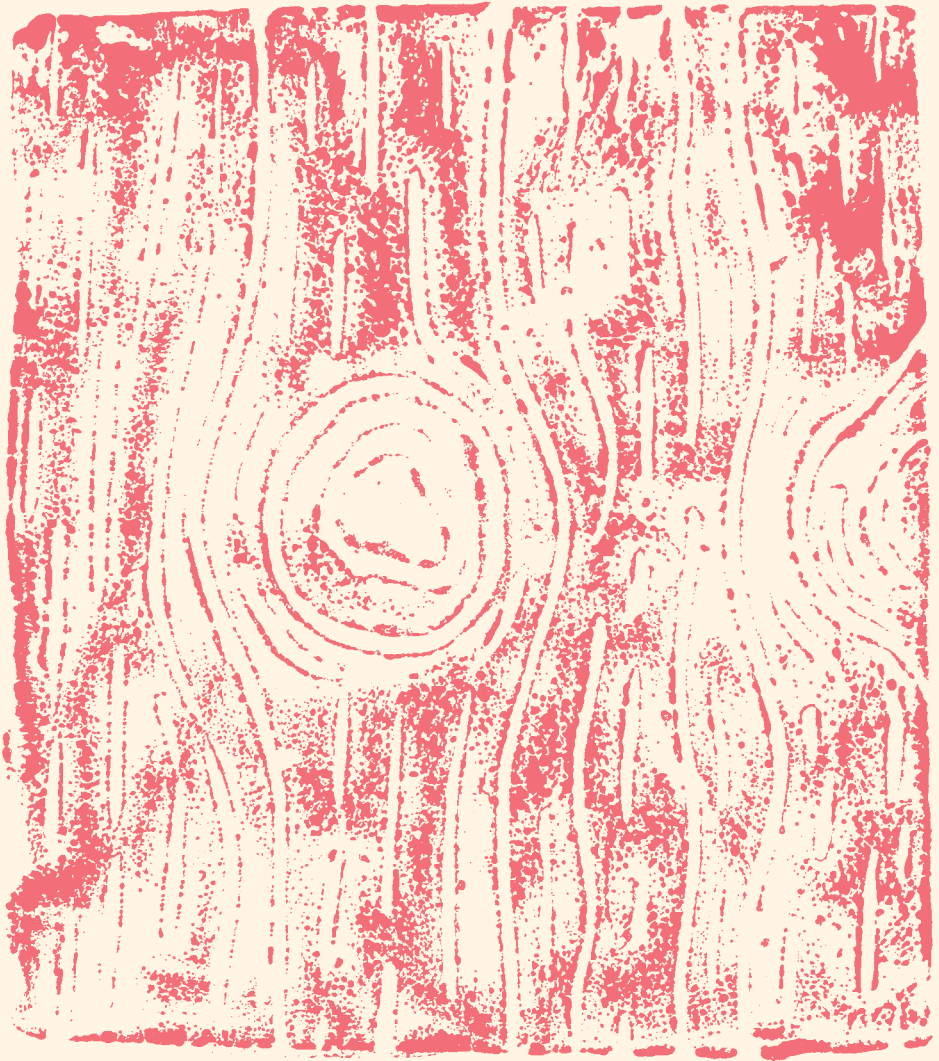


# NATURE RELATIONS

*design places  
design practices  
design senses*



Edited by  
Louise St. Pierre & Kate Fletcher

# NATURE RELATIONS

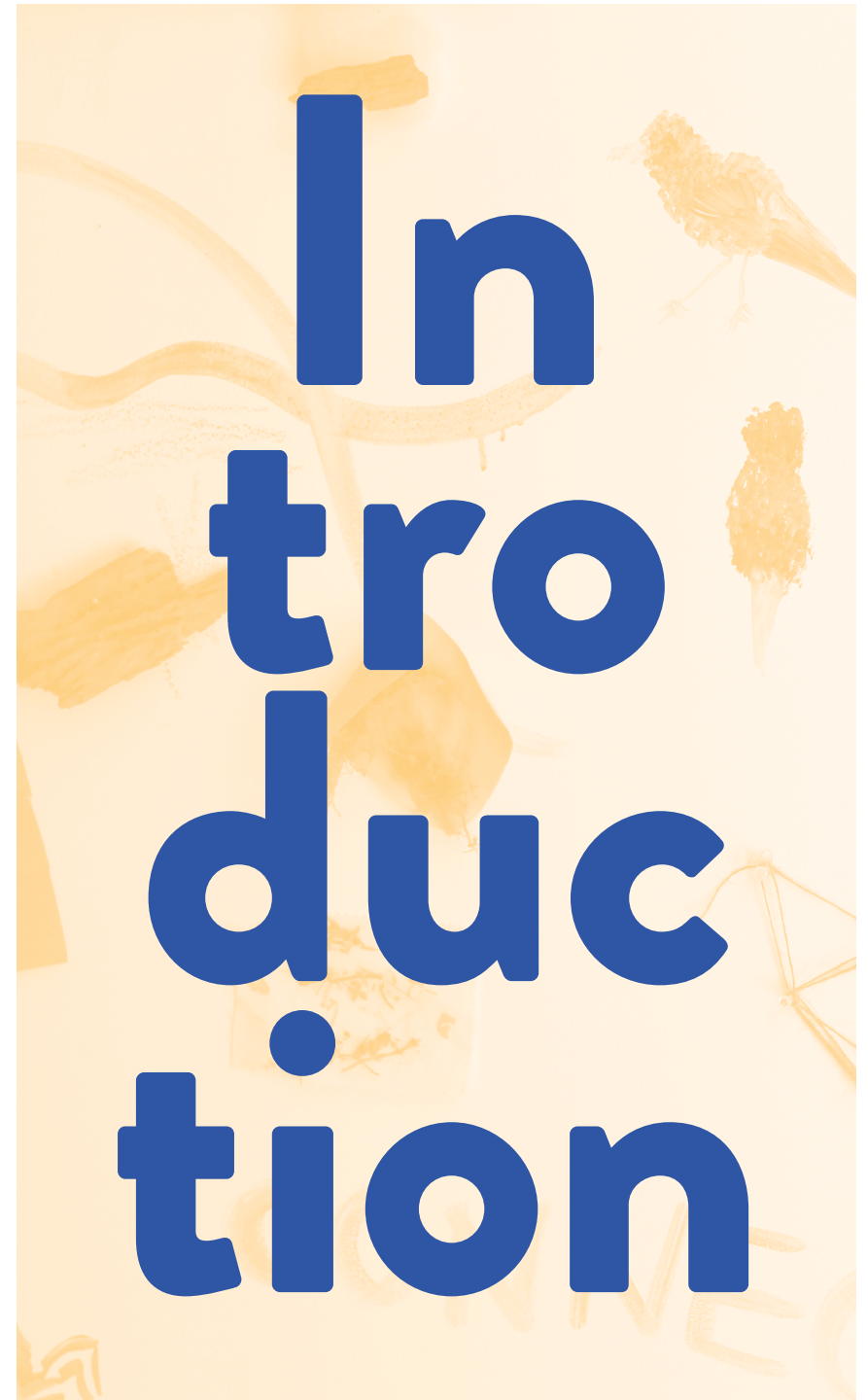
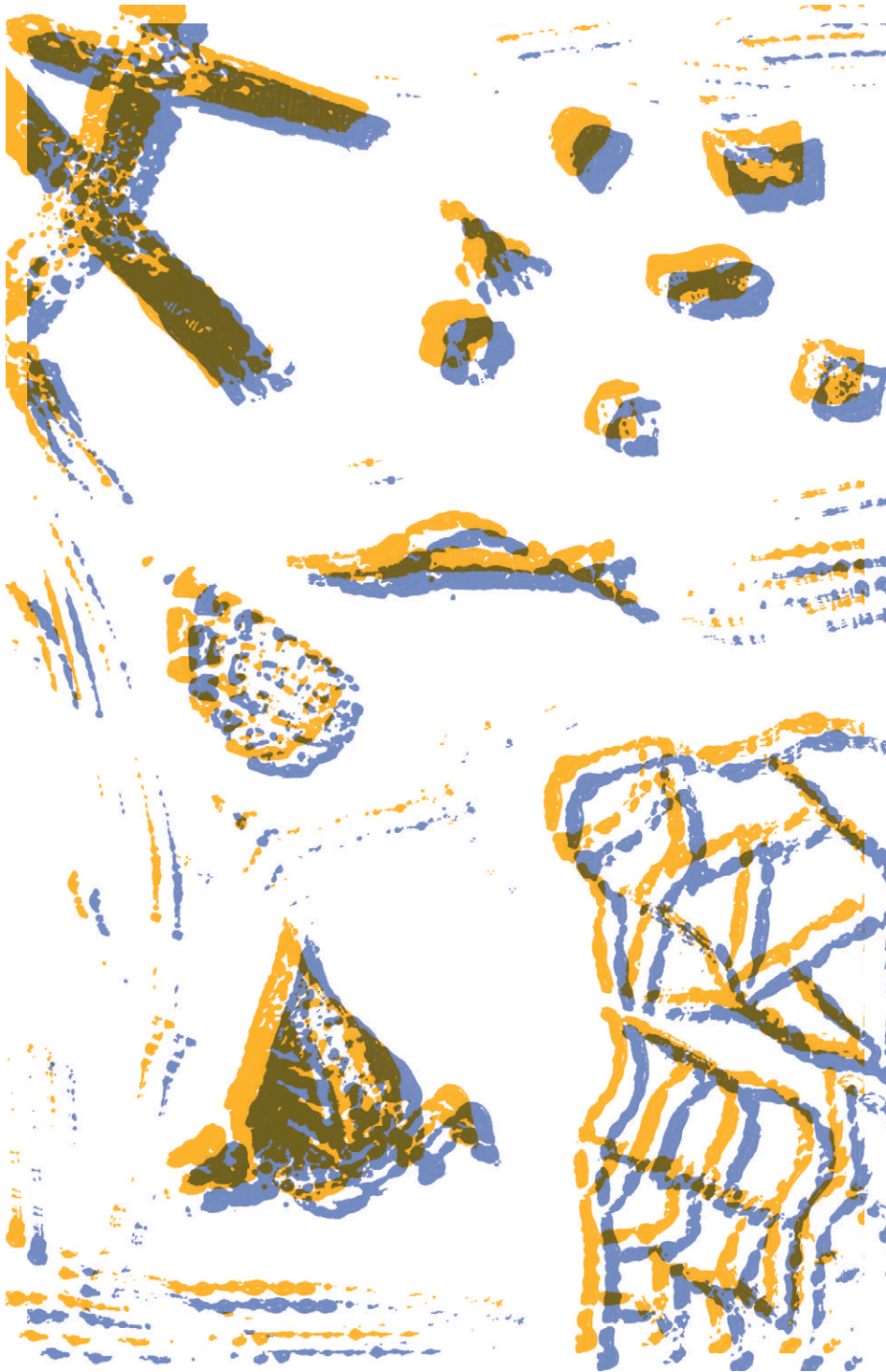
*design places*  
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Occasional Press

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This publication explores design and nature relations. It includes light, sensory and vicarious experiences that deepen the relationship between design and nature. Its focus is a body of practices of design and nature that examine nature relations as a form of inquiry for designers and that build understanding and terminology along the way. It draws on some of the workings and findings of the *Nature Relations Platform* pilot project and its experiments around key themes of design and nature.

## Challenges for Designers

In the Nature Relations Platform project, we learned that some designers find it challenging to understand the seriousness of nature relations practices. Perhaps this is because designers commonly focus on many external systems and structures that are conceived of separately to the natural world, things like: economics, technology, human needs, client relationships, product acceptance, sales, usability, outcomes and so on. These external preoccupations feed a conceived structural and artificial division between the work of designers, and the context of the natural world. This place apart from nature is the familiar place of design, and these external focus points are what is thought to be most important. Even those designers willing to critically question design practices often get caught up in intellectual dialogues about the creative output of design without integrating design with the natural world. Likewise, much critical theory spins around inside the realm of design's expected systems and structures, rarely overcoming the



designing in authentic relationship with the needs of other beings on the earth, in the earth, with the earth

sense of human (read design)-  
nature separation.

Nature relations require a new way of thinking and being, a quietness and receptivity that allows the unveiling of possibilities for designing in healthy relationship with the natural world. Nature relations practices are not suited to a critical dialogue that remains in the head; new understandings also come through the body. Nature relations practices have more in common with indigenous, land-based, or ancient ways of being than they do with the sirens of modernity that call designers forward to speed and novelty.

**“Leaving the ideas of  
normal behind.”<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Gagliano, Monica. 2018. *Thus Spoke The Plant: A Remarkable Journey*, Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

## Impacts on design

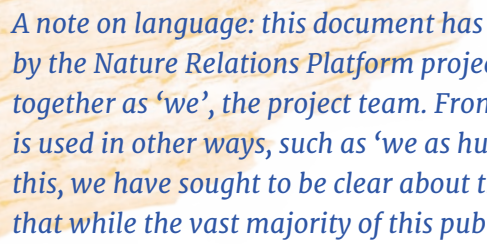
The Nature Relations Platform project explores ways to foster new actions in design disciplines and to transform the design process from extractive and exploitative relationships with nature, to something altogether different: a partnership. With awareness of the ecological realities in design and the continuous need for nurturing collaborations with nature, we put stories, moments, and conversations at the heart of the project.

How does nature relations change our views of good design? Maybe by taking part in these methods, new understanding unfolds that links to other cultures, collaborations and ways to be... For some, this is the outcome, because they were not aware of those cultures or hadn't yet accepted that their world view is only one within a plurality of views. For others, it allows them to take part in aspects of other (human and greater than human) cultures, which inherently changes how and what they privilege in design. As designers, we can try this, and then this, then this... and each time, we are actually practicing shifting world views from our old self to this new one. Then back to their old self, then back to this one. Over time, I bet this new world view becomes the preferred practice.

—Zach Camozzi

This document is organised into six sections, divided loosely into themes of nature and design around: collaborations, territories, timeframes, methods, surprises and language. We have imagined it as a conversation, a call and response, between different parts of ourselves as people and designers—our heads, hands, hearts, lips, noses, feet—between different people talking together (hello you!) and between us humans and greater-than-human species. The result is a publication that combines fragments and sketches, ‘materialisations’ and direct speech with creative writing and reflective prose.

Welcome.



*A note on language: this document has been written collaboratively by the Nature Relations Platform project team and we write together as ‘we’, the project team. From time to time the word ‘we’ is used in other ways, such as ‘we as humans’, and when used like this, we have sought to be clear about the meaning. Also to note, that while the vast majority of this publication is jointly authored, there are a few sections that were written individually and they are identified accordingly. The quotes dispersed throughout this publication that do not include individual attributions are ideas emergent from the research team and this research project*

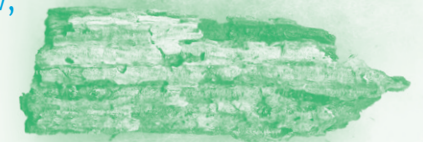


## Key Points

- + The act of decentring human interests opens up other collaborations.
- + Collaboration can be felt in the body, physically.
- + Collaboration as (design) philosophy, which crosses disciplines and worldviews that are more aware of interdependence.
- + There are multiple enablers to collaboration: tangible artifacts, other people, practices, disciplinary exchange.



We don't know what a collaboration between nature and design looks like, yet. But we can begin to feel the dynamics by shifting our creative practices. Starting with bringing nature into our considerations, then developing our relationships such that nature becomes a collaborator and beneficiary of our designs. We talked of a hypothetical fashion designer, and what it would take for their professional practice to shift from 'industry standard' to an imagined practice founded on nature relations. Zach emphasized that nature relations could be brutal as well as awe inspiring. Louise connected through her feet, practicing mindful walking and slowly exploring under the surface layers of the forest floor. Kate's ramblings led her through adventure and misadventure, connecting through skin and clothing, creating intimate sensual moments that we normally only feel with the closest people in our lives. Through sharing awkward hilarious moments that pointed to the ridiculousness of existing in a human body, while pointing out that we, as humans, are a part of nature. Caro gave us the opportunity to vicariously experience nature revealed in urban spaces. Poetically recounting walks with her dog, processing grief, noticing the paths carved out by the footsteps of young boys. We know all these moments were important, and that they are often unnoticed and undervalued, but we still ask: how do these moments of connection lead to collaboration within our design processes; how can these relationships shift our material choices, our supply lines, processes, our end markets and users? What shifts when nature has input on how, what and why we design?

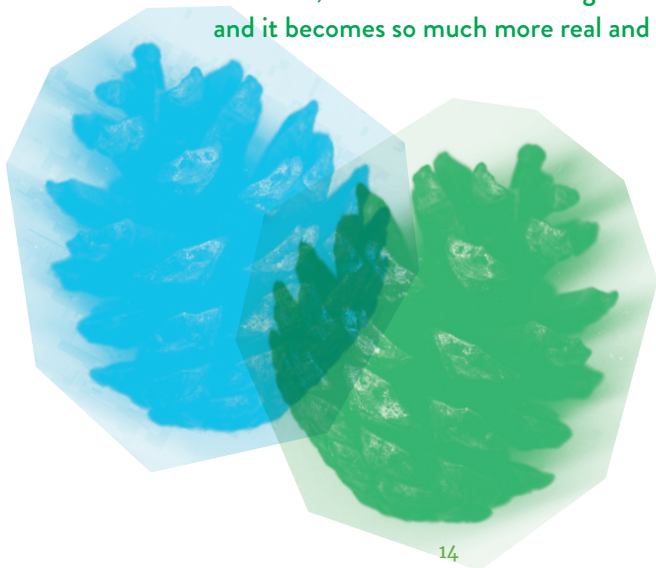






When we talk about design and nature experiences with each other, they begin to feel very real and become more powerful.

....we bring it forward like this, and we listen to each other, then all of a sudden it gains a different life and it becomes so much more real and more serious.



For me, a key collaborator is the weather and the lay of the land. I enjoy so many creatures on the way, but while we influence each other's behaviour, I'm not sure they are collaborators. Often I find I concentrate on particular articles of clothing as collaborating in my nature connections. The best to work with in my opinion have pockets, hoods, ones with buttons up the front, they are loose fitting (who wants to be trussed up like a turkey?). Tripartite relations, clothing, nature. Clothing becomes an enabler for different ways of engaging.



In collaboration with the trees and the moss and my drawing, I usually find that after a period of time that I am blanketed by a stillness. I turn to look for who is there, and see only the flicker of a squirrel's tail, and a flash of a wing, and suddenly the sound of my pen is present.

This collaborator is a field, a life force all around me.



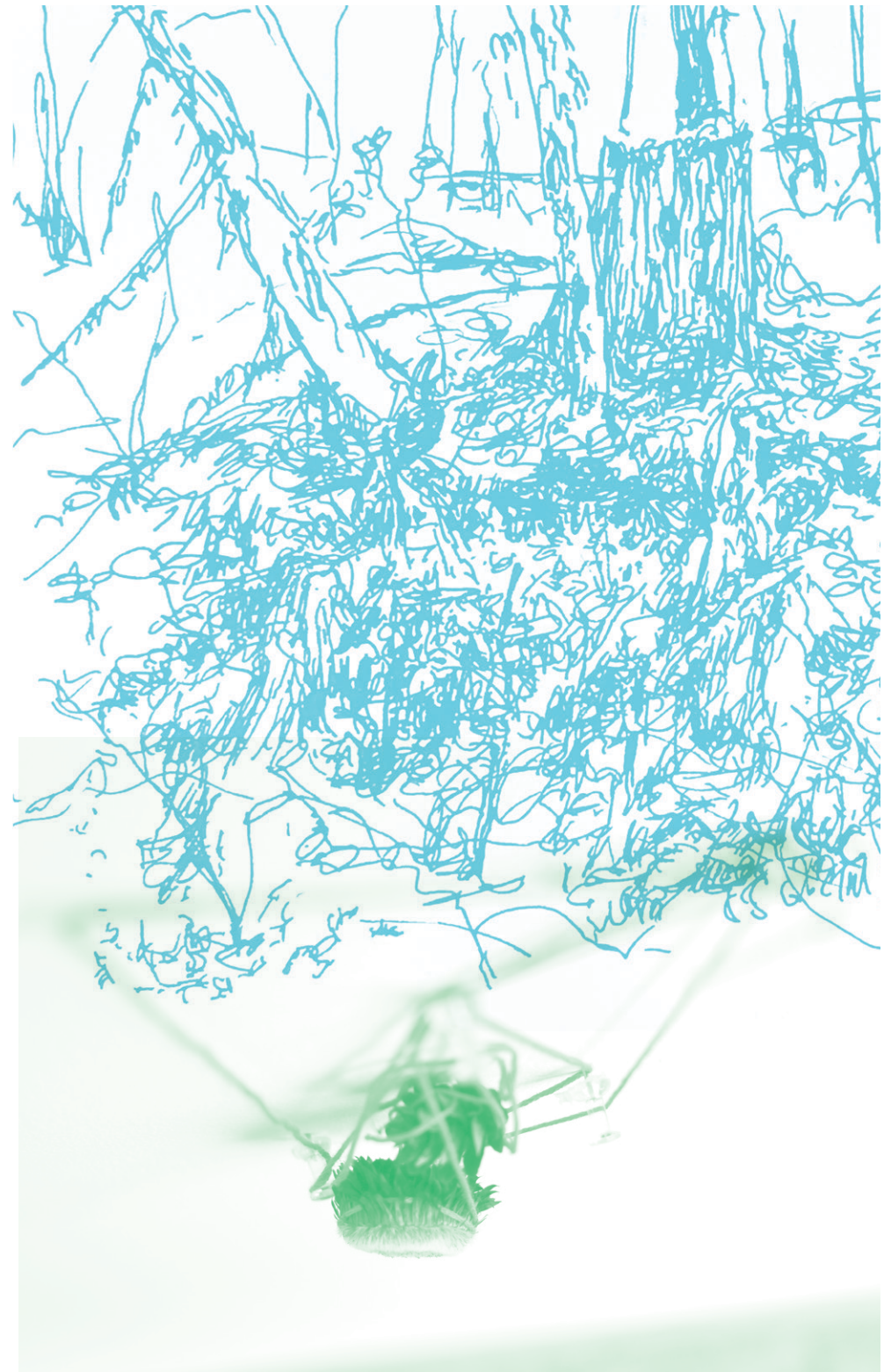
Louise on Zach's memory of @llap with us Share → turn more serious & real

## Caro, recording her experiences -

*All that rain and being in touch with that, [the] being of rain. And I feel like I could only be in touch with that being when I was touching something else, either me or, in this case, the land and the beautiful chatter of water that drew me to it. The sound of that chatter, movement. And the next day it was gone. It was the rain, just that wetness event... it was exactly the right thing.*

*...But today this path has turned into a temporary waterfall. I hear it before I see it. The backwater chatter with the social business of water. Moving. Stopping. And feel the water flowing there, and the chattering of the waterfall, as a social water moving along places today. I feel that the waterfall, it acknowledges me. We acknowledge each other. We go in different directions today. Water flows through me. I feel the energy with the rain dripping down towards my feet.*

*I went walking through the urban forest, this time past the pool and up a step ridge. There were some lovely large trees, and I stopped to engage with the one closest to me. Her large textured trunk and huge canopy of leaves were an umbrella under which only green light glowed. I stood silent and still and opened myself to her. After a short time I became aware of her energy, as a sound, but felt not heard. As I tried to tune into this thrum I became aware of many birds singing, speaking, communicating in her canopy. Their chattering sounds created a three-dimensional sound sphere—they became her cloak, umbrella—ing me in their dimensionality—expanding my experience. I thanked them, and held this moment as a new understanding.*





The act of decentring  
human interests  
opens up other collaborations.



The imaginary map lines that define borders of cities, parks, or countries, are not the only way to establish what a place is. Territories have often been defined along colonial lines, yet there are many different ways of understanding what they are. Understanding a territory calls for a much deeper awareness of place, it requires us to acknowledge other beings and lived experiences. Territories become the space where beings exist with their own rhythms and where interactions between different rhythms and those beings occur. Outside of the discipline of landscape design, the practices of design and nature are usually considered as separate territories. However, the relational aspects of design and nature expand these territories and allow re-territorial relations to be considered. In Deleuze and Guattari's<sup>2</sup> terms, deterritorialization is the process by which a social relation (a territory) has its current organization and context altered, mutated or destroyed. Redrawing the contexts for design and nature redefines these social relationships. Once we recognize the connections between ourselves and natural beings there is inevitable reterritorialization... these realisations aren't just useful for designers, they undermine all previous territories across all disciplines.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

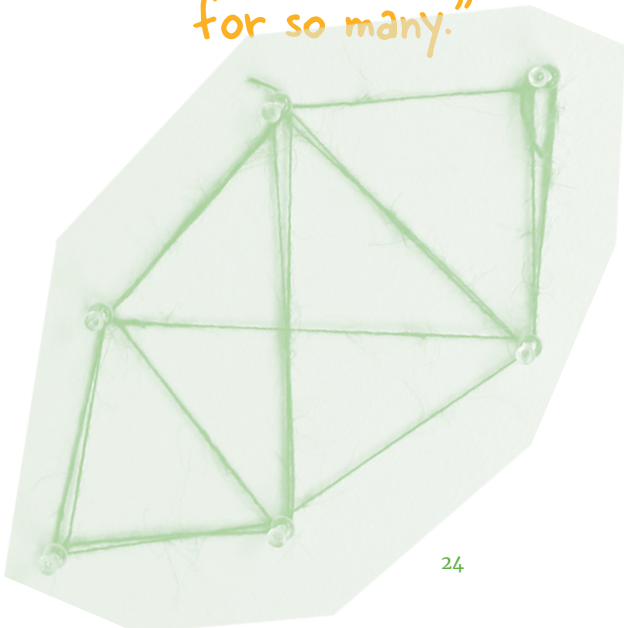
- + Understanding territory as a process of accepting/seeing/being
- + Reterritorialization as a process for redefining social relationships by recognising the connections between ourselves and natural beings;
- + Physical qualities of the earth describing shared, fluid and changing territories... the same place encompasses many overlapping territories. Is there no territory at all sometimes? Or is the squirrel defining the territory?
- + Design and nature deconstructs or challenges colonial notions of territories as owned or defined in relations of power.

## Key Points





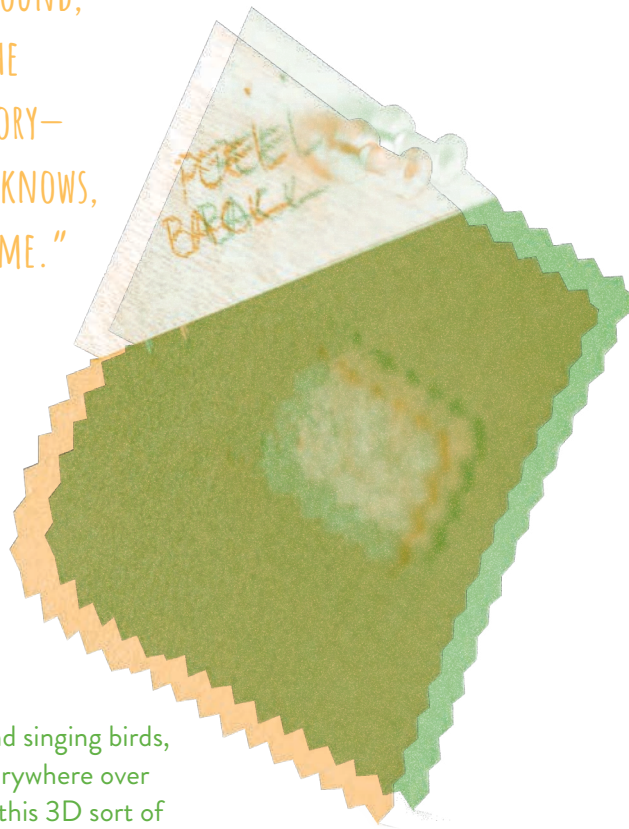
“I love that you found that it was when the rain was in touch with something else that then you could access, could connect, with its being. And I think that's probably the case for so many.”



Invisible...David Abram<sup>3</sup> talks about the invisible beings in the water, air, woods.. Our work is to find ways to connect with them.

<sup>3</sup>Abram, David. 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books.

“ALTHOUGH MAYBE WHEN I SIT  
IN THE WOODS WITH THE MOSS,  
WAITING FOR THE SQUIRRELS  
TO ADJUST TO MY PRESENCE  
AND START MOVING AROUND,  
MAYBE THIS SPACE OF THE  
SQUIRREL IS THE TERRITORY—  
SOMETHING SHE OR HE KNOWS,  
AND IS UNKNOWN TO ME.”



“We started to hear birds and singing birds,  
and that the birds were everywhere over  
the tree, and they created this 3D sort of  
soundscape, really, this globe that was made  
by the tree, and it’s that finding our bodies  
in organic spaces... Finding our bodies in  
organic spaces that’s like our medicine.

**It’s kind of a resetting of so much of our  
thinking... conceptual spaces that can help  
us think differently.** The tree defining its  
boundaries gave me a sense of who I am.”



## Key Points

- + Slow rhythms; waiting for the moment.
- + Slow process; building on experience.
- + Multiple points of view regarding; time, season, events, phenomena, rhythms.
- + Deliberate pauses; to allow a different kind of engagement or awareness, like the moment of entering the antechamber, the room before the room.



Practices of design and nature relations acknowledge different ways of framing time. The experience of rhythms of daily existence can differ when one is on a walk outside, or when executing a design project, for example, but it is necessary to bring deliberate awareness to different timeframes in order for a new relationship between design and nature to emerge. Nature speaks at a different pace. With the intention of shifting from an exploitative relationship to one of partnership, designers can recognize that the current design processes' timeframes do not serve all beings equally and overlook the possibility of building a stronger, more resilient relationship with greater-than-humans. This shift in perspective opens up the prospect of designers expanding their relationships to include diverse rhythms and timeframes, stretching back to ancestors and forwards to future generations. Maybe people you have been told about are still with you. So how do you bring those relationships along, how do you carry all these beings with you?







How hard it can be, to give yourself time to spend alone, not alone?

*The rhythms are often slow—at least for me. Things can happen in all of a rush—a flash of colour, a moment of insight—but so much of this work is at a pace forgotten by my body. I don't know if it can be rushed. Perhaps it is lifetimes / generations / oak tree maturity. I have some oaks that I planted as acorns more than 8 years ago and they are so small still they would fit into a shoe box. They are biding their time—waiting for the opening in the canopy above so that they can shoot up, get to the light. Perhaps that is what we need to do—to be ready with all of our material—for the sprint to the light?*

...where I live in Macclesfield there are lots of hamlets which are connected by these ancient footpaths, which over the ages have become hollowed away. They've been traveled so much that now they're very deep, and even the ground starts a meter up on either side. And there is a real sense of passage of multiple generations.



Near my home, in Dunedin, generations of [children] have created paths through the forest, shortcuts, they are footholds and worn smooth for the shortcuts of time.

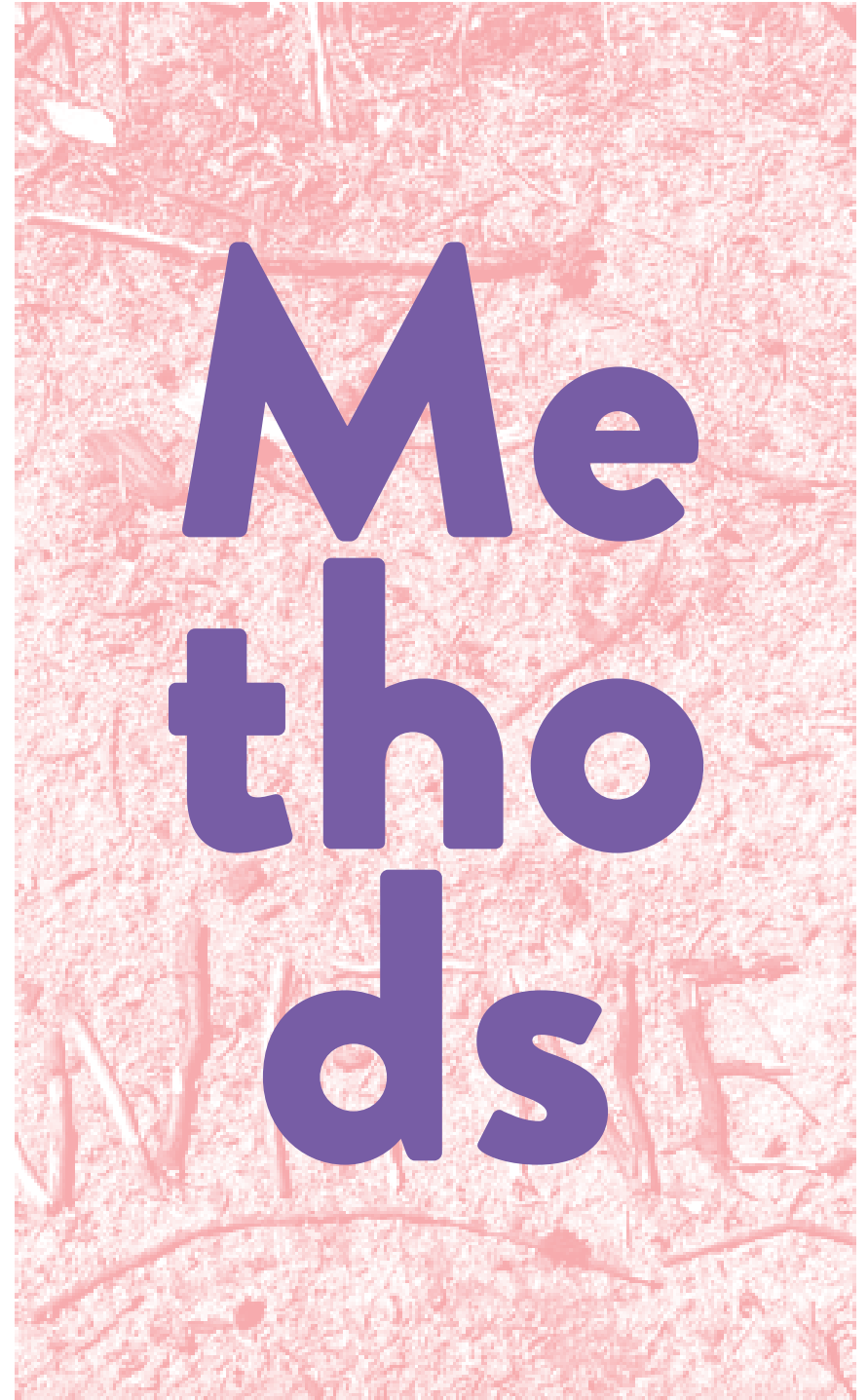




In northern BC, we can see the trails of the deer through the undergrowth.



*Before I start, I pause. I think I do this to see what is really there, instead of what we expected to be there. It is a bit like stepping into an antechamber, the room before the room.*



Designers are fairly adept at working with uncertainty, because so much of design training and education focuses on being generative and imagining ‘what could be’. Yet, as a newer, ‘industrial’ discipline, design’s outcomes have been shaped by the relationships between time, money, resources and labor. We see that our roles as designers shift when we begin designing alongside and in partnership with nature. Throughout nature relations practices we chose methods that emphasized embodied experiences. When we came together to share and make sense of what we had found, we recorded the richness of the stories using materialization instead of visualization techniques. This was purposeful, to shift the usual way of things for designers, demoting the visual and promoting the sensual. As a group we all felt that this led to a richness in the stories that were recounted, and increased the ability of those listening to add layers of meaning to each other’s experiences. This actually deepened the collective understanding of the connections with nature through visceral experience.

## Key Points

- + Sensory exploration, direct experience as a method, active body meditation
- + Preparing the ground (the pre-work) for sensory exploration
- + Preparing oneself to pause or stop (“I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile in the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit.” —Thoreau)
- + Grounded imagination; Making stories, allowing emergent stories
- + Elevating experience-based knowing over rational knowing
- + Sensory exploration can be experienced vicariously and still has power...this is one of our tools
- + All responses are different. Pointing to multiple elements of this experience. Different facets of a whole. None of us can ever do this work alone

# Taking the care to focus attention deliberately and openly.

Openness such as this requires humility. This has never really been a pre-requisite for designers. Using other senses, not relying on the visual literacy of a designer is another new requirement. The implications of these two challenges will change the nature of the designer-client/user relationship. Allowing the whole of nature into a design conversation will require new approaches and boundaries.

FINDING WAYS TO STAY WITH THE EARTH...  
MEDITATION PRACTICES, MAKING  
PRACTICES (BRING YOUR TOOLS OR  
MATERIALS), DRAWING PRACTICES

“Sensing through the body, giving permission to lie down and smell earth, permission to hang on a branch and look at the world upside down.”

“USING THE BODY AS A REFERENT:  
MEASURING THE DEPTH OF PINE  
NEEDLES TO A KNUCKLE, THE  
HEIGHT OF A NURSE LOG TO THE  
HIP, THE CURVE OF MOSS TO WAIST”

Bringing observations into the body: not committing to the digital, not using photographs, but using the eyes and the body to see, put trust in that!

[Caro about witnessing, recording and losing the recordings]

# Kinning with the Earth

Louise St. Pierre

How might I know soil, not as a scientist might, but as kin? Could I connect with the many beings that comprise soil? Over several months, I practiced embodied research and witnessing near Lightning Lake in the Northern Cascade mountains, and beside Alice Lake in the Pacific rainforest. I wanted to know how I might see, feel, hear and smell the activity of the soil in the forests where moss spreads in undulating mounds amongst the trees. I wanted to build relationships with the soil of the Earth, the activities under the surface.

I know intellectually that soil is alive, full of minute decomposers constantly working to cycle nutrients that support complex ecosystems. This time, I wanted to see how I could understand a soil relationship in and through my body. In the beginning, careful of disrupting mossy ground, I referenced my body as a measure. I started to match those undulating mounds of green moss to my own swell of hip or shoulder. We are similar in scale and form.

Concern for fragile ecosystems kept me to paths. I practiced walking meditation. I walked as Thich Nhat Hanh<sup>4</sup> suggests, to walk as if my feet were kissing the Earth. Walking through the paths. Staying on the paths. I brought my awareness to my feet, enjoying the softness of every step, the sensations under foot. There were times along the path where it was hard packed and graveled, and the sensations were unpleasant, but still I tried to walk as if my feet were kissing the Earth. It was a very quiet practice.

I came to a place where a pine had dropped a lot of needles and an exquisite fragrance of sun-dried pine rose to meet my nose. The bed of needles was so thick that I could feel them sliding and shifting beneath my feet. I bent down to measure the depth with my finger. The needles came up to my second knuckle.

As I went along to less travelled parts of the path, I could feel a bit of sponginess, a gentle response to my presence there. I went along the path, breathing mindfully with my footsteps and returning again to

<sup>4</sup> Nhat Hanh, Thich. 1992. *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Reissue edition. New York, N.Y: Bantam.

kissing the Earth with my feet. The path became softer and I often had to step over gnarled and knobbly arthritic tree roots. Thinking through my feet, sensing through my feet, breathing through my feet, reading through my feet.

I couldn't help but be distracted by the fragrances of the forest, a sweet almost a blackberries vanilla cinnamony smell like fresh cookies or the sweetest of flowers. I looked around and of course there were many things blooming. There were Huckleberry, there were Trillium, there were Columbine and False Solomon's seal—my senses were inundated. I could eat that fragrance, inhaling the forest like a form of nutrition.

Walking along, trying to return again and again to the sensation of my feet kissing the Earth, I noticed a spot where the path dipped lower into the ground, and there was a bit of a side wall. Along this side, the Earth was exposed in several layers of decay, mostly woody looking. I pressed upon it with my hand and it gave just so gently with a softness like

bread dough at a particular time in its rising. Or maybe more like flesh. The smell was sweet and welcoming, not loamy and earthy as I might have expected.

“By the side of a road I find one of these luscious moss mounds that has been cleaved by the road making, so I can see inside. It is made of fragments of wood chips—the cedar decaying. Pressing my cheek to this I inhale, and again I am surprised by how fresh and clean. Tenderly lifting the moss blanket, I notice how thin it is. These soft mounds are a result of the tree melting into the Earth, not of the moss growing above in plush bundles. The moss is a thin carpet molding itself to the activity that's going on beneath.”

—Journal August 2022

I gingerly step off the path to go pee and I'm surprised by how deeply I sink into the ground. The earth is porous and lovely and full of open holes. They might have been animal homes. This part of the ground is so open and receptive that I can't balance myself... If I put my foot down on the right my entire body tilts to the right. If I put my foot to the left, I tilt to the left. In that moment of my silly swaying, I felt

the Earth was saying, “okay, engage... you’re here. I am just not always what you might expect.”

Months later, this experience is embedded in my memory and my body. I felt the soil as energy weaving under the ground and infusing the plants, creatures, and air above the surface. This is a palpable knowing of interdependence. Daily now, when I breathe the air moment by moment and sense the earth with my feet hour by hour, I remember that I am one with the beingness of soil as it permeates us all. I wonder, how might this newfound reverence for the agency of soil change the way that I consider the implications of my design work?





Quiet listening  
and openness  
have joined other  
design languages

In one of the witnessing practices the weather was surprisingly warm and I ended up stripping off a woollen base layer. I then carried it around, bulky in my back pocket. Without it, I could feel the air circulating around my body, a sense of lightness, liberation. The vest, stuffed in a pocket felt heavy, holding me back. Taking it off, felt like freedom, it shifted everything.



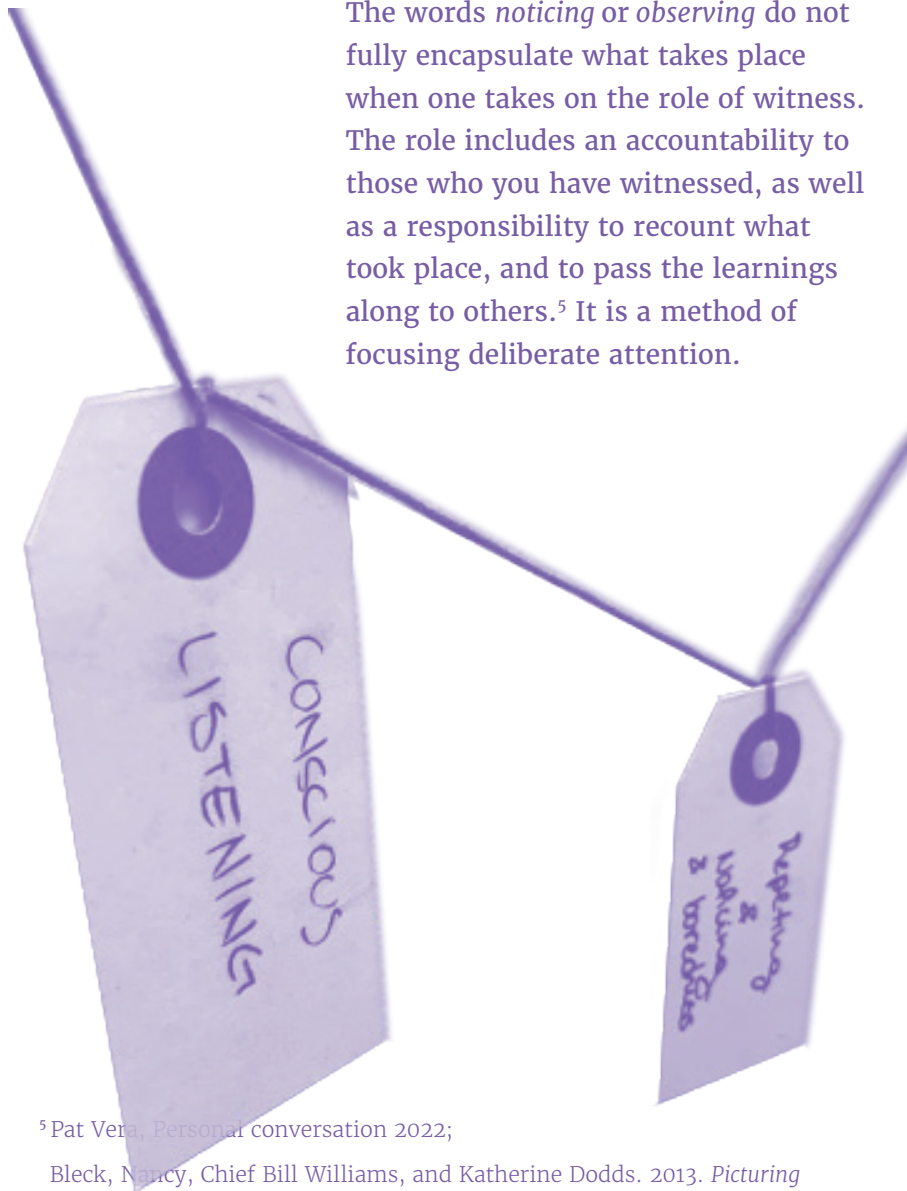


## Witnessing Method

“I have felt the transformative power of being a witness, of having my perspective shifted and having that experience drive my decisions and actions moving forward.”

—Melanie Camman

The words *noticing* or *observing* do not fully encapsulate what takes place when one takes on the role of witness. The role includes an accountability to those who you have witnessed, as well as a responsibility to recount what took place, and to pass the learnings along to others.<sup>5</sup> It is a method of focusing deliberate attention.



<sup>5</sup> Pat Vera, Personal conversation 2022;

## Witnessing Process

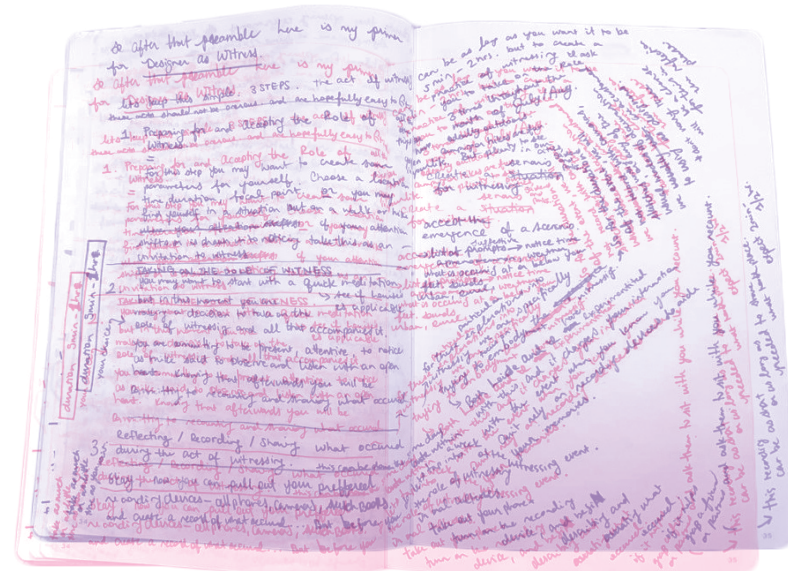
Melanie Camman

### TIME COMMITMENTS

Witnessing can be as short or as long as you want: 5 min or several hours.

### THE ONLY RULE

During the act of witnessing, do not use any recording devices. In the tradition of oral cultures, we ask you to speak about (record) your observations afterwards.<sup>6</sup> Please do not draw or write while witnessing (you can do this afterwards).



<sup>6</sup> Bleck, Nancy, Chief Bill Williams, and Katherine Dodds. 2013. *Picturing Transformation: Nexw-Ayanstut*. Illustrated edition. Figure 1 Publishing

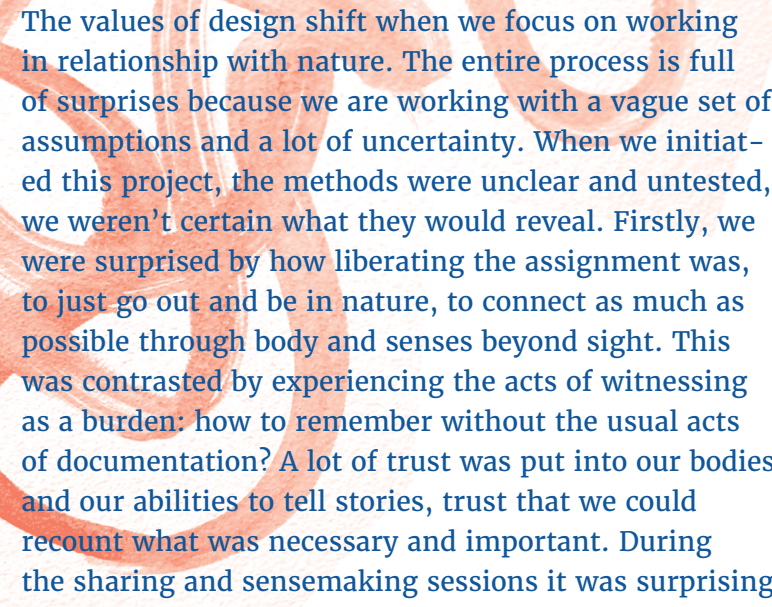
## DETAILS

- First act** *Preparing to accept the role of witness...* set some parameters. Choose the location, the time, focus and intentions. Stay open to what is not pre-planned; the moments when your attention is drawn to something may be an invitation to witness.
- Second act** *The act of witnessing...* remind yourself of your commitments to be present and attentive, to notice and perhaps be noticed. Decide to feel your observations in your body and remember what you see and feel. Know that afterwards, you will be called upon to recount and tell what you have learned and experienced.
- Third act** *Reflecting, recording, writing and sharing...* After witnessing, please take out your phone (or other oral recording device) and record an oral description of what you saw, felt, learned. This recording can be as short or as long as you like: about 2 minutes–30 minutes.
- Fourth act** *Gathering and Sharing...*



## Key Points

- + Vigour and intensity.
- + Warm and rewarding.
- + Shareable, common ground was found!
- + Receptivity to this practice, engagement with warmth and joy with nature relations practices.
- + How energising this practice is! It gives back.



The values of design shift when we focus on working in relationship with nature. The entire process is full of surprises because we are working with a vague set of assumptions and a lot of uncertainty. When we initiated this project, the methods were unclear and untested, we weren't certain what they would reveal. Firstly, we were surprised by how liberating the assignment was, to just go out and be in nature, to connect as much as possible through body and senses beyond sight. This was contrasted by experiencing the acts of witnessing as a burden: how to remember without the usual acts of documentation? A lot of trust was put into our bodies and our abilities to tell stories, trust that we could recount what was necessary and important. During the sharing and sensemaking sessions it was surprising how many of the initial experiences were translated to the group. We were surprised we could deepen our relationships with nature by vicariously listening and taking in what the other researchers shared. There was also a surprising level of vulnerability and trust that was developed throughout the process. The tone and sound of each person's voice was unique as they shared what were such intimate experiences with nature, from brutal to humorous, poetic and profound. The smallest moments grew in importance just through the act of witnessing and sharing.



That sensory experience in nature can be relayed to others and still have power, can be experienced vicariously.

*Changing the rules we live by.  
Changing the rules we design by.*

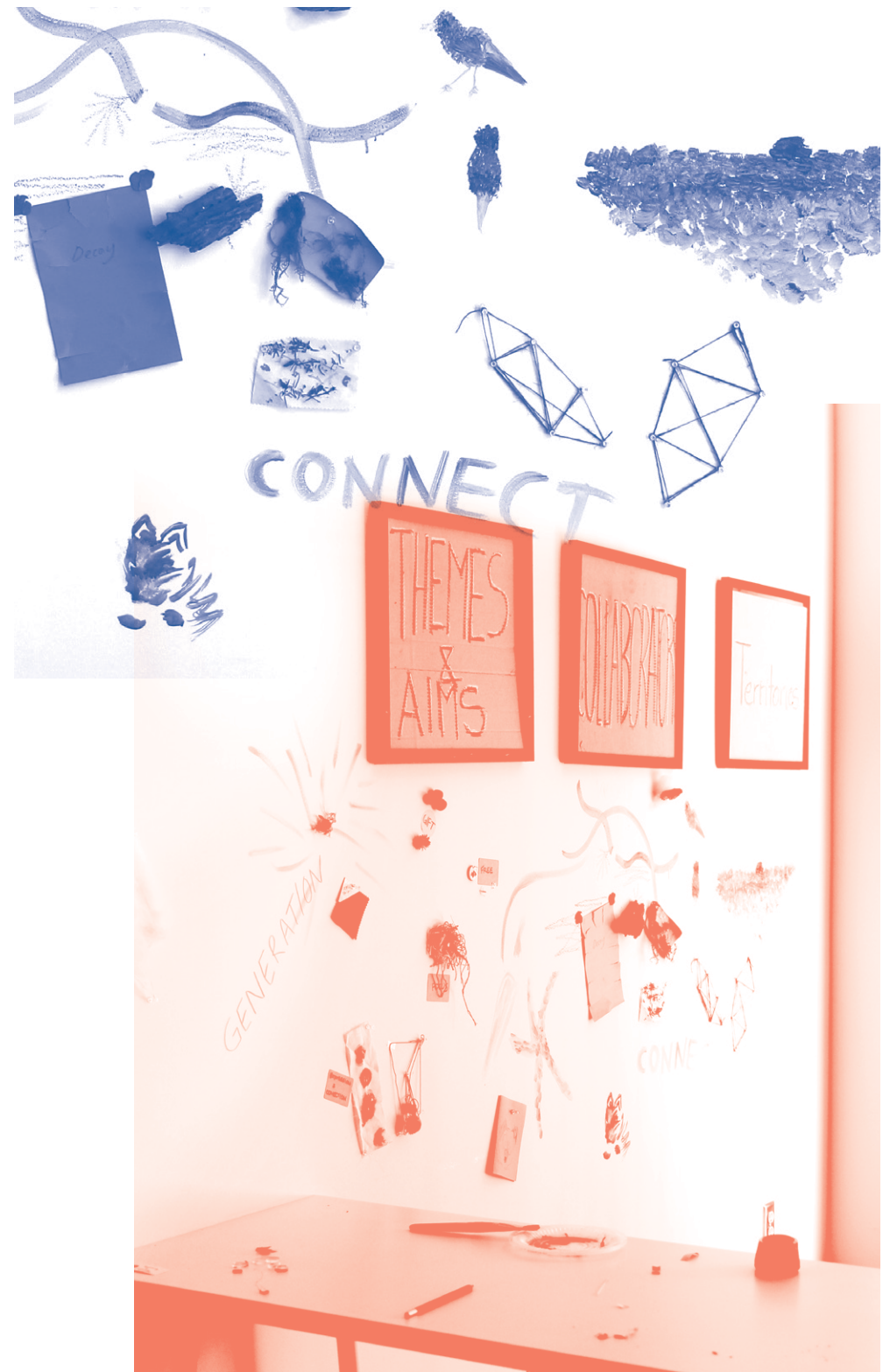
Proof, I saw it. I was there. I felt it. I smelt it.  
Now I've shared it—that touching of water.

A seagull eating a starfish, which I had never seen before. So a massive starfish and a seagull eating it and had it in its jaw waiting for the starfish to bring its fins in so it could swallow a little bit more, and a bit more, and a bit more. And just watching it in total dumbstruck disbelief of watching this happen and not even knowing that this relationship between these two species existed.

This project just gave me permission to kind of nakedly almost to go and be present and to consider it as research.

*It gave me opportunities to do something over and over again and these opportunities to go off path to look and find things.*

How energizing this practice is! It gives back.



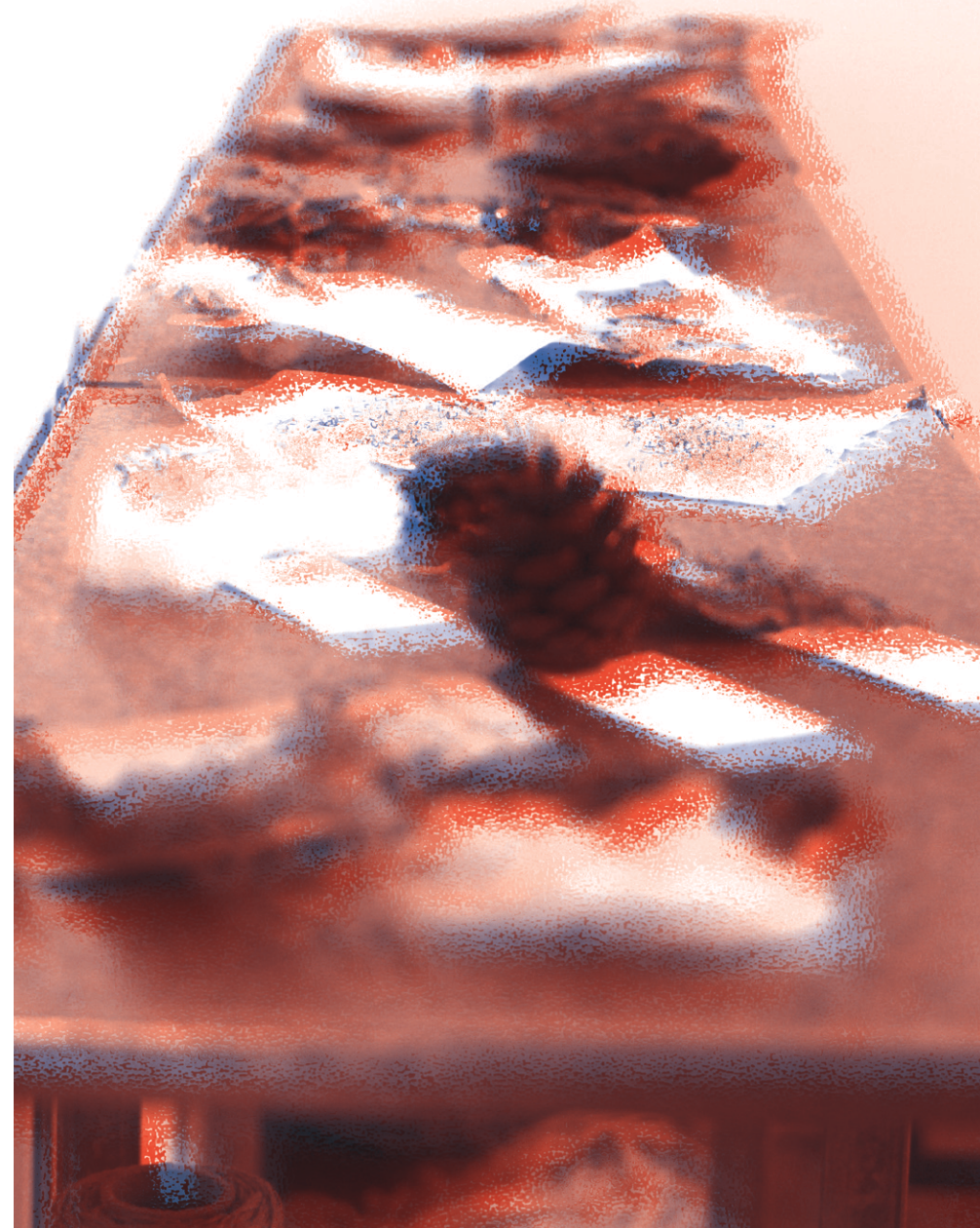


There were fruiting bodies everywhere...  
there was just so much abundance, all these gifts...  
like seeds and conkers and brambles,  
everything fruiting, and then, and then I sorta thought,  
ohhhh, I'm one of these gifts.  
And this was such a surprise to see myself in that way.  
I walked home and it just felt like a moment of magic.

How shareable the experience was...  
that we could all talk about nature relations  
and understand each other.



Perhaps how warm and rewarding  
this process is... making new friends  
is always special!



## These are the ways that trees and hairstyles are alike

Kate Fletcher

*Some oaks are the forerunners of the hairy human neck. Their trunks swirl with a tangle of back-combed twigs that are fixed in place with the flexible-firm hold of outer bark and inner phloem. Other oaks meanwhile have trunks that are sleek, smooth. Their long throats sit under decorous full crowns.*

*Lime trees model a bouffant style. They were the original Marge Simpson in both volume and height. And before her, Elizabeth I, heavy with perfume and studded with insects. Limes are the standard for the beehive, in form and function: scented verdant domes swarming with pollinators.*

*Summer sycamores are large, rolled curls of leaf shaped in florets. The 'do' is patted regularly by the hand of the wind, checking that all is as it should be.*

*Sweet chestnuts' trunks and branches coil in loose braids, their gold and green tresses twisted into a piled-on style. Fruits dot their crowns with gold and mahogany jewels. The hundreds of pins that hold everything in place are made from wood.*

*Firs wear their crewcut total, an all-over number 4. Their needles are bristly. Any hand that runs over them against the direction of growth knows how it makes the palm alive.*



*Under the stands of pines, squirrel-shredded cones fall like dandruff on the shoulders of the earth. Their woody fruit are scattered by passing traffic and time, as good a treatment as a medicated shampoo.*

*Ash trees, blighted by fungal disease, stand bare, their bald pates painfully visible. Here and there a few strands of leafy twig hang on, stretched comb-over across a branch, a reminder of what once was.*

*A weeping willow wears its foliage heavy and full, cut straight, blunt and thick at the edge of a river. A long bob, a lob, before humans even walked.*

*Hawthorn hedgerows predate the undercut. Their trim kept up by hungry sheep that eat from the ground up to where they can reach no further.*

*Larch trees foreshadow the layered 80s flick by a million years give or take. Soft ruffles of choppy, feathered needles and branches curl away from gravity's pull, adding oomph. Farah Fawcett doffs her cap.*

*Wet-look gel oozes from pine trunks. Pomade drops from the sticky flowers of sycamore. Powdery plumes of pollen blow like dry shampoo from every tree in flower.*

*Silver birch are fine and dry. Holly, thick and glossy. Cork-screw hazel form irregular curls. No comb shall pass through a thicket of knotted brambles. In autumn, the leaves of some trees turn gold-blond, some red-auburn. And then in winter, they turn brunette-black and then silver. Gravity sweeps them to the floor.*

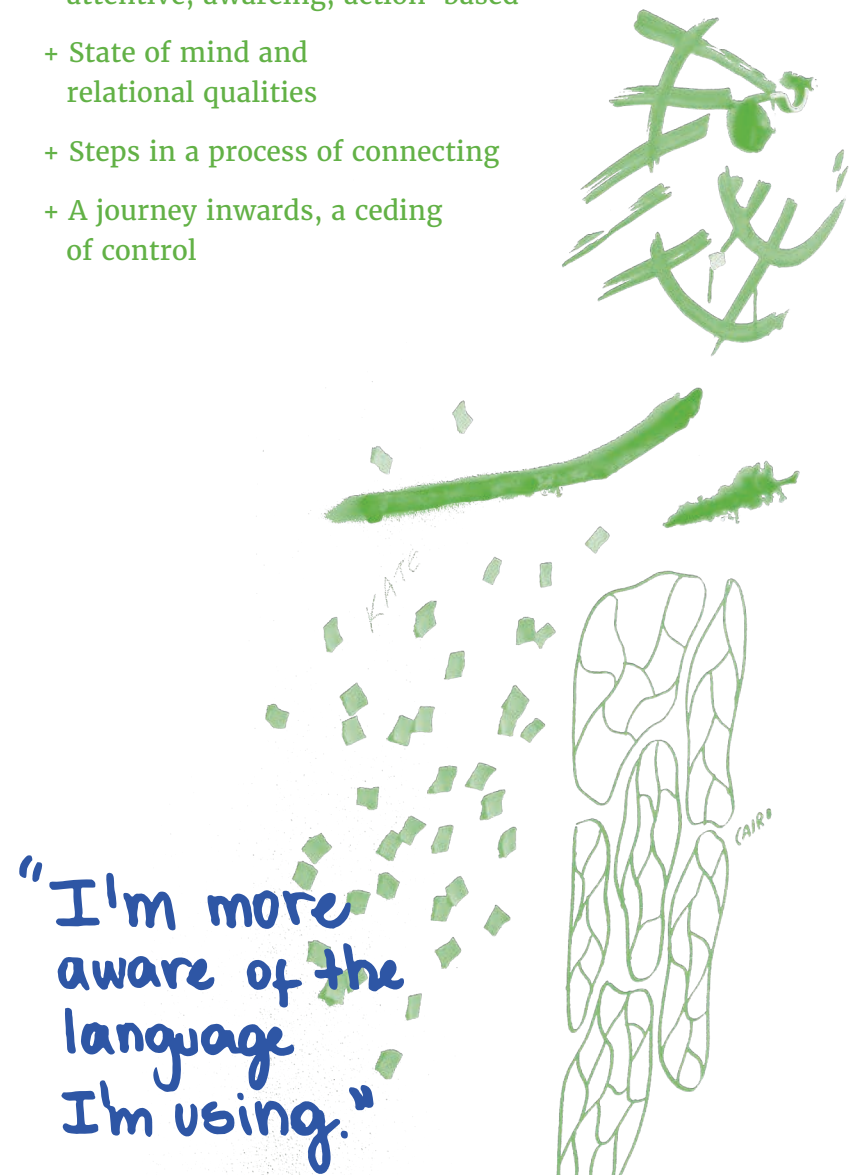


Language. It holds much power in itself. The language of this publication is not entirely unique nor is it ordinary; it has been found through bodily experiences with nature and evokes countless sensory aspects that sometimes words used in design processes don't. But it is also not just beautiful language—although there is much of that—it is also using language to show the not so beautiful parts of nature, it is using it to imbue the senses of practitioners and readers. Having a whole section dedicated to language makes clear the importance of this topic. It allows the researchers of this project to frame how we discuss and how we view this project. With words such as *awareing*, or phrases like *places of multiple touchings* we communicate a shift in perspective of what nature relations can be, especially with design. The language returns us constantly back to the practice of design. Design is never left behind, designing is key to this project. What makes us different to maybe a group of poets and writers who use this work of words is the design space; we are bringing these words to the conditions and processes of design. The language then, is bringing stories and feelings in nature forward, while at the same time doing the work of connecting these experiences to the established practice of design. This leads to new views, and new framings of these emergent practices.

Quiet listening, and openness have joined other design languages.

## Key Points

- + Physical and sensory body words: attentive, awareing, action-based
- + State of mind and relational qualities
- + Steps in a process of connecting
- + A journey inwards, a ceding of control





Redirection  
of attention  
back to where  
the attention  
should be.



The project has changed my relationship with the forests I have been walking in, and I have the desire to share the process with others. I want to spend more time with trees.

## Vocabulary

cadence  
places of multiple touching  
moments of the “layers of life”  
materializing storytelling  
sensory exploration—  
exploring through tactile  
and sensory methods  
sensory embodiment  
attention  
awareing  
witnessing  
level of intimacy  
journey inwards  
relational qualities  
ceding of control  
noticing,  
joining,  
delighting  
frutating  
empathy

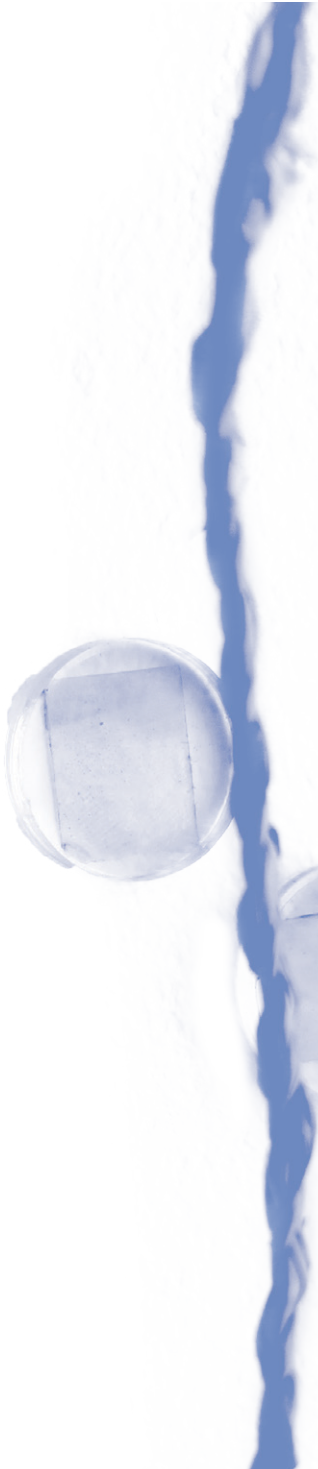


care  
 openness  
 trust  
 awareing  
 attune (presence, ancestors, land)  
 relate  
 offer  
 earthbond  
 windfall  
 relationality  
 openness  
 abandon  
 immerse  
 let go  
 disengage  
 unhook  
 submerge  
 immerse  
 summerse  
 kinning



Intimacy with the air, like the air is everywhere. The sense that it's wrapping itself around a body. That's a really sensuous, beautiful thing.

"Squelch."



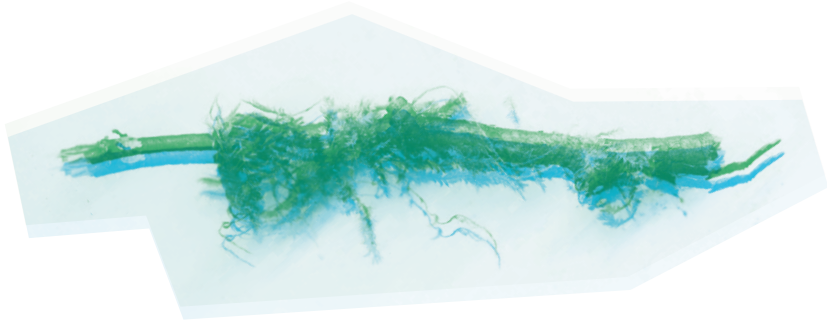
Today's walk took me to the harbour, in an industrial area. The day was cool and the water, completely still, a skin separating sky from water. I watched and felt this skin for quite a while—this sensuous surface between two bodies. At one point a school of small fish started kissing the surface of the water from below near to where I was sitting, I laughed and blew kisses back to them. Before long I sensed a change, little ripples began to shimmer the surface, unsettling the smooth flow. Within minutes the ripples turned to small waves, whipped up by a breeze. The lovers had work to do, it was time for me to move along

—Caro

#### About the Nature Relations Platform

*In the northern hemisphere summer of 2022, the Nature Relations project investigated the relationships—and more—of design and nature. This activity took place in three continents, involving four design researchers using embodied, direct experience and re-found methods for design, such as witnessing. This book captures a small part of the exchange that followed. The Nature Relations project is a continuation of the activity that some project members had already been doing both together and separately for some years in different configurations. But the project constellated them in a new way, including new members all the while adding heart, hand, eye, steadiness, questions and beauty.*

*If the challenge of nature for design is total, the challenge of design and nature is together.*



The Nature Relations Platform project was a research project led by Louise St. Pierre and Kate Fletcher. Field researchers spent time in nature, and reported their findings in various modes such as audio recordings and sensory workshops.

#### The Team Comprised of:

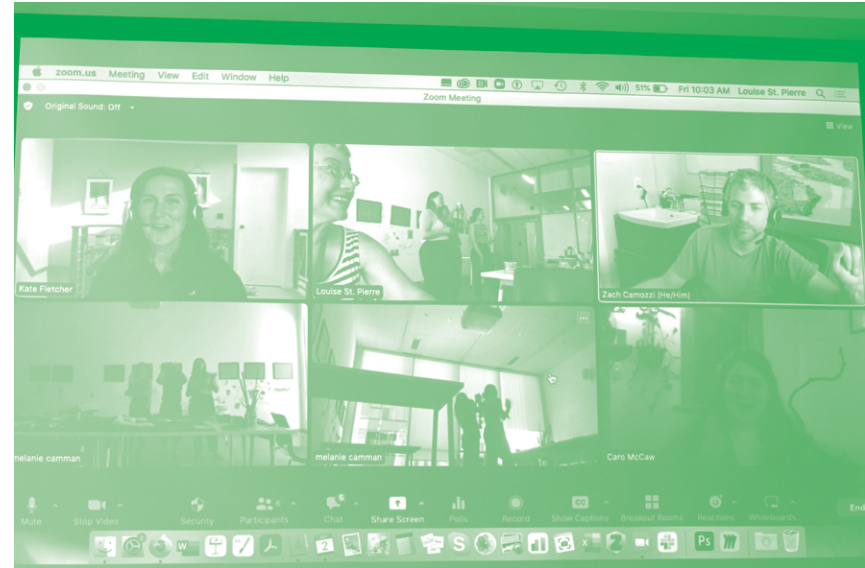
##### Field Researchers

*Louise St. Pierre (Vancouver, Canada), Kate Fletcher (Macclesfield, UK), Caro McCaw (Dunedin, New Zealand), Zach Camozzi (Naniamo, Canada)*

##### Design, Development, and Workshop Creation

*Melanie Camman, Giulia de Oliveira Borba, Yejin Eun, Eden Zinchik (a.k.a. The Dream Team)*

Everyone contributed to the writing.



##### Time Zones

*Louise—I'm sorry, it's 4am and you still missed an hour!*

*Caro—Just 4am now, oh my gosh.*

## Colophon

Published by Occasional Press, 2023

Occasional Press is an agile publication initiative aiming to showcase new forms of creative research from across Emily Carr University of Art + Design and the Broader community.

This project was supported by :

A SSHRC Institutional Explore Grant; DESIS Otago, a Design of Social Innovation for Sustainability lab located at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand; the Emily Carr DESIS lab, located at Emily Carr University in Vancouver, Canada.

ISBN (print): 978-1-7782221-5-3

ISBN (Digital): 978-1-7782221-6-0

Design by Giulia de Oliveira Borba, Yejin Eun, Howsem Huang  
Typeset in Brandon Grotesque and Merriweather.

Cover art by Giulia de Oliveira Borba.

Cover design by Howsem Huang.

This publication was produced using materials, machines and labour available through the stationery project. This book was designed to be printed on scrap and deadstock paper, and therefore will vary with each edition.



**NATURE RELATIONS** explores design and nature relations. It includes light, sensory and vicarious experiences that deepen the relationship between design and nature. Its focus is a body of practices of design and nature that examine nature relations as a form of inquiry for designers and that build understanding and terminology along the way. It draws on some of the workings and findings of the *Nature Relations Platform* pilot project and its experiments around key themes of design and nature.

