

A Manifesto In My Room

Aura Latva-Somppi, 2020, Contemporary Design MA; Personal Exploration course

This is to be a manifesto for myself, to be read in my own room, dust and hair lying in the corners, next to my messy bed and piles of clothes, letters and drawings, with the houseplants and fruit-peels and the smell of my biodegradable. It is not still or silent; there is light reflecting from a window of a neighbor house, the shadows of trees of the nearby forest and the sounds of buses and dogs and bicycle bells skipping around the neighborhood. This manifesto is from within myself but also from the outside, from readings and discussions and perception, and it is to be presented and projected from and to all these directions.

The question always ends up being about time. As far as I know, time is all I have, and how I decide to use it matters the most. That is why I often end up overdoing, as sufficiently as possible, running from one place to another and even in the evening eating my dinner while watching a movie in bed, triple relaxation! Our system values efficiency and rewards for accomplishments. It is not until now, having stayed in my house for weeks due to social distancing caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, I start to understand the meaning of taking time.

Time enables care. Care is never innocent. What we care about defines who we are and how we are seen – by caring for something one is also caring for themselves. To understand this I did a performative installation titled “*Traces Of Care*” in Koli: I tied together burnt logs and reindeer skin to form a heavy furry pencil, and while rocking it on my lap as if I was comforting it, or more myself, the pen drew my outlines on the paper I was sitting on. What we care for defines us.



Traces Of Care, Koli, Feb 2020

We choose to care, yet we cannot force it. We can care just as much as we understand, and we cannot understand all. Feminist science and technology scholar Maria Puig De La Bellacasa (2015) writes that understanding requires a significant amount of time spent with or within a certain thing. The time spent understanding is prioritized and excluded from other activities. Therefore, care being time-consuming, it is often devalued as unproductive. Society rewards for accomplishments, final results, not the time spent in the process of caring, which is tiresome and insufficient. (Puig De La Bellacasa 2015, 1-5) This can be seen in how society lacks respect towards care-related professions and actions such as nursery, motherhood and crafts. Recently, however, this figure has interestingly gone upside-down due to the Covid19-pandemy. We have never had so much respect towards the care-workers. The people who we are used to take for granted are today's heroes. Whether this respect will be seen in the salaries or will it remain symbolic will be interesting to see.

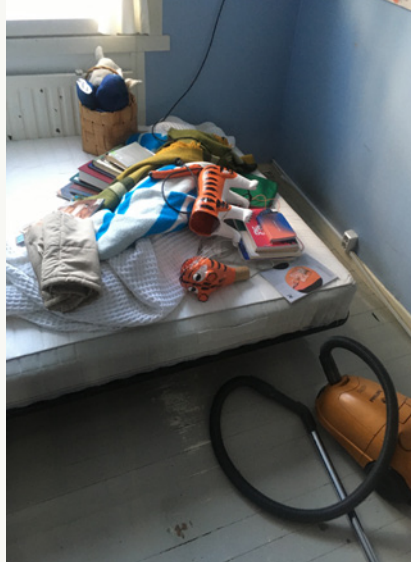
Cyborg feminist scholar Donna Haraway (2016) explains that we all have our situated knowledge and understanding from which we are able to draw care. “*No one lives everywhere but everyone lives somewhere; nothing is connected to everything but everything is connected to something*”, she concludes (Haraway 2016, 31). Situatedness is a theoretical position proposing that the mind is intertwined with factors in place and time. I, for example, feel very situated in my body in my house at the moment, and in the dust, the sounds and the changes of light during the day.

“*Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, matters, meanings*” (Haraway 2016, 1)

Puig De La Bellacasa (2017) explains that situatedness evolves with time and with love. It cannot be forced, and therefore it cannot cumulate from feelings of emergency, bitter cynicism and despair rather than future projections, and preservations of ruin. All these features are characteristics to “hype” which Puig De La Bellacasa describes, quoting the sociology professor Nik Brown, “*futuristic and progress driven concept co-dependent with the fear of doom and hope for salvation*” (Puig De La Bellacasa 2017, 4). We have to take a step back from technology- and future-oriented mindsets and cynical mistrust because they only narrow us down to human-exceptionalism, drawing a line between “human” and “other”. Disregarding all the human- nonhuman relationships we are not enabling ourselves to collaborate with companion species. We have to be situated in the thick presence and seek for the right relations, harmony, an idea essential in buddhism for example (Haraway 2016, 1-38). These right relations cannot be born without dwelling and staying, time.

I am fascinated by Haraway introducing the Greek originated term *Kainos*. *Kainos* means now, thick presence and ongoing beginnings without any hints to conventional pasts, presents or futures. *Kainos* is a place where human beings are with and of the earth (Haraway 2016, 2). Haraway suggests posthumanism and the humanities to be replaced with compost and humusities. I value the importance of not getting pompously stuck with the human-centric view, but instead to surrender ourselves to this diversity of mess and richness in this that we are situated in, among all the other critters, spirits and winds. “*I jumped into that wormy pile*”, Haraway utters, and I eagerly whisper it too. (Haraway 2016, 32)

I have all my life been criticized for my sloppiness. I often do things in a quick, impulsive manner and for long I listed it as one of my weaknesses. Nowadays I definitively see it in my strengths. I am not ignorant or careless but conversely I am careful, full of care. I care, love and I worry, but when I am making, I truly am carefree. This for me is being situated in the present and relying on my intuition.



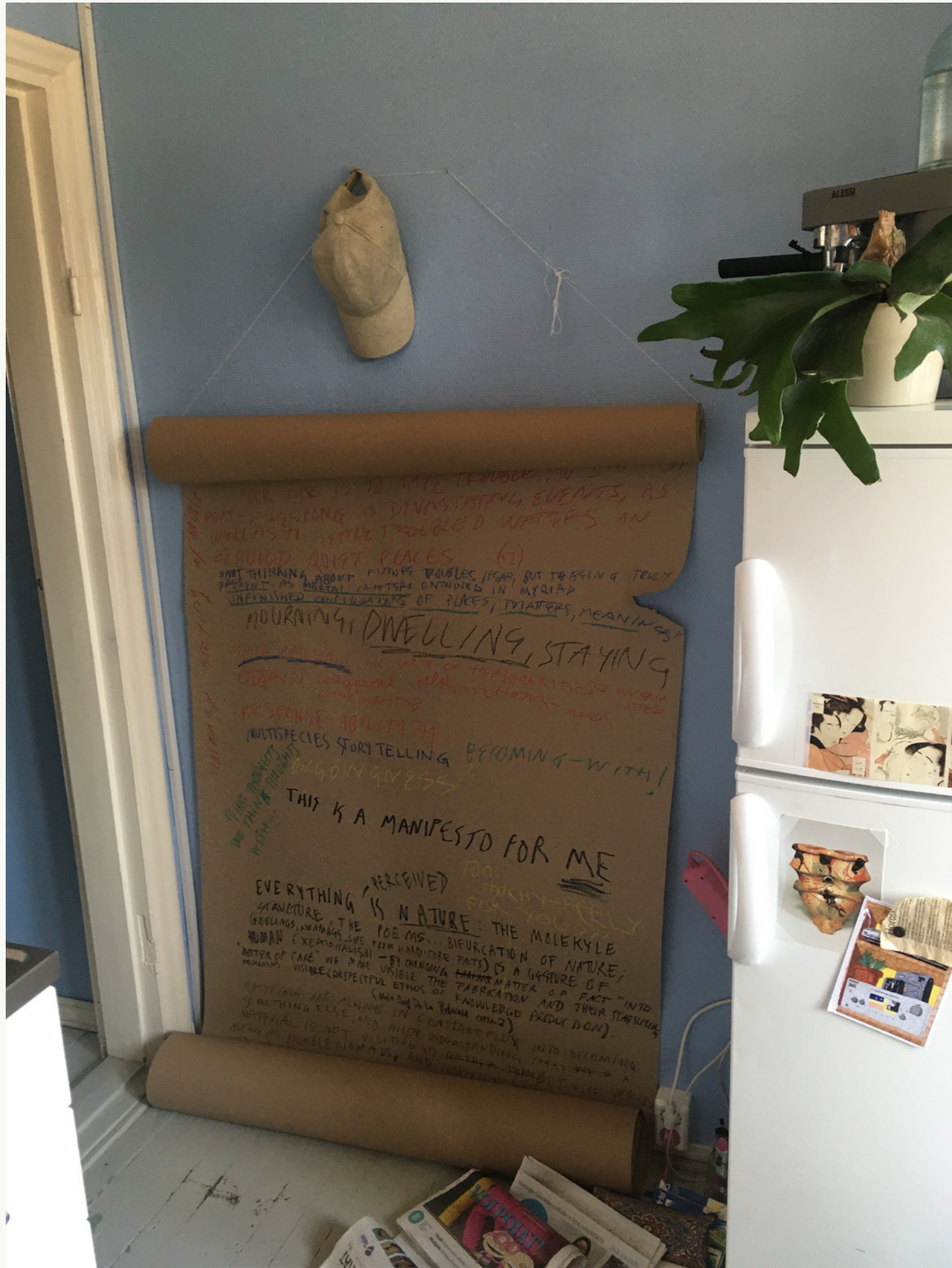
Staying with the trouble

Understanding it is impossible as a human to secede from completely human-centric view, we need to reposition ourselves from regarding ourselves as some sort of masters of the system. It is the human-exceptionalists claiming that a man and a tool shapes the history (Haraway 2019, 49). Instead we should think of ourselves as members in the massive and ongoing web of relations. We ought to see nature as a teacher rather than a resource. To exist is to learn to be present to and interact with the world (St Pierre 2019). Are we too afraid to feel so small or so tied up in this omnipotent illusion that we do not dare to throw ourselves into the games with the Nature, Earth, Gaia? Where De La Bellacasa is describing the web of relations (De La Bellacasa 2015, 11) Haraway is writing about SF: *speculative fabulations, science facts, science fiction, speculative feminisms, String Figures* (Haraway 2016, 105). The key idea is the same. I am not the start, neither the end in any time, place or relation. I am part of a web-like structure and it is a game of power, empathy and compromises. Haraway (2016, 103) manifests: “*Make kin, not babies*”. Se is referring to kin as something more than a relation tied by ancestry or genealogy. Making kin is making relatives, truly knowing something, being kind and changing the story (Haraway 2016, 103).

The bifurcation of nature is a gesture of human-exceptionalism (De Le Bellacasa 2015, 33). It means to distinguish knowledge based on, for example, emotion or sensorial experience from scientific, statistics based black-on-white facts. However, everything perceived is nature (De Le Bellacasa 2015, 33). Nature is both in molecule structures and crying-out-louds. By questioning the thinking where nature, emotion, spirit and the female is devalued, we are fighting against rationalism (Haraway 2016, 11). This is where it all gets mixed with my own perception and experience in life and in the field of arts and design. While my work is based on feelings, sincerity and joy, I have had the urge to look down on my doings because it is not “hyped” or “gamechanging” in a way design solutions often are expected to be. After reading Haraway and Puig De La Bellacasa I feel more comfortable convincing myself the relevance of emotion, femininity and intuition.

I wish to challenge these epistemological hierarchies and single truths or solutions and get enchanted by the magic and mystery rather than blindly believing measurable truths. A feminist design and sustainability researcher Mathilda Tham writes that practicing losing control enables us to learn to react with joy and excitement to this chaos, complexity and uncertainty – to embrace it rather than to take distance from it (Tham, 2019). I wish to be humble and situated. Using intuition and feeling as a valuable structure for creating knowledge and relying on it might seem a bit too touchy-feely for The Important Academia. However, I am no longer to hesitate working in a diverse, sensible and irrational, messy manner in this world of masculine, rational and statistics-based knowledge production.

“*It matters what stories we tell stories with*”, Haraway (2016, 35) writes. We should think, relate and tell stories with and through other thoughts, relations and stories as so does everything else - the soil, the butterflies, the plastic. We need to create stories and theories big enough to cover the complexities while keep the edges open, enabling the curiosity for new, surprising connections (Haraway 2016, 97-101). We are not The Thinkers From Above and we need to consider and make visible the relations and string figures between me and the other. If we stay within ourselves we are in danger of getting stuck and predictable. However, when we open-mindedly produce relations to expected and unexpected company, the opportunities are wider for surprising change. We must become imaginative and sensible for multispecies relationships and storytelling. (Haraway 2016, 61)



Making notes

This is not all knowledge in my mind, but also in my hands, on my skin, under my feet. It is all becoming-withs, learning with the world, being response-able (Haraway 2016). As an artist, craftsperson and a designer no less than as a human being, my storytelling relies strongly on materiality, both optic and haptic. However, materiality should not be regarded as a resource but a matter always in a constant flux into becoming something else. Materiality is everywhere and has been here way longer than I have. By understanding that material is not visiting my life but vice versa, I endorse the idea of collaborating instead of taming, mastering. A maker should consider themselves as a humble nomad and materials as riddles to be discovered through observation, engagement and intuition, instead of resources into which we project human-structured historically and socially situated agencies. We should work mindfully, without a rush and let our bodies interact with the material instead of forcing to transform an optic expectation into a haptic object. (Ingold 2013, 18-31). Haptic creativity emphasized by touch is a significant member in a play of creating knowledge in the body. It unites the subjects and objects, the knowledge and the world. “*We can see without being seen but can we touch without getting touched?*”, addresses Puig De la Bellacasa (2017, 105-106).

Essayist Rebecca Solnit (2016) writes about surviving modern disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, and the essay became current recently due to the pandemic turning the whole world upside down. Feelings like worry, confusion and helplessness occur, but the positive emotions that originate from the relations to others, human and nonhuman, and meaningful work –whatever it may be– are desired as well as intuitive and rewarding. What obstructs these feelings from arising most often is the very logic of our economy and society (Solnit 2016). Our society leaves no space for boredom, and boredom is a place where adventurous feelings like curiosity easily arise. After spending all this time in my house and nearby woods, I have begun to notice the smallest details, compositions and actions. One night laying in my bed I heard an all-encompassing sound of my upstairs neighbor running water from a tap, and some sort of deep happiness gushed from within. So I lied there smiling, suddenly touched by this embodied experience of a sound somehow uniting the inhabitants and the house. To encourage these kind of adventurous, unexpected and sensitive feelings to arise I need to spend time even beyond boredom and rely on my senses, emotion and intuition. It all takes time, but after all, time is all I have.

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