

MY MORE-THAN-HUMAN BALCONY

*You're back, whispered
the concrete floor of
my balcony*



It was an October Sunday morning when I sat all curled up on my 2,6m² balcony, listened to the humming of the traffic down in the street, and stared at the slowly dying family of plants growing in a white bucket. I decided that this would be my more-than-human place that I would set out to observe, understand and create with.

Due to the nature of the space, my observations quickly became very personal and in introspective. I was interested in my tendency of growing plants and collecting objects and creatures, almost like memories from the forest, as to create a tiny organic oasis on my balcony in the midst of concrete. This process of rather unconsciously gathering, planting and bringing obscurely meaningful lifeforms was nothing new, and had occurred several times whenever I had had the access and partly control over an outdoor space. Especially during the lockdown, these more-than-human relations on the balcony revealed both their importance and solace to me. I would sit with the plants and feed fruit flies to the spiders. Maybe that state of isolation made visible the companionship that I was craving and forming with these creatures. As if I wanted to create and invite wilderness in my life, even in its tiniest forms.

I looked at my balcony. What kind of life was there, saplings of pine and spruce, dried up lichen, sticks, bark, stones. I had tried to create a little forest for myself. But how was that ecosystem doing and who was it really for? And what would it really need?





inescapable parts of life. I would bring dry leaves from the forest, place the dead basil out for the spiders to weave their webs over. However I also quickly realised how minimal my knowledge in more-than-human needs was. I wanted to care for my pine trees, for the lichen that I had found on a forest path and the seeds that the death basil had left to this world, but I didn't really know how.

AN EXCERPT FROM A CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND ABOUT MY BALCONY, 8.9.2023

I was thinking about making a school project about how I could design my balcony into an ideally comfortable environment for my pines. If you have any ideas feel free to share



Oh ok. Maybe a couple of squirrels and a little bit of moss here and there:D



I would say that protecting that pine's pot during the winter is the most essential here, meaning that it should be isolated with something. Then when you replant it you should select a setting where it likes to grow. And as much light as possible!

Thanks, I must start inviting some squirrels over

FERAL



I want to take care of them but I don't really know how



The more I started thinking about the term feral throughout the course and reflecting on it in my personal life, the more it started to feel like the general condition of life itself: surprising and uncontrollable. Oh my hair is an absolute mess! No worries, it's just feral, let it be. That one houseplant that has exponentially grown and taken over my table, is extremely annoying, well feral, again. But could I learn to live with this plant and moreover with this feeling, that not everything, especially living, should please me?

My balcony soon became an experiment where I would test my ability to accept feralness, death and decay as

This controversy of wanting to care but not knowing how forced me to shift my perspective to the side of the others. I had planted the pine trees here on my balcony where there was no deep soil for them to sink their roots in for the cold winter. Did the trees actually even want to live here, I didn't know. Did the balcony itself want to become feral in this sense, quite the opposite of what it was seemingly meant for with its straight edges and hard surfaces?

I had reached a point in my process where everything I did was generating more questions than answers. The idea of compressing these observations that I had made of my relationship with my balcony and its habitants into a physical object felt impossible. The idea of co-creating anything else than something that would allow the others to create on their own, felt impossible. This was the moment where I had to learn to let my design process become more feral, personal and embodied, maybe these creatures could help me with that?



DIALOGUE



*You haven't really
thought of anyone else
than yourself*



The further I observed my relationship with my balcony and the more-than-human creatures inhabiting it, I realised how they had become a remedy for my longing for wilderness in the middle of my 21st century urban life. I had thought that bringing other lifeforms to my personal space would allow me to build a multispecies community. But I now realised that the only way I knew to do it was through captivity and domestication, carelessly placing these creatures into my cube of a balcony, and by doing so forcing them to become dependent on me. I had never really thought how they would feel about being placed in this unnatural environment, where possibly neither of us belonged.

This realisation and voicing the new observations from different points of view from mine were the first step I took towards my final artefact. The second was allowing myself to express these thoughts in a very personal, speculative and imaginative manner. These steps allowed me to find my way to a final translation, a video *Maybe I wish that you were a forest* that presents an imaginative conversation happening between me and my balcony.

The nature of this dialogue between me and my balcony is of course speculative: it is eventually a conversation with myself, where I explore my relationship to the different creatures that inhabit this more-than-human space. I based my answers as the balcony in how it looked, felt, smelled, and then I imagined. The conversation is feral in the sense that it has no conclusion, other than maybe none of us belong to a city environment. I was not aiming to present answers, just observations and questions from different points of view. I have no idea where this newly opened dialogue will lead, if me and my balcony will become best friends or end up hating each other. And it is this uncertainty that can hopefully create new ideas, interpretations and paths to explore.

The uncertainty and unpredictability of the feral are aspects that I learned to appreciate during my process and definitely something I take away from this project and hope to apply to my creative practice more. Even when editing the video I started allowing elements to take their place in a more free way, behave wild, and align incorrectly. After all, I am feral as well, as is my mind and creativity, that work in ways I cannot fully describe or control.

I feel quite overwhelmed by the question of how a human relationship with more-than-human creatures could be mutually beneficial and balanced. In my conversation with the balcony the never-ending criticality towards myself as a human becomes obvious: even the balcony is telling me that I am living in a wrong way, wrong place and that my relationship to the more-than-humans is very one-sided. And in this imaginary conversation, as in real life, I am aware and apologetic of my actions, and wish to continue learning to listen, observe, respect and let be.

