieluummin sammalta kuin lapsia?’” *Yle Uutiset*, 2020 <https://yle.fi/a/3-11406966>.

Additionally, the public process wasn't facilitated by the economic pressure put on completing the project. Early on during the motion for opposition, Eräkangas voiced her fear of a delay and the costs that would follow: "This is an investment of EUR 15 million. We have been involved since 2017. The hall site is set where it is in 2014. Where have these people been during this time?"⁸³ Prior efforts to protect and conserve Central Park were ignored by the City Plan 2016, which prioritized Helsinki's growth into a dense city linked by rail transport. While the plan aimed to maintain Helsinki's green spaces, it ultimately infringed on natural areas for economic growth. The question remains: how can we create a sustainable future and preserve green spaces when city planning prioritizes economic growth? How do we balance the needs of past and future generations in our decision-making processes?




Birdseye view of the construction site, post-blast. March 2021. Photo credit: Dominik Fleishmann.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

I distinctly remember the shock I felt when seeing the site again, once they had begun clearing the rocks. Although 'clearing' is rather a euphemism here. The massive substratum of red granite (known in Finnish as rapakivi), so particular to the Finnish landscape, had been blown to smithereens. A fine pink dust had emerged from its fractured remains; as we wandered the disfigured landscape, I collected some of the sand, though not entirely certain of what I would do with it. With the aid of a drone, Dominik documented this brutal development. Seen from above, the shattered bedrock lay open like a pulsing wound, mutilated, and incredibly vulnerable. Later, when examining these images, the sheer absurdity of the situation hit us with full force. These geological formations, which came together millions of years ago, had outlasted all our ancestors. And yet, in a matter of hours (perhaps even minutes), our contemporaries had reduced them to gravel and sand. Time, in its most aged and venerable form, had literally turned to dust in our hands.

Anima Silva: A Story of Significant Occurrences

As our practices unfolded, fostering an emotional dialogue among us that echoed the ravaged landscape, a rare and intriguing being, began calling for my attention. Its elusive presence took on a political dimension when occurrences of the  were observed near the contentious site and submitted to FinBIF⁸⁴ by local environmental activists, and later used as an argument to appeal Helsinki's decision to greenlight the construction project.

Clear-cuts are a particularly contentious subject in Finland, which has been captured by many artists in recent years. Finnish photographers Sanni Seppo and Ritva Kovalainen created a poignant critique of this forestry practice through their collaborative visual research in the 1990s. Their “forest trilogy”⁸⁵ emerged from this research, using photographic art to explore Finland's changing relationship with its forests and wooded landscapes, as well as to uncover the impact of intensive forestry on the natural biodiversity of forests and changing attitudes towards the industry. “Nearly all untouched forests or those beyond sampling stand have disappeared”⁸⁶ they write, “the amount of destruction is hard to understand, even to admit, because the woodland is such an important part of the image, skill and reputation, something that must not be violated.” Although Finland portrays itself as a ‘green’ country, mindful and protective of its environment, its heavy forestry industry tells a different story.⁸⁷

My collaboration with Leena, Janette, and Dominik resulted in diverse artistic responses to the clear-cut at Pirkkola forest, ranging from site-sensitive performances to aerial photography, and creating an emotional and experiential archive of the lost woodland. As Leena, Dominik, Janette and I came to know Pirkkola forest better over the course of multiple excursions, witnessing the erasure of all the elements that once made this place a part of the forest, our practices developed, seeking ways to address the many losses of the woodland. Throughout our collaboration, we actively voiced our desire to promote a worldview and artistic strategies based on “organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration.”⁸⁸ We longed to form non-hierarchical relationships amongst ourselves, the species, and ecosystem encountered in Pirkkola.

Our practices were rooted in a deep sense of loss, leading us to find new and meaningful ways to connect with the woodland and pay our respects to what had been lost and the struggles - both human and non-human - that had taken place in Pirkkola. Dominik used photography to


⁸⁴ FinBIF (Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility) is an open access data repository for researchers, government and the public. Suomen Lajitietokeskus, <https://laji.fi/en>




⁸⁵ The Finnish Museum of Photography, “Ritva Kovalainen & Sanni Seppo: Forests of the North Wind,” 2022, <https://www.valokuvataiteenmuseo.fi/en/exhibitions/forests-north-wind>



⁸⁶ Ritva Kovalainen, “Ritva Kovalainen & Sanni Seppo: Silvicultural Operations,” (n.d.), <https://www.ritvakovalainen.com/silviculturaloperations>


⁸⁷ In 2021, the value of forest industry production was over EUR 18 billion, while the forest sector accounted for about 17 percent of Finland's total export revenue. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, “Forests and the economy,” (n.d.), <https://mmm.fi/en/forests/forestry/sustainable-forest-management/forests-and-the-economy>

⁸⁸ Taking inspiration from the basic feminist tenets promoted by ecofeminism. Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecofeminism>

document the cruel loss of habitat and evoke the virtues of grief and mourning. Leena sought to uncover the stumps of felled trees, allowing them to feel the sun on their bark for one last time. Janette questioned how the value of something is measured, while getting to know this site as a place of multiple encounters and emotions. I explored the unseen world of departed trees, rock, and a rare but significant , seeking to uncover their tenuous, lingering presence.

*Green shield-moss (also known by its Latin name *Buxbaumia viridis*) is a rare bryophyte, found sporadically throughout the northern hemisphere.⁸⁹ With small, bright green leaves, forming a distinct shield-like shape,  differs in appearance from what most of us have come to know and recognize as . It is particularly notable for its slow pace of growth and longevity; it can take several years for  to mature and begin producing sporophytes, and it may take decades for a colony to establish itself on a new substrate.⁹⁰ But once established, it can persist for centuries, quietly bearing witness to the changing cycles of life and death in the forest.*

* requires specific conditions to thrive, such as moist and nutrient-rich soil, a stable microclimate, and a diverse understory of plant life. Its presence can indicate the existence of an undisturbed and mature forest ecosystem.⁹¹ Its Finnish moniker, *lahokaviosammal*, which literally translates as “decay moss,” reveals its preferred habitat, as  primarily grows on the decaying remains of fallen trees, stumps, and logs, particularly conifers. However, as the wood decays, living conditions eventually become unsustainable over time. The number of spore-carrying capsules produced each year is therefore critical, and it may vary greatly from one year to the next. The loss of woodland habitat, particularly old-growth forests that produce a significantly larger amount of decaying wood over time than younger, managed woodlands, is especially harmful to the species.*

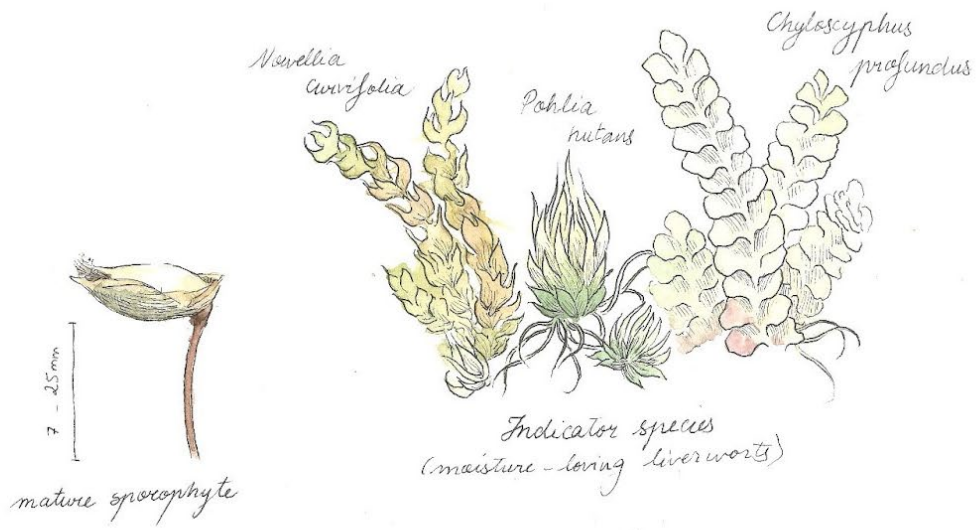
In 2017, a survey was conducted in Helsinki to improve awareness of the distribution and ecology of , leading to the discovery of 27 new occurrences.⁹² This confirmed the importance of Helsinki's woodland areas in the species' overall distribution in Finland. The zoned woodland in Pirkkola was home to pines, spruces, birches, and aspens, some of which were known centennial trees. Despite these known variables, the occurrences found in Pirkkola were classified as sterile and unlikely to persist.

⁸⁹ The Red List assesses and classifies threatened species in Finland. The Red List, <https://punainenkirja.laji.fi/en/results/MX.43478>

⁹⁰ Karin Wiklund, “Substratum preference, spore output and temporal variation in sporophyte production of the epixylic moss *Buxbaumia viridis*,” *Journal of Bryology*, 24(3), 2002, pp. 187-195

⁹¹ McCune and Geiser, *Macrolichens of the Pacific Northwest*, 1997

⁹² Manninen and Nieminen, “Lahokaviosammal Vantaalla: esiintymisselvitys ja suojelusuunnitelma,” *Faunatican raportteja*, 2020



Watercolor study of the green shield-moss (*Buxbaumia viridis*), watercolor and ink on paper, 2021

As we returned to Pirkkola throughout the year, a tenuous idea began taking root in my mind: what if the vanished woodland had not truly disappeared? What if it remained visible, almost within reach? Could it perhaps be seen, even interacted with? Observing the reflection of neighboring trees in bodies of water situated within the confines of the construction site seemed to infer an intangible link to the departed woodland. I began recording sound and images from the neighboring woods, pondering how to elevate this material. After putting a few ideas and sketches on paper, installation quickly imposed itself as a suitable medium for this project.

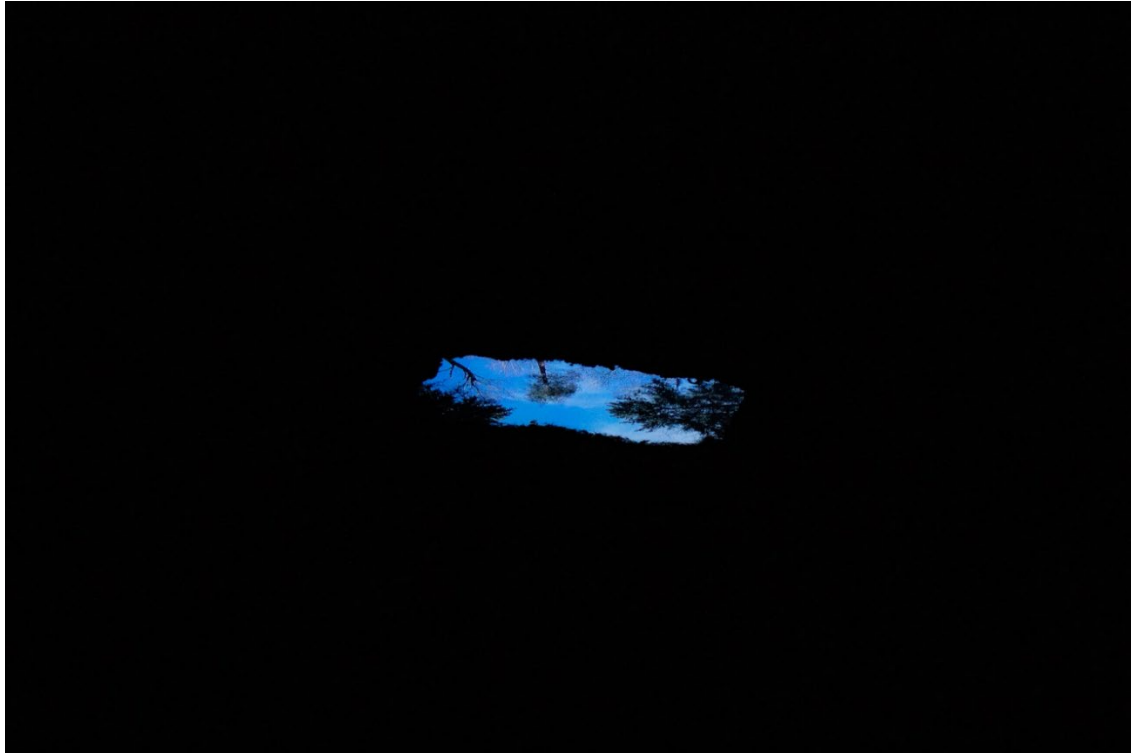


Body of water situated within the confines of the construction site; neighboring woods can be seen in the reflection.
March 2021.

Installation art refers to artworks that are created or installed within a specific space where they are intended to be viewed, often referred to as “in situ”. As a result, installation art is sometimes referred to as “environments” and is typically large in scale and created with a variety of media. Numerous notable artists, including Yayoi Kusama and Judy Chicago, have gained recognition through their work in this medium. Some of my most powerful aesthetic experiences have been triggered by encounters with installation works, such as Olafur Eliasson’s “Beauty”,⁹³ Giuseppe

⁹³ Olafur Eliasson, “Beauty”, spotlight, water, nozzles, wood, hose, pump, 1993. Bands of colored light shimmer in a curtain of mist. This apparition depends on the light projected from a precisely angled spotlight, as refracted and

Penone's "Pensieri e linfa",⁹⁴ and Chiharu Shiota's "Tracing Boundaries,"⁹⁵ which might account for the reason why I chose to turn to this medium.



Anima Silva, in "Aukko", Vapaan Taiteen Tila, March 2022.


reflected by the water droplets, meeting the eye of the viewer. The resulting rainbow changes depending on the viewer's position; no two viewers see the same rain-bow. <https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/beauty-1993/>

⁹⁴ Giuseppe Penone, "Pensieri e linfa" (Sap and Thought), linen, elderberry pigment, paper, ink, 2021. The artist wrapped an acacia trunk in a fine linen cloth, which he then rubbed with an elder leaf so as to reveal the imprint of the bark on the fabric. The canvas is accompanied by a text – a manuscript fragmented into regular sequences, like the pages of a book. <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/agenda/giuseppe-penone-seve-et-pensee>

⁹⁵ Chiharu Shiota, "Tracing Boundaries", red yarn, door frames, 2021. Known for her site-specific installations in which she weaves vast webs of black, white, or red yarn. Shiota created for EMMA museum an immersive installation taking visitors on a journey into personal memories and hidden depths. <https://emmamuseum.fi/en/exhibitions/chiharu-shiota-tracing-boundaries/>



Anima Silva, in "Aukko", Vapaan Taiteen Tila, March 2022

Though not particularly large in scale, *Anima Silva* was conceptualized as a standalone piece that would later be assembled on site. Having created a ‘puddle’ shape by using light wiring and papier-mâché with a suitable opening for a television screen, I began covering the structure – previously painted in earthy tones – with soil, intermittently scattering findings from Pirkkola: twigs, pinecones, lichen and , rocky fragments. I invited their lingering presence to remain with us, in the form of a multisensory encounter, where one can *stay with the trouble*⁹⁶ as a way of taking moral response-ability by working in the present, with all the people and things that are being affected, with the knowledge that things are imperfect and difficult. Staying with the trouble, it seems to me, means bearing a kind of tension – or contradiction – without all too quickly abandoning what is of importance to us. Staring down into this artificial body of water, one could observe gently swaying treetops under a clear sky, occasionally crossed by a stealthy bird. The sounds of Pirkkola forest filled the air, calling forth a livelihood, a spark of vitality persisting even in the face of death.

Its title, taken from Latin (in English “the soul, or spirit of the forest”), points to an intrinsically animistic worldview, one that ascribes animacy to creatures, objects, places, and even spirits. Religious studies scholar Graham Harvey observes that from an animistic perspective, “the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human,” and that this worldview is therefore “concerned with learning how to be a good person in respectful relationships with other persons.”⁹⁷

While I acknowledge the importance of animism as a worldview, I am cautious about its usage due to the fraught history of Western appropriation of indigenous perspectives. It is essential to recognize that engaging with indigenous animism from a Western, non-indigenous perspective carries the risk of cultural and spiritual appropriation.⁹⁸ Attempts to heal the wounds of modernity and return to a state of ‘authentic’ connection with nature should not involve appropriating the worldviews of indigenous peoples under the pretense that they are the same as those of the European past. This also raises questions about how I, as a white, cisgender, European person, can contribute to the revitalization of ecological relations without further enabling colonial trends.

⁹⁶ Haraway, 2016, p.1

⁹⁷ Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, 2006, p.xi

⁹⁸ Pagan “new animism” movements, in particular, are at risk of appropriating indigenous beliefs and practices through a romanticized, essentialized view of indigenous cultures and a reimagining of indigenous cosmologies as “one’s own heritage.” See Anna Fisk, “Appropriating, Romanticizing and Reimagining: Pagan Engagements with Indigenous Animism,” *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Modern Paganism*, 2017, pp. 21-42




The "sacred tree" in Pirkkola forest, March 2023

I revisited Pirkkola on another occasion, this time with my friend Niti, who had told me about a tree in the forest that drew a unique kind of attention. As soon as I saw it, I understood what she meant. The tree stump, perhaps felled by lightning or a storm some years back, was adorned with various offerings: light patches of moss, bright rowan berries, and even a small elf figurine. Who left these items here and why? Was there a connection to the construction site nearby? Niti couldn't say, but we could feel something significant happening here. To her, it was reminiscent of the sacred trees found all over the urban Indian landscape. To me, it spoke of an ancient and sacred connection to the living land.

Moving Towards a Politics of Vitality

“Is a ‘politics of vitality’ at all possible, or desirable, at this advanced stage of the planetary crisis? After all, the very idea of nonhuman vitality could be regarded as dangerous by those who believe that humans are the only beings endowed with souls, minds, language, and agency. And if this axiom is taken to be a defining feature of rationality itself, then it follows that to think otherwise is to be irrational, superstitious, or ‘mystical.’”

– Amitav Ghosh⁹⁹

In mid-2020, amidst the discussions surrounding the construction project, Kirsi Eräkangas, Chairman of the Board of Pirkkola Sports Hall Ltd, asked whether we should be “protecting  rather than children,”¹⁰⁰ arguing that thousands of young people will be left without decent leisure facilities, and the city of Helsinki will be left without long-needed indoor sports facilities. Her language struck me. Why should one be protected at the expense of the other? While Europe is sacrificing its ancient forests for energy,¹⁰¹ we should consider the implications of a politicized discourse relying more on absurd non-human provocative rhetoric than logic and using the vague concept of children and morality to further an unrelated agenda and distract us from the real issue (i.e., the destruction and loss of biodiversity in Helsinki Central Park). To me, the use of such a language is not only dangerous and reductionist, but also fundamentally denies the inherent state of interdependency that we all live in. Our existences are porous, connected, interrelated; we intertwine and commingle with multispecies otherness at every turn and are constantly interacting with broader ecosystems, where “I” only exists as a self in relationship to others.

Post humanist theorist and biologist Donna Haraway offers us an alternative way to consider multispecies relations and interact in a multispecies world through the concept of ‘making kin,’ which has long been espoused by indigenous peoples across the globe.¹⁰² She argues that “[...] all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time),”¹⁰³ encouraging us to overcome traditional categorizations and divisions. Rather than perpetuating hierarchical world views favoring a historically anthropocentric global narrative, shouldn’t we consider the incredible complexity of connections and entanglements of all life forms, strive to expand our way of thinking about who our loved ones could be and with whom we are connected in a given place and time?

⁹⁹ Ghosh, 2021, p.222

¹⁰⁰ Varpu Helpinen et al., “Helsinki on valmis neuvottelemaan kiistellyn Keskuspuiston urheiluhallin uudesta paikasta – Halliyrittäjä: “Suojellaanko mieluummin sammalta kuin lapsia?,” *Yle Uutiset*, 2020, <https://yle.fi/a/3-11406966>

¹⁰¹ Sarah Hurtes and Weiyi Cai, “Europe is sacrificing its ancient forests for energy,” *The New York Times*, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/07/world/europe/eu-logging-wood-pellets.html>

¹⁰² As Amitav Ghosh remarks, “Native American movements of resistance [which] have long been based on an ethic that foregrounds the familial instinct to protect ‘all our relatives’ – that is to say, the entire spectrum of nonhuman kin, including rivers, mountains, animals, and the spirits of the land.” 2021, p.237

¹⁰³ Haraway, 2016, p.103

Amidst the material and ontological destruction wrought in Pirkkola forest, I believe that Amitav Ghosh's exploration of a *political vitalism*¹⁰⁴ in *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021) might offer us a vision of hope.¹⁰⁵ A politics of vitality, he argues, seeks to reframe our relationship with the natural world by emphasizing the dynamic and interdependent systems of life that sustain us all, thus challenging the dominant paradigm of Modernity.¹⁰⁶ Beliefs in the Earth's sacredness and the vitality of trees, rivers, and mountains are signs of an authentic commitment to the defense of nonhumans, particularly when they are associated with "livelihood environmentalism" movements initiated and led by people intimately connected with particular landscapes.¹⁰⁷ Some of the most effective political movements of modern times, Ghosh argues, have derived their energy from vitalist sources, including Gandhi's decades-long struggle but also more contemporary movements such as Occupy¹⁰⁸ and the Climate Movement vanguarded by Greta Thunberg.

Pre-modern European society was deeply rooted in animistic beliefs, in which non-human entities such as plants and animals were believed to possess vital energy or life force.¹⁰⁹ These beliefs were integral to early knowledge of medicine, agriculture, and spirituality. However, with the rise of capitalism and the European expansion overseas, they were repressed and replaced by a mechanistic and reductionist worldview that viewed nature as a passive object to be exploited for human benefit.¹¹⁰ Ghosh exemplifies this repression through the history of the expropriation of common land¹¹¹ and the brutal witch hunts that plagued Northern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The process of land expropriation coincided with the rise of mechanistic conceptions of nature, embodied in the writings of Francis Bacon and René Descartes, who contributed to guiding and systematizing a new philosophy of science, and defined the modern scientific method.¹¹² While Francis Bacon may have originated the idea of conquering nature for the sake of relieving man's estate,¹¹³ it was Descartes who told us that we might truly become "like masters and possessors of nature."¹¹⁴ For the early rationalists and empiricists, nature was a thing to be conquered,

¹⁰⁴ Defined in *The Nutmeg's Curse* as the consistent pattern in the relationship between vitalist ideas and politics which emphasizes the importance of understanding and nurturing the life-giving forces that animate human societies and ecosystems.

¹⁰⁵ Through his account of the Dutch colonial presence in the Banda Islands, Ghosh reveals in *The Nutmeg's Curse* how European knowledge of natural resources like nutmeg was shaped by colonial power structures and how this legacy continues to influence contemporary scientific and cultural discourse.

¹⁰⁶ Which views the natural world as a set of resources to be exploited for human benefit.

¹⁰⁷ Ramachandra Guha, as cited by Ghosh, 2021, p. 233

¹⁰⁸ Which, incidentally, Michael Marder connects to vegetal life (citing the movement's emphasis on non-violence and the occupation of public spaces). See *Plant Thinking: Toward a Philosophy of Vegetative Life*, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Bates, 2002, p.114

¹¹⁰ Ariane Conty, "Animism in the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 39(5), pp. 127–153

¹¹¹ Or *commons*, areas of land that were collectively owned and managed by communities. The enclosure movement, which began in England in the 16th century and gradually spread to other parts of Europe, involved the privatization of commons lands and their conversion to private property. Today, there is a growing recognition of the importance of commons as a means of promoting sustainable land use and community resilience. See Derek Wall's *The Commons in History: Culture, Conflict, and Ecology*, 2014

¹¹² Lois Magnier, "Philosophy of Science: Baconian and Cartesian Approaches," Encyclopedia.com.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/philosophy-science-baconian-and-cartesian-approaches>

¹¹³ Thomas Merrill, "Masters and possessors of nature," *The New Atlantis*, 2008

<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/masters-and-possessors-of-nature>

¹¹⁴ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 1985 ed.

stripped bare for man to build his empire of knowledge and wealth. These conceptions of nature emerged in parallel to the rising persecution of perceived ‘witches’ across Europe, a violence that would be exported to other parts of the world through the colonial project. Most witchcraft accusations were directed at women, whose plight would come to be associated with the systematic subjugation of the earth.¹¹⁵

Both rationalism and empiricism laid critical basis for the debates that developed over the course of the 18th century and the Enlightenment. Ironically, the Age of Enlightenment, often regarded as a period of intellectual progress and liberation, paradoxically perpetuated, and fortified existing cultural and natural hierarchies. While its primary objective was to restore power and knowledge to the people, it inadvertently entrenched divisions¹¹⁶ and inequalities within society. It reinforced cultural hierarchies, viewing European culture as superior and marginalizing others,¹¹⁷ whilst perpetuating the idea of humanity’s dominance over nature.

From lively and vibrant, the natural world was subdued into a mute and inanimate background for human activities, from which resources could be reaped indiscriminately. In time, it became more and more profitable for Western dominant structures and elites to eradicate the idea of nature as a living thing by stamping out conceptions of vitality.¹¹⁸ As Ghosh remarks: “The awareness of a Gaia-like Earth [...] was systematically exterminated, through orgies of bloodletting that did not spare Europe, although its violence was directed most powerfully at the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ In her seminal book, *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant argues that the torturing of witches constituted a powerful metaphor for the emerging philosophy of science in which nature was seen as an essentially feminine domain of disorder that had to be conquered, subjugated, and indeed tortured in order to extract her secrets. This, she tells us, “Legitimated the exploitation of natural resources.” 1980, p. 189

¹¹⁶ Including the dualisms between mind and body, intellect, and materiality.

¹¹⁷ This ethnic and Eurocentric perspective not only justified the colonization and domination of non-European societies but also marginalized and suppressed indigenous knowledge and cultural practices.

¹¹⁸ As a result, many people lost their access to land and were forced to seek wage labor or migrate to cities, and the conversion of common lands to commercial agriculture often resulted in the depletion of soil fertility, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity, while it became more and more profitable for Western dominant structures and elites to eradicate the idea of nature as a living thing by stamping out conceptions of vitality, which were often identified with women and witchcraft.

¹¹⁹ Ghosh, 2021, p.212


Finland has a rich history of tree worship, where the forest was considered a sacred place. An old Finnish expression even states that visiting the forest is akin to going to church. People used to confide their worries to trees, believing that the trees would keep their secrets. They also believed that spirit trees guarded homesteads and that sacred groves were the dwelling places of gods. In Finnish folklore, these spirit trees are called 'Haltijapuu.' However, during Finland's transition from Paganism to Catholicism in the early Middle Ages, and later to Lutheranism, church authorities prohibited the worship of sacred groves and spirit trees. To end the old pagan traditions, they even cut down these trees and built churches over the sites. Despite this, many stories abound of communities banding together to safeguard their sacred groves.

While some may argue that the forest parcel that was clear-cut in Pirkkola to make way for the new sportshall was relatively small – compared to the large-scale forestry in other regions of Finland –, the reactions it sparked were significant, with a petition launched by artist Sanni Seppo to save Pirkkola forest garnering nearly 13,000 signatures.¹²⁰ The fact that people came together to protect “their” woods and trees shows to me that the old ways are not entirely forgotten, and that hidden currents of vitality still flow within even the most urbanized of individuals. Although our sacred and sensuous connection to the natural world may have waned over time, I do not believe that it has been completely severed. The absence that inspired me to write this thesis is temporary in nature, not permanent.

The contemporary and dynamic concept of vitality, which I have selected as the basis upon which this thesis stands, reflects the “old and powerful counter currents that have continued to flow around the planet, like a subterranean river, throughout the time in which the mechanistic metaphysics was rising to dominance.”¹²¹ It speaks of a continuity, of deep roots that can be traced back to ancient Greece (e.g. Aristotle’s *On the Soul* is a vitalist work).¹²² Modern vitalism arose as a rejection of Descartes’s mechanistic view that plants, animals, and even living human bodies are kinds of machines. By situating myself within a European tradition of vitalism, I am aligning with hidden currents of resistance that have manifested themselves in various forms of protest movements, both historically and contemporarily (i.e., through anti-enclosure movements, peasant revolts, and contemporary protest movements).

Importantly, this vitalist perspective does not attempt to appropriate indigenous ontologies for my own purposes. Rather, it reflects a growing desire to recognize and respect non-human lives and acknowledges a deeply ingrained subconscious struggle against the project of reducing the Earth to a clockwork, a mechanistic process that effectively silenced and muted every kind of being, including the land itself. From this perspective, I believe that a contemporary and dynamic politics of vitality reflects the intersectional nature of our current ecological crisis, which requires action on the environmental, social, political, and economic levels. It recognizes that environmental issues are inherently tied to social and political issues, and therefore, a true ecological approach must also become a social approach, integrating questions of justice into debates on the environment.

Indeed, from the perspective of environmental justice, Pirkkola left me with important considerations: who had a voice? Were the needs of other living beings and life forms also taken into consideration? And before one can ask the question of whose expertise matters more and why, shouldn’t we first ask who decides whose knowledge carries more weight? When it comes to achieving environmental sustainability within urban planning, I believe that we need to re-prioritize what is valued in our society.

Counteracting the loss of urban biodiversity in metropolitan areas like Helsinki would not only require extending our networks of kinship to non-humans, such as , and recognizing that

¹²⁰ Saara Hirvonen, “Helsinkiiläiset yrittävät puolustaa Pirkkolan vanhaa metsää kansalaisadressilla – parissa päivässä yli 3 600 allekirjoittajaa,” *Yle Uutiset*, 2020. <https://yle.fi/a/3-11389031>


¹²¹ Ghosh, 2021, p.235

¹²² Brian McLaughlin, *Vitalism and emergence*, 2003, pp. 629-639

they too are members of our communities and deserving of respect and protection; it would entail a shift in our values and priorities, away from a human-centric worldview and towards a more inclusive and holistic understanding of our place in the world. It would demand from us a recognition: that the health and wellbeing of more-than-human beings are intimately connected to our own. In the end, it is not a matter of “protecting 🌱 rather than children” as Kirsi Eräkangas suggested, but rather, it is about extending our networks of kinship to more-than-human communities, to recognize their inherent vitality in order to strive towards a future that will benefit our wider multispecies society, not as a single species.


If there is some good to be found in the Pirkkola case, it is that it has contributed to a renewed awareness about the vulnerability of urban biodiversity and motivated even more people to act towards its protection in the wider Helsinki region. I believe that revitalizing contemporary ecological relations through a vitalist metaphysics is both possible and desirable, as it can allow us to recover a sense of our own ecological entanglements with the more-than-human world and encourage us to “protect all our relatives.”¹²³

¹²³ Kimmerer, 2013, p.208

Niti and I returned to the 'sacred tree' this spring. It now boasted the addition of a peacock feather, a pine branch, and what looked like felt. There was something inexplicably special about this tree that compelled people to come back over time and depose these gifts. Could it be an underlying current of vitality? A wordless understanding that this tree was in fact a haltijapuu, and possessed a kind of spiritual significance for the wanderers of Pirkkola forest? We might never know the answer to these questions. But something told me that an old and powerful magic was at play here. Before taking our leave from the tree, we too left small offerings: me, a dried mushroom cap, beautifully preserved in its desiccation; Niti, a small white stone found hidden under  .



Paying homage to the “sacred tree”, March 2023

As winter began melting away in the light of spring, we went looking for . Referring ourselves to the observations of the species submitted to Laji, we attempted to find the previously located occurrences, to no avail. I can only speculate as to why we weren't able to catch a glimpse of it. Perhaps it was due to its fluctuating growth, or because the entire surrounding ecosystem has been disturbed and weakened by the recent disappearance of the woodland. Buxbaumia viridis eluded us.

An Elusive Spark of Vitality

From a medical and legal perspective, death is often thought of as a clearly defined event, a step function that marks the end of life.¹²⁴ However, as we witnessed the obliteration of non-human lives at the construction site in Pirkkola, we came to understand that death is a process, not a single event. Our collaborative, long-term project reflected our need to create a space dedicated to our shared sense of loss, a space for grieving, but also for processual thinking-with and caring for our non-human kin.






Our artistic engagement with Pirkkola forest inspired us to share our findings and expressions of sorrow with others. We began working on creating an exhibition to serve as a joint creative process, acting as an archive of the area's little stories, memories, and inhabitants. The exhibition would pay tribute to the activists and protesters who have shaped our practice and serve as a time-capsule to a unique moment of fearing inevitable destruction and feeling helpless in the face of it. It would also act as an educational tool for future activists confronting similar issues related to the case of Pirkkola forest. *Aukko*¹²⁵ opened in March 2022, at Vapaan Taiteen Tila gallery in Sörnäinen, Helsinki. The emotional responses it inspired deeply moved us.




Building the “Aukko” exhibition at Vapaan Taiteen Tila, Helsinki, March 2023

¹²⁴ Christopher A. Pallis, “Death,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/science/death>

¹²⁵ *Aukko* (‘hole’ in English) alludes to a Finnish colloquial term used when referring to a forest clearing in Finland. It is also employed to express loss or an internal void.

After spending so many weeks in the company of ghosts – whether it be , trees or rocks –, we keenly felt the need to honor their lives. Responding to the clear-cut in Pirkkola forest, *Aukko* sought to explore a dichotomy of presence and absence: the vanishing woodland, the elusive , the wider trend of clear-cuts across Finland. Although absent from the footage shown in *Anima Silva*, the  weighed heavily on our minds. Despite its smallness, its presence in a forest is a reminder of the intricate web of relationships that exists within ecosystems, and of the importance of preserving these connections. While none of us were able to locate  occurrences in Pirkkola forest, its intangible presence and vitality lingered in our community,  accompanying us throughout our encounters with the woods.

The impact of historical processes on both human and more-than-human minds and bodies has resulted in colonial violence that has repressed the ontologies of animacy that previously guided interactions with the world. Despite this, vitalist beliefs have persisted in various forms, manifesting as subterranean currents of vitality that resist the dominance of anthropocentric and mechanistic worldviews. It is therefore crucial for me to ground my practice in the context of a politics of vitality; however, I recognize that the adoption of a vitalist metaphysics carries certain political and metaphysical risks. As Cat Moir remarks: “It is precisely because vitalism is concerned with the question of life that it implies political considerations from the get-go.”¹²⁶ And indeed, forms of vitalist philosophy have undoubtedly been historically aligned with right-wing agendas, in an attempt to reappropriate the past to colonize the future.¹²⁷ On the other hand, political vitalism has also been used to advance emancipatory forms of politics by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and feminist new materialist thinkers like Jane Bennett and Rosi Braidotti, lending itself to questions of ecology and racial justice. If there are indeed ecological energies at work in the world beyond human control, then it is essential to ensure that the process of re-enchantment remains democratic, without artists or local experts setting themselves up as authorities on vital energy or dictating how others should live. I will revisit this question in **Returning to calendar time**.

The events that transpired at Pirkkola have left me with numerous reflections. From the controversy sparked by the  to Pirkkola’s “sacred tree” pointing towards hidden currents of vitality, it seems that there is an underlying desire to expand our bonds of kinship to include more-than-human life and ecosystems. How can we challenge centuries of anthropocentrically focused narratives and alter the way we perceive and engage with more-than-human life? This brings me to the question: How can engaging with emerging new materialist theory through the arts assist me in imaginatively recreating an earlier vitalist metaphysics? As **Summer** approaches, time begins to flow and expand in inexplicable ways. I contemplate how I can slow down, step into the shoes of another being, and genuinely challenge my own human perception of the world.

¹²⁶ Cat Moir, “What Is Living and What Is Dead in Political Vitalism?,” *Vitalism and Its Legacy in Twentieth Century Life Sciences and Philosophy. History, Philosophy and Theory of the Life Sciences*, 29, 2023.

¹²⁷ Nazism and eco-fascism being prime examples of such. As historian Horst Freyhofer writes, “[v]italists and fascists both affirm the existence of a transcendental, autonomous, and capricious force that controls all life, most apparently the life of men. And both think that some people can know and handle these forces better than most people” (Freyhofer 1982, p. 161, as cited by Moir).

*Once again, we start edging closer to boundless summer nights, and the early signs of a warming climate can be noticed: snow and ice are melting, revealing muddy pathways and sparse remnants of vegetation, while songbirds engage in their morning chatter and the whining call of a lone seagull, returning from his distant voyages, can be heard in the distance. Being a child of March - as I am -, spring can prove resolutely indecisive. Sudden snowfalls and dropping temperatures aren't uncommon for the season and have been known to occur until mid-to late May. But soon enough, the vibrant ecstasy of **Summer** will return to the shores of Finland.*

Summer





In the summer months, I move to my uncle's cabin in Sideby, seeking out a space for contemplation and reflection. Here, the boundaries between inside and outside blur and become porous, as I immerse myself in the multispecies world of the woods. As I walk through the understory with my feline companion, I am struck by the vividness of the world around me, from the 🌿 that clings to the trees to the critters that make their way into our cabin. The incongruity of bringing a domestic animal into the realm of the forest is not lost on me, but rather inspires me to examine the relationship between cats and 🌿. Through their resistance to domestication and domesticity, 🌿 and cat connect in unexpected ways.

Summer in Sideby becomes a time for renaturing, and for pushing back against the anthropocentric modes of thinking and acting that dominate our world. Mobilizing walking methodologies and more-than-human modes of perception and immersion, I seek to foster a network of kinship with the other creatures of the forest. This multisensory experience leads to a deeper understanding of the delicate ecosystem that surrounds me, and a renewed concern for its preservation. As I document our walks through moving images, the landscape and other moving bodies become coextensive participants in this renaturing exercise. The film becomes a record of my affective assemblages with 🌿, cat, and the other beings that populate the forest.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to reimagine vitality as vibrant matter through the lens of new materialism, exploring the interconnected web of beings and processes that make up our world. By tuning in to more-than-human modes of perception and immersion, I propose that we may be able to access specific forms of “earth-bound” knowledge in the complex political ecologies of the Capitalocene.



Looking out from the front porch, summer 2023

Finally, after a tedious four-hour drive, we reach Sideby. Turning left at the end of the village, by the green house, we drive down a beaten-up dirt road. I see a shimmer of light in the distance. The tree line opens to reveal a rugged shore, kissed by scintillating waters.

A rustic wooden building stands atop a rocky mass further up in the woods, its facade weathered by a continuous exposure to marine winds and the slow passing years. At last, I have come back.

Porous Boundaries and Sparks of Resistance

Our two cats join us. Witnessing their unbridled excitement makes up for the long journey. Throughout summer, they are free to roam the woods. Out here, the boundaries between inside (the cabin) and outside (the woods) become blurred, porous, and sometimes even dissolve. The cabin was constructed with the intention of being used during the summer, so insulation is minimal. Its proximity to both the sea and the forest means that various sounds permeate through the door and windows at all hours of the day. Consequently, the cabin's floor becomes a meeting place for diverse encounters. Feet and paws drag in debris and remnants from the forest floor, such as soil, needles, bugs, and 🍄 filaments. Occasionally, a frightened sorrel finds its way inside (whether it does so of its own accord is another question). It is possible that the cats intend for us to capture it. Far from their vigilant gaze, I return the unfortunate creature to the (relative) safety of the woods. In Sideby, the cats revert to their nocturnal habits, and departing at dusk, I remain oblivious to their presence until the following morning.

The presence of cats in the forest is not universally welcomed. Some hunters I've spoken to have no reservations about shooting them on sight, believing that cats are out of place in the woods. Similarly, conservationists worry about the impact of domestic cats' hunting instincts on wildlife and ecosystems as non-native predators.¹²⁸ I have personally witnessed this concern as I often find the cats' latest catches left to decay on my veranda, mostly rodents and occasionally birds. It saddens me, especially when birds are involved, but I also recognize that cats are following their natural instincts. It becomes my responsibility to find a balance between their presence and the well-being of the local fauna and ecosystem. It's a challenging situation, and I often contemplate how to reconcile these conflicting interests. Having been confined in our city apartment for most of the year, I find it difficult to restrict their freedom. Don't they deserve some leniency too?

The resistance to domesticity exhibited by cats is a recurring theme explored by thinkers from the eighteenth century onwards. Cats occupy a dual role as both pets and creatures resistant to complete subjugation. They have become part of human society but retain a level of independence that challenges the prevailing rational and anthropocentric view of the world. Early modern philosophers and writers grappled with the enigmatic nature of cats, often resorting to ill-conceived stereotypes. However, philosophers like Michel de Montaigne and Jacques Derrida attempted to transcend these stereotypes and pondered the commensurability of animal and human selves.¹²⁹ Jacques Derrida's meditation on cats offered a potential model for thinking about attempts to grapple with feline nature. Describing his embarrassment at being naked in front of his cat, he used that feeling to question the primacy traditionally accorded to humans over animals.¹³⁰ The realization that cats reflect our treatment of them, and other

¹²⁸ Medina et al., "A global review of the impacts of invasive cats on island endangered vertebrates," *Global Change Biology*, 17(11), 2011, pp. 3503-3510

¹²⁹ Amy Freund and Michael Yonan, "Cats: The Soft Underbelly of the Enlightenment," *Animals*, 18(7), 2019, <https://www.journal18.org/3778>.

¹³⁰ Derrida's consideration of the cat, part of a longer argument about animals, has been translated by David Wills and published as "The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," *Critical Inquiry*, 28(2), 2002

animals undermines the notion of human exceptionalism and our ability to control and exploit nature.

The hunters' opposition to cats recalls homeowners who are equally determined to eradicate 🌿 from their lawns and roofs in their pursuit of a pristine appearance. Often driven by a lack of awareness about their ecological benefits, they will go to great lengths to remove it. Aesthetic considerations also come into play, particularly when we think of the idealized suburban lawns where anything perceived as "out of place" or "invasive" (i.e., not grass) must be eliminated, sometimes taking on a political dimension. I wonder if homeowners would be as eager to remove 🌿 from their lawns if they were aware of its positive impact on ecosystems.

🌿 have the remarkable ability to form extensive carpets, which contribute to soil stabilization, nutrient cycling, and water retention, playing crucial ecological roles in various ecosystems. They are key players in biogeochemical cycling, breaking down organic matter as primary decomposers and recycling nutrients back into the ecosystem.¹³¹ Additionally, 🌿 can absorb atmospheric pollutants like heavy metals, making them valuable bioindicators of air quality.¹³² Both 🌿 and lichens are highly sensitive to air pollution, giving their presence or absence significant meaning.

In spite of our attempts to remove it, 🌿 persists and thrives in places initially intended for human use, such as cracked pavements and tiled roofs. Left to its own devices, our human-made environments of wood, concrete, and metal eventually become flourishing habitats for its gentle presence. Its slow encroachment on our lawns serves as a reminder that we conflict with natural processes at their most fundamental level. I believe that the resistance of 🌿 to being uprooted from our lives presents us with a genuine defiance against the dominant human influence. It also reminds us of the transience of our existence in the face of time, where nature serves as the ultimate measure.

Engaging in a profound, multisensory journey, I find myself fully immersed in the experience of walking forest trails with my feline companion. Together, we navigate the paths, our senses intertwined in a harmonious dance. As I walk alongside her, I strive to delve into the perception of this remarkable, more-than-human being. To capture the spirit of our shared experiences, I embrace the fluidity of film, documenting our companionship as it unfolds.

¹³¹ Goffinet et al., *Bryophyte biology*, 2009

¹³² Carreras et al., "Bioindicators of air pollution generated by a cement plant: spatial responses of seven lichen and one moss species," *Ecological Indicators*, 23, 2012, pp. 35-40



Still from (Un)familiar pathways, video, 2023

As we approach the door, her tail darts upward and starts quivering. She looks up, searching for my gaze, and upon finding it lets out a resounding “meow!”. Her tail now flickers with anticipation. The message is loud and clear: ‘Let’s go!’.

We step out of the door and walk into the wild. I observe as her composure changes: out here, in Sideby, she becomes more vigilant, aware and attuned to her surroundings. Her keen senses alert her to minute changes in the environment. She regains a sense of her own independence, but still welcomes my presence. As I approach her, she slows down, waiting for me to come closer. She follows me, and we set out rekindling our connection with once familiar pathways. Together, we unearth a year’s worth of transient alterations in the landscape, noticing a fallen tree here, budding meadow flowers there, and a newly erected anthill by the roadside.

(Un)familiar Pathways: A Renaturing Exercise

Walking through the woods envelops me in a tranquil embrace, a sanctuary where ideas flow unhindered, and my mind and body find rejuvenation. In the words of Rebecca Solnit, “The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echo or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts.”¹³³ This symbiotic relationship between internal and external passage suggests that the mind itself is a landscape to be traversed, with walking serving to explore its depths. Each new thought emerges like a hidden feature of the terrain, as if thinking were a journey rather than a construction.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes walking as a process of “becoming knowledgeable,” a form of knowledge that materializes through the temporal unfolding of the landscape.¹³⁴ These movements stem from the everyday actions that shape our existence. As we engage in embodied and sensory encounters with the landscape through walking, scientific knowledge of the site merges with other forms of knowledge, just as two individuals might come together and share their diverse understandings of the terrain through conversation. The folding of these varied perspectives forms a rich tapestry of insight, illuminating the multifaceted nature of our connection to the world around us.



Still from *(Un)familiar pathways*, video, 2023

The familiar aroma of warm pine permeates the air, triggering a flood of memories and connections. It evokes canicular summers spent in the south of France, where my cousins and grandparents reside, and the sun-drenched hikes in Florence, Italy, leading to churches nestled atop picturesque hilltops. These memories intermingle with the hazy summer days spent in Sideby, by the sea, where each moment merges seamlessly with the next, memories blending into a continuous flow. Each scent and memory connect me to a specific time and place, reminding me of the intricate relationships between our senses, memories, and the natural world. As I embrace these nostalgic memories, I wonder what my feline companion perceives through her acute sense of smell. What forest aromas dance upon her delicate

¹³³ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A history of walking*, 2002, pp. 5-6


¹³⁴ Sue-Ann Harding, “Becoming knowledgeable’: Ingold’s ‘wayfaring’ and the ‘art of translation’ as a politics of difference,” *The Translator*, 27(4), pp. 351-367

whiskers? Is it the scent of the dry layer of topsoil, or perhaps a faint trace of a rabbit, long gone and now faded in the coolness of the woods?

As we wander through the woods, a symphony of nature unfolds around us—the rustling of leaves, the gentle flow of water, and the melodious chirping of birds. These natural sounds form a soothing orchestra that calms the mind and alleviates stress. Scientific research has demonstrated that spending time in nature, particularly in forest environments, can reduce cortisol levels, the stress hormone, while promoting the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, which induces relaxation.¹³⁵ In Japan, this practice has long been recognized as *shinrin-yoku*, or “forest bathing,” where individuals immerse themselves in the forest’s embrace to enhance their physical and mental well-being.¹³⁶ Together with my feline companion, I revel in the multisensory signals emitted by woods. Our companionship transcends mere presence; it is a shared perception and experience.



Still from *(Un)familiar pathways*, video, 2023

We are heading for the grove behind the cabin. It isn't far, and she remembers the way. With wide, curious eyes and a twitching nose, she takes in the world around her. As we reach the canopy, she suddenly bolts and leaps into the underbrush – black stripes and ivory paws flash past me. Summer is at its height, and her excitement is contagious. As the morning sun creeps through the dense foliage of the woods, she plunges beneath the roots of a fallen spruce tree. I follow her as far as I can; under my bare feet, the ground already feels warm and crisp. I step on brittle patches of .

Before following her lead, I remove my shoes, reconnecting with the spirit of my childhood, when summer was only truly summer if you spent it barefoot from June to August. The soles of my feet make immediate contact with the forest floor, tender and unaccustomed to such direct connection after spending most of the year confined within shoes. Spruce needles, sticks, and pinecones prick my toes and heels, but I welcome the fleeting moments of discomfort. My bare

¹³⁵ Hansen et al. “Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) and nature therapy: A state-of-the-art review,” *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(8), 2017, p. 851

¹³⁶ Yoshifumi Miyazaki, *Walking in the Woods: Go back to nature with the Japanese way of shinrin-yoku*, 2021

feet embrace the soil, forging a deep and ancient bond, akin to the exploration conducted by post-disciplinary artist Mari Keski-Korsu in her permafrost walking practice. Keski-Korsu's work delves into the realm of walking methodologies and intuitive interspecies communication, utilizing these tools to cultivate rhizomatic thinking¹³⁷ and to inspire innovative artistic practices and modes of engagement with broader ecosystems.¹³⁸

This approach resonates with Donna Haraway's concept of tentacular thinking, which challenges the dominance of visually oriented, anthropocentric thought.¹³⁹ It emphasizes that perceiving the world involves touch, sensation, and active experimentation. The tentacles symbolize the 'other,' the non-human, implicitly prompting us to question how a perception that transcends the limitations of two arms, two eyes, two ears, and one brain can generate alternative forms of knowledge. It also aligns with feminist theories of "situated knowledge," which highlight that every form of cognition occurs from a specific position and perspective, necessitating critical reflection on our own situatedness.¹⁴⁰ Keeping in mind these tentacular and situated modes of thinking, I began documenting our excursions using my phone, engaging in a tentative exercise of renaturing leading to the creation of *(Un)familiar pathways*.¹⁴¹



Still from *(Un)familiar pathways*, video, 2023

I watch her intently, fascinated by the intricate movements of her ears as they twitch and swivel, selectively honing in on specific sounds. The surrounding forest comes alive with a symphony of avian communication, as birds converse through their melodic calls. Amid it all, a persistent woodpecker diligently drums away on a nearby spruce tree. I wonder if her keen hearing enables her to discern the faintest of sounds, such as the delicate pitter-patter of a field mouse scurrying nearby or the gentle scratching of a squirrel ascending a tree trunk. It is a profound listening experience, reminiscent of the practice

¹³⁷ Rhizome is a philosophical concept employed by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze to describe the relations and connectivity of things in a non-linear network. rhizome. Oxford

Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110919111808348>

¹³⁸ See Mari Keski-Korsu's work at <https://www.artsufartsu.net/info/>

¹³⁹ Haraway, 2016

¹⁴⁰ Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, 1988

¹⁴¹ See *(Un)familiar pathways* here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1z0GYt78lHtL3jw1MUPaGLSHlx2y24xAR?usp=sharing>

developed by Pauline Oliveros,¹⁴² inviting a deep attunement to the auditory tapestry of the woods.

I first started capturing pictures, and then recording short film snippets. Instinctively, I positioned myself at ground level, seeking to approach this realm of existence on the same plane as my companion, but also the other living beings that formed the lively ecosystem of this part of the woods. The frames I captured remained static, almost blending into the landscape as if attempting to dissolve into the background. They evoked the serene and contemplative atmosphere reminiscent of Bill Viola's artistic works, while also suggesting Maria Duncker's video installation titled *Hevonen on Häst*, which I encountered two years ago at the EMMA museum.¹⁴³

Duncker's installation beautifully depicted the gradual development of a relationship and the mutual exchanges between herself and her horse, employing a journal-like approach. The piece was composed of fragmented frames, some still and others dynamic. These choices in framing resonated with my own intentions, as I aimed to capture the profound companionship I experienced with my cat and our immersion into the woods on film. Instead of approaching the forest floor as a dominant force in the landscape, I tried to engage with the soil and its encompassing ecosystem on its own terms, by embracing a ground-level perspective. Using static video frames, I sought to mirror the perceived stillness of plants, which often move and grow too slowly for the human eye to perceive. By slowing down my observations, I could fully engage with their inherent temporality and capture fleeting moments in time.



Still from *(Un)familiar pathways*, video, 2023

I extend my hand towards a decaying log, delicately grazing my fingertips along the velvety mesh of 🌿 that blankets its surface. This act has transformed into a cherished ritual, tracing the intricate lace-like patterns of 🌿 adorning rocks and trees. The tactile sensations imprint themselves upon my memory, leaving a

¹⁴² Deep Listening, as developed by Pauline Oliveros, explores the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary, selective nature of listening. The Center for Deep Listening, <https://www.deeplisting.rpi.edu/deep-listening/>

¹⁴³ Maria Duncker's installation *Hevonen on Häst* (2019) focused on the mood and energy emerging from regular interactions with her horse. Pro Artibus, <https://proartibus.fi/utstallningar/maria-duncker-hevonen-on-hast/>

lasting impression. In a parallel manner, I contemplate her vibrissae, those remarkable whiskers that serve as her sensory guides, aiding her in both perception and navigation. Much like my fingertips, these appendages possess an abundance of nerve endings at their roots, endowing her with an extraordinary capacity to gather intricate details about our immediate surroundings.


Concealed within the refuge of the underbrush, we sit in quiet stillness, our eyes attentively scanning the surroundings. A neighbor ambles past, oblivious to our presence. In our shared immobility, we blend seamlessly with the tapestry of the landscape, becoming indistinguishable from the elements around us. I diligently strive to immortalize each subtle movement she makes through the lens of my camera, preserving the memory of her being in every frame.

She enters and exits the camera's frame, moving independently, asserting her own agency. Her presence sparks contemplation on fluid co-creation and the diffusion of creative power. While my involvement in the process should not be underestimated – as I ultimately determine how to frame the film and edit each snippet, making choices about what to include and what to exclude, retaining control over the narrative of *(Un)familiar pathways* –, her own creative agency remains significant. She chooses her own path, decides when to pause, observe, listen, and explore with her keen senses. I find myself mirroring her actions, following her spontaneous movements, and becoming more attuned to my surroundings. The more I engage in this way, the more I discover.



Still from *(Un)familiar pathways*, video, 2023

In the bright sunlight, her pupils contract into slivers of darkness. While her feline eyes excel in seeing through dimness, distant objects remain a blurry abstraction. Through the act of filming, I strive to immerse myself in her unique visual realm, capturing moments that mirror her perspective. Within the frame of my camera, unexpected visitors like beetles and bumblebees make occasional appearances, adding an enchanting touch to the weave of our shared experience. As I gaze upon the surrounding flora, I'm captivated by the diverse array of plants that envelop me. Some have become familiar to me, their names etched into my memory. With a sense of familiarity, I extend my greetings to these botanical companions: yarrow, meadowsweet, fireweed, lady's mantle, and ground elder, as I would with cherished old friends.

Walking alongside my companion on  pathways, I am reminded of Donna Haraway's insightful perspective on the concept of “companion species.” According to Haraway, companion species extend beyond mere pets or animals living with humans; they represent creatures with whom humans share a deeply interdependent relationship.¹⁴⁴ This relationship is rooted in mutual care, communication, and responsibility. She further argues that companion species possess their own agency and subjectivity, transcending the status of mere objects or possessions. In her view, this connection is a “co-constitution,” where both humans and animals mutually shape each other's lives and identities.¹⁴⁵ Companion species actively contribute to shaping the lives of their human counterparts, rather than being passive recipients of care. Haraway challenges traditional notions of human-animal relationships by proposing a new way of understanding our connections with other species.

In the context of our forest walks, my cat and I become intertwined as companions, navigating the trails together and experiencing the world through our respective senses. Our bond transcends the conventional human-animal divide, as we engage in a reciprocal exchange of care, attention, and shared experiences. Haraway's concept of companion species invites me to recognize the agency and vitality of non-human beings and to acknowledge the ways in which our lives are entangled with theirs. It challenges the hierarchy that places humans at the top and opens possibilities for more inclusive and respectful modes of coexistence.

Reflecting on this, I cannot help but acknowledge how my inquisitive and furry companion has profoundly influenced my life in ways that exceed my imagination. Over the course of three years, I have become attuned to the distinct sound of her high-pitched meow and can even discern her light footsteps from those of her brother. I intuitively understand when something is amiss. However, in this outdoor setting, her relentless curiosity and sheer joy prove contagious. I find myself following her lead, quieting my own footsteps and cultivating heightened observation skills. Gradually, I have attuned myself to the voices and moods of the other non-human beings that coexist within this ecosystem, acknowledging their role as essential contributors to our shared existence.

With a final, contented stretch and a soft purr, my feline companion turns her back on the enticing woodland, and we begin retracing our steps. In the rhythm of our footsteps, I carry with me the memories of our walks, the scent of the forest, and the warmth of her presence. As we return home, I am reminded that the lessons learned in nature are not confined to the trails we tread but are woven into the very fabric of our lives. Her curiosity and innate sense of exploration remind me of the beauty and wonder that can be found in the simplest of moments. While her dreams may be filled with visions of future escapades, I find solace in knowing that our bond will continue to grow, and together we will embark on many more adventures, both in the wilderness and in the realm of our shared companionship.

¹⁴⁴ Donna Haraway, *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness*, 2003

¹⁴⁵ *(Un)familiar pathways* also plays with the idea that one never truly knows the full array of beings, relations and processes co-constituting a familiar environment.



After spending a night out, the cats covertly return from their nocturnal escapades. Still groggy from sleep, I can hear them squeezing through the window downstairs—a gateway left ajar overnight. With a soft thud, they land on the wooden floor, one after another. A tinkling sound reveals that they are now voraciously devouring the food left out for them the previous night. Satiated, they ascend the stairs—tud-dum, tud-dum, tud-dum, tud-dum. He settles in the corner of the room, while she leaps onto our bed. I can sense the shifting weight on the mattress as she walks on its surface, eventually settling on my chest. She lies so close to my face that I can bury my nose in her fur. She has brought the fragrance of the forest back with her.

Reimagining Vitality: Vibrant Matter in an Interconnected Web of Beings and Processes

Later in the day, I come to the realization that she has also brought along an unwelcome guest: fleas. My initial reaction is one of disgust, and I immediately begin devising a plan to efficiently rid our household of these pests. “Their fur must be a lush paradise for those critters” I think to myself, as I diligently apply pest-repellent to every nook and cranny of the bedroom, unconsciously targeting not only insects but also other microorganisms. Bacteria, microbes, and germs coexist in this fertile environment, a characteristic shared by cats and 🌿.

🌿 foster biodiversity by providing microhabitats for a wide array of invertebrates and vertebrates, including nematodes, rotifers, tardigrades, and other microscopic organisms. Even larger invertebrates like snails, slugs, and earthworms find refuge in their embrace, while herbivores such as moose, elk, and reindeer rely on it as a vital source of sustenance.¹⁴⁶ The interdependence of these beings and their environment highlights the capacity of 🌿 to nurture life, blurring the boundaries between living and non-living entities.

While the presence of fleas undoubtedly triggers discomfort, it serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnected exchanges between inner and outer realms—a meshing of beings and processes so intricately entwined that human-made boundaries, such as walls, floors, and bedsheets, lose their significance in the face of the fluidity inherent in multispecies relationships within larger ecosystems. In my uncle’s cabin, we all form integral parts of a broader ecosystem.

Here, new materialist scholarship provides me with a framework to reimagine my connection with the more-than-human world, by recognizing the interconnectedness and irreducibility of all entities. Jane Bennett’s project of a vital materialism proves particularly pertinent, as it sees affect and materiality intertwined, rather than positing a separate animating force. Instead of regarding matter as passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused, it acknowledges a vitality intrinsic to materiality itself—a vibrant matter that transcends human or divine creative activity.¹⁴⁷ By engaging with this ontology, I can tap into “earth-bound” knowledge embedded within complex political ecologies, fostering care for the well-being and preservation of broader ecosystems.

By challenging the neglect of matter in the linguistic turn, new materialism affirms the agency¹⁴⁸ and liveliness¹⁴⁹ of matter itself. This paradigm shift finds resonance in contemporary art, where it can articulate and give agency to existing creative processes and open avenues for new modes of authorship and expanded interpretations of materials and objects.¹⁵⁰ This renewed interest in materialism has had a profound impact on contemporary art, fostering a revitalized sense of

¹⁴⁶ Bates et al. “Bryophyte networking: a potentially important mechanism for bryophyte community dynamics,” *Journal of Bryology*, 33(1), 2011, pp. 1-8

¹⁴⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 2009, p.xiii

¹⁴⁸ Barad, 2007

¹⁴⁹ Bennett, 2009

¹⁵⁰ Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, 1991

community and an enlarged ecological perspective. It offers artists opportunities for new modes of authorship and expanded interpretations of materials and objects.

Embracing the new materialist ontology allows me to create works that invite viewers to see themselves as part of a larger network of agency, where humans are not above nature but rather an integral part of it. By understanding myself and the world as complex and vibrant materials constantly interacting with one another, I can cultivate a more responsible and ethical engagement with my environment. This shift in perspective not only nurtures a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all elements in our ecological web but also holds the potential to ensure the long-term survival of our planet.

Within the encompassing framework of vital materialism, art becomes a conduit for reimagining my relationship with the world. It challenges the dualisms of modern and humanist traditions, recognizing that matter is agentic and lively. By embracing this ontological shift, I can reclaim the subterranean river of vitality that flows through all beings and processes. Through artistic expression and creative exploration, I can tentatively forge a path towards a more inclusive ecology—one that celebrates the interconnectedness of all elements, expands our understanding of agency, and reawakens our sense of responsibility towards the flourishing of our planet and its diverse inhabitants.

Infinity is but a Moment in Time


Infinity is but a moment in time, and as the summer heat intensifies, the once-thriving 🌿 carpets in Finland begin to wither and fade. The vibrant green hues give way to desiccation, as the delicate tendrils curl up in response to the relentless sun. It is a poignant reminder of the intricate relationship between 🌿 and water, and the profound impact of climate change on our ecosystems. In the face of global warming, the boreal forests of Finland are experiencing significant transformations. Consecutive hot and dry summers disrupt the delicate balance of the forest floor, affecting 🌿, lichens, and other vital understory plants. These plants play a crucial role in maintaining soil moisture levels, nurturing other plant species, and contributing to overall forest biodiversity. Their decline not only affects the immediate surroundings but also disrupts carbon sequestration and amplifies the challenges posed by climate change.¹⁵¹

As I ponder these ecological shifts, I reflect on the renaturing exercise of *(Un)familiar pathways*, and the power of immersive experiences. By engaging with the perception of other living beings and adopting situated walking methodologies, I have discovered a form of resistance against anthropocentric thinking. This shift in perspective has opened my eyes to the agency of the landscape itself, as a co-participant in my artistic practice. Through this attunement to the surroundings, a deeper sense of care and responsibility for broader ecosystems has emerged within me. Sideby's landscape has become a stage for affective assemblages, where 🌿, cats, and

¹⁵¹ Jepsen et al. "Climate change drives boreal forest decline in Norway," *Global Change Biology*, 26(10), 2020, pp. 5644-5659

the broader forest ecosystem converge in active exchanges that transcend human intention. Embracing the principles of vital materialism, my artistic practice has become a conduit for reimagining my relationship with the world, dismantling dualisms and recognizing the inherent liveliness and agency of matter.

Tuning into more-than-human modes of perception and immersion has allowed me to grasp the intricate interconnectedness between myself and the natural world. Through my artistic practice, I have engaged in a dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries, nurturing resilience in the face of climate challenges. By embracing this holistic perspective, I hope to become an active participant in the ongoing transformation of our ecological relations.

Once again, **Fall** draws nearer. The shifting light, the lengthening nights, and the cooling air mark the changing of the season. As I sit down to embark on an embroidery project, preparing to immerse myself in the art of needle and thread, an unexpected wave of sorrow washes over me and my family. It is in this moment of grief and transition that I turn to the humble and resilient presence of , to accompany me on this journey of mourning and remembrance. And so, as the autumnal season deepens, I continue to find solace and strength in the act of creation, and in the kinship of moss.

Fall





Leaves begin their gentle transformation, adorning the ground in a silent descent. As summer draws to a close and the air carries the whispers of impending change, I find myself embracing the structured rhythm of calendar time once again. Studies, work duties, and various projects await, but amidst the return to routine, a sense of melancholy fills me. The realization that my time in Sideby is coming to an end tugs at my heart, and I yearn to savor the final radiance of **Fall**, cherishing each fleeting moment.

In this bittersweet juncture, an embroidery project emerges, previously submitted to an international competition. It becomes my refuge, offering a much-needed respite to slow down and fully immerse myself in the remaining days at the cabin. As I dive into this creative endeavor, news of my grandmother's passing reaches me, coinciding with the presence of my family.

In the depths of grief, I seek out the wisdom of moss – its inherent slowness and the profound teachings nestled within its existence on the boundary layer. Engaging in a co-constitutive creative process with moss, a symbiotic dance of thread and vegetal matter unfolds. Together, we embark on crafting a ritual of mourning – a sacred space where the intricate complexities of my grandmother's loss can be navigated. We delicately intertwine threads of sorrow and resilience, weaving them together with tender care. Through this act of creation, I find comfort, meaning, and a path toward healing.



As the seasons complete their circle, I bear witness to a profound transformation in my artistic practice. This chapter signifies the culmination of my journey of thinking and creating with moss – the profound exploration of an absence observed, the celebration of moss's vitality, and the cultivation of practices that honor a deep kinship with its spirit over time.

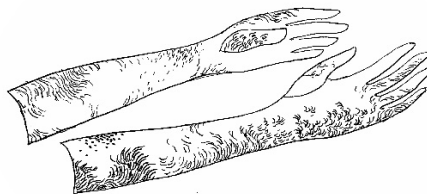
At the height of June, under the luminous glow of the full moon, I immersed myself in a personal ritual. With intention and reverence, I embarked on a journey of self-care and connection. Gathering herbs from the wild, I carefully prepared a soothing tea, allowing their aromatic essence to infuse the warm water. As the moonlight danced upon the water, I walked into the gentle tide. In the embrace of nature's watery element, I was met by the sea's wisdom, whispered through the rolling waves. Its voice carried a message of impending challenges, warning me of the tumultuous days that lay ahead. Yet, amidst this prophecy of unrest, it offered guidance and reassurance. "Keep your feet steady," she advised, reminding me to maintain a firm grounding in the face of adversity. "Keep your head out of the water," she cautioned, urging me to navigate the turbulent currents with clarity and resilience. Heeding her counsel, I gathered strength to weather the coming storm.

Embracing Impermanence

At the turn of the season, I cannot help but feel a certain sadness for the light-footed passing of summer. It always happens too fast. In the height of summer, everything is heightened, bursting with life and vibrancy: the land and sea are awake and exuberant, sunlight floods in and drenches your days in a hazy glow, hidden trails call you by name. But suddenly, you notice the receding daylight. The evenings are getting cooler, berries are ripening on their bushes, while chanterelles, boletus and other tender delicacies emerge in the forest – even mosquitoes, whose voracious appetite is known to all, appear languid, uninterested. Tove Jansson described this sudden seasonal shift in the Finnish archipelago: “Every year, the bright Scandinavian summer nights fade without anyone’s noticing. One evening in August you have an errand outdoors, and all of a sudden it’s pitch-black. A great warm, dark silence surrounds the house. It is still summer, but the summer is no longer alive. It has come to a standstill; nothing withers, and autumn is not yet ready to begin. There are no stars yet, just darkness.”¹⁵²

As I reflect on the passing of summer and my upcoming return to city life, I seek ways to slow down and savor the last warmth of the season. I make frequent visits to the woods, gathering wild foods, such as blueberries, lingonberries, and rowan berries. The forest becomes my measure of time, as I spend my days foraging and gathering. Though I must contend with moose flies, I find the activity soothing and become attuned to the rhythms of the understory, watching as berries ripen and mushrooms sprout. Trumpet chanterelles are particularly abundant this year.

In addition to my woodland explorations, I find mindfulness in the craft of embroidery, through a project initiated earlier in the summer when I submitted an entry to the international Hand & Lock Embroidery Prize in London.¹⁵³ My proposed entry, a glove embroidered with an array of bryological patterns, sought to foster a deep connection with  through tactile, embodied practices, and mutual learning. By engaging in the act of embroidery and contemplating  own temporality, I wanted to immerse myself in a gradual process of osmosis – an intricate dance of becoming in which care and interdependence intertwine across species divides.



Initial sketch for the “moss glove,” pen on paper, 2022

¹⁵² Tove Jansson, *The Summer Book*, 1972, p. 166

¹⁵³ Established in 2000, this competition aims to promote the art of embroidery, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship and skill inherent in this delicate art form. Hand & Lock, <https://handembroidery.com/the-prize/about-the-prize/>



Envisioning the "moss glove", watercolor and pencil on paper, 2022

Together, my partner and I craft a wooden frame to accommodate the width of my embroidery base. The weather, still warm, allows me to work comfortably outside, where I stretch the fabric tautly on the frame and begin sketching the shape of the glove. I carefully select the shades of green thread I will use for this project before immersing myself in the rhythmic dance of embroidery.

In David Lowery's 2021 film adaptation of the medieval poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," The Lady emphasizes green as the embodiment of "earth, of living things, of life."¹⁵⁴ However, green is not solely associated with life, but rather with what ensues after death. It is the hue that follows everything; persistent, inescapable, patient, and everlasting. Decay and rampant growth, time, nature, entropy, death – these are the unfathomable forces.



The intensity of embroidery can strain the body. Documentation of the *Blanket of Stories* project, as exhibited in Villa Lill Kallvik in 2021. Photo credit: Tuula Vehanen.

Initially sporadic, my movements gradually find their cadence, synchronizing with the demands of each delicate stitch. The immersive nature of this craft can be felt as hours slip by. An echo of intensity reverberates in my neck, necessitating occasional pauses to stretch and release the tension that accumulates with dedicated focus. This seemingly ordinary physical act carries with it temporal reverberations; other needleworkers, past, present and future, have experienced the

¹⁵⁴ David Lowery, *The Green Knight*, 2021

same strain on their bodies, the same intensity of concentration demanded by this activity. The somatics of embroidery speak of a long tradition of craftsmanship, where the intensity of labor can be felt and experienced by multiple generations over time.

Though I never had a chance to meet her, I have been told that my great-grandmother was an avid and skilled needleworker. Tablecloths embroidered by her, which have been passed on to me, speak of her dedication to the craft. Examining these small keepsakes of her memory is a moving experience; everything, from her choice of colors to the position and density of her stitches speaks of her own aesthetic vision and creativity. Somehow, simply by running my fingers across the embroidered petals of a violet, I come to know her a bit better.

My creative process is momentarily interrupted by an upcoming forum in Estonia.¹⁵⁵ With a sense of anticipation, I set aside my needle and thread, knowing that this event holds the promise of meaningful discussions and connections. Over the course of nearly two weeks, I immerse myself in fruitful reflection, exploring the role of the artist in society and engaging in enriching conversations with fellow creatives from my field. The forum becomes a catalyst for transformative experiences and sparks the birth of a new artist collective, the Sympoietic Society. These days are filled with joy and the excitement of forging lifelong connections with like-minded individuals.

After returning from the forum, I make my way back to Sideby to join my mother and siblings, who were visiting from France. Despite my exhaustion from recent sleepless nights, the sheer joy of seeing them after months apart overcomes all my weariness. We embrace, laughing and reminiscing about the time we had missed together since our last Christmas gathering. The following day, my family plans a day trip to Vasa; I stay behind, yearning for a moment of solitude and rest to recover from the forum's raging pace. Upon returning from the city, they decide to make an impromptu visit to my grandmother's place, hoping to surprise her and arrange an outing to Sideby in the days to come. It is then that my mother reaches out to me, her voice carrying a weighty message.

¹⁵⁵ DE STRUCTURA forum gathered nearly 100 young aspiring professionals in the fields of visual and performing arts. They joined the project from different countries of the European continent to communicate with experts and their peers in order to realise cross-border projects and discover the institutional politics of art. <https://destructura.com/project/>

In the realm of grief, language falters, unable to encapsulate the depths of sorrow. It can only attempt to give voice to the pain, to shape the shattered fragments of emotions into some semblance of coherence. With each word, the contours of my grief take form, as if grinding the edges of my being together, forcing a smile upon my face, though it remains a hardened grin.

But language cannot summon the sensory experience of what has been lost. It falls short in providing the sounds, the sights, the smells, the touch of the one who is no longer here. She was, and now she isn't. The divide, incomprehensible to my mind, carves a chasm into my spirit. A bird resides in my throat, its voice broken by the weight of my loss. One moment, the memory of her fades into the recesses of my mind, and in the next, it strikes me with a force that is overwhelming. I realize that she will no longer call, that her voice will remain forever silent when I reach out, that I can no longer hold her in my embrace.

My chest swells with a heaviness that words cannot fully express. Tears well in my eyes, and my throat constricts, as if to hold back the flood of emotions. Some days slip by in a haze of forgetfulness, while others are arduous to traverse.

I don't know how to mourn her.

With the deadline for submitting my embroidered entry to London quickly approaching, I was aware of the pressing need to resume my work. However, the weight of grief made it difficult for me to transition back to the structured rhythm of calendar time. Late in August, after a particularly challenging day, I reached out to my friend Niti, seeking comfort and understanding. I poured out my feelings to her, unsure of how to proceed.

In response, Niti offered me words of wisdom and a new perspective. She urged me not to separate the act of creating from the process of mourning, but rather to embrace embroidery as a liminal space where my hands and memories could intertwine, working together to bring healing. “Why not extend your love to the act of embroidery itself?” she gently suggested. “Allow your grandmother’s presence to accompany you as you carefully place each stitch on the canvas. Let her be near and guide you through this creative process.”

I found solace in her words. As I navigate the intricate journey of mourning, I begin to see my embroidery project in a new light. It becomes more than just a creative endeavor; it transforms into a vessel for expressing my grief, a means to engage in a ritual of remembrance and reverence. *Mourning-through-making* becomes a sacred act, a way to honor the memory of what has been lost and approach it with reverence. As psychotherapist and soul activist Francis Weller notes: “Grief work is not passive: it implies an ongoing practice of deepening, attending and listening. It is an act of devotion, rooted in love and compassion.”¹⁵⁶ Whilst immersing myself in embroidery, I engage with my grief, allowing it to flow through each stitch, each intentional movement of my hands. It becomes a form of communion with my emotions, a space where I can remember and pay homage to the one I have lost. In this journey, 🌿 becomes my guide, helping me find my way back to making, and reminding me of the importance of patience, resilience, and adaptability.

¹⁵⁶ Weller, 2015, p.5

The Lost Touch: Mourning-Through-Making

“Like many of the things that have been cast aside with our society’s love affair with technology, embroidery is a practice often relegated to nostalgic hobbyists ... hand stitching is rarely acknowledged in our contemporary culture. Not only have we built industrial factories to replicate embroidery... We seem to have little in common with those who stitched through centuries for reasons of economic or marital security. So, why is hand embroidery important now?”

– Leanne Prain¹⁵⁷

Textile crafts, including embroidery, have a rich history spanning centuries. Since ancient times, people have utilized needle and thread to transform plain fabrics into exquisite works of art through intricate designs. However, with the institutionalization of the art world in the 18th century, needlework was marginalized and confined to the realm of female domesticity, deemed inferior and unworthy of serious artistic recognition.¹⁵⁸ This gendered divide between fine arts and textile arts disregarded the deep and interconnected history between needlework and art.¹⁵⁹ The resurgence of feminism and the crafts movements in the 1960s and 1970s reclaimed needlework as a form of feminist resistance and political activism, elevating it within the realm of fine arts.

While embroidery can often be perceived as a simple hobby or pastime, recent research has highlighted its numerous health and social benefits. A study published in the *Journal of Leisure Research* revealed that individuals who engage in creative activities like embroidery report lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, embroidery can foster connections with others, build relationships, and cultivate a sense of community.¹⁶¹ This was especially evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, when many turned to needlework as a means of coping with the challenges of isolation and idleness. The resurgence of DIY crafts during this time provided a mental health salve, allowing individuals to re-engage with childhood pastimes and find a welcome respite from everyday anxiety in niche interests. It was during this period of heightened vulnerability and introspection that I, too, discovered the therapeutic power of embroidery through the collaborative project *Blanket of Stories*¹⁶² and began my own artistic journey with this medium.

¹⁵⁷ Leanne Prain, *Hoopla: The Art of Unexpected Embroidery*, Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011, p.17


¹⁵⁸ See Roszika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, 1984.

¹⁵⁹ Which, incidentally, echoes the history of moss which suffered a similar dismissal within the scientific community due to the perceived ‘simplicity’ of its living system.

¹⁶⁰ Sinikka Hannele Pöllänen and Marja Katriina Weissmann-Hanski, “Hand-made well-being: Textile crafts as a source of eudaimonic well-being,” *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(3), 2020


¹⁶¹ Gail Kenning, “Fiddling with threads’: Craft-based textile activities and positive well-being,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 13(1), 2015

¹⁶² The “Blanket of Stories” project emerged in 2021 as a collective response to Lucy Davis’s course, *Ecology in Theory, Practice & Everyday Life*. This collaborative quilting project examined how hands-on methodologies such as quilting and embroidery might facilitate the process of getting to know a new place, and, incidentally, one another as individuals. Working on the quilt during the pandemic certainly reinforced my understanding of needlework as a community-building practice, as it allowed us to come together and work towards a shared goal in a time of heightened vulnerability.

I have long held a fascination for textile crafts, but I only took a serious interest in needlework after reading Robin Wall Kimmerer book *Gathering Moss*. Early in the book, she describes the intricate patterns and textures of a moss carpet in terms of textile quality: “The wallpaper, which seemed at first glance to be of a uniform weave, is in fact a complex tapestry, a brocaded surface of intricate patterns.”¹⁶³ Reflecting on my reading, I began engaging in a multisensory dialogue with the being of , one embedded in touch and temporality.









Callicladium haldanum, cotton embroidery floss on cotton, 2021




Embroidery carries with it the potentiality of becoming-with, a power that resonates with my evolving relationship with . Although I embarked on the creation of *The Lost Touch*, or the “moss glove,” just a year ago, it has provided me with a profound opportunity for intimate learning and healing. Its design, carefully shaped to fit the contours of my left arm and hand, weaves together my burgeoning knowledge of embroidery and my yearning to bridge the divides between species through tactile and textile co-becoming. In this co-becoming, I embrace a metaphysics of connection and vitality, that challenges the illusion of separation – the misguided notion that we can exempt ourselves from Earth’s ecological community. Becoming-with

¹⁶³ Kimmerer, 2003, p.10

becomes a way of worlding that expands the boundaries of my perceptual and moral frameworks, attuning me to what matters not only to myself but also to others.¹⁶⁴

As I contemplate a small tuft of *Callicladium Haldanum*, I am captivated by its extraordinary patience. Its slow growth, imperceptible to human eyes, persists year after year, adapting and subtly evolving. Its measured pace mirrors the progression of embroidery, which requires a similar tempo of deliberate and intentional creation. With each stitch, each meticulous placement of thread, a  landscape is woven, demanding time and focused attention to bring to fruition. In this process, , those patient philosophers, guide me back to the art of adaptability and resilience over time. Their transient existence within the boundary layer, a delicate airspace hovering just above the ground, creating a unique and challenging environment,¹⁶⁵ illuminates the value of a handheld philosophy that nurtures the vital act of creation.

The boundary layer traps not only heat but also water, and experiences extreme fluctuations in temperature.  thrive within this realm. They have adapted by developing a complex network of rhizoids and hyphae that allow them to extract moisture and nutrients from the air. In doing so, they play a vital role in regulating water and carbon cycles, providing habitats for numerous other species, and even helping to prevent erosion.¹⁶⁶ Within the boundary layer,  intimately embrace rocks and logs, harmonizing with the contours and textures of their substrate. Due to the infrequency of optimal growth conditions,  exhibit an exceptionally slow pace of development. Their rhythm aligns more with the geologic scale than with human perception, barely noticeable to our eyes. It can take weeks, even decades, for a patch of  to spread just a few inches.

Echoing this slow vegetal temporality, embroidery becomes a mindful medium grounded in slowness. Each stitch becomes a deliberate act of engagement with the material, fostering a profound attunement to the non-human world. In the gradual and deliberate process of growth, both  and embroidery unveil their greatest beauty, creating a space for bryological sympoiesis, a symbiotic relationship of thinking-through-making with . As Kimmerer beautifully expresses, “Paying attention acknowledges that we have something to learn from intelligences other than our own. Listening, standing witness, creates an openness to the world in which the boundaries between us can dissolve in a raindrop.”¹⁶⁷ Through embroidery, I have discovered a means to foster a porous exchange between  and myself, as each stitch embodies a sense of my own attentiveness towards the subject and material being embroidered.

¹⁶⁴ Following Donna Haraway’s concept of “becoming-with” as a proposition for multispecies livability, “[i]f we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism then we know that becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.” Haraway, 2008, p. 244



¹⁶⁵ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Boundary layer.



¹⁶⁶ John A. Raven and Timothy D. Colmer, “Life at the boundary: photosynthesis at the soil–fluid interface. A synthesis focusing on mosses,” *Journal of Experimental Botany*, 67(6), 2016

¹⁶⁷ Kimmerer, 2015, p.300



Documenting my use of the 'split-stitch' embroidery technique, 2021

In my embroidery process, my past dedication to drawing is evident in the lines that emerge beneath my stitches, twisting and coiling in a process of entanglement. Beneath my fingers, intricate layers of  surface: first its delicate extremities of pale brown rhizomes hidden beneath a flourishing cloak of green; then branches and leaves, braided into elaborate designs that nonetheless recall the simple cellular structure of moss; finally, sporophyte bodies¹⁶⁸ appear, with long slender stems (setae) capped by bright vermillion capsules containing the spores that will later produce new life. Gazing upon the  tuft that inspired these textile musings, I deeply immerse myself in its vegetal world. Although now dry, its surface still feels soft to the touch, reminiscent of the texture of cotton embroidery thread. As I lift it up to my nose, the earthy aroma of the outdoors reaches my nostrils, encapsulating this microcosm of green.

Through my own art writing, I have deepened my understanding of the argument presented by Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder in their book, *Through Vegetal Being*, that engaging in 'vegetal' activities, such as touching and smelling plants, can reignite our relationships with the more-than-human world.¹⁶⁹ In a visual essay published in the *Research in Arts and Education* journal (RAE), I explored the medium of embroidery as a tactile and reflective method of inquiry—a practice of exploration woven with time, feeling, sensation, posture, gesture, artistic expression, and a yearning for kinship. Embroidery, I discovered, provided me with the necessary care, material intimacy, and a more deliberate pace to immerse myself in the world and temporality of . By embracing a subjective approach rooted in my own wonder for , I gained a deeper knowledge of its existence.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ The reproductive organs of moss.

¹⁶⁹ Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, 2016

¹⁷⁰ Eline Gaudé, "Yearning for Kinship: An Artistic Exploration of Moss and Embroidery," *Research in Arts and Education*, 2022(1), 2022, pp. 13-22



The Lost Touch, cotton embroidery floss and living moss on silk organza, 2022

Indeed, my sensorial experience – touch in particular – played a crucial role in the crafting of *The Lost Touch*. According to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, touch can be viewed as a grounded and speculative practice through which knowledge unfolds between interconnected subjects, thus turning knowing into a mutual project.¹⁷¹ It is through touch that we establish a reciprocal exchange, where our ability to know is shaped by how we reach out and the responsiveness of the other. Touch blurs the boundaries between subject and object, as the act of touching also touches us in return. The act of stitching on silk organza, tightly stretched on a meticulously crafted wooden frame, establishes a framework for such reciprocity. With each deliberate stitch, my needle pierces the fabric, the thread gliding through with a gentle swishing sound, occasionally forming knots that necessitate careful undoing. Given the delicate nature of silk organza, I must exercise caution to avoid damaging its intricate weave when puncturing it with the needle. The incorporation of living 🌿 into the design adds another layer of attentiveness to the materials.¹⁷² Tenderly placing small tufts of 🌿, gathered during my walks, onto the fabric, I secure them with nearly imperceptible stitches. I have grown reluctant to disturb 🌿 in its natural habitat; these are found fragments, uprooted by the forces of wind, time, or the inadvertence of other more-than-human entities.

Thread and 🌿 merge and meld together, becoming nearly indistinguishable to the touch. Pouring myself into my work, I consciously extend all my care and tenderness – for grandmother, for 🌿 – into my embroidery process. In *Matters of Care*, de la Bellacasa explores care as a situated and devoted form of speculation that not only maintains the world we inhabit but also opens it up to new perspectives and political considerations. I would argue that the entanglement of the making process, embodied learning, labor, and materiality that constitute embroidery becomes a rich ethnographic terrain through which to comprehend care as a situated practice. While offering a uniquely human way of envisioning my relationships with 🌿, it also attunes me to the care-like work performed by vegetal beings in sustaining our shared world, prompting me to pay closer attention to the intricacies of their existence.

¹⁷¹ See María Puig de la Bellacasa in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More-Than-Human Worlds*, 2017, chapter 3 “Touching Visions.”

¹⁷² Per the suggestion of my *H&L Embroidery Prize* mentor, Olga Prinku.



The Lost Touch presented on a plaster mould of my hand and arm, 2022

Embroidery gradually transforms into a profound recording device, each stitch unveiling intricate visual details of the 🌿 landscape and reflecting the nuances of my emotional state. Through careful observation, a cartography of my inner world emerges on the embroidered surface: some areas are meticulously and skillfully stitched, displaying a deep attunement to the materiality of 🌿, while others bear witness to my mournful turbulence, with uneven transitions between thread and vegetal filaments.

Over time, it unveils a textile archive of natural features, serving as a testament to the fleeting shifts of seasons, the transition from summer to fall, and the cyclical rhythm of time. Moreover, it becomes a sanctuary for my grief—a space where my hands can engage in contemplation and where I can nurture and learn to coexist with my sorrow, one stitch at a time. In a world that often prioritizes speed and efficiency, 🌿 becomes my teacher of slowness and patience. It serves as a gentle reminder that growth and healing cannot be hastened, that they require dedicated time and unwavering attention, and that the effort invested in them is truly worthwhile.

Amid my grief, I found solace in the creative process. It was a way to honor and remember my grandmother, to mourn the passing of her vibrant spirit. Through the intricate art of crafting, I wove together threads of memory and emotion, guided by the soothing touch of moss beneath my fingertips. Its velvety texture softened my gaze, and its vibrant green hues symbolized the ever-present vitality of life, even in the face of loss. As I painstakingly stitched each delicate detail, I created more than just an embroidered landscape of moss. I constructed a ritual of grieving, a tangible expression of love and longing. 🌿 became my collaborator, its multiple vegetal expressions mirroring the layers of emotions that unfolded within me.

Each day spent leaning over my embroidery frame, my mind and hands busied themselves, sharing in the soothing presence of 🌿. Its being grew on the fabric, tentacular, spreading across all directions, as thread and vegetal matter intertwined in a symbiotic dialogue of vibrant matter. In this intimate communion between making and mourning, I found catharsis. The rhythmic movement of the needle became a form of meditation, allowing me to process my emotions, celebrate the memories shared, and honor the profound impact my grandmother had on my life.



Sideby also permeated my embroidery process, leaving its mark on the result. August 2022.

As *The Lost Touch* took form, 🌿 began to spread across its surface, revealing an interplay of captivating copper and green hues. It felt as if 🌿 had discovered its rightful place here, akin to how it finds its home on cracked pavements, weathered roofs, or serene gardens. When the glove was finally completed, I eagerly tried it on, feeling the fabric lovingly enfold the contours of my hand and arm. This experience made me ponder whether, in a similar manner, a tree or a rock might sense a gentle embrace as 🌿 gradually envelops them, forging a tender connection to the natural world.

I came to realize that my journey through grief was not concluded by the completion of this artifact. Instead, it unfolded as an ongoing process of healing and remembrance. Through this grieving ritual crafted with moss, I discovered a pathway to navigate the intricate layers of loss, intertwining the threads of sorrow and resilience.

These days, when thinking about her, one of the first things that comes to mind is her hands. She had comforting hands, with soft palms and a faint scent of lotion. Her skin felt thin to the touch; pale, almost translucent at times, it revealed protruding blue-tinged veins. Though not particularly wrinkled, her hands manifested her age in other ways: over time, arthritis had altered her fingers, knotting and twisting them like the roots of an ancient willow; in later years, she also developed a tremor, a trembling which never really subsided.




Reflecting on this very tactile recollection of her presence, it seems befitting that I should've chosen to make a glove. It became a tangible connection to my grandmother, a vessel through which I could honor her legacy and carry her spirit forward. It was an invitation to touch and be touched. To explore the porosity of my and 🌿 being, in the form of a membrane-like artifact. It was an invitation to experience the meeting ground between earth and atmosphere, the boundary layer where 🌿 dwell and become intimate with the contour and texture of their abode.





Maj-Inger Hanses
Alltid älskad, aldrig glömd.
Jag saknar dig varje dag.

Becoming-With

As time passed and reality cast its shadow upon my doorstep, I embraced a practice of deepening rooted in a handheld philosophy of care and creation. I came to recognize the profound benefits of approaching grief and mourning with reverence. It was an apprenticeship with sorrow, an invitation to learn the sacred rites of grieving and to embody a reverence of approach, as Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue beautifully suggests. He writes, “When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our authentic life rises to the surface, and its light awakens the hidden beauty within all things. When we walk upon the earth with reverence, beauty will trust us.”¹⁷³

As the seasons come full circle, I stand at the precipice of transformation. The cooling air whispers of change, and I carry with me the wisdom and beauty gleaned from my encounters with . It is a testament to the interconnectedness of life and a reminder of the resilience found within the delicate threads of existence. Through my embroidery process,  became a trusty companion in my grief, gifting me with wisdom and acting as a creative agent. The act of creation fostered healing and kinship, bringing me closer to my grandmother and to .

Reflecting on the profound transformation in my artistic practice, I have realized how thinking and making with  through embroidery has allowed me to engage with matters of care and to situate my practice in a worlding process of ‘becoming-with,’ where boundaries between human and non-human become porous and enmeshed. This has ultimately allowed me to fully embody another being through the co-creation of a wearable artifact, the .

A few questions now remain: how can I share this understanding with others? How can my vegetal sympoietics inspire attunement to more-than-human beings and ecosystems in others? How can I open my practice and contribute to a wider revitalization of ecological relations?

As I reorient myself within the framework of calendar time, these questions accompany me, serving as guideposts for reflection on the potential application of the artistic approach that unfolded throughout the development of this master’s thesis.

¹⁷³ John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*, 2003

Here we are again, bidding farewell to Sideby on this late September day. The season has officially ended, and we have completed our final preparations. Bags are packed, food cabinets emptied, bedrooms freshened, and floors swept. Our feline companions, having learned the routine from years past, now watch us attentively as we transport our belongings to the car. Reluctantly, they join their respective transport boxes in the vehicle, protesting the whole way. One last check of the cabin assures me that everything is clean and tidied for the winter. With a firm push, I close the door and lean against it, ensuring it is securely locked. Standing on the veranda, I take a moment to gaze at the horizon. The sky is a somber gray, and a passing breeze sends a shiver down my spine. I have grown to love this time of the year.

Returning to Calendar Time





The quiet arrival of a new yearly cycle concludes my seasonal explorations. I reflect on the significance and impact of knowledge weaving within my writing process, which has allowed me to develop a temporally embedded artistic approach rooted in transdisciplinary research. Through this exploration, I aim to envision how this approach can be applied in future research endeavors, and how my artistic journey into the world of 🌿 might be directed toward a revitalization of our present community/society.




To illustrate this, I will provide a brief overview of an upcoming project called *Three Sisters*. This project is conceptualized as a participatory artistic process that involves engaging with local communities of farmers, fishermen, and foresters in and around Sideby. By doing so, I will examine how a re-enchantment process grounded in vitalism can remain democratic. In this context, I will draw upon Michel Foucault's insights regarding the diffuse nature of power and its correlation with the principle of cognitive justice upheld by my association, Ymmärrys.




Returning to Otaniemi, to calendar time, requires adjustment, a repositioning of mind and matter. As I attempt to find my way back to the routine of calendar time, I begin reflecting on the transformational and processual learnings of this thesis, and on my flourishing relationship with the multiplicity of 🌿 over time.



A Weaving of Knowledge and Understanding

“In indigenous ways of knowing, we say that a thing cannot be understood until it is known by all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit. The scientific way of knowing relies only on empirical information from the world, gathered by body and interpreted by mind. In order to tell the mosses’ story I need both approaches, objective and subjective [to let] matter and spirit walk companionably side by side. And sometimes even dance.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer¹⁷⁴

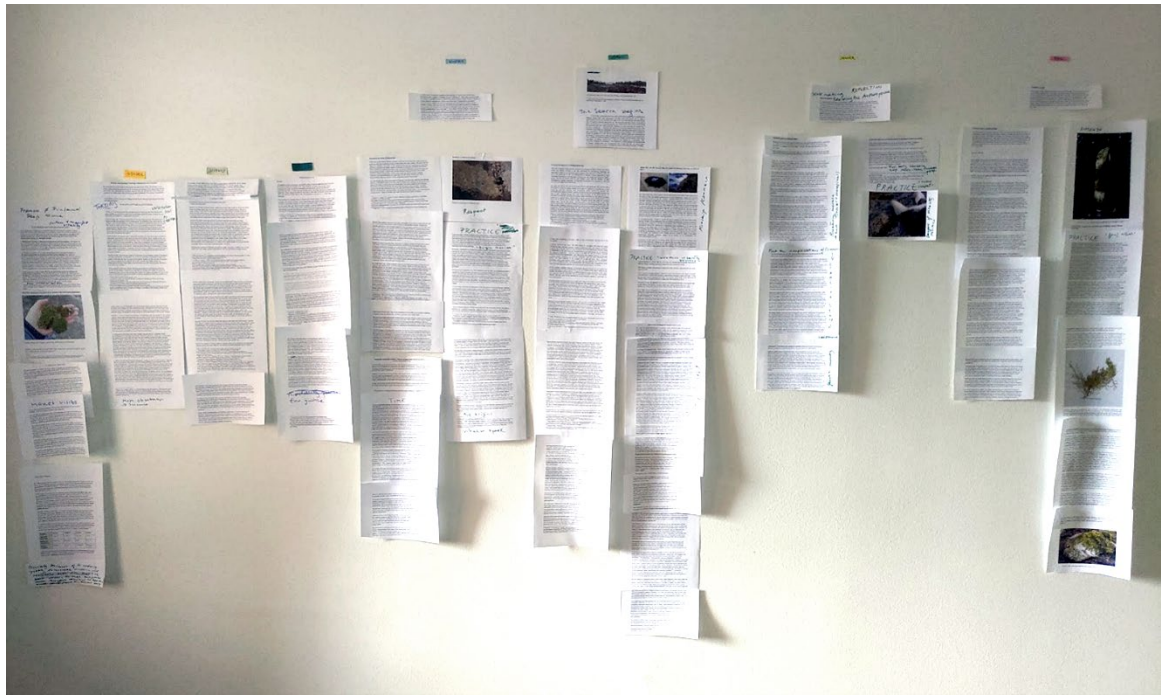
In the preface of *Gathering Moss*, author, plant ecologist and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer introduces knowledge weaving as a journey of companionship: one where mind and matter do not conflict with each other but rather engage in a dance, a balanced flux of perception and information inviting a more holistic engagement with the world. It was through her scientifically grounded yet poetically charged introduction to the history and biology of  that I first became acquainted with the scientific literature of . In this gentle yet provocative work, Kimmerer poked at the limitations of science and its inability to fully encompass and articulate the life and spirit of another, vegetal, being, asserting that: “The knowledge I have from plants has come from many sources, from the plants themselves, from my training as a scientist, and from an intuitive affinity for the traditional knowledge of my Potawatomi heritage.”¹⁷⁵ Her words inspired me to look beyond the confines of my own discipline and seek wisdom and knowledge from a wide array of sources, including  themselves.

By challenging the traditional western scientific perspective (which divides the world between human subject and natural objects – moss being the latter), Kimmerer acknowledged plants as teachers in their own right, with messages of consequence illuminating the perspectives of species other than our own. And just as she has found  to be “a vehicle for intimacy with the landscape,” my own encounters with  have illuminated the complex relationships and entanglements existing between human societies and nature. My research and creative inquiry into the ecology, temporality, and spirit of  has revealed stories of resilience, kinship, care, and recovery.

Not content with having filled my each and every thought,  has begun flourishing in my pockets, dishware, cats, and wool sweaters. It has also spread its multiplicity on my walls, as I have tried to make sense of my thesis and piece together my written material, assemblages of ideas, notes, visual connections and external input emerge, mimicking the very  carpets that I attempted to write about.

¹⁷⁴ Kimmerer, 2003, p.vii

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*




Sense-making exercises can lead to collaging your thesis on your apartment walls.

A short diary entry, written soon after initiating my apprenticeship with 🌿, speaks of my shift of understanding:

During my walk, I stopped to observe the 🌿 I had noticed last time, near the shore. I have begun to see it with fresh eyes, noticing that there isn't in fact only one species growing there, but a wide variety of 🌿, creating a patchwork of padded and filiform entities on the broad surface of a rock. A world of their own. Worlds world worlds. I collected two new samples, small ones. Realizing that I hadn't brought anything to store them in, I put them in my coat pocket. Without thinking, I began cradling them in the palm of my hand to protect them from the friction in my pocket, a human carrier bag for non-human entities. Softly, I ran my thumb across their leaves. They felt so small in my hand. Small yet resilient.

Ultimately, I, too, have come to “see the world through 🌿-colored glasses,”¹⁷⁶ crafting an artistic approach situated within the seasonal landscapes of Finland inspiring a deeper psycho-aesthetic and ecological attunement to its being. By drawing on the wisdom of scientists, humanities scholars, indigenous knowledge systems, and fellow artists, I have deepened my comprehension of the intricate connections between humans and the natural world. I am aware that this process of self-discovery and knowledge integration is an ongoing journey, with endless opportunities for further learning. My personal journey has fostered a profound appreciation

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

for the vibrant world of , allowing me to engage in meaningful conversations about their dynamic and vibrant nature. This enduring connection has provided me with a unique perspective through which I perceive the world and gain a deeper understanding of my place within it, a process which I have attempted to visualize below:



Visualizing the artistic approach developed through this thesis

As an artist, I have come to value the process of self-discovery and knowledge weaving, recognizing its significance in my practice. Through these experiences, I have become better equipped to comprehend and convey the intricate relationships between humans and the natural world. This approach to artistic research has been gaining recognition in recent decades,¹⁷⁷ while coinciding with the emerging interest in knowledge weaving in the environmental humanities and sustainability sciences.^{178,179}

¹⁷⁷ Alison Lizette Black, "Building a tapestry of knowledge in the spaces in between: Weaving personal and collective meaning through arts-based research," in the book *Mainstreams, Margins and the Spaces In-Between: New possibilities for Education Research*, 2015

¹⁷⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Weaving Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Biological Education: A Call to Action," *BioScience*, 2002

¹⁷⁹ Erin Bohensky and Yiheyis Maru, "Indigenous Knowledge, Science, and Resilience: What Have We Learned from a Decade of International Literature on 'Integration'?" *Ecology and Society*, 16(4), 2011

As I approach the completion of my thesis, I find myself contemplating new inquiries: How can I share the artistic understanding of 🌿 that I have cultivated over time? How can my experiences with vegetal sympoietics inspire others to attune to more-than-human beings and ecosystems? How can I expand my practice and contribute to a broader revitalization of ecological relationships?

The primary motivation behind my work in the arts has long been its transformative power. Art, I believe, possesses the ability to create intimacy and inspiration. It not only alters the physical spaces it occupies but can also impact the individuals it encounters. I have come to recognize that art is not only an act of creation, production, or a gateway to exhibiting material objects or digital experiences; it also fulfills a function of relationality, of forming connections and relationships with other individuals and beings and of cultivating care in time.

In 1983, the French philosopher Michel Foucault famously expressed a similar sentiment: “What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized, or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?”¹⁸⁰

Considering these reflections, I find myself returning to vitalism. Through my artistic research, I have underscored the relevance of art in nurturing resilience, fostering kinship, promoting care and recovery, and unveiling the subterranean river of vitality that flows within each of us. Is it conceivable to conceptualize a range of vitality practices that are accessible to both artists and non-artists, rooted in the temporal framework I have explored in my practice? Drawing inspiration from my individual work, these vitality practices might hold the potential to extend the creative process beyond the individual and open it up to the wider community. Through my involvement with Ymmärrys and the Sympoietic Society, I have already begun to explore the practicalities that these practices would entail, examining whether they could be disseminated to a broader audience through participatory interventions. *Three Sisters*, a participatory project conceptualized within the socio-cultural landscape of Sideby and its neighboring communities, might offer me an opportunity to continue this process of exploration.

¹⁸⁰ Michel Foucault in an interview with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress”. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 1984, p. 350

Three Sisters: Reconnecting with the Land, Our Communities, and Ourselves

“Imagine art which is capable of rekindling values of care, kindness, compassion, action-taking, social justice and cooperation. I’d like art to take a larger social dimension. Art isn’t about stagnation, conformism, fear. Art is about risk taking, resistance, empowerment and transformation.”

– Carmen Salas¹⁸¹

Sparsely populated areas in Europe and elsewhere often find themselves marginalized in terms of cultural activities. However, there is an increasing recognition of the valuable role that arts and design play in empowering communities and groups to comprehend changes in their socio-environmental circumstances and to respond appropriately.¹⁸² In recent years, I have felt compelled to contribute to the ongoing efforts aimed at the socio-cultural revitalization of my ancestral village, Sideby. In January, I was invited to participate in an ideation workshop organized by a local cultural association, bringing together younger individuals to brainstorm potential activities that would attract more visitors to the village. Additionally, I have been actively engaging in the cultural programming of the local homestead museum, Kilens Hembygdsgård, through forthcoming collaborations with Ymmärrys and the Sympoietic Society.

Three Sisters, which has been conceptualized as a long-term, participatory project, aims to explore the artistic possibilities that emerge from creative exchanges with local working communities in and around Sideby. Through this project, I wish to explore the intricate relationship between people who rely on the land for their livelihoods and their natural environment, as this relationship evolves throughout the seasons. I am particularly interested in amplifying the lived experiences of farmers, foresters and fishermen, and their intangible, embodied connection with the land. These communities live and co-evolve alongside soil, water, and trees, placing them at the forefront of climate change, where they are the first to observe and be affected by significant shifts in the landscape over time. Their lived experiences and living history, encapsulated by the Finnish concept of *muistitieto* (which roughly translates to “memory knowledge” in English), hold immense value in bringing communities closer to their evolving relationship with the land and their legacy of resilience and sustenance. Examining how this legacy can be contextualized and revitalized through the arts may also surface alternative ways of capturing and sharing embedded place-based and community-centric knowledge, moving beyond traditional scientific approaches reliant on words and numbers.

By engaging in interviews, discussions, creative workshops, and artistic activities, my intention is to create a space where the participants can freely express and bring to the surface their

¹⁸¹ Carmen Salas, “What should we expect from art in the next few years/decades? And what is art, anyway?,” *Medium*, 2020, <https://carmensp.medium.com/what-should-we-expect-from-art-in-the-next-few-years-decades-and-what-is-art-anyway-be9f75c3d1ae>

¹⁸² See Nancy Duxbury’s literature review on “Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities through Arts and Culture,” for the Creative City Network of Canada, 2011

intangible, embodied relationships with the land, as well as the ecological *muistitieto* that has been generated and accumulated by them over time. These encounters will serve as the foundation for the design process of three wearable cultural artifacts, taking inspiration from the rich history of textile crafts in the region and the tradition of folk garments.



Visually ideating the *Three Sisters*, watercolor and pencil on paper, 2023

Each artifact, referred to as a ‘Sister,’ will be meticulously embroidered to honor and celebrate the distinct natural environments that have sustained the livelihoods of coastal communities in Ostrobothnia for centuries: sea, forest, and farmland. The embroidery work will be executed in a manner that exalts the socio-ecological complexity and significance of each environment, paying homage to the profound relationship shared between the communities and the land. Through these wearable cultural artifacts, I hope to not only showcase the artistic heritage of the region but also contribute to the emergence of contemporary, tangible representations of the profound ecological connections that exist. They will serve as a testament to the deep knowledge and wisdom held by the participants and the communities, inviting others to engage with and appreciate the intricate interplay between culture, nature, and human existence.

In approaching each community, a vitalist perspective offers a potentially valuable framework to acknowledge their tangible and intangible connections to the natural living environments

they have been intertwined with over time. However, I must remain aware of the historical misuse of vitalist metaphysics, which have been co-opted to advance far-right ideologies and notions of superiority. Amitav Ghosh warns us that “[vitalist] ideas must always be distrusted and discounted when they are espoused by elitist conservationists, avaricious gurus and godmen, right-wing cults, and most of all political parties: in each of these manifestations they are likely to be signs of exactly the kind of ‘mysticism’ that lends itself to co-optation by exclusivist right-wingers and fascists.”¹⁸³ Reflecting on his cautionary words, it occurs to me that the last thing the community needs and wants is for a freshly graduated artist from Helsinki to impose her vision.

My conversations with Tomas, a forester and family friend from Sideby, confirm the pre-existing conflicting dynamics of power at play here. Our discussions reveal a sense of disillusionment among the people in the community, particularly the micro-entrepreneurs who make up the majority of local farmers, foresters, and fishermen. In their eyes, Sanna Marin’s government¹⁸⁴ has not been attentive enough to the needs of communities (mostly rural) beyond the capital region; they feel constrained by competitive market regulations imposed by the European Union; misunderstood and antagonized by local environmental authorities, whose agenda and directives ignore the realities of individuals and communities working with their natural living environment throughout the year. The sense that their labor and traditional knowledge often go unrecognized permeates Tomas’ words.

Given these complexities, it is essential to approach the facilitation of their ecological *muistitieto* with sensitivity and nuance, without assuming an authoritative stance on vitality, as many have done in the past. Michel Foucault’s insight that “power is everywhere; not because it encompasses everything, but because it emanates from everywhere”¹⁸⁵ is particularly relevant here. It highlights the constant interplay of power dynamics within society, emphasizing that power is not confined to a centralized entity but is exercised by individuals in everyday social interactions, thus pointing towards a recognition that *social relations are part of relational thinking*. This understanding provides a valuable framework for my approach, tangibly connecting to the guiding principles established through my association Ymmärrys, a connection which has already surfaced in practice.

Earlier in April, I began co-facilitating the first iteration of Ymmärrys’ *muistitieto* workshop¹⁸⁶ at Hannatalo, in Helsinki. Our workshop participants, aging members of the community who had gracefully accepted to join this project, had – for some of them – lived through very tangible

¹⁸³ Ghosh, 2021, p. 233

¹⁸⁴ Which it still was at the time of these discussions.

¹⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 1976, p. 93

¹⁸⁶ Which aims to navigate the realities of disruptive socio-cultural, economical and ecological transformations and what it means to live through and with them by surfacing the living narratives of marginalized communities and the in/tangible wisdom they have gathered over time.

transformations in Finland over the course of their lifetime. Each participant was asked to consider their own history and background, and what life story they might want to share with the rest of the groups in relation to these narratives of change. Though at times impeded by language (as some of the participants knew little to no English, and neither I nor Niti are fluent Finnish speakers), the workshop progressed smoothly, sometimes leading to animated discussion in our group. Although we, facilitators, were not fully able to comprehend the tenor of these discussions, as they often unfolded in Finnish, we did not attempt to cut them short. These unpredictable and sometimes lengthy exchanges between the participants touched at the heart of our philosophy, which acknowledges the social nature of collaborative practices, and seeks to recognize and respect the inherent value of “everyman’s knowledge,” a perspective known as cognitive justice.¹⁸⁷



Co-facilitating Ymmärrys' first *muistitieto* workshop at Hannatalo, 20.4.2023

¹⁸⁷ As conceptualized by scholar Shiv Visvanathan in *A Carnival for Science: Essays on science, technology and development*, 1997









With *Three Sisters*, I believe that an integrated principle of cognitive justice becomes vital. This principle acknowledges the plurality of knowledge and affirms the right of diverse forms of knowledge to coexist. In response to the rigid norms of academic and science-based assessments that often dismiss “traditional” ways of knowing, cognitive justice seeks to support, reframe, recontextualize, and expand the process of gathering and producing knowledge. It aims to shift the paradigm towards a more inclusive approach that embraces intangible ways of knowing, lived experiences, and the diverse array of embodied knowledge. Following this principle would allow me to engage with each participant on their own terms and to foster a space that respects their inherent knowledge and creative agency, thus facilitating the tangible manifestation of their traditional knowledge systems and ways of knowing (embodied, situated, generational).



In the coming years and decades, I believe that we will need to redefine our understanding of art and its place in society. It is my hope that the *Three Sisters* can be a small contribution to this larger cultural shift, a way of recontextualizing our presence in the land, of reconnecting with our communities, and ourselves. By weaving together principles of cognitive justice and an inclusive vitalist approach grounded in relationality, I hope to foster a collaborative and respectful space that enables a process of tangible manifestation of ecological *muistitieto* that honors and respects the agency and cultural heritage of each participant. To do so, I must ensure that their voices remain at the forefront and that the process of knowledge creation remains collaborative, inclusive, and respectful of their lived experiences.


As we drive away, I watch the cabin disappear in the rearview mirror, engulfed by a sea of green. The steady hum of the car's engine brings me a certain mindful quietude. My gaze, lacking direction, sets on the woods flanking both sides of the road. To my surprise, a pair of eyes stares right back at me: a doe, settled under the underbrush. Unaffected by the passing vehicle, she exudes an air of tranquility. My mother once told me that the dead sometimes return to visit us in animal form, a reminder of their watchfulness. The thought bursts in my mind, bittersweet. As tears well up and my vision blurs, the familiar sights of Sideby dissolve in a misty veil.


Closing the Book of Seasons: Reflections on , Time, and Vitality

Working on this thesis has been a transformative apprenticeship with  in every aspect. Though my master's degree will not culminate in a 'traditional' exhibition, the focus of this thesis has been placed on the process of research and thinking-through-making, unearthing a multitude of vegetal becomings. Through repeated encounters with  over the course of Finland's seasonal cycle, I have developed mindful, embodied, and contextual practices that enable profound forms of worlding with its living being. As an artist, I understand that the journey from wonder to research can lead to practice. In my case, my wonder at the world of  led me to delve deeper into the scientific field of bryology. This journey of wonder and immersion into the scientific study field of bryology has led me to a process of self-discovery and self-knowledge weaving, which has been central to my thesis as an artistic research project.

My encounters with  over time have uncovered temporal resonances, intertwining deep time and our shared history, allowing for creative reimaginings of vitalist approaches to ecological attunement amidst times of crisis. By situating my practice and research within the context of a vitalist metaphysics, I have been able to unearth new modes of eco-artistic attunement to the living being of , thus responding to the felt absence described earlier in this thesis. Through my straddling of language and knowledge acquired while completing a minor in Creative Sustainability, I have been able to discuss the political underpinnings of *Buxbaumia viridis'*  presence in a contested public space, revealing a political vitalism that resists the dehumanizing tendencies of the Capitalocene.

This journey of exploration and porousness has taught me to walk in harmony with another being, rekindling with vital sparks of resistance against anthropocentric modes of thinking and acting. Engaging with the post humanities and new materialism scholarship has enabled me to reimagine vitality as vibrant matter in a world of relations, thus leading me to recognize and acknowledge the inherent liveliness and vitality of . This renewed vitalist perspective has inspired me to find meaningful ways to engage and connect with  and its encompassing ecosystem over time, responding to Donna Haraway's call to 'make kin' with the more-than-human world, to engage in a mutual and enduring relatedness that carries consequences.¹⁸⁸

Amidst profound loss and sorrow,  has become my guide for navigating grief through a reverent practice of mourning-through-making. This journey has culminated in the creation of a consciously embodied and situated process of sympoiesis, where the boundaries between my human self and the vegetal being of  have dissolved, resulting in a dynamic exchange of thoughts and matter. Its vibrant spirit continues to inspire future endeavors, guiding me on the path towards ecological revitalization.

As I delved deeper into the ecology, temporality, and spirit of  through my artistic research, I became struck by the interplay between my creative process and my changing temporal response to the seasons. Through my practice, I have come to understand the importance of

¹⁸⁸ Haraway in an interview with Lauren O'Neill Butler, "Donna J. Haraway speaks about her latest book," *Artforum*, 2016, <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/donna-j-haraway-speaks-about-her-latest-book-63147>

slowing down and paying attention to the natural world around us, particularly to the intricate world of 🌿. The passage of time, encompassing various temporalities that manifest through Finland's seasonal rhythms (from deep time to the shifting experiences of seasonal time), has played a crucial role in shaping my relationship with 🌿 and the emergence of its vitality and vibrant being. In retrospect, I realize that it was precisely 🌿 enduring qualities – its resilience, quiet resistance over time and venerable wisdom – that drew me to it, sparking inquisitive and awe-inspiring encounters.

Thinking-with 🌿 has also allowed me to engage in a mindful language rewilding exercise. After having sent project applications left and right in the months leading up to the completion of my thesis, I found it increasingly difficult to recover my 'poetic' voice and let go of the unabashed solutionism and didactic tone of grant writing. Thinking more consciously about my use of language in relation to 🌿 has allowed me to find my way back to my own voice, away from the linguistic constraints imposed by grant funders, while creating a space for visual and textual sympoiesis.


Throughout this thesis, 🌿 has revealed itself as a humble and resilient being, a sustaining life form, an elder, a teacher, a companion, and a kin. In gaining so many names, it has transcended the limitations of a four-letter epithet that others have assumingly assigned to its being. Perhaps it will unveil other names in the future. Meanwhile, as I embark on a new voyage with the *Three Sisters*, I will continue dancing with 🌿, embracing a transformative process of becoming-with, with other, human and more-than-human beings.

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Finland, its peoples, landscapes, and the memories intertwined with it have significantly contributed to the development of my practice and writing. To this day, my mother's homeland continues to inspire my artistic practice and collaborative projects. I firmly believe that the outcome of my studies would have diverged significantly had I remained in France. Here, I have been granted the freedom to explore the potentialities that arise in the processes of worlding and endeavoring to bridge the gaps between species across time in meaningful ways.

Time played an essential role in shaping the evolution of this thesis over time, as well as my changing relationship with . I must therefore express gratitude for the time afforded to me in developing this thesis, allowing me to immerse myself in contemplation and nurture my understanding within the supportive environment of academia.

And, finally, thank you . I am incredibly grateful for the generosity of your teachings, and for allowing me to come closer to your being and spirit over time. In time, I hope to learn even more with you. But for now, I will continue walking companionably by your side.

September 10, 2022

The apartment remains largely untouched since our departure for the summer, albeit a bit dustier. To refresh the space, we open the windows and balcony door, inviting in the cool breeze. After the long drive, my legs crave a stretch. Cat and I venture out to the small woodland grove behind our building. Here, time seems to stand still. The cityscape begins to transition into its autumnal hues. With an air of familiarity, my feline companion leads the way. Eventually, we pause to take in the scene before us. I find a spot on the slightly damp ground, evidence of a passing shower. As we sit, we observe the passersby in the street. My hands instinctively reach out, finding the comforting presence of 🌿 beneath my fingertips. "Hello, dear ones," I whisper.

Soon, the landscape will bear only remnants of green, confined to the realm of evergreens. These residues of color will occasionally manifest themselves in mossy underbanks, under the snowy veils of winter, as they lay dormant for the season.

🌿 and time will continue to weave a complex tapestry, one extends far beyond the span of my own existence.



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