

WHAT I HAVE BEEN  
MEANING TO TELL YOU

A PEDAGOGY OF DARNING

A GRADUATION PROJECT  
BY LISANNE JANSSEN

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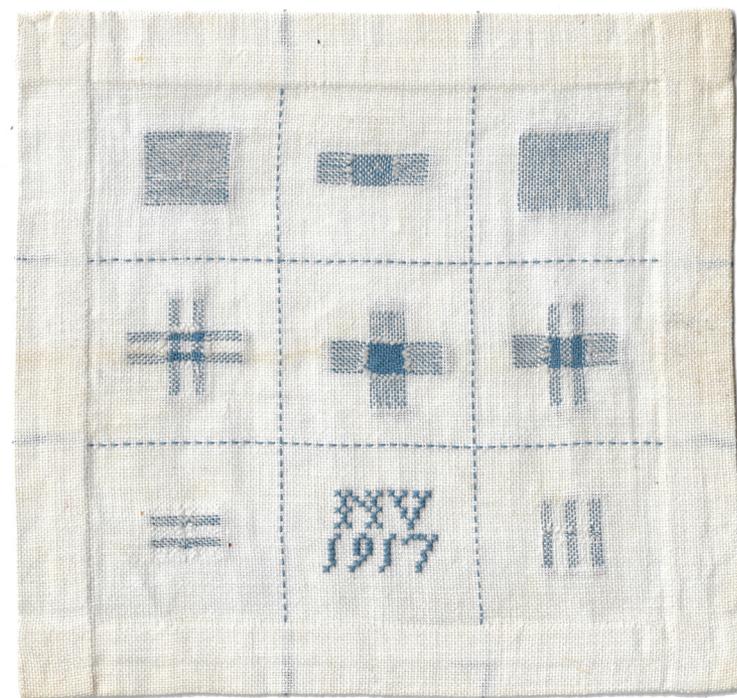


As a designer engaged in education, I have become increasingly intrigued by the way individuals consider and make connections. Especially, how humans experience their place, impact and agency within space, time and its interconnections. In my practice, I therefore pay close attention to human engagement with physical material, form and function. I provide mindful tools and activities that help darn the space between us. It is a slow and careful process, which requires close attention and care. **And as I work, I ask myself, how can experiential, slow and informal learning processes foster a sense of connection and relationship?**

*WHAT I HAVE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU* is a collection of exercises and writings in which I try to articulate a working educational ethos that is 'lived' rather than 'fossilised'. I inquire if and how being attentive - *tending to* - can be a 'gripping tale' to tell. How can I honour and articulate what often goes unnoticed? The answer may not be found in big concepts or theories. What lies in the margins, small gestures or my commitment to the process, tells just as much, maybe even more.

Therefore, in this body of research I have collected a sampler. By sampler, I refer to small brief darning exercises as were once done in sewing schools. The English word 'sampler' derives from the old French term 'essamplaire', or the Latin 'exemplum', meaning 'an example'. Before the introduction of printed designs, embroiderers needed a way to record and reference different designs, stitches and effects. The answer was to create a sampler – a personal reference work featuring patterns and elements that the owner may have learned or copied from others, to recreate again in new pieces. The darning sampler was common between the 17th and 20th century, and functioned as a way to teach young women a trade. The darning sampler leads to independence, while it holds space for both precision as well as imperfection.

This sampler does not offer a big overarching narrative. It can be seen as a series of darnings, each being a particular exercise, which contains descriptions and analysis of each project. These exercises are not to be read in a particular order. They all show a different part of my practice, which does not follow a hierarchy or timeline. They are an accumulation of tools, strategies, methods and educational activities that attempt to facilitate relationships, connection and slowing down. Next to sharing my personal, and often small, observations, I tap into a diverse set of framing writings that range from pedagogical texts to creative nonfiction. There is not one singular text or theory that has shaped my approach. A combination of thinkers accompanies me in everything I do. We are all a sampler of what we experience or read. We are the cloth that holds them together.



darning sampler from my personal collection



Everything I do, I approach with *empathy*, the feeling of curiosity about who other people are in themselves, and *radical openness*: the will to explore different perspectives and change one's mind as new information is presented.

With *WHAT I HAVE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU*, I attempt to voice my pedagogical approaches and to articulate meaningful aspects of my practice. I attempt to *darn by wording* the spaces that were left open, all that I could not put into words before. Through writing about my diverse experiences, I've come to understand my practice better as a whole. As I write, I invite the reader to slow down and reflect on their own practice, just as I have done: not to examine or to study, but to look with love and to be radically open. We are always in the process of becoming.



AN OUTGROWN GARMENT

*'Without noticing it you have traversed a great distance;  
the strange has become familiar and the familiar  
if not strange at least awkward or uncomfortable,  
an outgrown garment.'*

Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, 2005, p80

It has been a year of restrictions and uncertainty. A year in which we have all been asked to constantly respond to what is happening around us. Finding meaning in the spaces that open up, to find ways of coping with the ever changing nature of our surroundings and our shifting feelings. I've been asked to stay at home. My experience of time has changed. Suddenly the commute was unnecessary, the breaks offered space to go to the local artisan bakery, or to do the laundry. The domestic entered the professional, and the other way around. I had time for walks, which made me see, smell and hear the changing of the seasons. I met my neighbours. The world got smaller, while at the same time it grew bigger. I was able to attend lectures I would never think to be able to attend. I spoke to old friends. No longer did I value the same things, as I came to understand that some of them were not accessible, and some became more visible. I stood still. I paid attention differently. The details which I previously often oversaw, became more profound.

During lockdown, I cleared out my wardrobe, trying to gather everything that didn't feel familiar anymore. In it were so many pieces which remind me of the time I've spent my days around garments. Everything in my life revolved around it. Every flower I saw became an inspiration for a print, every song I listened to could potentially become a text to place on a sweater. My observations and inspirations were never solely for me, but became a commercial value.

Before I started engaging in education, I had been working as a designer for a Dutch fashion brand. Starting teacher training stemmed from a need to leave the destructive fashion system. Not only destroying the environment by creating a new collection every four weeks, but it was also slowly but surely affecting me personally: I had lost the joy in designing. In the past I had always focussed on crafts like book binding, letterpress and etching. But now we never spoke about the narrativity and craft of the prints I created. Every work meeting revolved about numbers, profit, margins. What value did my work have? How long can I keep convincing managers of my value? Is this something I want to do? Do I want to participate in this system that I do not believe in? What could a different system look like?

In 'Dissolving the Ego of Fashion: Engaging with Human Matters', Daniëlle Bruggeman, a cultural theorist specialised in fashion and identity, explores critical theories and practises that help to better understand and rethink the cracks in the fashion system. In doing so, this publication examines the role that fashion plays – and could potentially play – in urgent socio-cultural, environmental and political developments in contemporary society. Bruggeman focuses on the importance of envisioning a more engaged future of fashion that does more justice to fashion's human dimension. This entails fundamentally redefining the value systems from which we work and live, as well as reconsidering how we engage with each other and the material resources of the earth.

*'This new system must be holistic, interdependent, dynamic, creative, responsible, resourceful, and satisfying. It must lead toward an alternative that permits us to imagine a way of living and being together not predicated on constant economic growth, that builds prosperity through channels other than the market, and that values a broad spectrum of activity, not only those that can be most readily monetized. [...] A new, alternative fashion system must be based on an ethos of care, on attentiveness to one another and concern for the future, on continuous tending.'*

Fletcher, K. (2015) 'In the Hands of the User: The Local Wisdom Project and the Search for an Alternative Fashion System', *Journal of Design Strategies: Alternative Fashion Systems*, 7.

I decided to leave my position as a print designer, and started part-time teacher training. During teacher training I soon realised that the education system did not differ as much from the fashion industry as I was hoping it would. Learning goals, deadlines, numbers, grades. Systems, canons, rules, hard skills. Office-like buildings, aesthetically uninspiring hand-outs, cumbersome systems.

Although I started working as a freelance educator at a secondary vocational education and training in Fashion, I decided to research pedagogies for younger students such as *Forest Schools* and *Reggio Emilia*. These pedagogies both foster exploration, base classes on the observations and collaborative work between children and adult, and acknowledge the role of the environment and learning materials:

The *Forest School* takes a holistic approach focusing on the whole child and developing more extrinsic skills such as confidence and self-esteem. One key principle encouraged by Forest Schools is freedom, children having the choice to take risks and direct their own learning experience. The aim of Forest Schools is to promote holistic development: fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

*Reggio Emilia* environments are designed to encourage creative expression, communication and relationships, collaboration, discovery and social responsibility. Children work with a range of open-ended resources and natural and recycled materials which stimulate creativity, exploration and imagination. Each space respects children's capability by providing them with authentic tools and materials while offering beauty and a sense of well-being and ease. The role of the adult in Reggio Emilia involves careful and sensitive listening, observation, documentation and reflection. The teacher provides the stimulation of discovery through responding to children's dialogue, providing open-ended resources and collaboration. Knowledge is constructed through and with the children.

I later realised that during my Bachelor's research I was looking for pedagogies that would connect more to my personal values. I had been looking for an alternative, a garment that would fit me better.

This search continued during my time at the Master Education in Arts. I am trying to understand what this alternative way of practising, honouring my personal values, could mean in various settings, inside and outside of institutions. This body of research is a part of that quest where I am attempting to voice my pedagogical approaches and articulate meaningful aspects of my practice.



DARNING THE SPACE  
BETWEEN US

Above my bed hangs an old picture of my grandmother. She wears a white dress with roses, and on her left hip she wears my uncle. He must be less than a year old. My grandmother looks into the camera in a way only she is able to. A certain shyness, a slight uncertain smile, but her eyes look straight at you as if they know. She has always had this soft power within her. The way she holds my uncle tight, while leaning back a little against my grandfather's chest. My grandfather playfully gazes at my young dad, who his strong workman's hands are carrying. My grandfather used to be a bricklayer, and built their home himself. I don't recognize the house they are posing in front of. They rarely went on vacation, but maybe this is one of the times they did.

When I visited my grandmother over Christmas last year, I brought my old sweater. The knit on my elbows had loosened so much, I didn't know how to darn it myself. Together we went to her small sewing room to find the perfect yarn.

In the corner stand my grandfather's ashes and a picture I took of him a few weeks before he died. I had received an old camera and wanted to see if it worked. He was wearing his overalls and was standing in the front yard, taking a breath in between working on the flowerbeds. I remember him saying he was wearing his old hat. He had two, both the same dark green velvet rib fabric. This one had slightly been discoloured by the sun. It had stains, from all the garden work. In summer, he always wore a woven one. On Sundays, I can't remember him wearing a hat. On these days I remember him shaving in the hallway sink, then brushing his hair back, sticky. He never got grey and his hair remained full until his sudden death.

My grandfather and I have always been close, although there isn't much I can share about his life. He didn't say much. His life was quiet, with small jokes and joyful whistling while we weeded the allotment. He would secretly sneak me strawberries. Wink at me when my grandmother wasn't looking. He wasn't a man of grand gestures or loud stories: his love was found in every little thing he did. In everything he gave me the freedom to do myself, while standing beside me.

There I was, sitting next to my grandmother in her late eighties, watching her hands. Paying close attention, as I knew she would soon give the knit to me, to do it myself, while standing beside me. Although she is strong, active, her hands show the passing of time. While I managed to pull the thread through the eye of the needle, she would use a pin to connect all threads.

She then showed me how to darn, while she started sharing what it was like when she was a child. How she and her sisters would be sitting at the table together, talking, fixing socks and other garments that had to be darned in order to be worn by the next child in line. Historically, handicrafts have often been done in groups, mainly women working together, discussing and analysing matters at the same time - the repetitive and calm of darning guiding the conversation.

As I was darning with my grandmother, listening to her sharing memories of her youth in a way she hadn't done before, I was becoming aware of the role this repetitive act of mending has on the space we share together, in the dialogue that it provides and carries.



## A PEDAGOGY OF DARNING

In allowing an object to change shape, the more you use it, we create traces of wear. For yarns of the fabric to loosen, as the shape of our body wears an item off. The object that is being darned is considered meaningful. We value it, not only led by the actual value of a material. The fabric holds our memories. In darning, we create space for our minds to wander. We slow down, pay close attention to the individual threads, we lovingly follow and reconnect the way they intertwine. By darning together, we weave stories and memories (back) into an object. The stories that we add by darning or repairing will only bring the object into being even more. We attach our time to it. We attach part of ourselves to it. By darning we belong to it. We become part of the object, we are woven into its fabric. Textiles and garments are alive, ever changing. In darning them, we show how meaningful they are to us. How we care for them, and the stories they hold.

I've been thinking about darning as a practice, and what it does. How it relates to my thoughts and values as a designer and educator. What can darning mean for education and how learning is fostered? By describing the act of darning, sharing a series of related vocabularies, I am thinking through what a *pedagogy of darning* could look like.

tending to, noticing, choice, love, attention, observing, listening, small, **gesture**, details, *Intention*, process, personal, invitation, material, openness, **engagement**, care, *patience*.

slow, learning by doing, imperfections, involvement, commitment, emergence, failure, agency,

(re)connection, immersion, rhythmic, drift, correspondence,

repetitive, contemplation, reflection, dialogue, empathy, awareness, transformation, making do, meaning, **trace**

## TENDING TO

to pay attention, to apply oneself

In order to tend to our clothes we have to pay attention. To **notice** where the fabric loosens, to see small holes or tears, and to tend to them in time before they become (too) hard to repair. In a time where things are designed to be disposable, when it is often cheaper to buy a new product than to repair the one we already own, repairing is a **choice**. In a consumer culture where we are kept in a constant state of lack, I would also call repair a statement. Tending to our garments is an act of **love**. To love is a choice, both an intention and an action.

When working as an educator, tending to requires **attention** in multiple ways. We try to notice the needs of our students, by carefully **observing** and **listening**. We listen to their struggles, the things that excite them, we watch them engage in an activity and notice their body language. Just as we want to darn our fabrics before it is too hard to repair, we notice where students can grow and to help that growth we can tend to their needs through **small** adjustments. Small enhancements, small reinforcements, small **gestures**.

## GESTURE

an act or a remark made as a sign,  
symbol or token of intention or attitude

The darning of our clothes can be done visible or (almost) invisible. We pay close attention to the fabric. By looking at the **details** of our fabric, we are able to make a choice, to set an **intention**: Which colour is the yarn that is being used? How thick is it? Which way do the yarns intertwine? By choosing a darning yarn with a contrasting colour, we intend for others to see our repairs. The visible repair then becomes more than just a fix. By making the repair visible, we honour the **process**, we show that we have a **personal** connection to our clothes. We can inspire others to do the same. We carry out that we are open to having a conversation about the darning. The darning becomes a gesture, an **invitation**.

As educators, our role is to create the conditions for learning to happen. To set an intention. The metaphor of darning offers an alternative: instead of instructing it is able to invite. It invites us to engage with the **material**. This invitation is found in the margins. The details. The material. The preparation. The gestures. The listening. The attention we give to every aspect of a class. We set and manage the conditions. Learning can happen anywhere and through anything, if you accept the invitation. We have to acknowledge the situatedness of educational practises. Just as every darn asks for a **specific** yarn, every learning occasion asks for a specific approach. In order for this invitation to be accepted, we need to pay close attention to the individual treads of the fabric. To try to understand what the students already know, what their interests are, and in which way we can best invite them to learn. By connecting the threads to their intrinsic motivation, we are able to give them more agency in their learning process.

## ENGAGEMENT

emotional involvement or commitment

*'Attention without feeling, I began to learn,  
is only a report. An openness — an empathy —  
was necessary if the attention was to matter.'*

Mary Oliver, *Our World*, 2017

I came to notice that I prefer to work with prompts or instruction cards, zines. This way I can address the participants individually and offer them to engage with the material at their own pace. Holding an invitation in their hands, it also directly creates more connection to the task. The invitation and task itself should always have a certain **openness**, giving agency for the participant to make it their own. It offers the space to add your personal feeling, an empathy, that Mary Oliver also speaks about.

Engaging in the act of darning asks for a lot of **care** and **patience**. It requires you to take time and **slow** down. We have to look closely at the individual threads, and feel their tension. In darning we follow the weave that is already there, the intertwining of the original threads, and try to carefully redo this on the part where the threads don't hold anymore. Darning is a process of **learning by doing**. There is space for **imperfections**. If we prefer, we can undo and redo a piece of our darning, but a mistake in the weave we are creating will not stop the darn from doing its purpose. Darning asks for **involvement, commitment**. By holding a piece of clothing in your hands, taking the time to look at the smallest details and reconnecting the threads, slowly and carefully, we also weave part of ourselves into the fabric.

As an educator, I have found that through paying attention to something small, relatable, familiar, we can start to connect the threads between that which we engage with and the bigger picture. In my exercises, I often embed an experiential aspect. For this experience or activity to become relatable, I prefer to use a material approach. By engaging with something in our direct environment: something we see, hear, smell or feel, sense, an experience can become more connected to our being. It can become a personal involvement. Just as darning, paying close attention to details and engaging more personally asks for a slower approach. It asks for an openness for processes to **emerge**, to learn by doing, to invite **'failure'** (and to not see it as such, but as part of the process) and it asks us as educators to give the participants more **agency** in the process. As everything is connected, we can engage with large concepts, by focussing on the details.

## (RE)CONNECTION

the act of connecting two or more things  
or the state of being connected

Darning brings with it a sense of **immersion**. The **rhythmic** act of darning offers us to look at the fabric, while at the same time letting our mind **drift**. It offers another layer of thought. It allows for that inner **correspondence**. The **repetitive** needlework offers space for **contemplation** and **reflection**. If we are darning in company, it creates the space to start a conversation with others. To ask questions, to share stories. A dialogue often emerges while darning. We do not only connect the threads of our garment, we also (re)connect ourselves. To the material we are holding, to our thoughts and memories, to the others we share them with.

As we begin to pay close attention, we can begin to see the web of connections, the fabric of things. This web of connections can only be seen if we are offered the space for contemplation. In my exercises, I often invite participants to engage in a physical task that guides or supports a thinking process. A tool for reflection, a **dialogue**, that prospers through **empathy**: *'The sentiment of curiosity about who other people are in themselves.'* as Richard Sennett writes in 'Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation'. This does not only apply to cooperation between people, but if we look at the world around us with a sense of curiosity and empathy, another dialogic conversation is able to emerge. Dialogue is a way to raise **awareness** and to **transform** relations, social relations but also the society at large.

## TRACES (OF WEAR) (OF CARE)

a mark or line left by something that has  
passed, a sign or evidence of some past thing

By darning we don't rush to a new shiny product, we **make do**. The darn is a trace of that act. Darning highlights traces of wear, shows us traces of care. By allowing the use, the passing of time, to be visible, we honour the thing that already existed. We value it, we find it **meaningful**. We honour what was still good, still holding, and only enhance what needs fixing. The darn itself might not be perfect, it might not look as intended or it might not hold as long as we'd hoped it would, but the **trace** shows we cared.

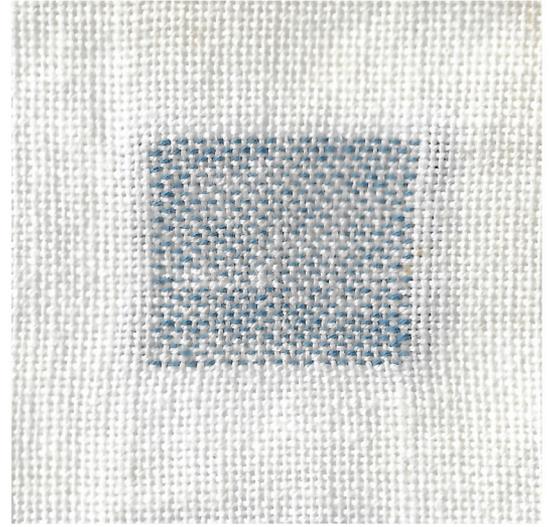
As much as we'd like to foster a connection, a relationship, there is a limit to the role of the educator in this process. Whatever conditions we create, whatever tools we use, we can never make sure this connection will be created. As an educator, we need to be open towards this. Be aware of the mistakes that might have been made in the darning, and see if it will still hold. Sometimes we leave it as it is, an imperfection that does not limit the darn from its repairing qualities. Sometimes, we want to undo the darn and redo. Start over, slightly differently. Use a different yarn, start in a different spot, use another tool to make the tension of the fabric better while we darn.

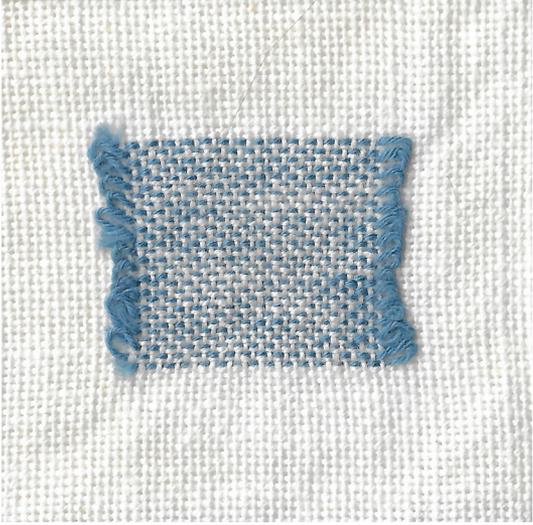
As an educator, sometimes we need to trust that the darn will be completed some time in the future. An experience can trigger a thought, but before it truly sinks in it often needs more time. It could be weeks, it could be months, even years. I often think back to classes I have experienced years ago, and am only starting to grasp the lessons I've learned. The same goes for this research and the learning community I have shared it with.



DARNINGS

In the following exercises I try to trace, through practice, what a pedagogy of darning could look like:





**STANDING STILL WHILE AT  
THE SAME TIME MOVING ON**

*STANDING STILL WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MOVING ON*, is an exercise I created for the first semester of the Master of Education in Arts. At this turbulent time of Covid and lockdowns, I felt the personal need to slow down and observe what I was experiencing. To feel what was happening inside my mind and body. To move inward. I needed time and space to carefully set intentions for the following years. I had intended for this Master to be this space for me. A space to put myself first. To explore which ways I'd like to move, what direction I would like my practise to grow. I have a tendency to go from project to project, switch from role to role, to say yes to many things at the same time. I am always moving, rushing, and often for causes and projects that I don't consider to be my own, or aligned with my personal values. This exercise was my first exploration in a more autonomous approach in education, not led by external learning goals, but the goal being to facilitate an intimate and personal experience which was led by questions and matters that were urgent to me at that time. In this exercise, there was an openness, a space for each person to dwell, to contemplate. I felt the need to gift myself this time to be invested in my own process and invited others to do the same.

During our previous '*Learning with Others – Contemporary Issues in Art and Design Education*' classes, led by Irina Shapiro, I was asked to elaborate on the word 'temporality' to contribute to a collective glossary. One of the definitions of temporality I came across was 'in a way that does not last for long or for ever'. But how do we define 'long'? And even 'forever'? It led me to question: How do we measure time? What scale do we use and why? What does it mean to last forever?

Next to exploring what it would mean for me to physically stand still and observe the internal processes I was experiencing during this exercise, I also intended to collectively explore how we experience time. This was done by asking every participant to stand still for ten minutes, and to measure this time without the use of a clock.

In the week before the *STANDING STILL WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MOVING ON* exercise each participant was given a zine, which was personalized. The zine spoke about stones, and their relation to time. Stones as a compression of place and time. Also the game of stone skipping was presented, and by the use of questions its relation to educational practices and the use of language was made visible. On the first page of every zine was a different stone, which was personally carefully selected for the participant based on a specific characteristic of the stone. This choice was based upon the conversations I had during the last months, how I've gotten to know everyone who participated. The selected stone could be related to the place where I collected the stone, the shape of the stone, the material of the stone, or the person who I've asked to collect it for me. One stone was selected by my niece, about the same age as one participant's son. Another stone I had taken with me from a trip to Iceland, and its lava consistency reminded me of the strength I saw in the person I gave it to. Another stone was sent to me from Maastricht by a former participant at Jan Van Eyck, and given to someone who had attended this same one-year residency. One stone I had taken during a recent walk together, which I had held in my hand during our conversation. All stones were printed in the zine, so during the workshop participants might be able to recognize their own as well as the stones of others. My aim was to use the gift, in this case a stone, as a mediator in this exercise.

Upon starting this exercise, every participant was given a small envelope which held the stone that was printed on the first page of their zines. I always collect small things on my walks, mostly stones. To me, they are keepsakes for time spent. I was curious to explore if the stones I had selected for other participants could also become objects that carry meaning to them.

In this same envelope, I also added instruction cards. By handing out the personal envelope, I was able to first connect with everyone in the group individually. Through reading the instruction cards in silence in a group, participants were able to have a safe personal but at the same time collective experience.

*'These pedagogical decisions set the tone of the workshop, as a space to take care of the objects but also ourselves and each other.'* (quote from tutors on feedback form)

*'For each participant the stone took on a different role or significance. For some it was a secret to take care of, a magical object, a camera or recorder (an excuse to observe), and for others it was a compression of time, a keepsake. The object became a placeholder or footprint of something else that was not present.'* (quote from tutors on feedback form)

I invited everyone to go outside in silence, find a place they feel at ease, and to walk back to the classroom after ten minutes of standing still. The invitation to go outside related to my larger quest to leave the classroom in education, and finding other environments to situate learning.

This exercise started as a personal research, which I suspected to become emotional: I had been going through some tough times in the months before, and by finally standing still I would be spending time with the feelings that I had been trying so hard to run away from. It became clear to me that this might possibly be the case for others as well. So in order to create a safe space for these emotions to arise, I decided that a collective reflection would not be necessary. I wanted everyone to be able to keep this experience to themselves as much as possible. To keep it small and personal. This is why I asked every participant entering back into the classroom, to look at each other and share their thoughts without talking. Not to put it into words, but just to hold it close. I did not plan an ending to this exercise. Through the time slot we were given,

## INSTRUCTION CARDS

I expected one of the tutors to stop it. While I was waiting for this to happen, something else emerged: '*... and at the end of the workshop the group figured out a conversation through the stones becoming an interface or tool for non-verbal communication.*' (quote from tutors on feedback form)

After a while, a tutor did stop our conversation through stones and we discussed the exercise. This intervention shifted our exploration in alternative forms of communication towards a more traditional form. It made me aware of the role I have as an educator, to also guide the ending of an exercise. I realized I had not put enough thought into this. I noticed how I did not intend for this verbal dialogue to happen, and how I felt it devalued the experience for me.

'*To share is to give away*' someone once told me. Did the fact that we experienced this together, make it less meaningful? I would argue the opposite. Then why is it that I think that when we put it into words, and share these words among us, the value of the experience gets lost? Or do I simply not (yet) know how to communicate the vastness of my experiences through language? What is the value of language for me? I've taken these questions with me throughout my Masters. They kept lingering on, every time I experienced a threshold or discomfort in writing.

As for now, I'd like to think through alternatives to ending this exercise. If we don't measure time through the use of a clock, can I think of other ways? I'd propose to look at time spent through the use of another object in transition: a burning candle, the dripping of a coffee, the melting of ice. How beautiful would it be if we would use the boiling of water for a cup of tea to measure our time? I wonder how aware we are of these daily acts and routines.

s t a n d i n g   s t i l l

while at the same time

m o v i n g   o n

1.

take this stone out of the envelope  
and hold it in your hand during the workshop

this stone is a keepsake which I'd like to give to you

it connects to you in a specific way:  
it can be the place I have found it, it can be its shape,  
or it can be connected through the person that found it for me

t a k e   c a r e   ( o f   i t )                      h o l d   o n   ( t o   i t )

2.

s t o n e s

as a compression of

place and

time

3.

i would like to ask you not to s p e a k

try not to look each other in the eye, put on your coat,

and go o u t s i d e

look for a place where you feel at ease,  
and s t a n d s t i l l for 10 minutes

m e a s u r e time

without the use of a clock

**STONES AS A COMPRESSION  
OF SPACE AND TIME**

4.

walk back inside in silence,

take the stairs  
and sit back at the table or floor

look at each other across the room

share thoughts without talking

temporarily

in a way that does not

last for

long

or forever?



how do we measure time?

s t o n e s

as a compression of

place and

time

what scale do we use

and

why?





stone

s

k

i

p

p

what does it mean to

i

last forever?

n

g



creating a

ripple on the surface

{ temporary effect }

traveling

d i s t a n c e s



s t o n e   s k i p p i n g

h o w   m a n y   t i m e s   d o e s   i t

{ i n   e d u c a t i o n }

s k i p

b e f o r e

i t

s i n k s   ?

h o w   f a r   c a n   a

t h o u g h t

r e a c h ?





to sink in

by extension, to become understood ;

to make

a lasting impression

or

a thought

that sinks in

memory



which shape and size

of stone is the best for skipping stones?

stones - pebbles

rocks - gravel

what is the perfect  
angle to throw?

different names for the same thing  
just different sizes

what angle

to teach?



the weight of words

point of impact

..

what happens

metamorphism

underneath

the surface?

'i have to change  
to stay the same'

-w d k

.....







## DANDELION

*DANDELION*, is an exercise I created for my students of IMC On Tour Schiedam. The students of IMC On Tour are between 7 and 11 years old and have not been in the Netherlands long. They speak the language, but their Dutch is not sufficient to go to regular education. All my students have different backgrounds: Moldova, Turkey, Ethiopia, Iran, Spain, Brazil. During my classes, learning the language is not the main goal. IMC On Tour's vision is to teach motivation-driven, to empower them to ask questions, and to recognize their place within the world. At IMC On Tour, we invite (local) inspiring guest lecturers to speak about their profession. Every class should be experiential. We are encouraged to leave the classroom, to visit the place where guest lecturers work or visit spaces that inspire them.

As we hadn't seen each other for a few weeks, due to the Covid restrictions, I planned a class without a guest lecturer for us to reconnect. Because in the upcoming two weeks we would have a visit from a botanical designer and a researcher, I decided to prepare a class which would combine the two: we were going to research the dandelion together. My aim was not to teach them specific research methods or skills, but to explain to them what the term 'research' means and to see what might emerge from that knowledge. I had been thinking about this myself, for my own research, and was interested to see what observations I could relate to my own struggles, and how this in turn could inform my path. I also aimed to have a conversation about their personal experiences in the Netherlands through this encounter with the dandelion.

I started the afternoon with a short presentation, in which I introduced them to the dandelion and its characteristics. I also talked to them about what it means to do research: to observe very well, and to compare. How sometimes you'd like to look at something up close, and sometimes far away. How it might be interesting to count, to weigh or to measure, depending on what it is you want to find out. I provided the students with different materials to conduct and share this research: rulers, measuring tapes, a microscope, a pantone chart, a scale, crayons, drawing materials and glue. Also, the students were given a lab coat and a little note pad. These coats operated as a kind of prop for them to take on the character of the scientist or lab technician.

After this introduction and the handing out of materials, we went outside. Together we decided what we could measure, and we talked about what that could tell us: How big are the different dandelion plants we find? What is the distance between them? Can they communicate? If we blow a ball of dandelion seeds, can we measure the distance until it lands? Does that mean a new plant grows there? How long do we think that might take? Do you think they notice us the way we do?

On a little field, we found many dandelions, and two students tried to dig them up. They were impressed by the length of the roots, and took turns digging deeper. One of them would lay on the field, trying to see how the root proceeds its route into the ground. 'Look miss! Look how big it is! We can't even see where it ends!' More students came over, observing and being in awe of the root system of this one dandelion.

When one of the students blew a ball of seeds, one of the others ran behind it, trying to see where the seed would land. The distance would be measured. When the measuring tapes weren't sufficient, and excitement grew, the children would lay on their backs in between. 'Measure me!' 'Write it down!'

Once inside, all students had their own piece of paper and research material. Their investigation was for them to decide: It could be focussed on size, the amount of leaves, weight, colours, anything they think is important to their research. The only requirement was that they had to somehow document their findings. No questions were asked. It seemed like my students did not need any guidance in 'requirements' or expectations for this exercise, which was something I often experienced during my Masters' research. But my students joyfully kept on collecting, writing, and drawing. The only questions that came up were ones to facilitate them in their documentation process: 'Miss, do you have glue?' 'Can you please hold this plant so I can measure it?' They didn't ask themselves who was going to read it, or where it would be presented. They were each intrinsically interested in an aspect of this research, and were not hesitant to share their findings. Seeing their excitement and rigour, I asked myself why I was not experiencing my research in the same way.

As they were so engaged in their processes, and the class was slowly coming to an end, I decided to change the structure of my class. I had planned to clean up, and to end the class sitting on the floor in a circle. I would start a conversation by asking questions. Some would be questions I had for my own research: What does it mean to measure something? Why do we measure? What does it mean to name something? When we can name it, can we then take better care of it? Did they see the dandelions before? Will they notice them more now on their way to school? But mainly I wanted to focus on the dandelion as a metaphor to talk about their position as newcomers in the Netherlands: What does it mean to root somewhere? Where are your roots? When are you really rooted? Is a tree more rooted than the dandelion?

To keep their research processes going, I decided not to have this conversation collectively, but to talk to each student or small group of students individually. While they were still engaged in their activities, I would ask them if they had dandelions back home as well. Some spoke about their grandmother's garden in Romania, and all the fruits and vegetables they grew there. How they would be there every summer, running around. They would tell me what they miss, and how they longed to return soon. The older students were more able to reflect on the process they are currently in, this space of learning a language, of rooting in a new country. We spoke about a dandelion blooming in Moldova, and a seed floating over to the Netherlands. In talking about the dandelion, I've attempted to create a space for students to talk of other things more intimately bound with themselves without fear of total exposure.

My other aim to explain to them what the term 'research' means and to see what might emerge from that knowledge, gave me beautiful insights. All students were so engaged in the process, and each naturally found their own way to document. One student measured all plants and shared their sizes. Another student had spent some time discovering how the light that falls through a magnifying glass became a powerful tool. I had observed him doing this outside, and provided him with different materials to engage with. Together, we reflected upon the question why some materials burn faster than others. When sharing his research, he wanted to draw. I asked him to draw the process of what we had been doing, and how he thinks the sunlight turns into this one small dot. Another student glued all different parts of the plant onto a piece of paper and tried to name the parts.

Seeing all my students so engaged with their task, not wondering about the way in which they shared their findings, made me reflect upon what was holding me back personally in my own research. As a designer I had gotten so used to working with clear goals and structures, wishes and demands, that I didn't know what to do with the space that was provided to me. By looking at this process through the eyes of my students, it gave me more confidence in myself in my own Master's research. As an educator, I was just as excited about everything they explored and in their sharing of the research I helped them by asking questions and providing materials that suited their path. It showed me to continue with the same passion and rigour as my students, and with the help of others I will find a way to tell my story.

If I were to do this exercise again, I would spend another class on this subject as we did not have enough time for contemplation. I would also seek a more somatic exercise to contemplate on rooting for these students. What if we could embody a rooted tree? What would it feel like to be rooted as a dandelion? Can we find a way in which we can each share our experience of rooting in the Netherlands through an alternative form of communication? Can we find a way where language is not the main way to communicate their personal experiences? This way it would give my students more confidence and agency.

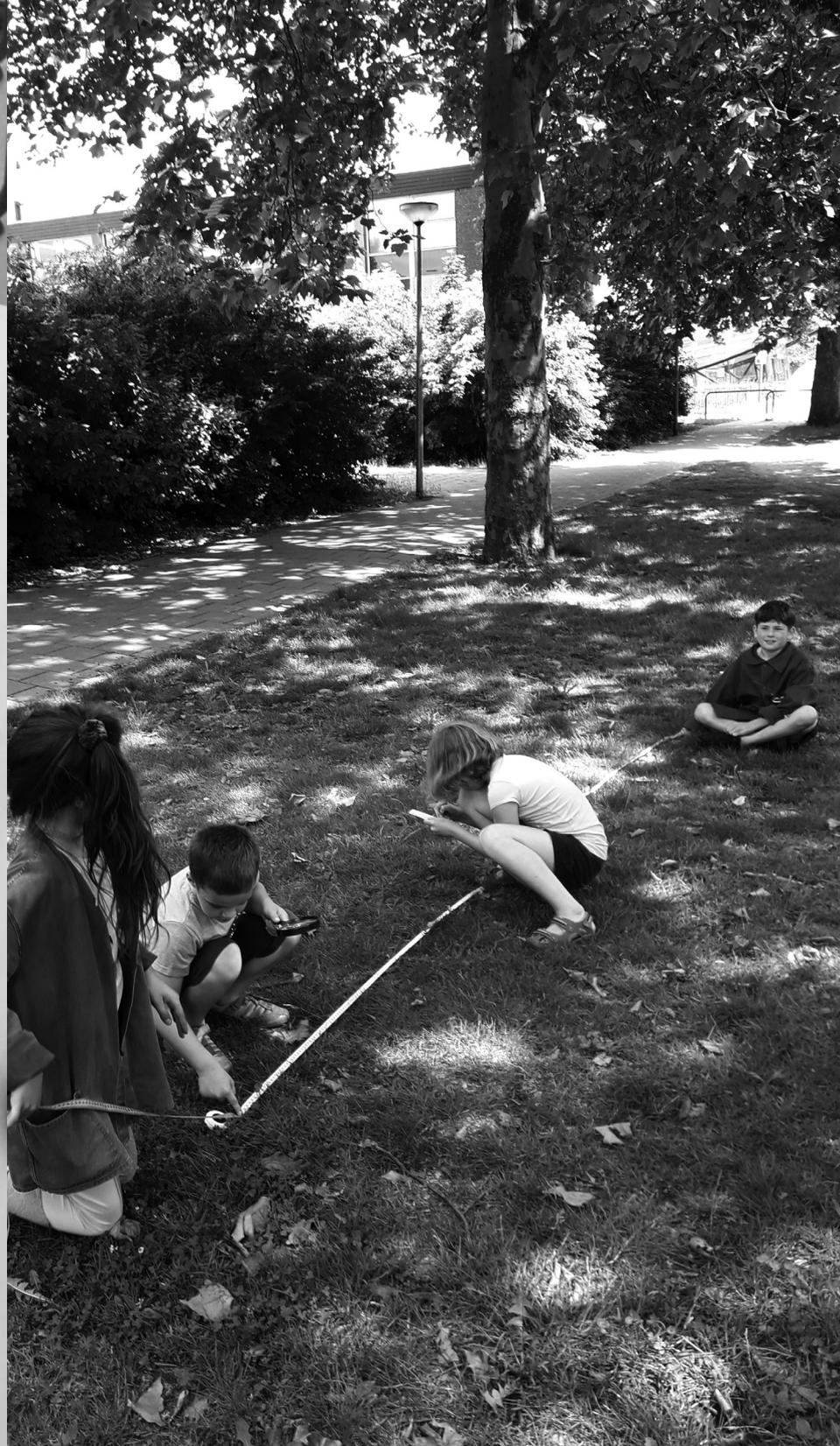
*'The dandelion is considered a common plant. So common, some say it had never been mentioned in Victorian Flower Dictionaries. The dandelion is able to root within the smallest spaces. Their taproots pull nutrients up to the surface, thus improving the soil for other nearby plants with less deep roots. Dandelions bloom early, attracting insects that enable pollination which helps other flowering plants. They are flexible, nurturing and resilient. If any plant could teach me anything as an educator, it is the dandelion.'*

(quote from my notebook)

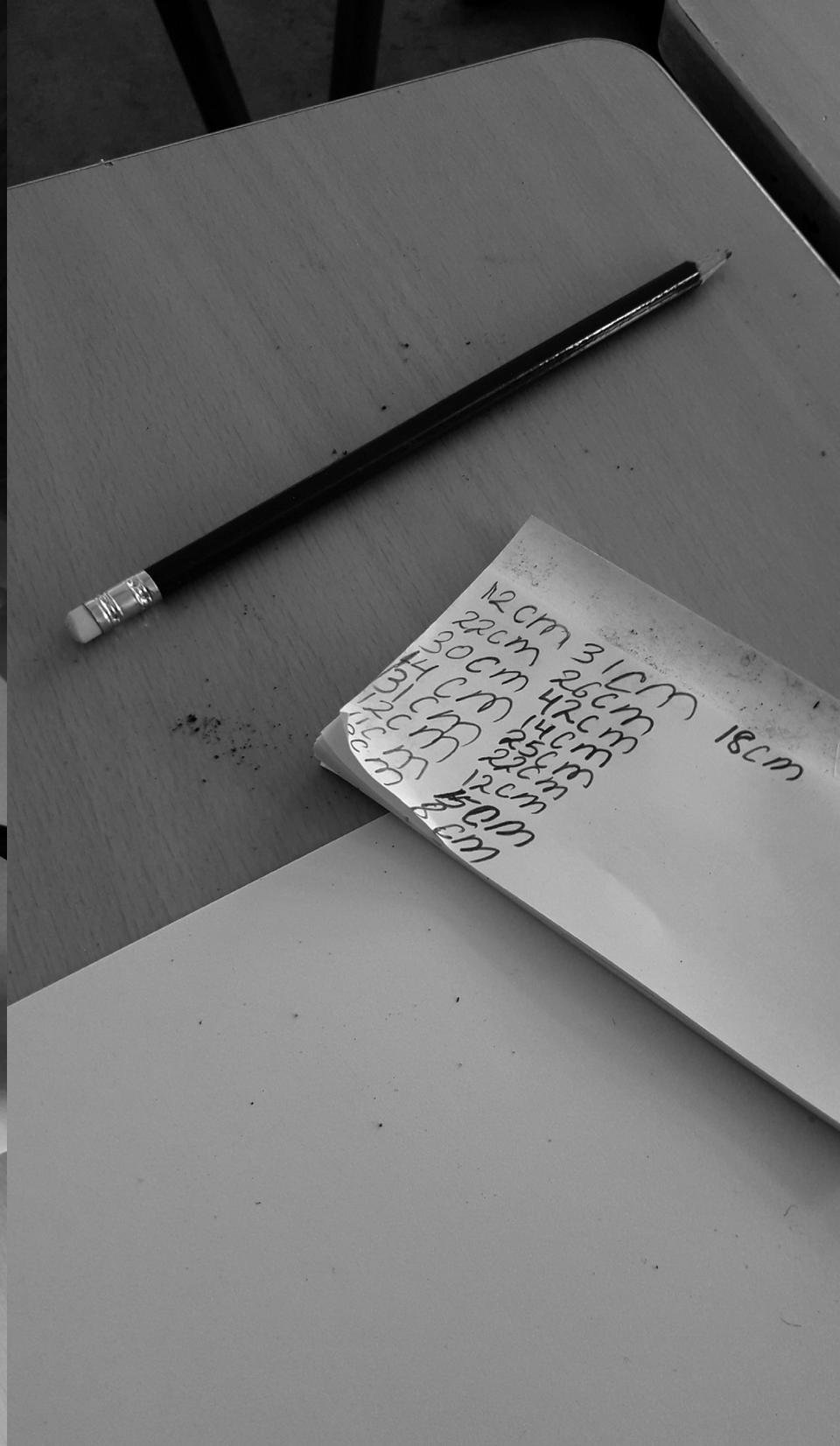




















**WEEDS**

*WEEDS*, is an exercise I created for students at the allotment class in Schiedam, in collaboration with Milieu Dichterbij and Irado. Together with local elderly volunteers, every week about hundred 7-8 year old children take care of their own plot of land. Together, we tend the land. Every week we planted beans, carrots, beetroot, dahlia, corn, sunflowers, and slowly watched the plants grow. Each at their own speed. We worked in the sun, in the rain. We watered our plants with the rain that was gathered. We took care of other plots, when we were done tending our own. This year, the nature centre was asked to provide additional classes for the students to gain some more in depth knowledge of the processes that take place when they grow their produce.

My aim for this class was to spend more time contemplating on what and why we consider certain plants a weed. I aimed to make my students aware of the multiple uses of a plant, especially of the ones we define as a weed. I also intended for them to become more aware of the act of naming, and to focus their attention on individual aspects of a plant to foster a (closer) relationship with the plants they were engaging with during these allotment classes. With this, I attempted to highlight that their relationship to their environment does not have to be defined by their knowledge of a name.

Every day we would start our afternoon at the allotment, mostly weeding. I would always join in and help the students, while volunteers guided them in the tasks for the day. With the subject of the class in mind, I would already make sure the students would be aware of the task they were engaging with. By helping them weed and asking them questions about the process some thoughts on the

act of weeding were already raised before my class started: What are we removing? What is staying? Who decides and why? What do we do with what we take out? Is it wasted or can it still be used? And what for? Do you think we can eat this? After 45 minutes working in the garden, we would wash our hands in rain water and walk to the nearby nature centre, where my additional class would start.

In Dutch a weed is called 'onkruid'. I asked the students if they knew other words that start with the word 'on'. Together we spoke about the meaning of 'on', and came to the conclusion it means 'not', so a weed is 'not-a-herb', or a non-herb. In a short introduction I presented them with images of some common weeds they might have seen in and around their garden and asked if they were able to name them. For each weed, I showed them both a photo and a botanical illustration and explained to them that in the past drawings were made of plants, as close to reality as possible. In the drawings some special features of the plant were highlighted: enlarged, cut in half, and named. The plant itself is named too, I explained to them. Everything we know, has once been named. Although we might not know, everything around us has a name.

I explained how all plants have a name which often also tells something about its characteristics. In Dutch, but also in Latin. We started with the Nettle, 'Brandnetel', 'Urtica', a plant which they will probably all recognize and with which they have had experience with its characteristics. After speaking about 'branden', to burn, I showed them the meaning of 'urere' is 'burning' in Latin as well. Next was 'Boterbloem' and we collectively tried to guess its name. 'Lemon flower because it's yellow!' someone yelled. After we found out its name, we spoke about butter and why it could apply: 'Miss, do they make butter out of it?' 'Maybe the leaves are just as soft as butter?' 'Maybe because it is yellow? Because when the butter is old it looks a bit like the yellow on the screen', Sarah replied.

I told them the Latin name, which holds the word 'rana', which is Latin for 'frog'. We spoke about frogs and how they live in the water, so the plant must probably love moist soil.

After showing a few other plants, we ended the introduction with the dandelion. I asked them if all plants we talked about today had been weeds. Everyone nodded in agreement. All plants we discussed are not welcome in their allotment garden. I then showed them a slide of the dandelion: how its leaves serve as a salad, how its roots can be ground into coffee, how the flower is used as tea. I re-raised the question: Should we still consider the dandelion a weed, seeing all the ways we can use it? The students were uncertain. Probably not.

We then went outside and all students received a clipboard, a piece of paper and a pencil. They were invited to look at all the plants that surround them as if they didn't know them and choose one plant to carefully observe and make a botanical drawing of it. What are the characteristics they see? How does it grow? How does it feel? The students instantly spread, scanning through the garden to see which plants were present. Some of them observed and drew the most colourful and uncommon flowers they could find, others kneeled at the patch of grass and observed the small daisies as if it was the first time they ever saw them, discovering many more new details: The shape of the edges of the flower, the way the snails might have eaten the fresh green leaves, how another flower has small tentacle-like properties which help them climb onto another plant. After drawing, the students were invited to name the plant they just observed.

While they were drawing outside in the sun, I handed them something to drink. At the end of the class, when we walked back to the allotment, I told them the iced-tea we drank was also a weed: Nettle.

By teaching this class 4 times a week, I had the luxury of slightly adjusting it every time I did it. The first class, the dialogue took too long, which led to the children not having enough time at the end of class to show their work and to explain how they named the plant. So in the second class, I chose to skip a few examples of weeds in my presentation. This way, we could still have an in depth dialogue about the plants, and afterwards have enough time for the drawing and naming exercise. In the first lesson, I created a moment for everyone to stop drawing and sit together in the grass to have a drink. I noticed how this interrupted their individual processes a lot, and how there was a lot of attention to what we were drinking. This was not my aim. The aim was to unconsciously let them experience drinking tea made from weed. This is why I later on decided to just prepare the glasses and place them there for them to drink while they were working on their drawings. Sometimes I would bring a glass to a student, but they naturally all came by at their own pace. Some to show me their drawings, some because they were thirsty. On our walk back to the allotment, I would casually ask them about the iced tea. What do they think it was? We would spend the five minute walk along the winding path playfully discussing what it could be, and I would not tell until we were at the gate. This made everyone engage naturally, as during the walk they would ask and tell each other that I didn't say what we drank. The mystery of it is what kept them engaged. As we would arrive at the gate, before we entered the allotment I would gather everyone and thank them for yet another great class. There always was a student that would yell 'But miss! What did we drink?' and I would tell them it was a nettle.



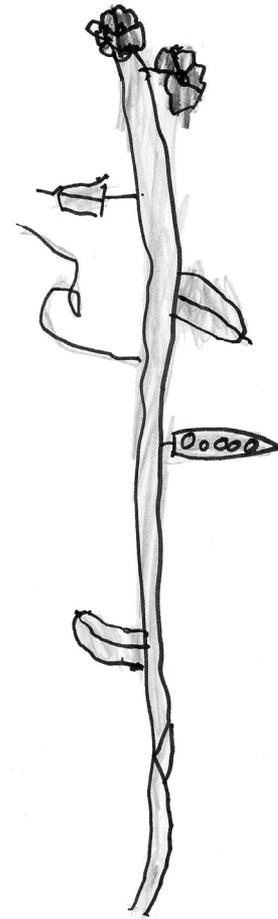


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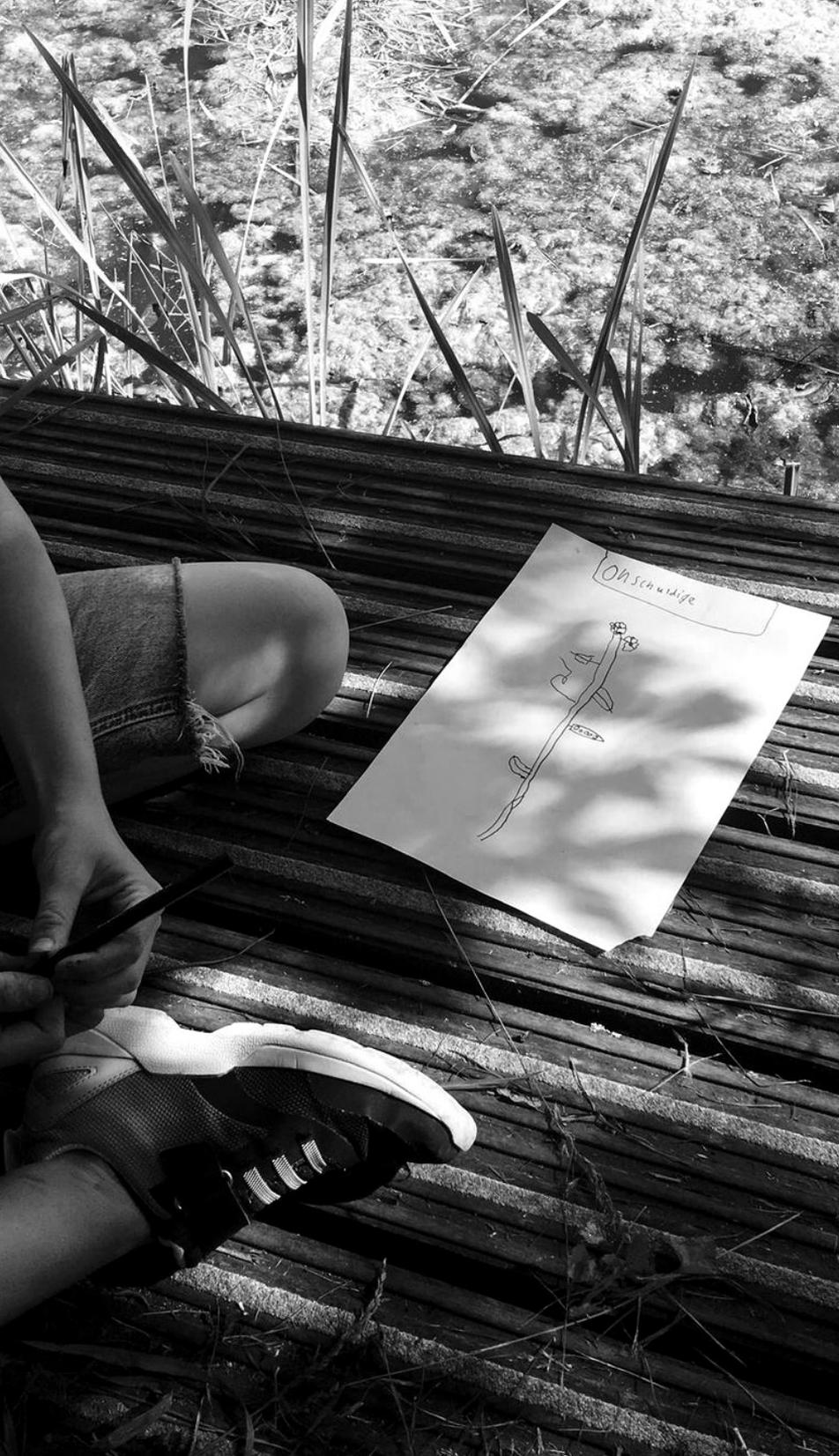


*'When our language honours the animacy of all life forms we are able to come into relationships of reciprocity rather than exploitation.'*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Grammar of Animacy, p18

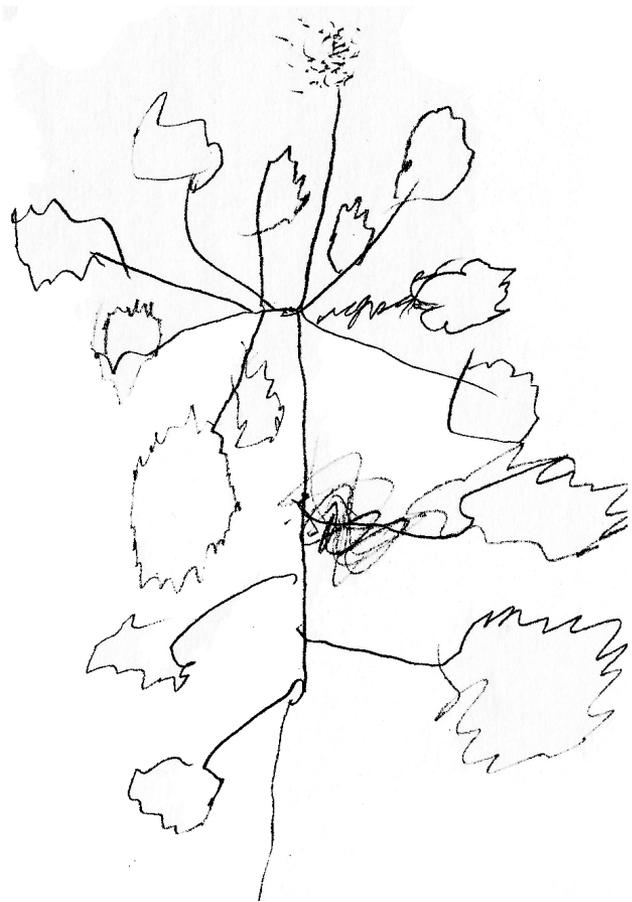


Oh schuldige grüßer



*'When we stop to look at something and trace the connection between that organism and ourselves, we invest time in a form of contemplation'*

Tristan Gooley, How to Connect With Nature, 2014, p130



stebel plant



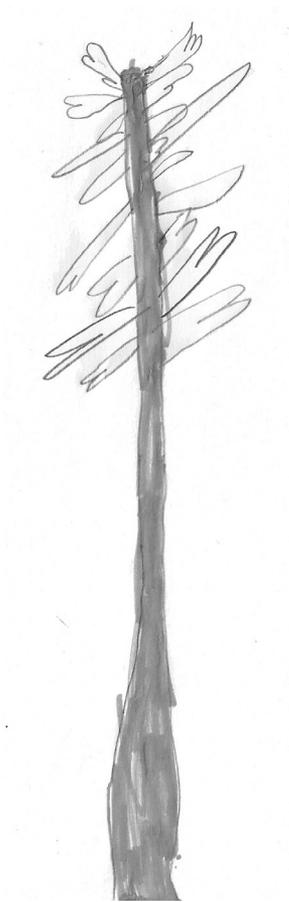


*hemiglossaem*





leuwentkam



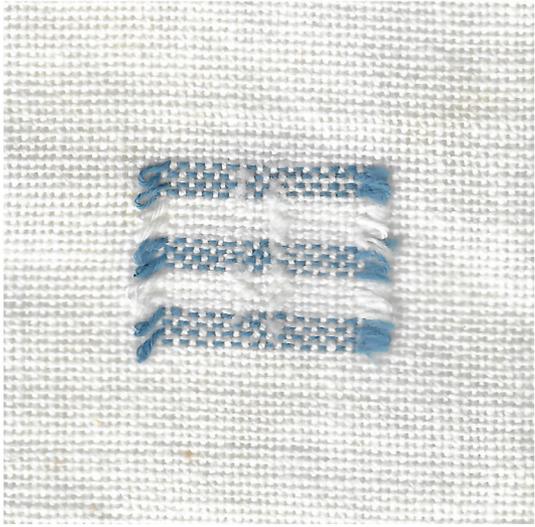
*'Through communication with the land, we learn  
new ways of being in community with each other.'*

*A Community is a Garden: Tools for Artists,  
Communities, and Institutions, 2020, p18*

W Lengerblad







**RECEIVE, TO PASS ON**

*RECEIVE, TO PASS ON*, is an exercise I created for the second year of the Master of Education in Arts. As we were navigating yet another lockdown and exploring the idea of a collective graduation project, the idea came about to each offer an exercise to guide this process. We were uncertain what it meant to be a collective in these times. How do you collaborate while having to meet online? What could a collective graduation project look like? What are our expectations? I noticed within myself that a collective graduation would mean that I abandon my personal research path for a while, and see how I could embed (part of) it into a collective graduation project. I was intrigued by the idea of a collective graduation, and very engaged in this process. Next to teaching online and handling multiple projects, I spent many nights online with other participants to navigate this possible collaboration. I felt committed, even though I was exhausted. I created *RECEIVE, TO PASS ON* as one of the first steps of our collective graduation: to map out our individual aims, research interests, practises and ideals.

*RECEIVE, TO PASS ON*, uses the making of a sourdough starter as a catalyst, vehicle and metaphor to explore each participant's personal position in our collaborative graduation. On a snowy Sunday in February, when there were no trams due to the weather, I put on my boots and decided to walk to all the homes of Rotterdam based participants and deliver them what was needed for this exercise: a small zine and a bag of local flour. In the zines, I had shared some of my references related to fermentation as a metaphor and it also held a recipe to make a sourdough starter. The amount of starter would be high, so that after a week you could pass on 3 parts of your starter to others in your direct environment. The package thus also held small instruction cards for future owners of the starter.

In the zine, I had added a list with words that associated with a collective graduation as a sourdough starter: attention, care, slow, process, experience, collaboration, cooperation, cyclical, reciprocity, gift, growth, nutrition, rest, balance, kinship, environment, commitment, abundance, symbiosis, generosity and possible failure.

The process of creating a sourdough bread has a risk of failure. Although we all seemed to agree with the idea of graduating collectively, I also saw a lot of indicators for this process to become tough and unsuccessful. I noticed how everyone was struggling, and how exhausted everyone was and had been. As we met online the first time after every participant had received the package, I asked everyone to begin making the starter on the same day. The exercise was planned in such a way that at our upcoming assessment, we'd each have a bread we could share. They could fail or they could not be done yet, quite possibly, but I saw that as a beautiful metaphor to our collective graduation process. During the daily feeding of the starter, I asked every participant to write down what they added to the collective. The last question was: What is left to give to yourself?

Email, sent to all participants  
on February 16th, 2021 at 19:30:

*Dear all who have already started this sourdough journey with me, or those who might in the future,*

*I've started mine the morning after our meeting. I measured the ingredients carefully, following the recipe. This recipe had been selected after some research. It all seemed very difficult. So when I came across this one, an easy recipe (shared by a organic brand, written by a baker who also published a sourdough book) I thought this might be a great way to start. But after a few days of following the recipe, I started to doubt. Is there enough activity in my starter? It had a layer of water. It smelled weird as well. I spoke about it with others, I researched it online. I put the starter on a different spot, closer to the heating. But I did not want to change the recipe. Because, maybe I should just trust the process?*

*Yesterday morning, after some thought, I decided to change things up. I decided to take two small parts of the original starter, and put them in other jars. Instead of weighing the exact amounts of water and flour, for these two jars I let go of the recipe, and fed the starters as I thought they needed. Which was more than what was written in the recipe. I placed them in the oven, with the door open so the light would shine and warm them a bit (something I learned on one of my Google journeys to provide the best conditions) I placed a towel over them, shielding them from light.*

*Today, I thought of my responsibilities. Does it make me unfaithful to the process if I don't follow the recipe? Should I let you know I adjusted it? Maybe your starters are all perfectly fine and I am just failing at it?*

*For now, with this e-mail I would like to inform you about my process, and the steps I have taken. The metaphor I thought of, became even more present than I planned it. I am looking forward to talking through it with you all soon :)*

About a week after, shortly before the assessment, some participants decided they could not collectively graduate. The limits I had already felt approaching were set. Some bread was baked, some answers were shared with me, some tasted perfect, some tasted bittersweet. I have not reflected on this process with many people. Each of us was navigating through graduation, restrictions and all responsibilities that came with that. The sourdough is in conversation with its environment. Every condition has an effect, which then triggers a different approach to foster its wellbeing. It is trial and error, which asks for close attention, just as navigating a collective process. Some participants have kept me updated about their bread, and shared what they had written in my zine. Some shared the process of their dough through sending me pictures and tips almost every day. They have kept their starter after the exercise and kept on sharing the bread with their loved ones. For them it had become a refuge, a way to deal with the current situation. I personally questioned if some of the participants did the exercise at all, but I felt this was not the moment and place for me to engage with this question. The exercise was created to bring into light just that: How much time and care do you have to give at this moment? I aimed to help each of the participants communicate that with the group.

As I spoke to one of the participants, who turned into a dear friend over the course of this Masters, we realised six months had passed. Currently, she still makes bread from the starter she started during this exercise. For her, the experience was quite similar to mine. On the first three days, she followed the recipe step by step. She added *patience & focus, love (being there for others, believing in us) and care*. Trusting my instructions, feeling a sense of commitment to the process and the group, she followed the recipe. But after four days, she noticed something was wrong. The starter was constantly hungry and grew too big.

'It felt out of control,' she told me when we reflected upon the exercise. On day four she had started to doubt the recipe. On that day she wrote in the zine: *I can give space for: My point of view. Experience. Needs. And those of others. Attention (awareness / be aware) of the needs of others. Underneath I can give space for she added: Also, I need to learn that.*

'On that fourth day I noticed a shift was happening', she shared with me over tea, 'I needed to give space for my own point of view. But I needed to learn how to give space for myself.'

Day 5 turned out to be a breaking point. It had a hooch. She fed it twice. The starter wasn't working. She researched some recipes, and dove into why her starter was behaving this way. She divided the starter in different parts and looked for the perfect conditions for the starter to grow. Following her own recipe she realised 'I am done with it. Nothing works. I'll keep it for one more day, otherwise I throw it out.' On day five, her notes say: *My own voice. Approach. View. Terms.*

The sourdough exercise made the collective graduation process visible for her. It showed her that the collective was asking a lot, but not giving anything back at that time. The exercise became a tool for reflection upon our collective process. 'Your exercise definitely illuminated for me what I was already sensing, suspecting at the beginning of the collective process. It helped to word/articulate what I felt. It gave the much needed space to step back and look at the whole thing'

On day six she decided to quit the collective process. Her notes read: *Time. (?) Choice. How invested I am (doesn't feel that way in reality though)* 'It felt like I was giving and giving and getting nothing back, just as the dough.' She wrote a letter of resignation, and read it at our online meeting. In it, she said 'I will however help today. Let's see how things evolve. I can also be there as a support group'

The recipe I had shared, would provide for so much sourdough starter that all participants would be able to pass it on. But on day six she had thrown a large part of it away. 'In order for something to happen, I needed to discard,' she told me as we were sitting at her dinner table, realising what this exercise had set in motion for her. When my eyes glance past her, I notice a new work on her wall. It is hers. She is choosing her own voice.

*'As a force for change, fermentation is relatively gentle. Bubbles are not flames. Contrast fermentation with that other transformative natural phenomenon: fire. Fire destroys whatever lies in its path. Fermentation is not so dramatic; its transformative mode is gentle and slow. Steady, too. Driven by bacteria that spawned all life on Earth and continue to be the matrix of all life, fermentation is a force that cannot be stopped. It recycles life, renews hope, and goes on and on.'*

*'Fermentation is a force that cannot be controlled, and the changes it renders are not always desirable. Even so, the metaphorical ferment is an unending source of new ideas, dynamic energy, and inspiration, and our best hope for regeneration. "What fermentation shows us is the invisible connections of everything," writes Mercedes Villalba in her Fervent Manifesto. "You learn to cultivate the future."*

Fermentation as Metaphor, Sandor Ellix Katz

**FERMENTATION  
AS A METAPHOR**

fermentation

as a metaphor

## invitation

every day you add to the mixture,  
i invite you to think of  
what you can add to

the c o l l e c t i v e

what you need:

400 grams of organic spelt flour (20°C)  
400 grams of water (20°C)  
spatula (no metal)  
spacious mixing bowl  
cling film

day 1

150 grams of spelt flour  
150 grams of water

in a bowl, mix the water and flour together with a spatula until the flour is completely absorbed (it will feel quite stiff). fold the mass gently, because you want to prevent gluten formation. take a large bowl, because the dough will increase in volume in the coming days. cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on the counter.

day 2

50 grams spelt flour  
50 grams of water

add the weighed ingredients to the mixture you made on day 1 and mix gently. cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on the counter.

day 3

50 grams spelt flour  
50 grams of water

add the weighed ingredients and mix gently. you should already see some changes occurring, such as air bubbles. cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on the counter.

day 4

50 grams of spelt flour  
50 grams of water

add the weighed ingredients and mix gently. the fermentation has now really started, so the right temperature (20°C) is very important here. cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on the counter.

day 5

50 grams spelt flour  
50 grams of water

add the weighed ingredients and mix gently.  
the volume has now increased considerably!  
cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on  
the counter.

day 6

50 grams of spelt flour  
50 grams of water

add the weighed ingredients and mix gently.  
cover the bowl with cling film and set aside on  
the counter. this is the last day, tomorrow you  
can bake and share

day 7

today your sourdough starter is ready for use.

you should now have about 800 grams of mass.  
divide the sourdough starter into four parts of  
200 grams. you can pass on three parts (cover  
the trays well with cling film) and use one part  
to bake your bread.

to pass on:

if you pass on your starter, the receiver will have  
to slightly adjust the steps you've taken:

day 1

as they have already received 200 grams of  
sourdough starter, on the day they received the  
dough, they can start immediately by adding  
the ingredients:

day 1-5

on days 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, add *60 grams*  
of spelt flour and *60 grams* of water

day 6

on day 6 you will end up with a volume of  
800 grams of sourdough starter that you  
can divide into 4 portions of 200 grams.  
use one portion to bake, use three portions

to p a s s o n

collective graduation

as a sourdough  
starter

attention

care

slow

process

experience

intention

collaboration

cooperation

cyclical

reciprocity

gift

growth

nutrition

rest

balance

kinship

environment

commitment

abundance

symbiosis

generosity

possible

failure

invitation

every day you add to the mixture,  
i invite you to think of  
what you can add to

the collective

on day 1  
i have added:

on day 2  
i have added:

on day 3  
i have added:

on day 4  
i have added:

on day 5  
i have added:

on day 6  
i have added:

what is left to give

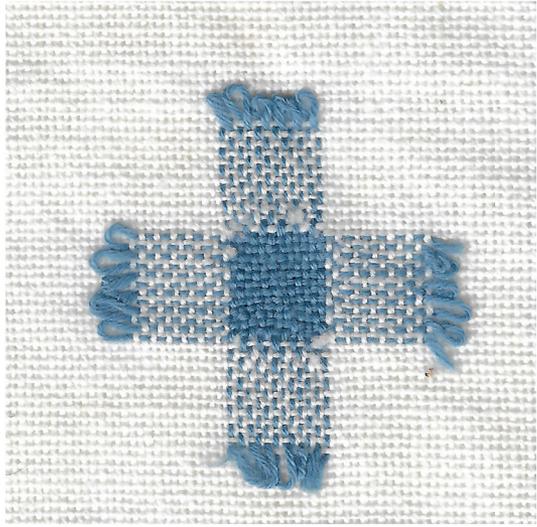
to yourself?











## TEA CEREMONY

*TEA CEREMONY*, is an exercise I created together with artist and participant Anita Hrnica in May 2021. With this exercise, we aimed to explore the making and drinking of a tea blend as a tool for reflection. The past few weeks we had been rushing out the door at the end of the day as the school closed, still processing the day when we each arrived home. With this exercise we aimed to create some time for slowing down, sensing, observing our emotions to collectively end our day together. We aimed to explore an alternative process of reflection, which was more embodied and less based on language. We aimed to create a safe space to share these emotions amongst each other, if we felt the need, or to share a collective feeling.

‘Modernity prides itself in naming things, but there’s a kind of power that’s occultic and diffractive, and yet to come. That is entangled and embodied, and is in league with rhizomatic movements, and mushrooms, and air, and climate. That’s a deep sense of power that escapes modernity. And I feel if we learn to listen, maybe we might learn to tap into those other spaces of power.’

Bayo Akomolafe Finding Our Way Podcast (Season 2 - Episode 3)

After a day of discussing our final graduation, we invited participants to create their own tea blend based on the question ‘How are you?’. We had provided them with multiple herbs, all arranged into small glass containers that were placed upon the table. We created a small zine which holds all herbs and their meanings in order for you to look up their meanings, either before or after you make the blend. In order to create their own blend, there were two options: *Option one* was to select herbs for a personal tea blend based on their meanings: What can they provide that you need?

*Option two* was to select the herbs guided by your intuition, based on smell or the way they look. After they were created, we each drank our own blends. There was space to discuss them, and adjust them, if necessary. If a participant was satisfied with their blend, they'd make that same blend for all other participants and close the sachet with a note. This note could for example be the name they gave their blend, ingredients, or a personal note to the receiver. An optional last activity was to add all the herbs we selected in one group-blend, and to taste it collectively.

Due to an unexpected closure of Piet Zwart Institute, we were not able to print our zines and the preparation of the exercise took place in another space and framework than we had previously expected. This led us to engage with it slightly less prepared, which meant navigating possibilities and solutions as they occurred. For example, the information to the workshop had to be sent to each participant's e-mail, which made them engage with their phone during the exercise. We had given a lot of attention to the materials: all herbs were bottled in the same glass containers with handwritten labels, we brought a small wooden box which held the spoons and tea bags. So for me, the fact that the instruction had to be engaged digitally, was not in line with the material experience I had intended. How your fingers try to get hold on the corner of the page, the flipping of, the glancing through. The pace of the exercise turned out to be a wonderful way to end an intense day. Most participants were guided by their sense of smell, browsing through all the glass containers, instead of making a blend guided by the meaning of the herbs.

As I reflected upon this exercise with a participant, we realised this exercise had allowed for some vulnerability, a comfortable quietness. 'It was quieting down on many levels.' The fact that we were experiencing it in someone's home, played a huge role, she said. She also mentioned that the materials we used required a certain gentleness. When I asked her how she engaged with the exercise, she told me she had smelled the herbs, instead of selecting them from their meaning. 'I just wanted to enjoy the exercise. Not based on texts or something I have read. Less rules.' She shared with me the memories that are connected to certain smells. 'There is already a story behind a smell. It is also knowledge, but a different kind of one.' Almost all the ingredients she had chosen were protective, safe. It made her reflect upon her current state. Having just been to the dentist, she could hardly speak, but she did feel comfortable to participate. 'The exercise forced us to slow down. To reflect and slow down. It forced you to dive deeper, to sink in whatever you are doing.'

If I were to do this exercise again, it would be interesting to see if it would be experienced the same way if it would take place within an institutional space. What could we do to make a space feel more like home? Should we bring a tablecloth? Play soft music? Sit on the floor? I would also take some more time for this exercise. This would provide some more time for everyone to specifically create a tea blend for another person. In our process it went smoothly: the group organically tended to one another and made sure that at the end of the exercise everyone had a gifted tea blend. With an unknown group, it might be useful to think of a way to make groups of two. I would also add more emphasis on the introduction of this exercise, maybe through a collective reading, focussed on the plants and their meanings and powers.



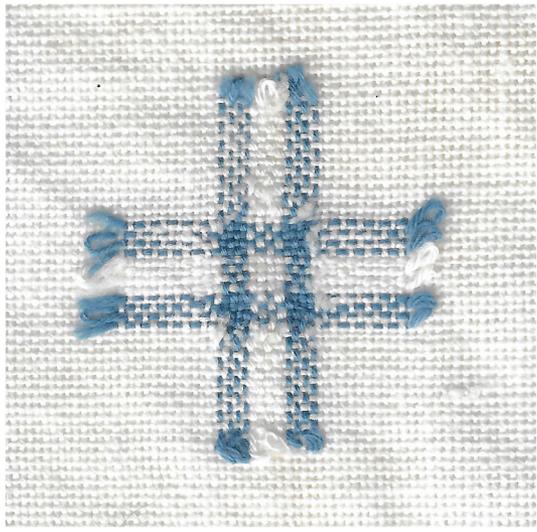
*'Tea began as a medicine and grew into a beverage. In China, in the eighth century, it entered the realm of poetry as one of the polite amusements. The fifteenth century saw Japan ennoble it into a religion of aestheticism—Teaism. Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.*

*The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature. It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it is economics, for it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly; it is moral geometry, inasmuch as it defines our sense of proportion to the universe. It represents the true spirit of Eastern democracy by making all its votaries aristocrats in taste.'*

The Book of Tea, Kakuzo Okakura







**FABRIC FOR  
DIALOGUE**

*STOF VOOR GESPREK (FABRIC FOR DIALOGUE)* is a collaborative design I created during Taskforce Fashion's Residency for Responsible Fashion, in collaboration with four other designers, the Municipality of Rotterdam and Stimuleringsfonds. The end result is a tablecloth which exposes the underlying (and rather discriminating) data set of a governmental tool called 'Leefbaarometer'. The work guides participants in having a collective conversation about the data used to grade a neighbourhood on its livability, and offers a space to add their personal experience.

'Rotterdam is the second biggest city of the Netherlands. With its skyscrapers, cultural highlights and bustling port on the one hand, and challenges such as poverty, segregation and polarisation on the other, it can be considered a real metropolis. Like most metropolises, Rotterdam is incredibly rich in diversity and hosts more than 173 nationalities. Yet, there is a huge divide between inhabitants with different backgrounds, education and incomes. The Municipality of Rotterdam invited five designers of Taskforce Fashion to investigate a neighbourhood where this divide is rapidly emerging because of gentrification: the Oude Noorden. Their question: could fashion play a positive role in increasing contact and social cohesion in this area? Instead of seeking for answers, the designers first researched the question at hand: who is asking the question and on what information is it based? When we choose different angles, methods and parameters to look at the neighbourhood, do we still see a divide, a problem? Would we still ask the same question? Rather than focusing on overcoming differences between inhabitants, the designers chose to focus their research on ways to find shared values and stories instead. Which dreams and superpowers do young people have in the neighbourhood? How do people in the neighbourhood feel about their own bodies? And how do they personally experience their surroundings?

In this presentation, the designers show their intermediate results. They propose alternative, mostly visual research tools to the Municipality, to encourage new conversations with inhabitants of all ages and backgrounds. With fashion & identity as a base, they seek for common ground and connections between longtime residents and newcomers.' (<https://taskforcefashion.nl/teamrotterdam>)

*STOF VOOR GESPREK (FABRIC FOR DIALOGUE)*, is a collaborative textile project that gives insight into how neighbourhoods are evaluated on their 'livability'. In The Netherlands, neighbourhoods are regularly measured by the 'Leefbaarometer', a governmental tool that visualises how cities, municipalities and neighbourhoods 'score' in terms of livability. In this methodology, also used by policy makers, the following definition is used for 'livability': 'Livability is the extent to which the environment corresponds to the requirements and wishes set by humans'. The 'Leefbaarometer' works with 100 indicators, categorised in 5 dimensions, that together lead to one final score. The final score for the Oude Noorden is evaluated as 'Weak'. In this collaborative research for Taskforce Fashion, I work together with Lena Winterink, an Amsterdam based Design Academy graduate who mainly works with textile. We decided to look into the 100 different indicators that led to this outcome. To their surprise, they could only retrieve data of the 5 dimension scores and the final score, but not of the 100 individual indicators that were used to score the Oude Noorden. Which parameters led the Leefbaarometer to score the Oude Noorden as weak? According to the Leefbaarometer, anything that deviates from the norm constitutes a negative score on the quality of life. But what is that norm? And whose wishes and requirements are being taken into account? With this project, Lena and I provide insight into indicators that inform the 'Leefbaarometer' and also create a space for conversation about what is important (to local residents) for the quality of life in the Oude Noorden.

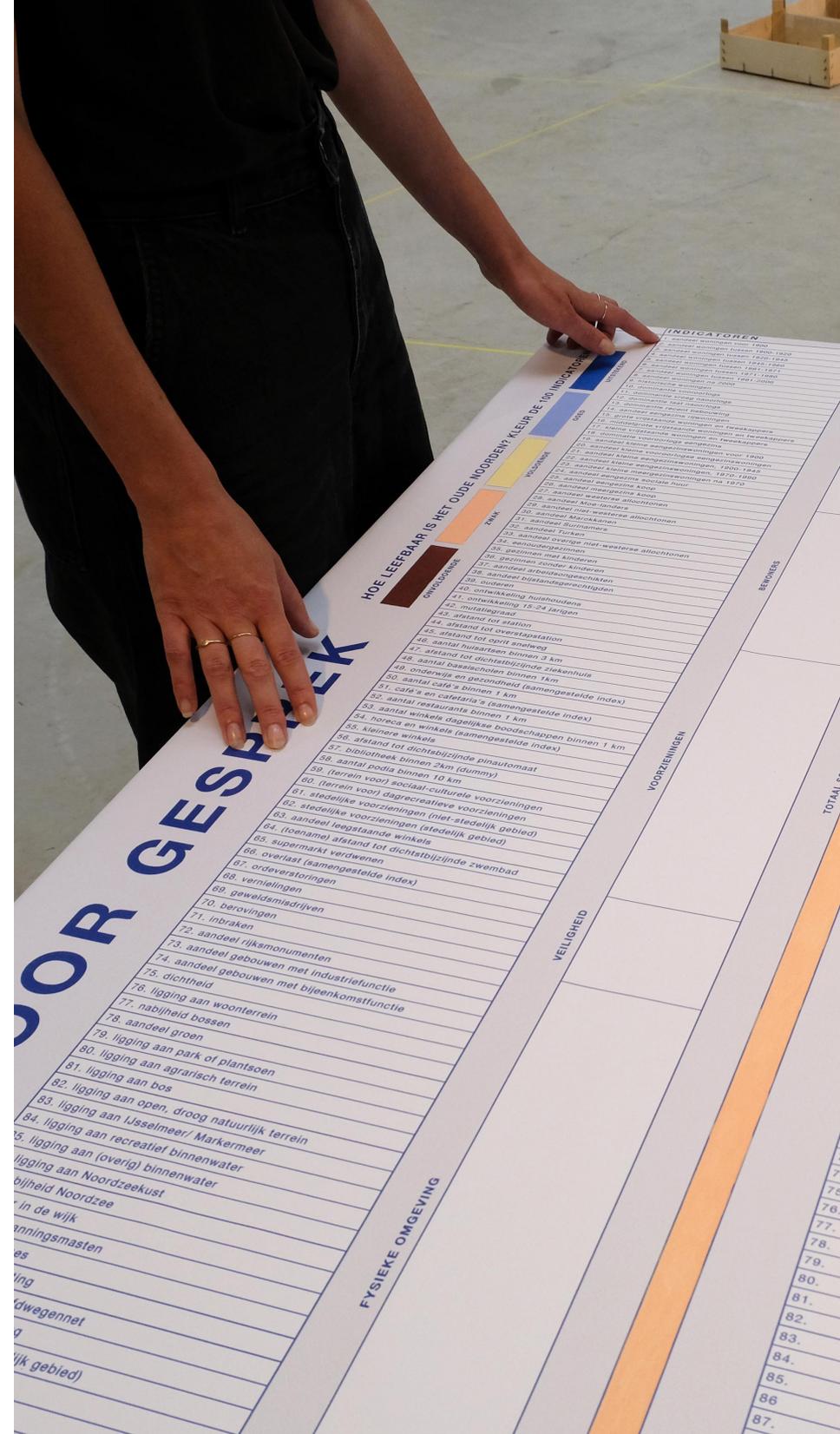
*STOF VOOR GESPREK (FABRIC FOR DIALOGUE)* provides inhabitants and involved parties the chance to add on indicators and fill in the data themselves. Visitors can use the colours as indicated in the legend to fill out their own 'Leefbaarometer' scores. There is also plenty of space on the textile canvas to leave notes or comments. In this way, we will create a personal version of the 'Leefbaarometer' of which the scores are visible and accessible to the public.

In this work Lena and I have designed the cloth in such a way that participants could not read the information by themselves, but had to ask another participant. On both ends of the five metre long cloth all 100 indicators for livability are mentioned. Between those ends, all that is presented are the numbers. When filling in your personal experiences of the neighbourhood, everyone had to ask the person standing at the end of the table what each number stands for. Most indicators provoke a conversation by itself, by the participants contemplating how they would grade them and if they care about them themselves. Another way the conversation would be started, is through giving a general grade: does your overall feeling align with the data of the 100 indicators you just filled out for yourself?

For the exhibition, we invited people who worked for the municipality, and somehow had a connection with the area. With this work, we wanted to give them an insight into the governmental tool on which important decisions are partly made. For two hours, with coffee tea and biscuits, we sat at the table and all filled in the empty graphs. Some parts of the graph were not filled in, but commented upon. Most conversation was about the part of the indicators which were about the ethnicity of the inhabitants. One governmental advisor told about her partner, who is Moroccan, and the struggles they have had in finding a home. Another participant said she moved to the Netherlands when she was young, and raised the question if her children were still considered to be foreigners when looking at this tool. We also spoke about the feeling of

safety, and how for every street this feeling can be different. Another interesting conversation that occurred was about the indicator which spoke of the era that houses were built. Someone pointed out that if houses are not well taken care of, the era does not really do any justice as an indicator for livability.

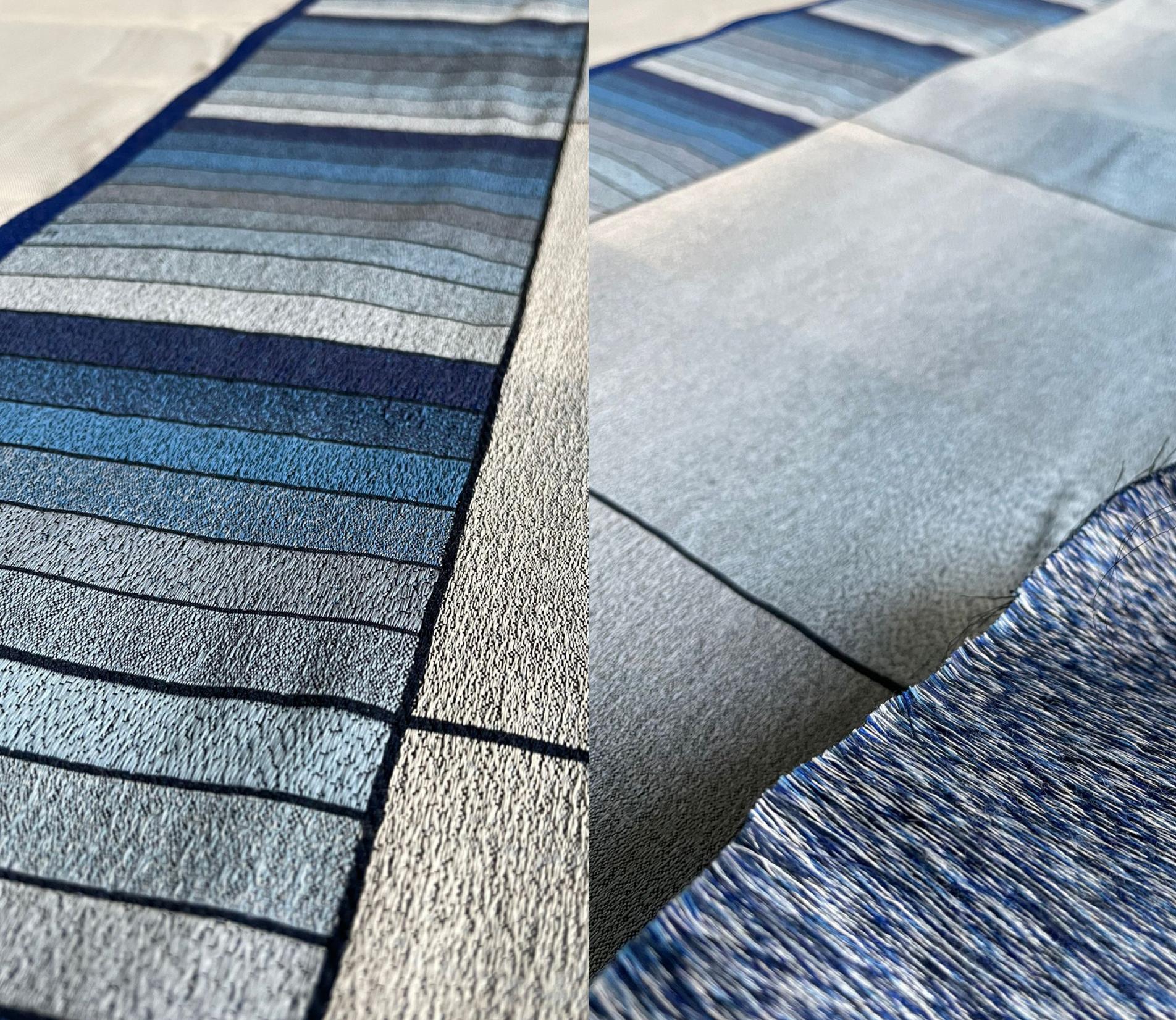
The outcomes will be used to create a woven version of the canvas, that can be used as a tablecloth during important dinners and meetings with and about the neighbourhood. This cloth does not hold the answers or gradings of a particular area. What it does, is only exposing the system. For the final piece we decided to create a four metre long woven fabric in a blue that resonates with the colours the government uses in their visual identity. Blue is said to communicate significance, importance, depth, trust as well as confidence and intelligence and sincerity. On the cloth, all hundred indicators are mentioned, as well as the five dimensions. Also, the field to cover the overall score is named 'livability'. In this way, there is no need for the viewer to know the 'Leefbarometer' tool, in order to engage with it. With this large piece we invite the viewer to come up close and read the individual threads and indicators. The final piece is currently being woven, and will be shown in an exhibition at Textielmuseum in January 2022. I will currently only be able to share images of the first woven sample piece and the process that has led up to it.

















THE LAST STITCH

These past years I have explored alternative and unknown paths: I have explored leaving the educational context of a school completely. I have explored a more autonomous aspect of my pedagogical practice. I have explored what it means to be part of a learning community. I have even found my way back into fashion, while thinking through what an alternative fashion system could look like. In these explorations, I have felt lost sometimes. But just as Rebecca Solnit writes in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, feeling lost (after years of restricting and even harming commitments) has given me a sense of empowerment: *'To be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender.'*

In all projects I shared in this research, I have attempted to create or enhance relationships through offering tools and facilitating activities which foster attentiveness, listening, questioning, contemplation and connection. These tools have been used in various situations where I have been practising as a designer engaged in education. They often offered material interventions which made participants engage with a material, their direct environment, the world around them. Through this, I held space for contemplative dialogue, either with others or as an inner dialogue. With these experiences I have attempted to create awareness of systems and how you behave in them, while offering a space to question certain systems as well. In these projects I did not state an alternative or critique, but enhanced the visibility which aimed to (collectively) create meaning and provide participants with an enlarged sense of agency. My role has been to facilitate this encounter while using local resources and knowledge, as well as situated, embodied and tacit knowledge of participants.

As I wrote in the introduction, writing has been an act of darning. Although I have found back my love for language, devouring books again in a way I had never believed possible, putting my practice into words has not been an easy task. I tried to use as little force as possible, and over the course of two years filled many notebooks with field notes, small observations, and beautiful things others have said.

For me, this research also became a search for how to name, and how to begin to feel a sense of openness in that act. Writing down my thoughts and experiences has helped me to understand myself and my practice better. But although I have spent months reading, thinking, talking, connecting, feeling, writing, walking, fermenting, contemplating, listening, I still am not sure if the traces I have collected are able to capture the essence of my process and practise into words, and if I will ever find the right words to do so. But I hope my voice can be found throughout.

*'Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.'*

Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

I carried these words of Rilke with me throughout the year. To keep questioning, with empathy, knowing that I am now living these questions. Acknowledging I am now and will always be in the process of becoming, and finding comfort in that movement. Even while I seem to be standing still, by my own choice or by the circumstances I have suddenly found myself in, I am in fact still moving. Moving on. Moving away. Moving towards.



INITIALS

This sampler would not be complete, without also stitching the initials of all the people who have accompanied me along the way. Thank you all for your patience, your care, your encouragement and for always guiding me. Back to myself.

|    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|
| RT | SW | IC | IS |
| SP | EG | TW | AH |
| TE | GM | SC | MG |
| MK | AB | MB | ML |
| FL | JJ | LJ | MJ |
| GJ | JJ | MJ | IC |
| DJ | NJ | DM | SU |
| LW | AM | JB | ML |
| SN | RG | FG | ND |
| LD | TK | JH | CP |



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